Cosmopolitanism and/or ethnicism: Ezra Pound’s multilingual poetics
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Abstract

This dissertation is a critical study of what I am calling Ezra Pound’s “multilingual poetics”. In it, I establish a practical and theoretical understanding of Pound’s tendency to deploy foreign languages in his poetry, discussing its philosophical, poetical and political implications. The dissertation has three parts.

In part 1, I situate Pound’s multilingualism within the historical and philosophical contexts of linguistic relativism, the belief that different languages and their structures in various ways affect their users’ worldviews.

In part 2, I discuss the cosmopolitanism of Pound’s early work, both his general ideas of mankind’s common spiritual capacity and his more specific literary quests into foreign languages and foreign poetic traditions. I suggest applying the term “literary cosmopolitanism” to the poetic practice characteristic of Pound’s early work.

After having presented and discussed Pound’s documentary poetics in The Cantos, in part 3 I consider the broader implications of the cosmopolitan and ethnicist contradictions in Pound’s work, particularly as they apply to Pound’s infamous political commitments of the 1930s and 1940s. I show that Pound’s work in this period is marked by a gradual turn toward a totalitarian conception of society. By tracking this development in Pound’s thought and poetic practice, I indicate how it correlates to an evolution in his ideas about universalism and relativism in language and culture.

When considering the relations between Pound’s multilingual poetics and his politics, I argue that his multilingual experiments undergo some significant changes in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Even if the later poems continue to be multilingual, they also have affiliations with a segregationist idea of avoiding hybridity. This means that the development in Pound’s politics may be read as forcefully present on the poetic microlevel.
Sammendrag

Denne avhandlingen dreier seg om Ezra Pounds “flerspråklige poetikk”. Jeg drøfter hvorfor Pound bruker mange ulike språk i sin poesi og hvilke implikasjoner dette har, språkfilosofisk, poetisk og politisk. Avhandlingen har tre deler.

I første del plasserer jeg Pounds flerspråklighet historisk og filosofisk innenfor tankeretningen lingvistisk relativisme, det vil si forestillingen om at forskjellige språk og strukturene som preger dem, på ulike måter påvirker språkbrukernes syn på verden.

I andre del diskuterer jeg det kosmopolitiske ved Pounds tidlige diktning, både hans generelle forestillinger om menneskehetens felles åndsevner og hans mer spesifikke litterære sonderinger i ulike fremmedspråk og ulike poetiske tradisjoner. Jeg foreslår å benytte betegnelsen «litterær kosmopolitisme» om den poetiske praksisen som kjennetegner Pounds tidlige arbeider.

Etter først å ha presentert Pounds dokumentariske poetikk i hans hovedverk The Cantos, drøfter jeg i tredje del de mer dyptgripende følgene av de kosmopolitiske og etnisistiske motsetningene i Pounds verk, særlig i forbindelse med Pounds beryktede politiske ståsted på 1930- og 1940-tallet. Jeg viser at Pounds verk i denne perioden er preget av en gradvis orientering i retning et totalitært samfunnssyn, og påviser hvordan denne utviklingen korrelerer med en utvikling i Pounds forestillinger om universalisme og relativisme i språk og kultur.

Jeg drøfter forholdet mellom Pounds flerspråklige poetikk og hans politiske standpunkter og argumenterer for at eksperimentene med poetisk flerspråklighet endrer seg på 1920-, 1930- og 1940-tallet. Til tross for at de senere diktene også er flerspråklige, har de også en «segregasjonistisk» karakter, i den forstand at de unngår hybride former. På denne bakgrunnen argumenterer jeg for at Pounds politiske holdninger er markant til stede på mikronivå i poesien hans.
Thank you

I had never quite understood why, in an acknowledgment section such as this, the one person who is understandably grateful always insists that any errors are his or her own. Now I do understand, however – I am sure to have made errors at some instances in the pages that follow. But I never erred in enrolling at the University of Oslo, and in accepting the aid of the following people: my dear supervisor Christian Refsum, always ready to let me consume much too much of his time; my co-supervisor, the brilliant Pound scholar (among other things) Michael Kindellan; and the incredible polymath Richard Sieburth, who generously offered to be in charge of the midway assessment of my dissertation. I could not have done this without you. A special thanks for aiding me several times during my work goes to the incomparable Archie Henderson. He in turn got the energetic and inspiring Walter Baumann to help me at a crucial point. The highly competent and friendly staff at the Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library made my two-month stay in New Haven, Connecticut, in the fall of 2019 a pure pleasure. I also want to express my earnest gratitude to Erling Hagen Agøy of the University of Oslo for aiding me with pinyin transliterations of Chinese. Similar gratitude is due to Lars Fredrik Janby and Jon Haarberg for helping me with some questions of Greek. Maya Klein of Tel Aviv University taught me a valuable lesson of Hebrew. Silje Susanne Alvestad and Lutz Etzard made additional contributions. I am deeply honored to be able to include a detail from one of Christopher Haanes’s “abstract calligraphic improvisations” on page iii; to my mind, at least, there is something reminiscent of Pound’s creative interpretations of Chinese written characters at play in Christopher’s improvised abstracts based on his intimate knowledge of the calligraphic tradition. My dear friend and colleague Camilla Chams turned out to be a constant inspiration in our shared office. For his lasting friendship and always fabulous conversation I want to thank Endre Ruset, a true poet. Pål H. Aasen has read and commented on most of my dissertation and has been patient with me and encouraging toward me as only a primo amico can be. Lastly, I will, even if I think they may find it somewhat of a cliché, thank my parents for believing in me. There is, I think, nothing to add but a hope that everyone realizes that the errors in this dissertation are all mine.

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Introduction: Ezra Pound and multilingualism in literature

It has never been a secret that Pound wrote, or attempted to write, “polyglot poetry”, to use the expression Leonard Forster put forth in his ground-breaking 1968 lectures published as *The Poet’s Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature* (1970). Pound and T. S. Eliot, said Forster, not only used “polyglot quotation as a stylistic device” but went further and made it “an element of their personal style”, the result being “polyglot poetry, in which several different languages are used to form the texture of the poem” (Forster 1970, 74–75). Forster also compared Pound and Eliot to James Joyce, betraying a preference for the latter. Both the comparison and the preference is rejected by Michael Lee Warner in his PhD dissertation from 1986, “Cantomorphosis: Multilingualism in the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound”: Warner portrays Pound’s multilingual poetry as being “totally unique in our literature”, especially since Eliot abandoned his multilingualism after having composed *The Waste Land* (1922), and also since Warner considers James Joyce in a work such as *Finnegans Wake* (1939) to be “merely pasting together morphemes and phonemes in multilingual clusters” (Warner 1986, 57) By contrast, Warner argues, the multilingualism of Pound’s mature *Cantos* “presents itself in bold strokes that assert an almost independent realm, a part of the language art of the poem” (ibid., xvii).

While Warner primarily concerns himself with the aesthetic effects achieved by Pound’s multilingual practice, making him muse on interesting, if somewhat counter-intuitive parallels such as that between *The Cantos* and jazz, I will on my part show how this practice ought to be understood as related to an overall poetics that has linguistic, philosophical, historical and political implications. In order to understand the nature of Pound’s multilingual project, I find it imperative to ask questions such as, What makes a poet like Pound write multilingual poetry? What does he gain in doing so? How can we distill what perspectives on languages and on the world that underlie such a project? How shall we understand the development of Pound’s multilingual poetics? What does this development signal poetically, epistemologically and politically?

This means seeing Pound’s multilingual poetics not just as a “personal style” but as a larger project that needs to be contextualized more broadly. A central methodological premise of my investigation is that our understanding of Pound’s multilingual poetics gains considerably by bringing into the picture theoreticians seldom linked to Pound or even to poetry. In chapter 1, when I consider Pound’s project as part of a larger twentieth-century intellectual climate, I will discuss both Benjamin Lee Whorf’s linguistic writings and Martin Heidegger’s philosophical ones, demonstrating that they both are relevant to an understanding of differences between languages, differences that I will claim constitute a central basis for Pound’s experiments with linguistic diversity. Even if Pound’s project is arguably about poetry rather than language, I will claim that
analytically separating the two would be highly misleading in this instance. It is precisely at the crossroads where poetic practice and linguistic theory meet that my thesis finds its starting point. This dissertation represents the most in-depth investigation of multilingualism in Pound’s work done to date.

Although Pound as a poet was free to experiment with languages without subjecting these experiments to a specific program, I observe a tendency that he also attempted to formalize his thinking and link his poetry to more committed forms of theoretical and political stances. When Pound hesitates to address the question of language in the abstract, preferring to refer to specific languages and their practical implementations, particularly in poetic practice, I take this as itself marking a contribution to a certain philosophy of language: It implies that language is not an abstract structure, but something defined by its use, not least by its use by the best poets, who are able not only to deploy its existing resources but reshape and renew language itself as well. Pound himself did this in various ways: I start chapter 2 by investigating an early poetic fragment that Pound never published, discussing how Pound here worked on the poetical microlevel to attain a form of linguistic hybridity. When in chapter 3 I discuss the later development of Pound’s multilingual poetics, I find that in the Malatesta Cantos (Cantos 8–11) such instances of hybridity are largely absent; instead we see a radical juxtaposition of different languages. Here it seems that Pound is not so much out to forge a hitherto unseen language, but instead exhibit specimens of different languages and discourses, preserving them in their diversity.

My goal in this dissertation is not first and foremost to make exegetical comments on individual poems, but rather to uncover a certain poetics and discuss how it manifests itself in manifold ways through Pound’s oeuvre, from bombastic statements to subtle hints in a single poem, even morphologically. I will comment on texts from the whole corpus of Pound’s writings, including his early poems, his translations, his prose essays and his letters, as well as occasionally notes, typescripts and manuscripts. An investigation of this heterogeneous textual corpus calls for a pluralist method of research that systematically traces the central questions of multilingualism, poetics and politics across a host of different genres, taking account of the varieties of formal, stylistic and linguistic registers Pound tried out.

In chapters 1 and 2, I deploy two concepts to organize my discussion, namely, linguistic relativism and literary cosmopolitanism.

**First key concept: Linguistic relativism**

Linguistic relativism is the belief that different languages and their structures in various ways affect their users’ worldviews. When Pound’s poetry contains words, expressions and whole passages from several foreign languages, among them Latin, Occitan, Italian, French, German, Greek and
Chinese, this rests, I will argue, on a premise of relativism. In his essay “How to Write” (1930) Pound states that Chinese ideograms constitute “a door into a different modality of thought” (MA, 88). This indicates that a main purpose of immersing oneself in foreign language is expanding one’s habitual range of thought, opening up for foreign worldviews.

A mere ascertainment that Pound was a relativist would not bring us much further in the understanding of his work. What are the implications of such a claim? I will argue that when Pound deploys foreign languages in his poetry, this is partly a way of illustrating and investigating the important points where languages intersect and differ. This is not least the case when we come to Pound’s translations – although, it must be underscored, the difference between translation and “original writing” in Pound’s case is anything but clear-cut – such as those of Classical Chinese poetry in Cathay (1915). Although made on the basis of English-language comments in the notebooks of the late American art historian and “Orientalist” Ernest Fenollosa, these “translations” bear witness to an understanding of Chinese as a verb-driven language, a contested theory that Pound first encountered when reading these notebooks. In chapter 1, I will present and discuss Fenollosa’s theories from a relativist vantage point. In chapter 2, I will discuss the specific wordings in a selection of poems from Cathay. My claim is that these poems both point to and are enriched by a relativist understanding of language.

In his study In Babel’s Shadow: Multilingual Literatures, Monolingual States (2010), Brian Lennon asserts that an “extreme relativist position” holds that “the difference of languages is complete incommensurability”, while an “extreme universalist position” holds that “the difference of languages is always reconcilable” (Lennon 2010, 77). In other words, relativism negates universalism. Important as an alternative category opposite to relativism would be nativism – what Caleb Everett calls “the nativist Chomskyan paradigm in linguistics” (Everett 2016, 14) – that is, the belief that what constitutes human psychology is somehow innate and does not vary to any large degree between cultures or, indeed, between languages and language groups. In this sense, linguistic relativism is a position on the side of nurture in so-called nature and nurture debates.

Let us look at an example of such relativistic versus universalist or nativist premises, fetched from Lawrence Venuti’s influential history of translation, The Translator’s Invisibility (1995), a work to which I will return later in this dissertation. It concerns the differences between Venuti and biblical scholar Eugene Nida. Venuti takes Nida to task for believing in humanity as “an essence that remains unchanged over time and space” (Venuti 1995, 22). In other words, Nida is a universalist or nativist underplaying the importance of nurture. Since launching his concept of “dynamic equivalence” or “functional equivalence” in 1964, Nida had been somewhat of a guru when it came to translation theory. Venuti makes a vehement attack on Nida’s contribution to this field, stating that it is marked by “ethnocentric violence” (ibid., 21): What Nida conceives to be
universal characteristics of all human beings are simply projections stemming from his own Christian humanism. Venuti quotes Nida:

As linguists and anthropologists have discovered, that which unites mankind is much greater than that which divides, and hence there is, even in cases of very disparate languages and cultures, a basis for communication. (Nida, quoted in Venuti 1995, 21)

Even if one thinks Nida is right and that there exists a “basis for communication” between disparate cultures, this does not mean that there are not great differences between the languages of these cultures. A 2009 article by the linguists Nicholas Evans and Stephen G. Levinson, to which I will return in chapter 1, indicates that the idea that the world’s languages are fundamentally similar is quite plainly a myth.

Although linguistic relativism has at times been presented as a belief in the downright impossibility of grasping the worldview of people speaking a radically different primary language, Aneta Pavlenko shows in her 2014 study The Bilingual Mind, and What it Tells Us about Language and Thought that a central twentieth-century relativist such as Whorf on the contrary insisted on the importance of learning foreign languages. It is crucial to take note of this point, for it was in fact largely a commonplace in the early twentieth century that second language learning was cognitively damaging. Pavlenko cites the 1915 work La Pensée et la polyglossie by Izhac Epstein, which concludes, “La polyglossie est une plaie sociale” (“Multilingualism is a social plague”; Epstein, quoted in Pavlenko 2014, 4). She also indicates that Otto Jespersen, “one of the best-known European linguists of the era” (ibid., 5), expressed a similarly unfavorable view of bilingualism.

As Pavlenko demonstrates, such attitudes were not limited to linguists but were also prevalent among politicians. The anti-German sentiment of World War I, for example, made the United States National Education Association go so far as to declare “the practice of giving instruction […] in a foreign tongue to be un-American and unpatriotic” (Fitz-Gerald 1918, quoted in Pavlenko). A similar sentiment toward German language is referred to by Pound in Canto 16, speaking of his friend, the philosopher and poet T. E. Hulme:

And he read Kant in the Hospital, in Wimbledon,  
in the original,  
And the hospital staff didn’t like it. (C, 16/71)

A negative view of bilingualism was further developed in Nazi Germany, where it was “associated with Jews, Poles, and other minorities” and “regarded as a cause of ‘mercenary relativism’,
intellectual deterioration and mental inferiority” (Pavlenko 2014, 5). This bilingualism admittedly has little to do with the multilingualism of a modernist poet like Ezra Pound. Still, it is of great interest that Pound, with his infamous Fascist allegiances, in his Guide to Kulchur (1938) would simply state that “a monolingual culture will never breed anything but asses” (GK, 323). The tension between multilingualism and monolingualism, as well as between cosmopolitanism and ethnicism, will be returning points of orientation in the following.

As an intellectual position, modern linguistic relativism signals that there are important realizations to be made that cannot be subject to a Western, American, or even English-language matrix. In short, linguistic relativism is linguistic anti-imperialism. That is to say, linguistic relativism minus racism equals linguistic anti-imperialism. However, linguistic relativity has at times gone hand in hand with racist assumptions. Even if I myself consider the hypothesis of linguistic relativity to be defensible and fruitful even today, this does not mean that it cannot be (and has not been) used to ends that are more than problematic. Much hinges on this point, and I will return to it when I examine Pound’s specific variety of linguistic relativism.

Second key concept: Literary cosmopolitanism
The concept of world literature (Weltliteratur) as presented by Goethe in his conversations with Eckermann had evident utopian aspects. Goethe envisioned it as a means to create common understanding across different cultures, a sort of diplomacy for cosmopolitans. In What Is World Literature? (2003), David Damrosch links world literature to a certain nuanced and localized cosmopolitanism that remains attentive to the culture both home and abroad and stands in contrast to “rootless cosmopolitanism” (Damrosch 2003, 22). Furthermore, Damrosch explains how the purpose of world literature has been understood as “to broaden the reader’s horizon through the encounter with cultural difference” (ibid., 121). In her Against World Literature (2013) Emily Apter claims that such ideas about world literature remain too idyllic, like a “celebration of nationally and ethnically branded ‘differences’” (Apter 2013, 2). The way she sees it, we need a critical reassessment of how world literature actually functions – that it risks smoothing cultural differences over instead of making us conscious of them, and that it aids in making English the dominating language at the expense of threatened languages, idioms and ways of thinking. In contrast to this, she stresses the need to recognize the “untranslatability” that exists between different languages, as signaled in her subtitle On the Politics of Untranslatability.

The temptation to see world literature as a utopian idea can both be illustrated and problematized when reading Pound’s work. That Pound had a cosmopolitan orientation toward Weltliteratur in his early years is betrayed for example by a 1913 letter of his to Harriet Monroe, editor of Poetry, about his ideals for the magazine, namely, that it must aim at “a universal standard which pays no attention to time or country – a Weltlitteratur [sic] standard” (SL, 24–25). In a letter to the poet and critic Louis Untermeyer written in 1930, Pound mentioned that he had enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania at the age of fifteen “with intention of studying comparative values in literature (poetry) and began doing so unbeknown to the faculty” (Pound, quoted in Moody 2007, 14). “In this search”, he continued,

I learned more or less of nine languages, I read Oriental stuff in translations, I fought every University regulation and every professor who tried to make me learn anything except this, or who bothered me with “requirements for degrees”. (ibid.)

For all its questionable accuracy as an assessment a posteriori, this quotation shows beyond any doubt that Pound saw a clear connection between taking a cosmopolitan stance and immersing oneself in foreign languages.

Pound was cosmopolitan in his ambitions for poetry, as well as in his ambition to learn and deploy as many foreign languages as he was able to. My reading is that these are fundamentally the same. Pound’s literary cosmopolitanism is not characterized by an ideal of any complete mastery of foreign languages. In a letter to the young poet Iris Barry from June 1916, Pound wrote:

Really one DON’T need to know a language. One NEEDS, damn well needs, to know the few hundred words in the few really good poems that any language has in it. It is better to know [Sappho’s] POIKILOTHRON by heart than to be able to read Thucydides without trouble. (SL, 93)

It has been intimated that Pound’s own grasp of languages other than the Romance ones, especially Greek and German, was comparatively weak (cf. Xie 2007, 205). Addressing his reader(s) in Canto 105, after having given a quote in Greek, Pound simply states:

I shall have to learn a little greek to keep up with this but so will you, drratt you. (C, 105/770)
There is reason to stress, then, that Pound’s “polyglot poetry” is, in a sense, *polyglot to an extent that its author is not*. This is sign of Pound’s radically innovative way of composing poetry, using multilingual passages as collage elements. These passages are not necessarily there to be *understood* in the sense of being *translated by the reader* but may just as well be signaling an impregnable fortress of linguistic difference, as such indicating the relevance of linguistic relativism to an understanding of Pound’s poetry.

Even if the student Pound was out to learn as many languages as he was able to, his literary cosmopolitanism is more importantly a search for valuable lessons from poetic cultures remote both historically and geographically, to be deployed in the present. Furthermore, it is, as I will show in chapter 2, not solely a cosmopolitanism of *lexical borrowings*: What is borrowed is just as much literary genres, rhythms, sounds, images, topoi and conventional forms of phrasing, in short *forms and motifs*. These forms and motifs are not only ways of representing the world but ways of experiencing it and thinking about it. I will read Pound’s poetry as a way of working with experience, epistemology and cognition.

James Wilhelm claims that in Pound’s years as a student, his mind was “already functioning in a comparative literary way – far ahead of his time” (Wilhelm 1985, 138). In other words, Wilhelm sees Pound as a proto-comparatist in the study of literature:

In short, Pound wanted to create a department of Comparative Literature and was frustrated, just as today many schools tend to divide literary studies almost entirely across national lines. (ibid., 153)

Both Wilhelm and James Dowthwaite are concerned with how Pound became a literary comparatist. Dowthwaite, however, conceives of this whole complex differently than Wilhelm, seeing Pound’s “comparative method” not as something he sought out himself, but rather as fundamentally a continuation of the instruction he received as a student:

The comparative method which Pound employs in his criticism and in his poetic practice, his insistence on comparing and drawing out the relations between literary traditions in various different languages, mediated by time and place, corresponds to the instruction he received, as revealed in his notes. (Dowthwaite 2019, 36)

The notes referred to by Dowthwaite are the ones Pound took as a student, a sample of which are to be found in the two folders labeled “Philology” in the Pound archives at the Beinecke Rare Book
& Manuscript Library.² Knowing to what degree Pound came to polemicize against “philology” – Luke McMullan (2019) coins the term “counter-philology” to denote Pound’s artistic practice rivalling more orthodox academic varieties of the discipline – it gives a strange feeling to observe how he marks many of his sheets with an initial “Philol”, typically at the top of the page, and in the notes themselves does painstaking work to acquire the basics of Romance philology, such as relatively elementary grammar and somewhat more advanced metrics and (in fact especially) phonology and phonetics. The notes in the “Philology” folder repeatedly mention the legendary philologist and literary historian Gaston Paris, an important source for the revival of interest in the Provençal troubadours. These poets were so important, claimed Pound, that “any study of European poetry is unsound if it does not commence with a study of that art in Provence” (LE, 101). In other words, Pound’s literary cosmopolitanism is not least a study and deployment of forms and motifs from different poetic traditions found throughout history. When we come to Pound’s Cantos, we find a work that is deeply marked by different historical layers, like a palimpsest.

The Cantos of Ezra Pound clearly represents something original and new, while stressing the importance of history. This strikingly multilingual poem arguably represents a call to explore connections and differences between languages, poetic forms and ways of thinking. In this way, it may be read as an invitation to the reader as well as the critic to engage in a form of cosmopolitanism. But, as we shall see, the experimental character of The Cantos cannot be reduced to a cosmopolitan statement. By including the adjective “literary” in the characterization “literary cosmopolitanism” we may, however, regardless of Pound’s influences or intentions, ask whether it makes sense to read The Cantos itself as representing an invitation to study “world literature”, as such being an experimental form of a comparative literature syllabus. The poetry is not only fruitfully analyzed comparatively, but itself functions comparatively, for a reader open to delving into the heterogeneity of literary traditions and different languages. The Cantos is one of the works of modern poetry that is most resistant to Apter’s claim that world literature downplays the importance of the “untranslatable”: By quoting poetry and other texts in their original language, the poem tries to keep languages as they are, insisting on the foreignness of the foreign. However, as I will come back to toward the end of the dissertation, there is something about this need to segregate languages that remains deeply problematic given Pound’s segregationist view of cultures as such.

² The notes are marked in the archive as having no date, but some of the sheets are marked with month, such as January and February (EPP, Box 87, Folder 3733) and November and January again (EPP, Box 87, Folder 3734). Dowthwaite must be right in assuming that these stem from the year 1905 and/or 1906, in other words from Pound’s later stint as a student at the University of Pennsylvania. In the same box, there is even a separate folder (Folder 3735) labeled “Phonetics” that, judging by the paper and writing, must date from about the same time. In a separate folder labeled “Literary Criticism” (Folder 3732), also in all likelihood from the same period, there is what may be the first note Pound makes of Dante’s work of linguistics and literary criticism, De vulgari eloquentia.
A multilingual poem is not necessarily a melting pot but might rather be a locus for “exhibiting” cultural and linguistic difference.

**Monolingualism and ethnicism**

Yasemin Yildız’s study *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (2012) has become a commonplace reference within studies in the field of multilingual literature.³ Yildız stresses that multilingualism is and has been far more common worldwide than has previously been acknowledged. Referring to Forster, she in fact observes a “complete absence of the mother tongue-centric monolingual paradigm in the seventeenth century when it came to writing practices” (Yildiz 2012 [2006], 72). But according to Yildiz, the West has since German Romanticism been influenced by a monolingual ideology. If not an actual state of things, monolingualism has been set out as ideal both for individuals and larger collectives; as such, it has worked as a “vital element in the imagination and production of the homogeneous nation-state” (ibid., 7). A monolingualist ideology was to become crucial to the nationalist movement in the nineteenth century. This ideology indicated that a state would ideally consist of only one nation speaking only one maternal language.

Yildız explains that the monolingualist ideology of the Romantics in turn was predated by a certain language purism, for example as expressed by German Sprachgesellschaften (language societies) in the Baroque era, which aimed “to establish and heighten the prestige of German vis-à-vis Latin, French, and other European languages at a time when the language was not yet standardized” (ibid., 72). These elite societies saw it as a goal to eradicate the traces of other languages within German and replacing Fremdwörter (foreign words) with German ones – even if Fremdwort as a term is not documented until 1816 (ibid., 73). The early modern movement for language “purification” was instrumental in installing the opposition between “pure” and “foreign” when it comes to languages. In chapter 2, I will give some examples to show that a similar idea of the foreign and the proper was relevant in a British context from as early on as the beginning of the sixteenth century, and that a similar idea of language purity had its revival in the nineteenth century, as such creating a background for the early Pound’s anti-purist attitudes in questions of language.

Intellectuals like Johann Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt and Friedrich Schleiermacher “spearheaded the view”, says Yildız, “that one could properly think, feel and express oneself only in one’s ‘mother tongue’” (ibid., 6–7). Even as they supported the study of other languages, these thinkers laid enormous weight on the idea of the Muttersprache – Yildiz

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³ Yildız’s study was originally published in 2006 as *Beyond the Mother Tongue: Configurations of Multilingualism in Twentieth-Century German Literature*. The 2012 title indicates that, according to Yildız, we are at present finding ourselves in the complex territory of the postmonolingual condition, playing on the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard’s concept of the postmodern condition (in the work with this title, originally published in 1979). We are, I would suggest by way of exegesis, experiencing a lack of legitimacy on the part of monolingualism comparable to the postmodern lack of legitimacy on the part of metadiscourses and metanarratives analyzed by Lyotard.
quotes Schleiermacher to the effect that “every writer can produce original work only in his mother tongue” (ibid., 8–9) and Richard Wagner, who opined that “to make poetry in a foreign tongue has hitherto been impossible, even to geniuses of highest rank” (ibid., 9–10). Strikingly, it has been pointed out that Pound in his poetry “puts his more private feelings into a foreign language” (cf. Redman 1991, 87), turning any idea of the Muttersprache having a privileged link to emotions on its head. Even if the tradition of English-language poetry arguably was never governed by a monolingual ideology to the same extent as the German-language tradition studied by Yildiz, I insist that understanding Pound’s poetry, poetics and political commitments requires a thorough investigation of the reasons why he goes in an entirely different direction and of the functions of the multilingualism at play in his work.

My contribution in this dissertation is to the study of Pound’s poetics and politics as well as to the field of multilingual literature more generally. Put very schematically, chapter 1 will explore epistemological concerns, chapter 2 poetry, and chapter 3 politics. But the exploration in all three chapters is concerned with the intermingling of epistemological, poetical and political considerations. Toward the end I point to how Pound’s highly problematic political attitudes affected his writings. I do not intend to give any final answer to questions concerning Pound’s Fascism and anti-Semitism, but will demonstrate how such ideologies present themselves on the level of his texts. While their multilingual lexicon and formal borrowing from foreign literary traditions clearly point to a form of literary cosmopolitanism, their equivocal relation to linguistic relativism points to striking copresences of purity and anti-purity, of homogeneity and heterogeneity, of cosmopolitanism and ethnicism.
Chapter 1: Ezra Pound and linguistic relativism

In his pioneering study of the relation between Ezra Pound and twentieth-century theories of language, James Dowthwaite at one point asks the question, “Was Pound a linguistic relativist?” (Dowthwaite 2019, 102). As Dowthwaite indicates, there are many reasons to give a simple “yes” in reply to such a query. Still, he argues, the issue is considerably more complex than that, particularly since the whole question of linguistic relativism also needs to be discussed in anthropological terms such as cultural relativism and its dichotomic opposite, universalism. A central hypothesis in this dissertation is that Pound developed a view of language akin to linguistic relativism, with its own Poundian characteristics. It is not my point that Pound was in any way directly influenced by relativists like Edward Sapir or Benjamin Lee Whorf or their precursor Wilhelm von Humboldt (Pound only mentions his brother, Alexander von Humboldt, in Cantos 89 and 97).4 I am not after any such historical causality.5 My claim is conceptual and intellectual, signaling that Pound was conceiving of language similarly to these influential proponents of relativism. Importantly, Pound’s interest in differences between languages was not solely a question of poetics. It also had profound political implications.

In the first section of this chapter, I will discuss some of the prose texts in which Pound explicitly discusses language(s). I then turn to Pound’s writing about and interaction with British philosophers C. K. Ogden and his proposal for a universal language, the so-called Basic English, as well as Pound’s own project for a system consisting of three international languages. Subsequently, I will devote much of this chapter to a discussion of Ernest Fenollosa’s essay The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry. The fact that Pound edited and published this essay, characterizing it as an ars poetica, leads me to discuss Pound’s own poetical version of linguistic relativism. I will do this with reference to not only the likes of Sapir and Whorf, but also to intellectuals not usually associated with linguistic relativism, such as Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida. After suggesting a relativist interpretation of a passage on the color red from Pound’s ABC of Reading, I end this chapter by discussing the possible relations between linguistic relativism and poetry.

4 According to Jean-Michel Rabaté, it is not clear whether Pound in Canto 89 alludes to Alexander or Wilhelm von Humboldt when saying: “Out of von Humboldt: Agassiz, Del Mar and Frobenius” (C, 618). Rabaté remarks that “the link between Wilhelm von Humboldt’s linguistic theories and Frobenius is undubitable” (Rabaté 1986, 317), which is an interesting observation given the importance Leo Frobenius had to Pound. Still, the reference to Louis Agassiz indicates that it is more likely that Pound was pointing to Alexander von Humboldt: Agassiz’ biographer Edward Lurie says that “Agassiz was doing for American science what [Alexander von] Humboldt had done for Europe” (Lurie 1960, 198).

5 I will just quickly note that the poet Charles Olson, famously influenced by Pound, whom he visited at St. Elizabeths as early as 1946, made a list of authors worth studying, dated March 1961. Among the twelve names are Edward Sapir, Benjamin Whorf and Ernest Fenollosa (cf. Olson 1997, 188).
1.1. Pound’s linguistic relativism

Taking my cue from the works of American linguist and anthropologist Edward Sapir (1884–1939) and his student at Yale, Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897–1941), commonly taken to be the two main proponents of linguistic relativism in the twentieth century (to the extent that the theory is often referred to as the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis), I will start by suggesting a provisional definition of linguistic relativism. This position may be said to consist of three primary claims: (1) that languages produce specific organizations of experience; (2) that languages differ in important ways from one another when it comes to classifying the real world, to the extent that even the sense of the “real world” is built upon unconscious linguistic habits pertaining to the specific sociolinguistic group in question; (3) that languages belonging to different language families differ to an especially large extent.

In his history of linguistic relativism in the Western world, *Linguistic Relativities* (2011), John Leavitt considers it imperative to separate the idea of linguistic relativism from what he calls the “linguistic determinism hypothesis”. Where linguistic relativism implies that the language(s) one speaks influences one’s habitual conception of the world, linguistic determinism states that human thought is constrained by one’s primary language, in such a way that there are things this language makes one fundamentally unable to think. It is important to stress, as does Aneta Pavlenko (2014), that neither Sapir nor Whorf were claiming such a determinist position, even if they are sometimes portrayed as doing so.

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6 Even if neither Sapir nor Whorf referred to their ideas as a “hypothesis”, the expression “Sapir–Whorf hypothesis” was coined in 1954 by their theoretical ally, the linguist and anthropologist Harry Hoijer, and soon gained ground. It is also referred to as such in John B. Carroll’s 1955 introduction to Whorf’s *Language, Thought, and Reality* (2012 [1956], 33). However, as anthropologist Caleb Everett observes in his study *Linguistic Relativity* (2013), this denomination seems to be falling out of favor: Linguists of today tend to speak of “the hypothesis of linguistic relativity”, not linking it explicitly to Sapir or Whorf.

7 One might contend that there is a difference in semantics between “linguistic relativity” and “linguistic relativism”. Still, I will almost exclusively use “linguistic relativism” in this dissertation. The main reason is that there are important and interesting parallels between linguistic relativism and what is commonly referred to as cultural relativism. It has, for example, been noted that Edward Sapir spoke of relativity in a sense very close to cultural relativism – or, as Everett terms it, “cultural relativity” (Everett 2016, 12).

8 In articulating these points I am building on Benjamin Whorf’s statements about linguistic relativity in his *Language, Thought, and Reality* (2012 [1956], esp. 70, 178, 274, 282–83, 322–23), as well as Edward Sapir’s article “The Status of Linguistics as a Science” (1929, esp. 209).

9 Pavlenko is highly critical of the very category “linguistic determinism”, which she sees as a result of the so-called Sapir–Whorf hypothesis becoming reified and presented in a strong and weak form, in what she considers a “false dichotomy”: It is this false dichotomy, she argues, that made it possible for Ronald W. Langacker, in a 1976 article, to characterize the “weak” version as “obviously true but uninteresting”; and the “strongest” version as “the most interesting” but also “obviously false” (cf. Pavlenko 2014, 15). Unsurprisingly, empirical research has failed to “prove” the strong version. Pavlenko clearly has a point in dismissing the usefulness of the category “linguistic determinism”, since it is a position that hardly anyone today would be willing to claim. The whole idea of a strong, deterministic version of linguistic relativism is traced by Pavlenko back to the work of psychologists Roger Brown and Eric Lenneberg in the 1950s. The underlying idea of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, she claims, has been profoundly affected by the reformulation of it given by Brown and Lenneberg, moving the discussion of “further and further away from
I will certainly not claim that Ezra Pound is a determinist. Given a tendency among Pound scholars to treat his view of language as one of a (somewhat naïve) linguistic “realism”, positing a seemingly straightforward mimetic relation between words and things, one may even wonder why Pound should be of any interest to a relativist understanding of language. One primary response to such an objection would be that there is every reason to question the extent to which Pound’s so-called realism implies that the stated ideal of a one-to-one relation between verbal expression and referent is something equally achievable by all languages, or if some languages lend themselves better to it than others. Pound’s positive view of Chinese written characters, for example, clearly has do with this written language’s supposed ability to mime the world in a more faithful way that does modern English (as habitually used). Furthermore, one may certainly complicate the whole picture of Pound as a simple realist in matters of language in the first place, as I will show by reference to some of Pound’s explicit statements on language. Later, when moving on to his giant poem The Cantos, I will stress that Pound’s magnum opus is surely not a work that can be easily dismissed as purporting a simplistic, not to say easily paraphrased, relation to questions of language. I find Allen Ginsberg’s comment illuminating: In the conversation he had with Pound in 1967, Ginsberg asserts that there are “series of practical exact language models which are scattered throughout the Cantos” (Ginsberg 2001, 8). Such “practical exact language models” are not limited to, but certainly include, the many multilingual elements that form part of the poem: The very characteristics of Pound’s work suggest that there is more to linguistic difference than universalists generally assume.

Pound also made numerous statements that have obvious relativistic traits. For example, in the essay “How to Read”, originally published 13 January 1929 in the journal New York Herald Tribune Books, he states the following: “Different languages […] have worked out certain mechanisms for communication and registration. No one language is complete.” (LE, 36) Pound then takes medieval Italian as an example:

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Sapir’s primary interest in ‘social reality’ and Whorf’s central concern with ‘habitual thought’” (ibid., 15). In Pavlenko’s opinion, what is commonly discussed under the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis label should instead be referred to as “the Brown–Lenneberg hypothesis” (ibid., 14). She argues that a return to the sources is warranted: Sapir and Whorf are much more nuanced and interesting than what their (often highly critical) reception has taken them to be. In his dissertation on Pound’s translations, Andrés Claro claims that “Pound’s ideas about language per se were those of a realist […] – even if a mystical realist with medieval and scientific inflections” (Claro 2004, 8). Even Roxana Preda, who in her study Ezra Pound’s (Post)Modern Poetics and Politics (2001) is out to trace a sort of proto-postmodernism in Pound’s work, says that “an unhinging between the word and the real in Pound’s work is not discernible” (Preda 2001, 11).

10 In his dissertation on Pound’s translations, Andrés Claro claims that “Pound’s ideas about language per se were those of a realist […] – even if a mystical realist with medieval and scientific inflections” (Claro 2004, 8). Even Roxana Preda, who in her study Ezra Pound’s (Post)Modern Poetics and Politics (2001) is out to trace a sort of proto-postmodernism in Pound’s work, says that “an unhinging between the word and the real in Pound’s work is not discernible” (Preda 2001, 11).

11 As early as in 1948, Harold Watts published an article claiming Pound was a nominalist (Watts 1948, reprinted in P&P, vol. 8), a contention that has been put forth anew by Marjorie Perloff (2003). But it ought to be said, as Dowthwaite does, that “realism and nominalism are theories of reality, not theories of language” (Dowthwaite 2019, 177). A synthesis of the critical writings on Pound would suggest that he was simultaneously a metaphysical nominalist and a linguistic realist. Alternatively, as Massimo Bacigalupo and Donald Davie have argued, one can see Pound as a linguistic realist who did not realize “how his own practice went beyond his own mimetic theory” (Davie 2006 [1982]).
The man who does not know the Italian of the duecento and trecento has in him a painful lacuna, not necessarily painful to himself, but there are simply certain things he don’t [sic] know, and can’t; it is as if he were blind to some part of the spectrum. (*LE*, 37)

This quote clearly exposes Pound as thinking in terms of linguistic relativism. In one respect, Pound seems congenial to Whorf, who considered knowing and not-knowing languages an *unconscious* element in the speaker’s worldview – those ignorant of Italian language dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Pound implies, have a “lacuna” in them, and this lacuna is a sort of unconscious blindness. I should, however, note that there is also a clear difference between the approaches of Whorf and Pound that is on display in this quotation, a difference that tells us something important about the characteristics of Pound’s form of linguistic relativism: Pound’s relativism is not only about *synchronic* differences between individual languages, but by *diachronic* differences internal to a single language itself. Even modern Italians, one must assume, may not know the variety of Italian dating from the late medieval period, and as such be victims of the same lacuna as are speakers of other languages. One might object that this passage does not refer to language per se, but to poetry: The “Italian of the duecento and trecento” refers to the Italian of the poets of that era, not that of the average speaker. This is not an incidental difference, as it relates to Pound’s linguistic thinking as a whole. I would not suggest, however, that this thinking is about poetry rather than language. This would be a false dichotomy. Instead, for Pound language is not an abstract structure, but something that is practiced by individuals capable not only of “inheriting” the language, but of shaping and renewing it. In other words, a language is defined by how it is used by its best poets.

In the following passage from Pound’s 1918 essay “Notes on Elizabethan Classicists”, where Pound speculates about how the grammatical cases of Classical Latin must have been associated with different feelings for the ones having this as their primary language, we can see that Pound is not *solely* concerned with poetry when discussing language. We also observe how the diachronic and synchronic perspectives are amalgamated in his thinking:

The Latin had certain *case feelings*. For the genitive he felt source, for the dative indirect action upon, for the accusative direct action upon, for the ablative all other peripheric sensation, i.e. it is less definitely or directly the source than the genitive, it is contributory circumstance; lump the locative with it, and one might call it the “circumstantial”. (*LE*, 239)

This passage makes it evident that Pound saw the grammar of a language as linked to certain specific ways of thinking. There is a substantial amount of linguistic relativism implied in these few lines.
alone. Nonetheless, even here Pound’s thinking is clearly more diachronic than Whorf’s: It seems reasonable to assume that Pound must have thought of Romance languages such as Italian, French, Spanish and Occitan as languages where the case feelings associated with Classical Latin had somehow disappeared together with the grammatical cases, or at least had been given other linguistic modes of expression. The very idea of historical change being relevant to human understanding and feeling does itself constitute a contrast to universalist conceptions of humankind. Pound’s linguistic relativism is also a form of historicism, a form of relativism that underscores the importance of historical change, of thinking historically and of taking the actual historical and political situation into account. Pound actively linked his linguistic thinking to geopolitics, as we will see in the following section, where I will examine how Pound relates to the idea of a universal language and subsequently launches a similar project himself, “a tri-lingual system for world communication”. Investigating this project will aid us in understanding how seemingly philosophical understandings of language have considerable relevance to questions of poetics and politics.

1.2. Pound and universal language: “Debabelization” and the trilingual system

On 28 February 1935, Pound published a short essay in the New English Weekly titled “Debabelization and Ogden”, which is clearly relevant in regard to linguistic relativism. Apart from a reference to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9), the title is a reference to the British philosopher and linguist Charles Kay Ogden (1889–1957), who himself had used the term “debabelization” in the title of his 1931 book Debabelization: With a Survey of Contemporary Opinion on the Problem of a Universal Language, a work that, according to Dowthwaite, is “heavily influenced by Sapir” (Dowthwaite 2019, 150). Ogden’s influential 1923 book The Meaning of Meaning, co-authored with Igor Armstrong Richards (1893–1979), has also been said to contain “many of the positions held by both Whorf and Sapir” (Koerner 2000, 2).

One year before issuing Debabelization, Ogden had published his own attempt at making English the starting point for a universal language, Basic English: A General Introduction with Rules and Grammar (1930). What is probably best known today about Ogden’s “Basic English” (Basic being an acronym for British American Scientific International Commercial) is that the philosopher here compiled a list of 850 English words that make up the lexicon of Basic English. Ogden himself referred to the language as an “international auxiliary language”, thereby indicating

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12 In Machine Art and Other Writings: The Lost Thought of the Italian Years, edited by Maria Luisa Ardizzone (1996), Ardizzone includes the article with the inverse title “Ogden and Debabelization”. The version published in 1935 is reprinted in the nine-volume publication Ezra Pound’s Poetry and Prose: Contributions to Periodicals (1991), from which I quote it here.
that it was not out to replace the existing languages, but instead function as a world-wide second language.

Pound’s essay about Ogden opens with a humorous admission: “If mere extensions of vocabulary, or use of foreign words is a sin, I surely am chief among all sinners living.” (P&P, vol. 6, 251) Here Pound is evidently referring to the extensive use of multiple languages in his poems. The essay continues like this:

Yet, to the best of my knowledge, I have never used a Greek word or a Latin one where English would have served. […] When it has been an Italian or French word, it has asserted or I have meant it to assert some meaning not current in English, some shade or gradation. (ibid.)

Pound indicates that he is not simply showing off his learnedness when using foreign language elements in his poetry, but is constantly searching for verbal precision, even if this means going beyond the borders not only of any “basic” version of English, but indeed beyond the borders of the English language as such. Moving on, Pound says that if he is Ogden’s ally, he is “probably the last one he looked for” (ibid.). It seems, though, that he does consider himself an ally of Ogden’s. How can this be? The answer comes down to the fact that Pound, in his arguing for the so-called Social Credit Policy, had stated that “AS MUCH PROPAGANDA AS POSSIBLE SHOULD BE WRITTEN IN BASIC ENGLISH” (ibid.). In other words, as an economic activist or propagandist, Pound endorsed Ogden’s conception of “Basic English”. He actually says:

[T]he advantages of BASIC vocabulary limited to 850 words and their variants, plus the specific technical vocabulary for individual sciences, for the diffusion of ideas is, or should be, obvious to any man of intelligence. (ibid.)

However, when composing poetry, Pound went in the opposite direction, steered not by concerns for “the diffusion of ideas”, but rather searching all languages he could for words that would enable him to achieve an accurate verbal set of expressions.

The whole project of Basic English had originated with Ogden founding his so-called Orthological Institute in 1927. It is striking that Pound in the 1930s started to use the very term “orthological” in some of his economic writings, clearly having derived the term from Ogden.13

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13 Two 1935 articles in the New English Weekly (11 April and 20 June) were, for example, called “Towards Orthology” and “Toward Orthology: Sargent Florence” (cf. Dowthwaite 2019, 171). From 1936 to 1938, Dowthwaite observes, “the term [orthology] appeared in the headline of a number of his [Pound’s] contributions to periodicals” (ibid., 156).
Pound’s deployment of the term indicates that a remedy for what he saw as unnatural usurious capitalism could be found by simply righting verbal wrongs in the day-to-day language of the financial world. As Dowthwaite says, both Pound and Ogden “argue that the problems of language are at the root causes of the development” of political inequality and corruption (Dowthwaite 2019, 167). Pound evidently also considered “orthology” a didactic ideal by which one can gain “readability”, as stated in a letter to publisher Stanley Nott from May 1935: “readability in ECON. comes from GOOD WRITING, it comes from ORTHOLOGY. (in my sense, as ameliorated from Ogden)” (Pound, quoted in Dowthwaite 2019, 150). Pound does not specify how he has ameliorated the sense of the term “orthology”. By indicating that he has crafted his own sense of the term, Pound clearly marked that he considered himself to be at a certain distance from Ogden, even if his using the term would suggest that he was still fundamentally thinking of the two being in alliance.

As Dowthwaite says, “Pound shared with Ogden a distrust of abstraction and generalization” (Dowthwaite 2019, 135), something that might explain that Pound in January 1935 had begun a correspondence with the philosopher. Ogden was not as strange a choice as one might think. As a matter of fact, he also exchanged letters with T. S. Eliot and Wyndham Lewis, contributed to Eugene Jolas’s journal *transition*, and – even more strikingly – in 1929 wrote an introduction to James Joyce’s publication *Tales Told of Shem and Shaun*, a selection of extracts from Joyce’s “Work in Progress” that eventually became *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Ogden and his colleague Leonora Lockhart also “translated” another extract from Joyce’s work, *Anna Livia Plurabelle*, into Basic English, publishing the result in *transition* in 1932.

In his first letter to Ogden, from 28 January 1935, Pound intimated that he could be willing to compose a canto in Basic English (cf. Dowthwaite 2019, 147), a suggestion that he never followed up on, although Dowthwaite claims that the nine-line passage from Canto 51 which seemingly just echoes Canto 45 on usury, does in fact represent a simplifying of the wording of the earlier canto (for example by changing “Wool comes not to market“ (C, 45/229) to “Wool does not come into market” (C, 51/250)) and must have been written with the principles of Basic English in mind (ibid., 159). After having published “Debabelization and Ogden”, Pound in another letter wanted Ogden to respond publicly to the article. Such a response never materialized, much to Pound’s frustration. The correspondence between the two then ended, only to be reasserted in 1938, again coming to an end with Pound castigating Ogden for not having written a response to his article.

The same day he wrote his first letter to Ogden, 28 January 1935, Pound also wrote to Mussolini’s son-in-law Galeazzo Ciano, at the time the minster of propaganda in the Italian Fascist government. In this letter, Pound claimed that “[t]he first European nation to use BASIC, as the basis of their teaching in schools, will get an immense advantage over all other[s]” (Pound, quoted
in Dowthwaite 2019, 149). He even claimed that “[y]ou can SAY anything you like” in Basic English. Admittedly, it will not “enable a man to appreciate psychological poetry”, but it “can be used for all necessary TRANSMISSION; all commerce” (ibid.). At this point, Pound clearly saw a political value in such a simplified version of English.

In the 1940s, Ogden’s Basic English was endorsed by Winston Churchill, in Emily Apter’s words as “part of a meliorist colonial platform” (Apter 2006, 137). On 20 April 1944 Churchill wrote a letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt, stating that if the United States were to support the promotion of Basic English, this auxiliary language will “prove to be a great boon to mankind in the future and a powerful support to the influence of the Anglo-Saxon peoples in world affairs” (Churchill, quoted in Dowthwaite 2019, 169). If Pound had not already distanced himself from Ogden, he would probably have been additionally put off by Churchill’s endorsement of Basic English, given how much he loathed the British prime minister. Still, Pound did not cease referring to Ogden. For example, in an undated letter to Harvard sinologist Achilles Fang (possibly from February 1951), Pound writes that “a better ‘basic’ stunt than Ogden’s might be found”, referring to the idea of having a Chinese dictionary for foreigners grouping together words that start with the “same or similar sound” (Achilles Fang Papers, Box 1, folder 4).

Whorf, who must be said to be the one with whom the very coining of the expression “linguistic relativism” originated, also refers to Ogden’s Basic English in one of his articles. Here, it becomes clear that Whorf is out to counter illusions that average speakers of English might have about their language:

Basic English appeals to people because it seems simple. But those to whom it seems simple either know or think they know English – there’s the rub! Every language of course seems simple to its own speakers because they are unconscious of structure. But English is anything but simple. (Whorf 2012 [1956], 105)

For an average speaker of a language, this very language seems simple, Whorf observes – but once one becomes “conscious of structure”, one realizes what an intricate and idiosyncratic system a language is. Here an interesting parallel can be drawn between Whorf and the later Pound who, in one of his letters to aspiring poet Robert Creeley in their correspondence dating from 1950 and 1951, again comments on Ogden:

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14 This letter is not included in Zhaoming Qian’s *Ezra Pound’s Chinese Friends* (2008), but clearly relates to subjects discussed in letters between Fang and Pound included here. This context makes February 1951 a plausible dating.

15 Whorf himself referred to the idea as the “linguistic relativity principle”, thereby playing on the parallel between his own theories of language and Albert Einstein’s theories in the domain of physics.
Yes, Ogden is pleasant, but the kind of ass who when propagating basic english seemed to expect one to TRANSLATE his english prospectus for every italian one mentioned it to, TOTALLY dead to fact that the foreigner wd/ want or need a page of explanation in his own language re/ what the basic (and of course abominable for all use except selling british goods) was aimed at … (P&P, vol. 9, 400)

Even if initially stating that Ogden is “pleasant”, Pound’s ambivalence toward the philosopher in this passage borders on the dismissive when he indicates that Basic English is “abominable for all use except selling british goods”. To understand why such a project would be “abominable” for other purposes than purely commercial ones, we might think of the explanation given by Whorf: The way Pound in the Creeley letter comments on Ogden, the latter is portrayed as one who, just like an “average speaker”, does not realize that English is “anything but simple”. Pound stresses that what may have seemed simple to Ogden was in dire need of explanation in foreign language versions if foreigners were to understand the very purpose of Basic English. In other words, Pound intimates that behind Ogden’s project for making a simplified version of English into an international language lies universalist prejudices presupposing that all languages are basically alike. It would seem, then, that Pound reproaches Ogden for not being sufficiently relativistic in his ideas about language. What is striking, given the indications I have given so far of Pound’s relativist convictions, is that Pound himself, in the period between the publication of “Debabelization and Ogden” and the letter to Creeley, launched a universal language project of his own.

As early as May 1935, Pound suggested a “post-Ogden” series of pamphlets called “Ideogrammic Series” in a letter to Nott, indicating that the series should drive toward “ORTHOLOGY” – “not […] in opposition to C.K. Ogden”, although “definitely […] in CONTRAST” to Ogden’s project (Pound, quoted in Dowthwaite 2019, 153). In his 1936 preface to the reissue of Fenollosa’s essay The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry (originally published by Pound in 1919), Pound declared Chinese ideogram to be the right basis for a new universal language, being in his opinion more reliable than Ogden’s Basic English (cf. Saussy 2009, 7). While Basic English had as one of its most prominent features a radical reduction of the amount of verbs to one hundred – all others being replaced by composite expressions using sixteen “operators” (come, get, give, go, keep, let, make, put, seem, take, be, do, have, say, see and send) and two “auxiliaries” (may and will) – Pound in his preface states that “[m]any of the nouns in the Ogden list of 850 words could very well serve as verbs, thereby giving considerably greater force to that brief vocabulary” (Pound, quoted in Dowthwaite 2019, 154). The verb was, as will become increasingly clear throughout this chapter, of great importance to Pound. Basic English, in contrast,
was in its grammatical machinery “driven by a radical attack on the notion of the verb”, and Ogden himself “sceptical about the verb’s basis in reality” (Dowthwaite 2019, 134).

Pound had indicated ideograms as a possible basis for a universal language. Later he moved on to suggest a *trilingual* system of universal language. The first time the idea of a system based on three languages to facilitate world communication is launched by Pound is in a letter from January 1938, addressed to Erminio Turcotti, a professor of Eastern languages based in Milan. Pound here says that he suggests the “three language system” for “practical purposes”, taking into consideration “the combined populations of U.S.A. and Brit Empire” and claiming that Chinese ideogram is “comprehensible to all China and Japan”; Italian, on its part, in a version with “slightly freer grammar” would, Pound says, be “easy for Germans, Scandinavs and all speakers of English”, and a necessary inclusion as a third language since “structurally Chinese ideogram is TOO FAR from the spirit of [L]atin grammar to be translatable into Italian” (Pound, quoted in Dowthwaite 2019, 164) – this latter observation is once again clearly a statement presupposing a form of linguistic relativism. Dowthwaite comments that the three languages Pound has marked out as potentially “universal” are also “the most common of his *Cantos*” (Dowthwaite 2019, 165), and concludes: “Rather than prescribing a model of interlinguistic systems for the modern world, he [Pound], in fact, describes the interlinguistic system of his poetic attempt to render that world.” (ibid.) This perceptive assessment could be expanded to include a contemporary political dimension: The choice of Italian and ideogram at a point in a time when there was a Fascist regime governing Italy, and Japan had allied with Nazi Germany by signing the 1936 Anti-Comintern Pact, is hardly a coincidence. Bringing *The Cantos* into this picture suggests that Massimo Bacigalupo may be onto something when he, in *The Forméd Trace* (1980), refers to Pound’s magnum opus as “among other things, the sacred poem of the Nazi-Fascist millennium which mercifully never eventuated” (Bacigalupo 1980, x). Even if linking Pound’s masterpiece to the fate of Fascism in this manner may seem reductionist, there is certainly something to the idea that Pound’s work could have ended up having a completely different role and function in such a contrafactual millennium. At the very least, Pound’s trilingual system would seem considerably more meaningful given such a historical trajectory.

Before it became clear that the Nazi-Fascist millennium would not eventuate, Pound went on advocating his trilingual project. A year after having written the letter to professor Turcotti, Pound takes up again the question concerning universal language in an article in the *Japan Times*, claiming that all attempts at universal language have failed, and for the first time launching his own solution in public:
I propose a tri-lingual system for world communications. None of the schemes for Esperanto or other universal language is at all satisfactory. Ogden’s proposals for basic English could be developed. He has not the necessary tact or humanity to apply them. The greatest practical, that is possible, simplification would be a triple system: Ideogram, with the Japanese sound (syllabic) comment, Italian and English. (Pound, quoted in Dowthwaite 2019, 164)

Four years later, in 1943, Pound returns to the issue in one of his infamous wartime radio broadcasts for what is frequently called “Radio Rome” (although the official name was Ente Italiano Audizioni Radiofoniche, abbreviated EIAR), in an interesting (and disturbing) talk that Dowthwaite does not mention.

In the first paragraph of “[On Brain or Medulla]” (reprinted as # 100 in EPS), broadcasted by Pound on 20 June 1943, the poet-turned-propagandist says the following:

Esperanto and Basic English are both unsatisfactory. Any language is unsatisfactory. Any language is unsatisfactory if you have to cut down the thought to fit a very restrictive means of expression. (EPS, 347)

The claim that any single language is unsatisfactory should probably not count as a particularly controversial opinion, but it is still interesting in the way it obviously sees thought and language as intimately intertwined, insisting that a single and simplified language necessary would lead to poverty of thought. Pound subsequently goes on to refer to the “scheme” he “broached” in the Japan Times, now stating, rather incredibly: “My scheme was impartial. It contained one Axis language, one anti-Axis language, and one Oriental language, or other means of communication.” (ibid.) As already indicated, supposing that “ideogram” with Japanese pronunciation was above the division of powers between Axis and anti-Axis is misleading to say the least. Pound insists, however, that he “was considering civilization at large”, and was not merely after “a commercial stenography”, by using this description obviously referring to Ogden’s Basic English. Pound’s trilingual language is not out to facilitate trade, but to enhance civilization as such. This becomes even more apparent when he indicates that his trilingual system would give the world “the languages of Confucius, Shakespeare, and Dante” (ibid., 347–8).

Pound goes on to argue against the idea that the Germans would not accept that their language be excluded from his system, and tries to motivate his choice of Italian over French: Italian is chosen “not merely for political reasons”, but because it is “spoken like she is writ”, while French “is hell to pronounce” (ibid., 348). Italian is also, Pound claims, “as easy to learn” as Esperanto,
and “clearer than Latin” – he even adds that “you might say maturer than Latin” (ibid.). In short, Pound brings to the table several arguments about different aspects of his selected languages and their possible competitors. One might question whether he really believed in the feasibility of his trilingual project. Anyway, the project is of interest since it shows the multilingual poet being willing to simplify for geopolitical reasons. And, ending his talk, Pound arguably does have a point relevant to the discussion of universal languages, and even to the geopolitical situation of our present day: “[W]hen you people talk of a one language system, you mean mostly one language for Europe and for America. Very few of you think of the rest at all.” (ibid., 349) It is not obvious how much this point has to do with the respective characteristics of different languages. Maybe Pound was primarily thinking of practical challenges involved in language learning when saying that “you people” are mostly after one single language for Europe and America. Nevertheless, given how Pound indicates that Italian is different in “spirit” from “ideogram” to the degree that the latter is “untranslatable” into the former, it seems reasonable to expect even the bigoted perspective Pound describes to be indicative of a blindness when it comes to linguistic difference, an illusory idea of English as itself being enough to communicate whatever is seen as essential.

Such a point would come close to the one made by Nicholas Evans and Stephen C. Levinson, two modern linguists of a relativist leaning, in their 2009 article titled “The Myth of Language Universals”. In the opening of this article, Evans and Levinson state that languages “are much more diverse in structure than cognitive scientists generally appreciate”, subsequently claiming that these cognitive scientists tend to think that “all languages are English-like but with different sound systems and vocabularies” (Evans and Levinson 2009, 429). This latter fallacy is one of the most important ones that linguistic relativism is out to counter. Relativism functions as a warning against overeager attempts at mutual understanding across different languages and cultures. Much as such understanding is desirable, there is always a risk that the sense of mutuality is illusory, that one projects onto others what they would want to communicate, supposing that one’s own primary language is sufficient for all such messages. Making understanding across cultures possible demands that we are conscious of the possible traps that such illusions may put up.

16 Although Levinson wrote the foreword to the 2012 edition of Whorf’s Language, Thought, and Reality, Evans and Levinson do not mention Whorf in their article. Notwithstanding, their general argument has many similarities with his theories. Even if Whorf has been labeled a “strong universalist”, especially in the sense that he accepted the validity of modern science, with its universalist suppositions and pretensions (cf. Leavitt 2011, 141), he could hardly be said to be a believer in “language universals” – on the contrary, it is not least by virtue of his critical attitude toward such assumed universals that he becomes a relativist. John Lucy also qualifies the idea of Whorf being a “scientific universalist” when he states that “Whorf tended, on the whole, to argue that Western science and philosophy are very much influenced by traditional Indo-European categories” (Lucy 1992, 44). Not disregarding this important point, it should be stressed that Whorf had a clear idea of science being able to progress in terms of knowledge. What is striking is that he saw linguistics as one of these sciences and opined that its importance for science not least rests on its ability to, in Lucy’s words, “reveal to people their linguistic biases” (ibid.).
Having indicated that Pound was at the same time inclined to relativist thinking about language and pragmatically willing to promote some selected languages as vehicles to facilitate international communication, among them Chinese written characters (with Japanese pronunciation), I will devote much of this chapter to an investigation of the source of Pound’s initial interest in what he referred to as ideograms or ideographs, namely, Ernest Fenollosa’s essay The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry. Before turning to Fenollosa’s essay proper, I should say something about the controversial issue of Pound’s and Fenollosa’s idea of Chinese written characters as originating in pictograms.

1.3. On misunderstanding the Chinese written character

Pound must have gotten something terribly wrong about Chinese written characters. He claimed to be able to see what he thought of as the pictorial roots of these characters, although only about 3 percent of Chinese characters have such discernible roots – the rest have phonetic functions, just as the characters of the Latin alphabet.\(^\text{17}\) Pound had gotten his ideas partly from Ernest Fenollosa’s essay The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry, and partly, it seems, from his friend, the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, who according to Pound was able to see the roots of the Chinese characters without having studied the language.\(^\text{18}\) The classic attack on Fenollosa and Pound was made in 1958 by a sinologist at Yale, George A. Kennedy, who wrote that Fenollosa’s essay was “a small mass of confusion” (Kennedy 1964 [1958], 444).\(^\text{19}\) The year before, the aforementioned sinologist Achilles Fang, who exchanged numerous letters with Pound in which he seemed rather congenial to Pound’s ideas about translation (cf. the 2008 volume Ezra Pound’s Chinese Friends, edited by Zhaoming Qian), wrote an immensely technical article listing misunderstandings and mistakes made by Pound in his translations of Chinese poems. Although partly ascribing these to Fenollosa’s theories, Fang nevertheless admits that “[t]he ‘ideogramic’ or

\(^{17}\) Three percent is the estimate given in an article by R. John Williams (2009). Pound scholar Christine Froula (2003) claims that the number is somewhat higher, between 10 and 20 percent. It should be mentioned that neither of these two are sinologists. Froula’s source is James Liu, author of The Art of Chinese Poetry (1962). Williams refers to later sources, some of which deny the very possibility of an ideographic system of writing, such as John DeFrancis’s The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy (1986). In his Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry (1999) Ming Xie writes that “[m]odern scholarship has established that among the Shang oracle bones (the earliest discovered Chinese scripts) […] 23% were ‘pictographic’ characters” (Xie 1999, 23).

\(^{18}\) Pound makes this claim both in Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir (1916) and in a footnote he appended to The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry when he had the essay published in 1919.

\(^{19}\) Since scholars who write about Fenollosa and Pound tend to only quote this snippet from Kennedy’s article, I should mention that he also states that Fenollosa’s prose (which he refers to with the equivocal adjective “eloquent”) is “well worth reading” (Kennedy 1964 [1958], 446).
‘ideogrammic’ method […] seems to have borne some delectable fruit in the Anglo-American poetry of the first half of this century” (Fang 1957, 216).20

“It is not as a professional linguist nor as a sinologue that I humbly put forward what I have to say,” writes Fenollosa at the outset of his essay (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 42). This instance of captatio benevolentiae has not prevented him from being severely criticized for his statements. In all fairness it should be mentioned that Fenollosa does state that “the pictorial clue of many Chinese ideographs can not now be traced, and even Chinese lexicographers admit that combinations frequently contribute only a phonetic value” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 59). Fenollosa seems here to proleptically answer his critics, if keeping open the very concept of a traceability of “pictorial clues”. Sinologist-cum-literary comparatist Haun Saussy in fact chooses to absolve Fenollosa of some of the responsibility for the effects of his theories, saying that the “[i]deogrammic method was what Pound made of the essay” (Saussy 2009, 8) – Saussy seems here first and foremost to use the expression “ideogrammic method” as a name for the idea that Chinese written characters have their origin in pictograms, while what Pound most often intends with the expression is, as I will expand on in chapter 3, rather a general manner of using concrete particulars in order to express something more complex.

If one were to criticize Pound’s idea of the Chinese written characters as pictographic in origin, this need not be done on the basis of sinological expertise. More generally, one could focus on the implicit Cratylism of such an idea, with Cratylism (named after the Athenian philosopher Cratylus) being the notion that linguistic signs are somehow intimately related to (and arguably motivated by) what they are signs for.21 Such Cratylism in the Western tradition is the subject of French literary theorist Gérard Genette’s study Mimologics: Adventures in Cratylism (Mimologiques: voyage en Cratylie, 1976). Genette in fact mentions Pound in a footnote in this work, referring to his use of “Ernest Fenollosa’s shaky theories”, from which follows his (alleged) endorsement of “Chinese logography as the model of a writing system independent of speech, even of natural language” (Genette 1995, 404). In his afterword to the English translation of the Belgian writer and painter Henri Michaux’s Ideograms in China (Idéogrammes en Chine, first published in 1971 as a preface to Leon Tcahng Long Yen’s book La Calligraphie chinoise), Richard Sieburth refers to Genette’s study, indicating that both Michaux and Pound are essentially Cratylists.

20 When publishing this article, Fang had already written the introduction to Pound’s translation of the Chinese classic usually referred to as the Odes (if not the Book of Odes, Book of Songs or Classic of Poetry) published by Harvard University Press as Shih-ching: The Classical Anthology Defined by Confucius (1954). Here, Fang praises Pound, who “now emerges as a Confucian poet” (Fang 1954, xiii).

21 The concept of Cratylism stems from Plato’s dialogue Cratylus, which portrays the philosopher Cratylus as defending the so-called naturalist thesis, according to which each object has received a “correct denomination” that belongs to it through a natural appropriateness, while his main opponent Hermogenes opts for the so-called conventionalist thesis, according to which names result simply from a convention and an agreement among mankind (cf. Genette 1995, 7).
Michaux’s poetic meditations on Chinese calligraphy do indeed seem to imply that Chinese written characters have “original meanings” that one can “rediscover”, meanings based on an “immediate resemblance” of these characters to “the object” they portray (Michaux 1971, n.p.). Michaux’s work has perhaps some remnant of chinoiserie – that is, nineteenth century China-centered Orientalism, but also contains forceful statements on cultural difference that are interesting and thought-provoking:

China, land where one meditated upon the tracings of a calligrapher as, in other countries, one would meditate upon a mantra, or upon substance, essence, or fundamental principles. (ibid.)

According to Guy Davenport’s obituary memoir of Pound, Ideograms in China is a work he considered translating even during the final years of his life when he seemingly had given up on all things literary (cf. Sieburth 2002, 39). Such circumstantial evidence lends a certain credibility to the claim that Pound shared Michaux’s Cratylist leanings, but I still find this theory ultimately unconvincing. Let me explain why.

Pound was aware that his more or less visionary interpretations of the roots of individual Chinese written characters was not shared by the experts in the field. As Hugh Kenner quotes him admitting in The Pound Era, “Well, some people say I see too much in these characters” (Kenner 1971, 13). This seeing too much, however, is something Pound goes a long way to defend in other contexts, such as when he quotes the parable of one of his favorite contemporary intellectuals, the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius:

He [Frobenius] saw nothing ridiculous in a child’s wanting to know if the last letter of the word Katz stood for the cat’s tail, and the first one for its head. But to the school teacher, who cared little for intelligence or lively curiosity, the child just seemed stupid. (SP, 328)

What is striking here is that Pound, when reporting Frobenius’s parable, sees something positive in the reading of visual aspects of signs that have nothing to do with their actual provenance. The child’s vision is artistic, or poetic. It is such an understanding we must suppose Pound was referring to when he, in a 1960 note to his daughter Mary de Rachewiltz’s Italian edition of Cathay, clarified that Fenollosa “did not claim that the average Chinese journalist uses this instrument as a ‘medium for poetry’ but that it can and has been so used” (Pound, quoted in Qian 2010, 342). The assumed pictorial roots are not taken by Pound to be facts about Chinese written language, but a specific way of poetically interpreting and deploying this language.
In my view, a more illuminating parallel than that between Pound’s and Michaux’s ideas of Chinese characters would be that between Pound’s outlook and something that the Japanese–German author Yoko Tawada observes about the characters of the Latin alphabet in her work *Sprachpolizei und Spielpolyglotte* (2007):

With the Warsaw express, I arrived at the “Berlin Zoologischer Garten” [Zoo] and discovered a “B” in “Berlin,” a “C” in “Zoologischen” [sic] and an “A” in “Garten.” The alphabet always reminds me of the Middle East. Vilém Flusser wrote, “The A still shows the horns of the Syrian steer, the B still the cupolas of the Semitic house, the C (G) still the hump of the camel in the Near Eastern desert.” (Tawada, quoted in Perloff 2010, 123)

As Marjorie Perloff comments: “Tawada cannot resist the tendency to ‘ideogrammize’ the individual letters of the modern alphabet” (Perloff 2010, 124). Tawada’s perspective would probably seem foreign to most Westerners – but this hardly means that her way of seeing the Latin letters is without value. What Tawada does is draw attention to the alphabetic signs not only as originating in pictograms (this is hardly the point, or not at least the whole point), but as something that can be perceived as foreign, just as foreign as the Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Chinese written characters historically have appeared to Westerners. I stress this idea of the appearance of the “hieroglyphic” Chinese character to a Western eye. When Fenollosa comments on poetry as “time art” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 43) and states that Chinese poetry consists “largely of semi-pictorial appeals to the eye”, this “semi-pictorial” does not refer to anything illustrated by the character, but simply to the appearance of the “hieroglyphic” Chinese character to a Westerner, very much similarly to the observations made by Tawada. Later on, however, Fenollosa makes some observations that make his critics’ view of the essay understandable after all:

But Chinese notation is something much more than arbitrary symbols. It is based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature. In the algebraic figure and in the spoken word there is no natural connection between the thing and sign: all depends upon sheer convention. But the Chinese method follows natural suggestion. First stands the man on his two legs. Second, his eye moves through space: a bold figure represented by running legs under an eye, a modified picture of an eye, a modified picture of running legs, but unforgettable once you have seen it. Third stands the horse on his four legs. (ibid., 45)

Here, Fenollosa has found three Chinese characters that can be seen, with some good will, as portraying actual visual images. There is quite a distance from such an observation to making claims
for the Chinese language as such. However, we should note that Fenollosa is after an effect in poetry, and what is important is that this poetry in his view is not solely “time art”, but also “speaks at once with the vividness of painting” (ibid., 45). One should also note that Fenollosa emphatically states that Chinese characters are not pictures of things:

It is not so well known, perhaps, that the great number of these ideographic roots carry in them a verbal idea of action. It might be thought that a picture is naturally the picture of a thing, and that therefore the root ideas of Chinese are what grammar calls nouns.

But examination shows that a large number of the primitive Chinese characters, even the so-called radicals, are shorthand pictures of actions or processes. (ibid., 46)

Fenollosa claims that the world is characterized by process and action – furthermore, individual acts are “successive, even continuous, one causes or passes into another”, “motion is everywhere” and “[a]ll processes in nature are interrelated” (ibid., 47). This is Fenollosa’s quasi-Taoist take on the world.22

If we are to understand the motivations Fenollosa had for writing his essay, it is important to note what sort of contemporary view of Chinese and Japanese poetry he sought to correct:

An unfortunate belief has spread both in England and in America that Chinese and Japanese poetry are hardly more than an amusement, trivial, childish, and not to be reckoned in the world’s serious literary performance. (ibid., 42–43)

And later: “We have been told that these people are cold, practical, mechanical, literal, and without a trace of imaginative genius. That is nonsense.” (ibid., 55) Whatever the validity of Fenollosa’s judgments, what he says are prevailing views on the subject indicate that the prevailing attitudes he was out to counter may have been equally, if not more, misleading. Just as important as these points is the understanding of just what the primary subject matter of The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry is. The essay is much more a text advocating a specific poetic conception of language, not least English language and the possible remedies the study of foreign languages can bring to it, than a theory of Chinese language as such.

22 As a matter of fact, his biographer Van Wyck Brooks tells us, Fenollosa (born 1853) had become a Buddhist as early as the 1880s (cf. Brooks 1962, 50). But Fenollosa’s general outlook was syncretistic: The way he saw it, Lawrence W. Chisolm explains in his larger study on Fenollosa, great individuals of Sung China (the dynasty which reigned from 960 to 1279) had created “the greatest illumination of the Far East” precisely in their effort to fuse Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism (cf. Chisolm 1963, 95).
This does not prevent Fenollosa from making overarching comments on Chinese language as such, for instance that it “naturally knows no grammar” (ibid., 50–51). Fenollosa’s statement is bold, probably much too bold. Important for our understanding of Fenollosa’s perspective on Chinese is that for him having no grammar is a good thing, since “[n]ature has no grammar” (ibid., 50). We can here observe Fenollosa’s tendency to state that Chinese writing is somehow closer to nature than Western writing is and, more specifically, than modern usages of English are. We should also be aware that nature here, in a tradition stemming from Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82), is a term that comes very close to denoting reality as such. Such an idea of Chinese language giving their practitioners a better cognitive grasp of reality itself clearly amounts to a form of linguistic relativism. This does not mean that Fenollosa would imply that practitioners of other languages are not in principle able to grasp the real to the same extent, but rather that those accustomed to Chinese written language somehow do this with less effort. Fenollosa’s thinking here can fruitfully be coupled with a passage from a text by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), considered by many scholars to be the main precursor of twentieth-century linguistic relativists. In his 1821 article “Versuch einer Analyse der mexikanischen Sprache”, Humboldt expresses the following:

If one only looks at what can be expressed in a language, it would not be surprising if one would judge all languages to be practically equal when it comes to their respective advantages and shortcomings. [...] However, this is precisely the point that matters. Not only what can be expressed in a language, but what this language encourages and stimulates its speakers to do from its own inner force. (Humboldt 1905, 287–88)

Here, Humboldt initially states that all languages are essentially equal in their pros and cons, since no language constrains the possibilities of thought in its speakers. Nevertheless, the Israeli linguist Guy Deutscher opines that Humboldt “made this famous pronouncement for the wrong reasons”

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23 As Robert D. Richardson Jr. puts it: “Emerson’s definition of nature is a broad one. Nature is the way things are.” (Richardson Jr. 1999, 97) Ming Xie sees Emerson as the fundamental source of Fenollosa’s thinking: “Most of the fundamental ideas contained in Fenollosa’s essay on the Chinese written character are not original and are in fact largely derived from Emerson whose essays such as ‘The Poet’ and ‘Language’ provide an immediate source of ideas for Fenollosa.” (Xie 1999, 26–27)

24 Among these scholars we find John Leavitt and Aneta Pavlenko. In Leavitt’s view Humboldt is not only the most important precursor of twentieth-century linguistic relativists, but also the founder of the discipline of linguistics as such (cf. Leavitt 2011, 88). It is worth noting that Sapir, in his MA thesis, wrote about Humboldt, comparing his ideas to those of Herder (cf. Koerner 2000, 9).

25 My translation. This is von Humboldt: “Sieht man bloß auf dasjenige, was sich in einer Sprache ausdrücken lässt, so wäre es nicht zu verwundern, wenn man dahin geriete, alle Sprachen im Wesentlichen ungefähr gleich an Vorzügen und Mängeln zu erklären. […] Dennnoch ist dies gerade der Punkt, auf den es ankommt. Nicht, was in einer Sprache ausgedrückt zu werden vermag, sondern das, wozu sie aus eigener, innerer Kraft anfeuert und begeistert, entscheidet über ihre Vorzüge, oder Mängel.” (Humboldt 1905, vol. 4, 287–88).
(Deutscher 2011 [2010], 266), namely, to argue that some languages are better than others after all, because they actively encourage their speakers to form higher ideas. Such an evaluation of different languages was arguably also part of the forms of relativism we find in Fenollosa and Pound, particularly when it comes to their assessment of Chinese written characters. It is by trying to comprehend what Chinese written characters encourage and stimulate a Chinese-language poet into doing that a poet with English as primary language can learn valuable lessons, Fenollosa intimates. As the following section will show, Fenollosa’s discussion of the relation between the Chinese written character and English poetry is the thrust of his argument.

1.4. Fenollosa and English poetry

*The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* was originally written in about 1903, five years before Ernest Fenollosa passed away. In November 1913, his widow, the novelist Mary McNeil Fenollosa, gave Pound the sixteen notebooks left after her husband, containing among other texts the essay in question. Pound eventually published the essay in 1919, when it ran in four successive numbers of the *Little Review*, from September to December. A year later, it was included in Pound’s volume of critical prose titled *Instigations* (1920). The text is seen as one of the most important influences on Pound’s conception of language, art and poetry. A closer look at the text will prove fruitful.

Of particular interest are the comparisons Fenollosa draws between Chinese and English. I should mention the fact that Fenollosa also observes a similarity between uninflected languages like Chinese and English (compared to inflected languages such as Latin, German and Japanese) and that he sees this common characteristic as bringing both these two languages “close to things” (Fenollosa, 2009 [1919], 48). However, Fenollosa is of the opinion that the English language has run dry and needs to be recharged with power. The lessons to be learned from Chinese poetry might be just what is needed, he contends. The mission of recharging English language by way of translating from Chinese was left, incidentally, to Pound, when handed Fenollosa’s notebooks. And Pound responded – thereby becoming “the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time”, as T. S. Eliot would put it in his 1928 introduction to Pound’s *Selected Poems* (Eliot 1928, xvi). I will return to *Cathay* (1915) in chapter 2, to discuss Pound’s versions of a selection of Classical Chinese poetry, also culled from Fenollosa’s notebooks.

When Fenollosa writes about the strengths of the English language, he makes the point that these have to do with the verbs, most notably transitive verbs:

> I have seldom seen our rhetoricians dwell on the fact that the great strength of our language lies in its splendid array of transitive verbs, drawn both from Anglo-Saxon and from Latin
sources. These give us the most individual characterizations of force. Their power lies in their recognition of nature as a vast storehouse of forces. We do not say in English what things seem, or appear, or eventuate, or even that they are; but that they do. Will is the foundation of our speech. We catch the Demiurge in the act. I had to discover for myself why Shakespeare’s English was so immeasurably superior to all others. I found that it was his persistent, natural, and magnificent use of hundreds of transitive verbs. Rarely will you find an “is” in his sentences. “Is” weakly lends itself to the uses of our rhythm, in the unaccented syllables; yet he sternly discards it. A study of Shakespeare’s verbs should underlie all exercises in style. (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 58)

Even if sharing some structural traits, Fenollosa indicates that Chinese writing is in many ways opposed to modern English, the latter being characterized by a specific use of verbs that leads to abstract thinking:

In English we call “to shine” a verb in the infinitive, because it gives the abstract meaning of the verb without conditions. If we want a corresponding adjective we take a different word, “bright.” If we need a noun we say “luminosity,” which is abstract, being derived from an adjective. To get a tolerably concrete noun, we have to leave behind the verb and adjective roots, and light upon a thing arbitrarily cut off from its power of action, say “the sun” or “the moon.” Of course there is nothing in nature so cut off, and therefore this nounising is itself an abstraction. Even if we did have a common word underlying at once the verb “shine,” the adjective bright” and the noun “sun,” we should probably call it an “infinitive of the infinitive.” According to our ideas, it should be something extremely abstract, too intangible for use. (ibid., 51)

It is the domestic abstraction Fenollosa is concerned with – the Chinese examples are there primarily to illustrate that the English way of using language is not the only one conceivable, or, as he himself puts it, to throw light upon “our forgotten mental processes” (ibid., 53).

It is not least when he combines observations of grammatical traits in modern languages with an idea of reviving lost ways of thinking that Fenollosa seems close to Marin Heidegger, at least as presented by Hans-Georg Gadamer, who contends that Heidegger “was able to trace in thinking the concept of the tradition back to the Greek language, back to the natural sense of the words and the hidden wisdom of language they contain” (Gadamer 1989, 107). The idea of reaching back to “the natural sense of the words” and “the hidden wisdom of language” contained in them suggests that Fenollosa and Heidegger were driven by congenial concerns in their writings, even if
Heidegger was concerned with Greek rather than Chinese language. Importantly, Pound in 1914 had expressed the view that “this century may find a new Greece in China” (LE, 215), something that suggests that what made a Westerner at the outset of the twentieth century interested in Chinese culture and language was something similar to what had driven earlier interest in Greek culture and language. The two traditions had something in common in Pound’s perspective, namely, that the English poet would be better able to refresh his language by studying them: By studying the Greek tradition, the poet would be able to learn lessons of *melopoeia*, that is, of the musical element of poetry, that went against a prevalent “metronomic”, stiff kind of rhythm; by studying the Chinese tradition, the poet would most of all learn *phanopoeia*, that is, the creation and presentation of images.

Fenollosa states that the Chinese written language “retains the old primitive sap”, that it is not “cut and dried like a walking-stick” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 55), and that “one necessity, even in our own poetry, is to keep words as flexible as possible, as full of the sap of nature” (ibid., 51). This amounts to an organicist view of language, one that indicates that a language at certain stages is ripe or blooms, only to wither or stiffen in others. This linguistic seasonality leaves much up to individual gardeners, that is, to poets and other writers, whose effort can change the entire trajectory of the language. Such a take on linguistic issues may seem at a remove from a more synchronic relativist position. Nonetheless, I will argue that given a somewhat enlarged semantic field, Pound, Fenollosa and Heidegger can all meaningfully be labeled linguistic relativists. The following section will start by investigating Heidegger’s thinking about language, and then discuss some further parallels between Heidegger and Fenollosa.

### 1.5. Fenollosa and Heidegger

Even if Sapir and Whorf are arguably the most prolific among Pound’s contemporaries who formulated the hypothesis of linguistic relativity, many twentieth-century intellectuals expressed similar views. Although seldom mentioned in discussions about linguistic relativism, Heidegger’s highly influential thinking includes several meditations on the question of language that I will claim together form a type of relativism. More importantly for my undertaking here, I consider this specific type of relativism to be particularly relevant to an understanding of Pound’s thought and his poetic practice.

Language as “discourse” (*Rede*) and “idle talk” (*Gerede*) plays an important part as early as in *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*, 1927), but in Heidegger’s later works the question of language (*Sprache*) arguably becomes the main issue, along with the always present question of being (*Seinsfrage*). The title of a work like *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (1959) testifies to this shift. At the same time, this title indicates that Heidegger was not proposing any “philosophy of language” as
such, but rather that his thinking about the issue of language was to be conceived as an ever-ongoing process. The way Heidegger came to see it, the modern understanding of language as information (and as such as an instrument for domination over beings) was deeply rooted in the Western metaphysical tradition, and deeply flawed. Language as information seems for Heidegger to be linked to the idea of truth (Wahrheit) as adequation (Übereinstimmung) between thought and object, as developed in texts like “Overcoming Metaphysics” (“Überwindung der Metaphysik”, 1936–46). In opposition to this understanding of truth, Heidegger pointed to what he conceived to be the original sense of the Greek word for truth, aleteia, namely, “unconcealment” (Unverborgenheit). In “The Question Concerning Technology” (“Die Frage nach der Technik”, 1953), Heidegger at one point hyphenates the German word for truth, spelling it Wahr-heit, thereby indicating its root in the morph wahr, which connotes “attentive watchfulness and guarding”, as William Lovitt observes in a note to his English translation of this text (Lovitt 1977, 12).

Even given these very sketchy observations, necessarily simplifying Heidegger’s complex thinking, a designation of Heidegger as a “linguistic relativist” might seem somewhat surprising. Traditionally strongly influenced by Whorf’s theorizing, linguistic relativism has connotations not only of something empiricist but of something slightly “scientistic”. As such it seems at a far remove from the later Heidegger, who considered the whole of Western science as conditioned by metaphysics. Still, I will argue that Heidegger develops his own specific form of linguistic relativism as part of his attempt to escape Western metaphysics.

That Heidegger should be any kind of linguistic relativist is hardly ever commented upon by Heideggerian scholars. I should note, however, that Wanda Torres Gregory, in her Heidegger’s Path to Language (2016), at one point states that Heidegger purports a “semantic relativist thesis”, made explicit in his conversation with a Japanese professor, rendered in On the Way to Language, where Heidegger states:

Some time ago I called language, clumsily enough, the house of Being. If man by virtue of his language dwells within the claim and call of Being, then we Europeans presumably dwell in an entirely different house than Eastasian man. (Heidegger 1982, 5; cf. Gregory 2016, 82)\(^{26}\)

This passage clearly bears the mark of the later Heidegger and indicates both a cultural and a linguistic relativism. The earlier Heidegger would arguably be harder to designate as a relativist,

\(^{26}\) “Vor einiger Zeit nannte ich, unbeholfen genug, die Sprache das Haus des Seins. Wenn der Mensch durch seine Sprache im Anspruch des Seins wohnt, dann wohnen wir Europäer vermutlich in einem ganz anderen Haus als der ostasiatische Mensch.” (Heidegger 1985, 85)
although there is certainly something about his treatment of time that is relevant to this kind of thinking, this issue arguably being central to the very naming of the hypothesis of linguistic relativity in the first place, since Whorf was referring to the “relativity” of the concepts of space and time as these are conceived of in different cultures. Using the term “relativity”, Whorf was influenced by Einstein’s theories of relativity and particularly by the fundamental idea of time and space as codependent on each other, rather than for example two “forms of intuition” (Anschauungsformen) as in Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason (Kritik der reinen Vernunft, 1781). Where Kant saw Zeit and Raum as essentially given, as ahistorical “forms of intuition”, Whorf postulated that there is such a thing as a uniquely European concept of time, fundamentally different from that of the Amerindian Hopi tribe, who, in Whorf’s terminology, in fact have their own “metaphysics” (Whorf 2012 [1956], 73–82).There is every reason to stress that the way Heidegger conceives of this problem complex, even what he refers to as the “ordinary” or “vulgar” sense of time, is determined by the philosophical tradition. Heidegger indicates that the concept of time, seemingly drawn from the people (the vulgus), in fact stems from Aristotle, and was subsequently simply accepted, continued and handed over by philosophers such as Hegel and Bergson. This is not to say that there are not important differences between the perspectives of Heidegger and Whorf. Not least, it is hardly the case that Heidegger would accept the idea that the concept of time is given by the existing language. Rather, in Heidegger’s view, it is the intervention of Aristotle’s philosophy that determines the later European concept of time. This idea, however, is similar to what is actually stated by Whorf at a certain point: He maintained that the Greeks, and Aristotle in particular, “built up” the contrast between noun and verb and “made it a law of reason” (Whorf 2012 [1956], 309). In other words, even if Aristotle had a linguistic substratum to build on, the later European concept of time is not solely a product of the Greek language, but also the

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27 Jacques Derrida sees the concept of time as conditioned by metaphysics, to the extent that an entirely different concept of time would not be able to emerge within metaphysics (Derrida 1982, 63). By “metaphysics”, Derrida here means Western metaphysics. Not disregarding this essential difference in terminology, I would propose that the respective analyses done by Whorf and Derrida have something in common: namely, that the Western idea of time is uniquely Western, and that an entirely different conception such as the one of the Hopis is in fact so different that no European word exists for it.

28 Of interest in this connection are the views expressed by the French linguist Émile Benveniste, notably in his article “Categories of Thought and Language” (“Catégories de langue et catégories de pensée”), reprinted in Problems in General Linguistics (Problèmes de linguistique générale, 1966). Here, Benveniste claims that Aristotle, when discussing categories of thought, simply was “identifying certain fundamental categories of the language in which he thought” (Benveniste 1971 [1966], 57). In his article “The Supplement of Copula” (“Le supplément du copula”), reprinted in Margins of Philosophy (Marges de la philosophie, 1972), Jacques Derrida criticizes Benveniste’s analysis, as well as the one of the Aristotelian philosopher Pierre Aubenque, which he cites to the following effect: “Bergson said that Aristotle’s metaphysics is the spontaneous metaphysics of the human mind: it would be more correct to say that it is the spontaneous metaphysics of the Indo-European languages, and of the Greek language in particular.” (Aubenque, quoted in Derrida 1982, 187) To Derrida, these observations go too far in the direction of linguistic “determinism”. Where Benveniste and Aubenque see Aristotle as simply reproducing the grammatical structures of the Greek language, Derrida observes that the very concept of “category” could just as well be put up by Aristotle precisely in order to consciously pose questions about the relationship between thought and language.
result of Aristotle’s intervention. Although Whorf normally stresses the importance of linguistic structure’s importance for thought, he was not blind to the importance of the individual speaker’s ability to shape a tradition of thinking. What is especially interesting about Heidegger is that his conception of time is combined with a specific interest in the grammatical forms of verbs, strikingly similar to the way of thinking we have seen in Fenollosa’s essay. For example, in his *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (*Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 1935), we can see Heidegger move from the question of being to the grammatical characteristics of the verb tenses, in a dense but highly interesting paragraph:

[W]e understand the verbal substantive “Sein” through the infinitive, which in turn is related to the “is” and its diversity that we have described. The definitive and particular verb form “is”, the *third person singular of the present indicative*, has here a pre-eminent rank. We understand “being” not in regard to the “thou art,” “you are,” “I am,” or “they would be,” though all of these, just as much as “is,” represent verbal inflections of “to be.” […] And involuntarily, almost as though nothing else were possible, we explain the infinitive “to be” to ourselves through the “is.” (Heidegger 1959, 92)

Here, Heidegger implies that grammatical concerns such as verbal tenses have major intellectual implications for thinking as such. Derrida comments on this aspect of Heidegger’s thought, when he states the following in his seminal work *Of Grammatology* (*De la grammatologie*, 1967):

Heidegger occasionally reminds us that “being,” as it is fixed in its general syntactic and lexicological forms within linguistics and Western philosophy, is not a primary and absolutely irreducible signified, that it is still rooted in a system of languages and an historically determined “significance,” although strangely privileged as the virtue of disclosure and dissimulation; particularly when he invites us to meditate on the “privilege” of the “third person singular of the present indicative” and the “infinitive.” Western metaphysics, as the limitation of the sense of being within the field of presence, is produced as the domination of a linguistic form. […] To question the origin of that domination does not amount to hypostatizing a transcendental signified, but to a questioning of what constitutes our history and what produced transcendentality itself. (Derrida 1976, 23)

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Derrida also refers to Heidegger’s *On the Question of Being* (*Zur Seinsfrage*, 1959) where “being” (*Sein*) is being “crossed over” (or, to use Heidegger’s own terminology, put under a *kreuzweise Durchstreichung*), in such a way as to simultaneously suppress this problematic verb and let it remain legible. Heidegger was, in other words, on a continuous search for ways to think that would somehow not be governed by the quasi-omnipresent Western metaphysics, where being is conceived of as presence (*Anwesenheit*). Heidegger also claimed that several nouns are best understood as originating in verbs. This is even the case for the later Heidegger’s use of the word *Seyn* instead of *Sein* to designate “being”; in English translations of Heidegger, to underscore the verbal character of the word, *Seyn* is often rendered as “beyng” or “be-ing”.

If Heidegger seems prone to thinking in a relativistic manner about language, this would probably be for what Deutscher termed the “wrong reasons”, as when he in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* claims that German, along with Greek, is, in regard to its possibilities for thought, “at once the most powerful and most spiritual of all languages” (Heidegger 1959, 57; cf. Longxi 1985, 285). Here, Heidegger is clearly implying that different languages lay the foundations for different kinds of thinking, and even sees these different kinds of thinking as qualitatively different when it comes to what, for lack of a better word, might be termed *depth*.

In his *The Origin of the Work of Art* (*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, 1935–36), Heidegger states that the Western explication of the being of beings (*des Seins des Seienden*) begins with the taking over of Greek terms in Roman thought:

> [T]his translation of Greek names into Latin is in no way the innocent process it is considered to this day. Beneath the seemingly literal and thus faithful translation there is concealed, rather, a translation of Greek experience into a different way of thinking. *Roman thought takes over the Greek words without the corresponding, equally original experience of what they say, without the Greek word.* The rootlessness of Western thought begins with this translation. (Heidegger 1993, 149)\(^{30}\)

Once again, we see Heidegger linking a specific language to a certain *experience*. We also see that Heidegger, in a way vaguely reminiscent of Whorf, sees the relativity of languages as a *subtle* phenomenon, and translation between languages as something that can be illusory perceived as an

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\(^{30}\) “Diese Übersetzung der griechischen Namen in die lateinische Sprache ist keineswegs der folgenlose Vorgang, für den er noch heutigentags gehalten wird. Vielmehr verbirgt sich hinter der anscheinend wörtlichen und somit bewahrenden Übersetzung ein Übersetzen griechischer Erfahrung in eine andere Den-kungsart. *Das römische Denken übernimmt die griechischen Wörter ohne die entsprechende gleichursprüngliche Erfahrung dessen, was sie sagen, ohne das griechische Wort. Die Boden-losigkeit des abendländischen Denkens beginnt mit diesem Übersetzen.*” (Heidegger 1977, 8).
“innocent process”. But, as the final line of this passage indicates, the consequences of interlingual translation can be very serious indeed.

Having made these observations concerning the specific variety of linguistic relativism in Heidegger’s writings, I now return to Ernest Fenollosa’s treatment of language and poetry, which, as I will demonstrate in the following, has key points in common with Heidegger, especially when it comes to the understanding of the importance of verbs for our understanding of language, poetry and cognition.

For Fenollosa, as for Pound, abstraction is the enemy. But what is meant here by the term “abstraction”? According to Fenollosa, a typically abstract use of language, prominent in modern English, is characterized by the use of intransitive verbs:

We do not say a tree “greens itself,” but “the tree is green”; not that “monkeys bring forth live young,” but that “the monkey is a mammal.” This is an ultimate weakness of language. It has come from generalizing all intransitive words into one. As “live”, “see”, “walk”, “breathe”, are generalized into states by dropping their objects, so these weak verbs are in turn reduced to the abstractest state of all, namely bare existence. (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 49)

This is certainly concordant with Pound’s own concerns. In June 1916, in a letter to the young poet Iris Barry, Pound writes:

You should have a chance to see Fenollosa’s big essay on verbs, mostly on verbs … He inveighs against “IS,” wants transitive verbs. “Become” is as weak as “is.” … “All nouns come from verbs.” To primitive man, a thing only IS what it does. That is Fenollosa, but I think the theory is a very good one for poets to go by. (SL, 82)

Notably, Pound says that Fenollosa’s essay is an essay “on verbs, mostly on verbs”. Kennedy criticized Fenollosa and Pound not only for their idea about the roots of Chinese signs, but also for this idea of their verbal character – Kennedy’s claim is that these signs in fact tend to be nominal in character (Kennedy 1964 [1958], 449). Might this controversy simply be a sign that Western grammatical categories lack pertinence when confronted with Chinese language? Fenollosa, strikingly, claims the following: “The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motions, motion in things, and so the Chinese conception tends to represent them.” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 46) At this point, Kennedy may be said to grant Fenollosa a point, if only to inscribe himself in the tradition that states that Chinese language has no grammar:
Scholars, and grammarians as well, who deal with written Chinese, especially poetry, are quite persuaded to follow Fenollosa in the view that parts of speech do not exist. But it is difficult to describe, perhaps even to imagine, such a linguistic condition in terms of another language like English where word-classes are still of some importance. (Kennedy 1964 [1958], 447)

In other words, Kennedy accepts that one can view Chinese as a language that does not have “parts of speech”, an expression that he uses as a synonym to “word-classes”; still he finds it hard to “describe […] such a linguistic condition” in a language that does have word classes. In “The Myth of Language Universals”, Evans and Levinson argue that the very distinction between nouns and verbs is part of the myth that languages are basically the same all over the globe. Might it be that Fenollosa on this point could be vindicated by modern varieties of linguistic relativism? Kennedy makes a satirical stab at Fenollosa who, he implies, talks about Chinese characters being mainly verbs, but then primarily gives nouns as examples (cf. Kennedy 1964 [1958], 449). This seems somewhat ungenerous: As I have tried to show, Fenollosa’s claim must be taken to mean that there is a verbal character even to the seeming nouns. We saw Derrida quipping that Western metaphysics “is produced as the domination of a linguistic form” (Derrida 1976, 23), and this we could take as a sign that even the verbs in Western languages tend to become more like nouns, as betrayed in what Heidegger and Derrida sees as the “privilege” accorded to the infinitive in these languages. In other words, this is not so much about verbs and nouns in any strict technical sense, but about the active and concrete linguistic forms on the one hand and the passive and abstract forms on the other.

It seems imperative to understand that Fenollosa is not only concerned with verbs in a grammatical sense, but with something like the verbal character of the world at large. Fenollosa links this to etymological investigations, which reveal that words originally referred to actions: “Abstract terms, pressed by etymology, reveal their ancient roots still embedded in direct action.” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 54) At this point, Fenollosa’s concerns certainly converge with those of Heidegger. As Eric Hayot has put it: “For Fenollosa, the fundamental evil of Western languages springs from the verb to be, which makes existence a state rather than an action” (Hayot 2002, 30). Keeping this point in mind, I now turn to a discussion of the possible and actual relation between the writings of Fenollosa and those of Jacques Derrida, still guided by the thread of linguistic relativism.
1.6. Fenollosa and Derrida

It would be hard to argue that Derrida is a linguistic relativist in any traditional sense. When language is conceived of as a process of what Derrida calls *différance* (consciously spelled with an “a” to indicate process), it can hardly be seen as a carrier of any given cognitive structures. Nonetheless, Derrida at times purports ideas that have an interesting relation to the entire theoretical complex involved in the discussion of linguistic relativism, as here:

> Is there a “metaphysics” outside the Indo-European organization of the function “to be”? This is not in the least an ethnocentric question. It does not amount to envisaging that other languages might be deprived of the surpassing mission of philosophy and metaphysics but, on the contrary, avoids projecting outside the West very determined forms of “history” and “culture”. (Derrida 1982, 199)

Here, Derrida clearly draws up a demarcation line between his own position and outright “determinism”: It is obvious that Derrida does not consider certain (here Western) languages to be superior for the purpose of any intellectual undertaking. On the other hand, he insists that Western concepts such as “history” and “culture” must not be projected onto other cultures, if we are to understand the latter with as much as their particularities intact as possible. When it comes to the initial question, about the Indo-European function of “to be”, Derrida betrays his well-known Heideggerian influence. What is perhaps not so well known is that Derrida, in a single passage of great importance, also refers to both Fenollosa and Pound. Let me situate these references in their context.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida emphatically points out that even if a (mainly) seventeenth-century philosopher such as Leibniz, with his project of a universal language – “in spite of all the seduction that it can legitimately exercise on our epoch” (Derrida 1976, 78) – does not escape ethnocentrist metaphysics. The case of Leibniz is of special interest, for, just as Pound later, Leibniz became particularly concerned with understanding what he conceived of as the nature of Chinese writing. This interest might appear to “interrupt” the ethnocentrism associated with logocentrism, but as Derrida makes clear, this “interruption” of logocentrism performed by Leibniz is only apparent, for “[w]hat Leibniz is eager to borrow from Chinese writing is its arbitrariness and therefore its independence with regard to history” (ibid., 79).

This striking will on Leibniz’s part to see Chinese language as some sort of algebraic script certainly puts him at a considerable distance from Fenollosa and Pound. He is closer to the early European missionaries in Japan, whom Hwa Yol Jung talks about in his article “Misreading the Ideogram: From Fenollosa to Derrida and McLuhan” (1984), since these missionaries “expressed
their unqualified and unrestrained admiration for the Japanese kanji (ideograms) as being superior to Greek and Latin” (Jung 1984, 212). As we have seen, the idea of the ideogram as a superior form of written character also characterizes Fenollosa’s argument in *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* (even if Fenollosa uses the word “ideograph”), but not because of its arbitrariness. On the contrary, Fenollosa sees the Chinese written character as something *motivated by nature*, as a vehicle for capturing nature as it really is. This perspective is clearly at play in the extensive quotation from Fenollosa’s text which occupies most of the footnote Derrida devotes to it right toward the end of the first part of *Of Grammatology*:

Questioning by turn the logico-grammatical structures of the West (and first Aristotle’s list of categories), showing that no correct description of Chinese writing can tolerate it, Fenollosa recalled that Chinese poetry was essentially a script. He remarked, for example: “Should we pass formally into the study of Chinese poetry, … we should beware of English [occidental] grammar, its hard parts of speech, and its lazy satisfaction with nouns and adjectives. We should seek and at least bear in mind the verbal undertone of each noun. We should avoid the ‘is’ and bring in a wealth of neglected English verbs. Most of the existing translations violate all of these rules. The development of the normal transitive sentence rests upon the fact that one action in nature promotes another; thus the agent and the objects are secretly verbs. For example, our sentence, ‘Reading promotes writing,’ would be expressed in Chinese by three full verbs. Such a form is the equivalent of three expanded clauses and can be drawn out into adjectival, participial, infinitive, relative or conditional members. One of many possible examples is, ‘If one reads it teaches him how to write.’ Another is, ‘One who reads becomes one who writes.’ But in the first condensed form a Chinese would write, ‘Read promote write.’” (Derrida 1976, 334–35)

Here, we can observe that Fenollosa sees in English grammar a “lazy satisfaction with nouns and adjectives”, and encourages his English-speaking readers (not least poets and translators) to “bear in mind the verbal undertone of each noun”, much as we saw Pound doing when he commented on the list of nouns in the lexicon of Ogden’s Basic English. Derrida underscores how the verbal undertone in Chinese writing differs from the “logico-grammatical structure of the West”, first among these Aristotle’s categories, and comments that this is Fenollosa seeing Chinese poetry as “essentially a script”, that is, as something not reducible to transcribed sound, but something that has in it a value precisely in being written. This note corresponds to the following passage in the body text of *Of Grammatology*, which contains a remark on Pound’s “irreducibly graphic poetics”
indicating that Pound himself had introduced similar effects, thereby achieving a “break in the […] Western tradition”:

In a different way: the necessary decentering cannot be a philosophic or scientific act as such, since it is a question of dislocating, through access to another system linking speech and writing, the founding categories of language and the grammar of the epistémè. The natural tendency of theory – of what unites philosophy and science in the epistémè – will push rather toward filling in the breach than toward forcing the closure. It was normal that the breakthrough was more secure and more penetrating on the side of literature and poetic writing: normal also that it, like Nietzsche, at first destroyed and caused to vacillate the transcendental authority and dominant category of the epistémè: being. This is the meaning of the work of Fenellosa [sic; and here is where Derrida inserts his note] whose influence upon Ezra Pound and his poetics is well-known: this irreducibly graphic poetics was, with that of Mallarmé, the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition. The fascination that the Chinese ideogram exercised on Pound’s writing may thus be given all its historical significance. (Derrida 1976, 92)

The “decentering” referred to at the beginning of this quote chimes together with the “break” toward the end of it: Both relate to a reaction against the logocentric metaphysics of the Western tradition, which Derrida claims could not have been achieved by conventional philosophy or science alone, since, it is implied, these are too much contained by the given epistémè, Michel Foucault’s term for the structural limits or guidelines and tacit conventions that govern the discourse of truth in a given era. To break the Western tradition, Derrida writes, one needed “literature and poetic writing”: The historical significance put on literature and poetry here is very great, and in many ways reminiscent of Pound’s own thinking. It is also striking that Derrida finds in Pound an “irreducibly graphic poetics”, and puts it together with that of Mallarmé, an author on which Derrida has written extensively elsewhere.31 Mallarmé’s “whites”, or blanks, are mentioned by Derrida earlier in the same chapter, where he quotes from the French poet’s preface to his poem Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard, in which, writes Mallarmé, “the ‘whites’ indeed take on an importance” (Mallarmé, quoted in Derrida 1976, 69). The poet is pointing to the use of graphic blanks on the page in the poem in question, which Derrida in the same paragraph indicates are relevant to his own concept of spacing. According to Derrida, Pound made – together with Mallarmé – “the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition”, alluding to what he has just named “the heliocentric

concept of speech” (Derrida 1976, 91), a concept that has served to eclipse writing as such. In other words: Pound’s poetry is writing’s striking back at its critics in the Western metaphysical tradition.

1.7. Fenollosa and Whorf
Earlier in this chapter we saw that Fenollosa, although opining that Chinese written characters are close to nature, did not think of them as visually founded pictures of concrete material objects. His point is rather that “thing and action are not formally separated” in Chinese language (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 50). This, incidentally, is very close to the claim made by Whorf about Amerindian languages like Chinook, Navajo, Nootka, Yana, Tlingit, Sarcee, Kutchin, Ingaliik, Hupa, Paiute and others, namely, that they “combine the verb and the object into one word, impose a ‘monistic view’ on the universe, so their speakers would simply not understand our distinction between object and actions” (cf. Deutscher 2011 [2010], 5).

The Amerindian language to which Whorf devoted most attention was Hopi, a language distantly related to Aztec. He studied it with an informant in New York City, and then, in 1938, in the Hopi reservation in Arizona. In Whorf’s opinion, most European languages have so many commonalities, at least compared to a language such as Hopi, that he grouped them together as one single language, which he termed Standard Average European (SAE).32 For my purpose here, this opens up some interesting possibilities: Could it be that Pound, who as we have seen considered thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian as covering other semantic fields than for example modern English does, actually saw linguistic relativity as playing a more important part than Whorf did, even when it comes to languages belonging to the same language family? Or should we perhaps assume that Pound, with his intense interest in Chinese language, in fact shared Whorf’s general outlook, but first had an eye-opening experience of linguistic difference when he immersed himself in Chinese, declaring in 1930, as quoted in my introduction, that Chinese ideograms constitute “a door into a different modality of thought” (MA, 88)? Whatever interpretation is chosen, it should be noted that Pound, by giving such a statement as the latter, clearly does not take a “deterministic” position where one’s primary language limits what one is able to think, but on the contrary sees the learning of a foreign language and/or writing system as a door, that is, as a passage-way to other kinds of thinking. Although occasionally treated as a “determinist”, even Whorf, says Pavlenko, “saw the learning of another language as a way to transcend the categories of one’s own” (Pavlenko 2014, 9).

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32 Whorf is actually of the opinion that even non-Indo-European languages spoken in Europe might not constitute a valid exception to this rule: “Since, with respect to the traits compared, there is little difference between English, French, German, or other European languages with the possible (but doubtful) exception of Balto-Slavic and non-Indo-European, I have lumped these languages into one group called SAE, or ‘Standard Average European.’” (Whorf 2012 [1956], 178)
It is especially interesting to note that Whorf’s preferred examples of linguistic relativity are not drawn from the different lexicons of different languages, but from their grammatical differences, as when he stated that the Indo-European languages have given great prominence to a type of sentence having two parts – substantive and verb – and that this distinction “is not drawn from nature” (Whorf 2012 [1956], 309). At one point, Whorf suggests that the word for “day” in Hopi belongs to a special word class in being both nominal and verbal. Stephen C. Levinson indicates that modern research confirms the validity of this observation (Levinson 2012, xii). Here, it seems appropriate to note a prescient idea of Fenollosa’s in The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry, namely, that a Chinese written character can serve several different grammatical functions, being interchangeably a verb (“to shine”), a noun (“sun”), or an adjective (“bright”), an observation that made a deep impression on Pound (cf. Albright 1997, 20). The following passage in Fenollosa’s text, of which I previously quoted the final phrase, also has much in common with statements made by Whorf:

A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature. Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting points of actions, cross-sections cut through actions, snap-shots. Neither can a pure verb, an abstract motion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things, and so the Chinese conception tends to represent them. (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 46)

Here, Fenollosa’s text surely rests on some sort of premise of linguistic relativism. It even goes far in attributing to Chinese language conceptions that are natural to the human observing eye, implicitly claiming that modern European languages are less natural. Whorf rarely makes claims such as these about what is more natural, but there can be little doubt that Fenollosa and Whorf shared a view of the instructive aspect of relating to foreign language worldviews. Whorf never seems to have commented on Fenollosa’s article, though.

One of the best-known examples of the linguistic phenomenon of the object and action being unseparated is not from Chinese but from the Nootka language spoken in Vancouver, given by Sapir in 1931: According to Sapir, Nootka has no verb for the English verb “to fall” and therefore explains a stone falling with the words for “stone” and “down”, something that can be rendered as “[it] stones down” (cf. Sapir 2008, 139). This recalls not only Fenollosa’s claim that English not allowing speakers to say that a tree “greens itself” represents “an ultimate weakness of language” (Fenollosa 33 Whorf went much further, however, and stated that “[m]ost metaphysical words in Hopi are verbs, not nouns such as in European languages” (Whorf 2012 [1956], 79).
2009 [1919], 49), but also Heidegger’s interest in the “it” of “it rains” (Es regnet),\textsuperscript{34} and not least of his saying die Sprache spricht – “language speaks”, or rather “language languages”, or perhaps, if one were to risk an attempt at rendering some of the melopoeia of the German wording, “speech speaks”.\textsuperscript{35}

There is a certain “primitivism” at play in Fenollosa’s essay: “All nations have written their strongest and most vivid literature before they invented a grammar.” (ibid., 50) A similar idea of decadence, and the need to return to poetical origins in order to rejuvenate poetry, is certainly something that characterizes Pound’s own work. No doubt he would subscribe to Fenollosa’s view that “[p]oetry only does consciously what the primitive races did unconsciously.” (ibid., 54) There is a certain parallel to Heidegger’s thinking even here. In An Introduction to Metaphysics, Heidegger states that language is the primal poetry (Urdichtung) in which a people poetizes or dictates (dichtet) Being (cf. Lacoue-Labarthe 2017 [2012], 14). Such a point, it should be said, is in many ways simply a version of a topos found, in different installments, in philosophers such as Vico, Rousseau and Herder. This does not mean that it is not fundamental to an understanding of Heidegger’s thinking. For Heidegger, language is exposed to changes that can render, and in the case of Western languages, have rendered them more grammatically controlled, and thereby less poetic, less open. In his Letter on Humanism (Brief über den “Humanismus”, 1946), Heidegger states the following:

“[S]ubject” and “object” are inappropriate terms of metaphysics, which very early on in the form of Occidental “logic” and “grammar” seized control of the interpretation of language. We today can only begin to descry what is concealed in that occurrence. The liberation of language from grammar into a more original essential framework is reserved for thought and poetic creation. (Heidegger 1993, 128)\textsuperscript{36}

First of all, when it comes to the inappropriateness of the concepts of “subject” and “object”, it seems relevant to cite Herbert Schneidau, who says that Fenollosa showed Pound “a way across the terrifying Cartesian gap between internal and external, between subjective and objective” (Schneidau 1969, 61) Furthermore, this passage, as many others in Heidegger’s writings, is reminiscent of Fenollosa’s repeated attack on “grammarians”, their views being based on “the

\textsuperscript{34} Heidegger refers to this expression in Zur Sache des Denkens (cf. Heidegger 1969, 18).

\textsuperscript{35} Heidegger first formulated this in the lecture “Sprache” (1950), where it serves as a “refrain” (Caldwell 2009, 268). “Sprache” was reprinted in Unterwegs zur Sprache, but is not included in the English translation On the Way to Language: Still, even here one finds several repetitions of the phrase, which were to serve as a refrain not only in the 1950 lecture, but for the later Heidegger as such.

\textsuperscript{36} “Dabei sind ‘Subjekt’ und ‘Objekt’ ungemäße Titel der Metaphysik, die sich in der Gestalt der abendländischen ‘Logik’ und ‘Grammatik’ frühzeitig der Interpretation der Sprache bemächtigt hat. Was sich in diesem Vorgang verbirgt, vermögen wir heute nur erst zu ahnen. Die Befreiung der Sprache aus der Grammatik in ein ursprünglicheres Wesensgefüge ist dem Denken und Dichten aufgehalten.” (Heidegger 2004, 314)
tyranny of mediaeval logic” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 56). It was precisely against the “medieval or ‘logical’ method” that Pound set up his own “ideogramic method” (see for example P&P, vol. 6, 87), a point that I will expand on in my chapter 3. When it comes to Heidegger’s goal of reaching back to “an original essential framework”, this seems resonant with what Pound states in his 1928 edition of the Ta Hio, The Great Learning, where he cites this Confucian classic (in pinyin known as Da Xue) as important for “developing and restoring to its primitive clarity our reason” (TH, 11; cf. Hong Sun 2003, 98). “Primitive clarity” is in other words something to be sought after, according to Pound. In her introduction to Machine Art and Other Writings, Maria Luisa Ardizzone comments on this aspect of Pound’s thought:

Chinese language and primitive languages, both structured on plural relations, lead Pound to evaluate the relationship between language and culture. Pound is attempting to see if they interact. That is why, as he puts it, the so-called naturfolkers, while they possess a language of things and do not use the language of grammar and syllogism, also do not practice usury. (Ardizzone 1996, 10)

Knowing the extent to which usury was the primeval evil of the modern world in Pound’s perspective, this “endorsement” of the “naturfolkers” acquires all its importance. This leads me in the following section to investigate some of Pound’s relations to his contemporaries in the field of anthropology and ethnology.

1.8. Pound, anthropology and language

Pound has his ideas about “naturfolkers” primarily from the French philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and from Leo Frobenius. Lévy-Bruhl is best known for his work How Natives Think (originally titled Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures), which, although also citing examples from Australasia and Africa, draws its main examples from Amerindians groups and their languages. This book, published in 1910, was also an important influence on the young T. S. Eliot. In his 1985 introduction to a reissue of the authorized 1926 translation into English of this work, C. Scott Littleton claims that Lévy-Bruhl’s ideas involve what he refers to as cognitive relativity – that is, “the notion that the logic we bring to bear in our descriptions of the world is not universal” (Littleton 1985, vi). Littleton goes on to say that the parallels between the ideas expressed in How Natives Think and the so-called Sapir–Whorf hypothesis are “remarkable, to say the least” (ibid., xxx). Lévy-Bruhl argues that there are two kinds of mentality: a “logical mentality” in the “civilized” West, and a “prelogical mentality” found among “primitive” groups, and, as Littleton
notes, he devotes an important section of his book to the “linguistic parameters of prelogicality” in a manner reminiscent of Whorf (ibid., xxx–xxxi).

In the chapter of How Natives Think titled “The Mentality of Primitives in Relation to the Languages They Speak”, Lévy-Bruhl observes that perhaps “the most salient characteristic of most of the languages of the North American Indians is the care they take to express concrete details which our languages leave understood or unexpressed” (Lévy-Bruhl 1985, 140). Furthermore, he quotes David Livingstone, who states that the language of primitive people “always express their ideas of things and actions in the precise fashion in which these are presented to the eye or ear” (Livingstone, quoted in Lévy-Bruhl 1985, 158). Lévy-Bruhl also quotes A. S. Gatschet’s work on the Amerindian Klamath language: “It is our aim […] to speak clearly and precisely; the Indians’ is to speak descriptively; while we classify, he individualizes.” (Gatschet, quoted in Lévy-Bruhl 1985, 168) Lévy-Bruhl insists on similar points at repeated instances:

Again, while it cannot be denied that those who speak these languages have a concept of hand, foot, ear, etc.; their concepts do not resemble ours. They have what I should call an “image-concept”, which is necessarily specialized. The hand or foot they imagine is always the hand or foot of a particular person, delineated at the same time. (Lévy-Bruhl 1985, 168)

Basing himself on Edward John Eyre’s Journals of Expeditions of Discovery into Central Australia (1845), Lévy-Bruhl claims that the Australian aborigines lacked “generic terms such as tree, fish, bird, etc., […] although specific terms were applied to every variety of tree, fish or bird” (ibid., 170). The Tasmanians, he continues, “had not words to represent abstract ideas, and though they could denote every variety of gum-tree or bush, by name, they had no word for tree” (ibid., 170). Such points clearly fascinated Pound, who in Canto 38 refers to both Frobenius and Lévy-Bruhl:

The ragged arab spoke with Frobenius and told him
The names of 3000 plants.
Bruhl found some languages full of detail
Words that half mimic action; but
generalization is beyond them, a white dog is
not, let us say, a dog like a black dog. (C, 38/189)

This idea that generalization is “beyond” the “natives” gives this passage a clear ring of ethnocentrism, but still Pound is obviously admiring the native languages for their “detail” and for their ability to “half mimic action”. That Pound considers the native language as unfit for
generalizations is also made clear in his “How to Write”: “Lévy-Bruhl points out the savage’s lack of power to generalize. He has forty verbs where we have two or three verbs and some adverbs.” (MA, 90) Interestingly, this seems close to what French linguist Émile Benveniste says about the Ewe language spoken in Togo: “In the Ewe language […] the notion of ‘to be,’ or what we shall designate as such, is divided among several verbs” (Benveniste 1971, 62). It later turns out that we are in fact talking about five different verbs that, according to Benveniste, serve the function of the notion of “to be”. Lévy-Bruhl on his part claims that “nearly all the languages of primitive peoples” have no verb “to be”.

Lévy-Bruhl has, says Pound in yet another text, “a number of excellent ideas about savages and primitive languages” (SP, 303). Pound here stresses that the thoughts of the so-called savages “are pretty much incomprehensible to civilised man” (ibid.), since they rest on particulars, never generalizations or abstractions. In itself, Pound’s endorsement of the points made by the French philosopher should not be taken as an endorsement of linguistic relativism, since here the two mentalities on each side of the dichotomic divide between “primitive” and “civilized” man is rather the cause of the differences in language than the effect of it. When Littleton claims that Lévy-Bruhl “anticipated by almost three decades Whorf’s […] conclusion that Western reality-constructs are not necessarily universal, but rather for the most part as much a function of the syntax in which they are couched as any other set of such constructs” (Littleton 1985, xxxi), he seems to me to be exaggerating the proto-Whorfian elements in Lévy-Bruhl’s thinking. Whorf himself refers to Lévy-Bruhl in one instance, clearly implying that he had advanced on the claims set forth by the French scholar: After having observed that Lévy-Bruhl’s term “primitive mentality” has mostly been taken to mean “any cultural mentality other than SAE cultural mentality” (Whorf 2012 [1956], 363), Whorf adds that his own research shows that much of the difference in mentality may be understood through “differences in grammatical categorization […], in segmentation of experience and in the implicit metaphysics of the culture–language complex” (ibid., 362–63). Although Lévy-Bruhl acknowledges that there are important differences between diverse languages such as European and Amerindian languages, and link these to a difference in mentality, there is little to suggest that he would accept Whorf’s idea of grammatical differences being the primary source of these differences in mentality.

When Pound on his part is after observing differences between languages, he does so in a much more artistic vein than Whorf. Pound’s point is that immersion in foreign languages can function as a means of “refreshing” contemporary poetry written in English. In “How to Write”, Pound couples Lévy-Bruhl to both Dante (about which Pound had written in his 1910 study The Spirit of Romance) and Fenollosa, insisting on the value of the verbs of certain languages. Here “the
“bushman” has an advantage over the European of the present day, namely, a certain “vividness” of language:

What Lévy-Bruhl says about the verbs of savages, what Fenollosa says about the verbs of Chinese, what I have written about Dante’s verbs before I had heard of Fenollosa all joins up. The good writer need not throw over anything humanity has acquired but he will in the measure of his genius try to recover the vividness of Dante, Li Po and the bushman. (MA, 90)

Here Pound is clearly far from presupposing a “deterministic” form of linguistic relativism; instead, he is arguing that a poetic genius can be able to renew a language like English by being attentive to the vividness involved in historically and culturally remote means of verbal expression. He is clearly implying that “[t]he good writer” can, by means of good writing alone, be able to achieve similar effects in modern times and with a modern language.

In another passage, Pound compares Chinese and “primitive” languages, seeing them all as liberating when compared to European ones:

When we break out of European languages and the Renaissance tradition, we get still stronger alternatives. Notably the ideograph and in a less significant way the languages studied by Lévy-Bruhl. (MA, 109)

Strikingly, Lévy-Bruhl himself uses the word “ideograms” when he writes about gestural language in *How Natives Think*, using this word as meaning a kind of “complex ensemble” of communicated meaning (cf. Lévy-Bruhl 1985, 162). Frobenius, on his part, is invoked by Pound to illustrate some characteristics of the verb tenses of the (undifferentiated) African natives: “His [Frobenius’s] Africans talk about what the leopard and antelope are doing and saying NOW, not what they did or said in the time of Aesop.” (P/J, 246) Whatever the truth value (and lack of modern political correctness) in these statements, we see that Pound searches different cultures for linguistic resources, and that these have to do with vividness, presence and action, as well as with the verbal aspect of language. In other words, there are important differences between languages, but reflecting on these differences makes it possible to take advantage of the specific characteristics of one language in the other as well. This amounts to a rather limited form of linguistic relativism, at least for the poetic genius. Even if the average speaker would be conditioned by the worldview of his or her primary language, this does not mean that there are not speakers endowed with abilities to break
out of this worldview. Pound, on his part, is fundamentally concerned with linguistic relativism’s *function for poetry*.

It should be mentioned that Pound, in a 1931 article written in Italian, says that Lévy-Bruhl’s studies, as well as those by Fenollosa and Frobenius, “have a bearing on the problem of ‘language’” *(P&P, vol. 5, 311)*. This indicates that he is very much inclined to view the question in linguistic as well as cultural terms. In fact, this is a rare instance of Pound seemingly talking about language as such, in the abstract – although we should notice that he puts the word in inverted commas, as if to indicate a critical distance toward such a generalized idea.

When Fenollosa is talking about the translation of Chinese poetry, the point seems to me to be to “clean up” the English language, deliver it from abstraction and generalizations:

> Should we pass formally to the study of Chinese poetry, we should warn ourselves against logicianised pitfalls. We should beware of modern narrow utilitarian meanings ascribed to the words in commercial dictionaries. We should try to preserve the metaphoric overtones. We should beware of English grammar, its hard parts of speech, and its lazy satisfaction with nouns and adjectives. We should seek and at least bear in mind the verbal undertone of each noun. We should avoid “is” and bring in a wealth of neglected English verbs. Most of the existing translations violate all of these rules. (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 58)

As this passage indicates, Fenollosa is not so much talking about “language” as such, but about certain poetical deployments of a given language. In other words, and although I consider him a linguistic relativist in a generalized sense, Fenollosa seems to have believed that the pitfalls of abstract language could be remedied by individual acts of poetic creation and translation. This puts him at a remove from Whorf, who attributes far less power to the individual to change the course and character of a language. Pound was surely much closer to Fenollosa than to Whorf on this point. In fact, Fenollosa seems to have aided Pound in chiseling out a specifically poetic version of linguistic relativism. I now turn to a renewed discussion of this specifically Poundian form of relativism.

**1.9. Pound’s relativism in a new light**

When Pound writes about his “ideogrammic method” in the *ABC of Reading* (1934), he signalizes that a central problem in Western thinking has to do with abstraction:
In Europe, if you ask a man to define anything, his definition always moves away from the simple things that he knows perfectly well, it recedes into an unknown region, that is a region of remoter and progressively remoter abstraction.

Thus if you ask him what red is, he says it is a “colour”.

If you ask him what a colour is, he tells you it is a vibration or a refraction of light, or a division of the spectrum.

And if you ask him what a vibration is, he tells you it is a mode of energy, or something of that sort, until you arrive at a modality of being, or non-being, or at any rate you get in beyond your depth, and beyond his depth. (ABCR, 19)

Pound goes on to give an example of how a Chinese individual out to define “red” would do this differently than a Westerner. The example is interesting for several reasons:

How can he do it in a picture that isn’t painted in red paint?

He puts (or his ancestor put) together the abbreviated pictures of

ROSE           CHERRY
IRON RUST      FLAMINGO

That, you see, is very much the kind of thing a biologist does (in a very much more complicated way) when he gets together a few hundred or thousand slides, and picks out what is necessary for his general statement. Something that fits the case, that applies in all of the cases.

The Chinese ‘word’ or ideogram for red is based on something everyone KNOWS. (ABCR, 22)

In her A ZBC of Ezra Pound (1971), Christine Brooke-Rose claims that Pound here actually illustrates the ideogrammic method by pointing to what for Fenollosa was a counterexample of what he was after, indeed an example of the simplified manner of thinking in the West. Josephine Park comments that “this error certainly exposes Pound as a poor reader” (Park 2018, 29). I will not argue with these critical verdicts. There is something to them. What I will do instead is suggest that Pound here was touching on a more subtle point, which has an important bearing on the whole idea of linguistic relativism.
Interestingly, Pound picks color as his example. The question of color has been a recurrent one in discussions of linguistic relativism, from William Gladstone’s forays into the Homeric words for color in his 1858 work *Studies in Homer and the Homeric World*, via Franz Boas’s statements on the sense of color as an ethnological object of study, to modern scientific experiments. It is well worth tracing this history to understand how it came to be that the discussions about linguistic relativism so often have revolved around this subject.

Gladstone had been puzzled by the paucity of color terms in the Homeric epics, as well as Homer’s strange deployments of such terms, such as his using the same words for the color of the sea, of iron and of sheep (cf. Deutscher 2011 [2010], 33). This led the British statesman and amateur Classicist to claim that “the organ of color and its impressions were but partially developed among the Greeks of the heroic age” (Gladstone, quoted in Pavlenko 2014, 46). We should note that Gladstone is not necessarily giving a relativist account of this problem complex, since nothing suggests that it is the linguistic categories that produce such a “partially developed” organ; instead, Gladstone proposes a deeply historicist understanding of the physiological basis of human sensations. Many researchers have continued to discuss the strangeness of the words for colors in Homer, even recently (see for example Griffith 2005 and Grand-Clément 2013).

Independently of Gladstone’s writings, other researchers were discovering similar differences between color categorization in languages studied in the present. In *How Natives Think*, Lévy-Bruhl quotes the following passage form Richard Parkinson’s *Dreissig Jahre in der Südsee* (1907), about the Bismarck Archipelago east of New Guinea, where “there are no names for colours”:

> Colour is always indicated in the following way. The object in question is always compared with another, the colour of which has been accepted as a kind of standard. For instance, they will say: This looks like, or has the colour of a crow. In the course of time, the substantive alone has been used in adjectival sense. [...] Black is named after the various things from which this colour is obtained, or else a black object is named. (Parkinson, quoted in Lévy-Bruhl 1985 [1910], 170)

This statement is relevant to my investigation not only because it points to a different compartmentalization of reality in different languages (a premise of all linguistic relativism), but because it indicates that what we would take to be color terms are in fact words indicating objects that have a certain color, opening up the possibility that *color as such*, qua abstraction, might not
form part of other languages in the same way it does in Western languages. *(This, it seems to me, is what is important about the quotation I have given from Pound’s *ABC of Reading*).*

Something similar was noted by Franz Boas, who was Sapir’s teacher, and who in 1909 held a talk where he explained that his study of Amerindian culture had led him to the conclusion, the importance of which he says “can hardly be exaggerated”, that in the languages of Amerindian people “[w]hat we call green and blue is often combined under a term like ‘gall-color’, or yellow and green are combined into one concept which may be named, ‘color of young leaves’” (Boas, quoted in MacLaury 2000, 253). Once again, the colors in these examples are seemingly never detached from the objects, never made into a “self-sufficient” abstraction.

As Aneta Pavlenko makes clear, Boas (as well as Whorf) saw color categorization as something not influenced by language (Pavlenko 2014, 13). In other words, even if the verbal palette for colors varies, this does not in any profound way affect the individual’s ability to discern colors. Nevertheless, the question of color categorization has been at the core of the discussions of linguistic relativism during the twentieth century, leading up to modern scientific experiments with brain scanners and the like. Highly influential was the 1969 volume published by Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, *Basic Color Terms*, which posited a physiological basis for basic color terms, simultaneously maintaining that there are clear differences between cultures in their linguistic palette, with instances of languages reportedly associated “with simple cultural and technological development” (Berlin and Kay, quoted in Pavlenko 2014, 49) having as few as two basic color terms, and others having up to what Pavlenko calls “the English-like eleven-term system” (Pavlenko 2014, 49). Berlin and Kay explained the differences between languages on this point as a development through certain given stages, where a language first would give name to black and white, then to red, subsequently to green or yellow, and only later to blue and other colors (cf. Deutscher 2011 [2010], 86). This was seemingly no longer speculation, but assessments backed up by scientific proof. However, what is most relevant in connection with Pound is, I will argue, not this kind of empiricist science, but a more fundamental question of whether color is itself a universal category. Many critics, among them John Lucy, have been very critical of Berlin and Kay making such an assumption. The main argument of these critics is summed up by Pavlenko as follows:

37 This point is arguably put even clearer in “How to Write”, where Pound construes the example as follows: “On the one hand, the ideograph abstracts or generalizes in the known concrete. For example the picture letter for red is composed of the four signs meaning respectively: Rose, cherry, iron-rust and flamingo. Whatever the inconveniences or this form of writing it has for poetry a great value. It is a treasure house of concrete images.” *(MA, 89)* This passage signals that Pound thought that there is in fact a “picture letter for red” which is composed this way. Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas comments: “The invariable example [Pound] gives of defining ‘redness’ as a compound of the relatively concrete words ‘rose’, ‘cherry’, ‘iron rust’ and ‘flamingo’ does not correspond to any ideogram, nor do Chinese characters function in this manner – that is, their ‘meaning’ is not determined by nor does it arise from what is common among the individual radicals.” *(Twitchell-Waas 2020, 165)*

The critics of “color universals” object to the “epistemological chauvinism” reflected in the assumption that the abstract Western category of “color” is “natural” and in reliance on color terms of American English, which miraculously coincide with universal categories, and on the dimensions of hue, brightness and saturation, associated with the English terms. (Pavlenko 2014, 49)

In other words, the fundamental question is if color as such is a Western, or at least not universal, category. This is the contention not only of the critics Pavlenko refers to, but also of Pavlenko herself: She even claims that “the treatment of ‘color’ as a ‘natural’ category by speakers of ‘color’ languages – including academics – is, arguably, the most prominent Whorfian effect to date” (ibid., 80), implying that even professional linguists unconsciously assume that a linguistic category to be found in their own language necessarily must have corresponding categories in other languages. However, many languages, Pavlenko argues, “do not encode color as an abstract dimension independent of other properties of material objects”, and “do not possess a superordinate term for ‘color’” (ibid., 59). Instead, they “rely on analogies with similarly coded objects or materials” (ibid., 59–60) – I underscore once again how relevant this is for the point made by Pound in ABC of Reading.

Pavlenko also remarks on some problematic methodological issues in the very research done on color categorization in different languages, subsequently making a point that is not only similar to the ones made by Lévy-Bruhl and Boas, but also to the one made by Pound:

They [the critics of “color universals”] also point to ethnocentric biases in research design, such as the assumption that participants respond in a “natural” way to the presentation of small color chips, and in data collection procedures, such as artificial transformation of field glosses into “color terms”, e.g., “kind of tree” > purple, “unripe” > green, or “blood-blood” > white/red/yellow. (Pavlenko 2014, 49)

The question I posed above might be given in a more scholastic form: Is there such a thing as redness, or only things having similar, in English so-called red, appearances? Whatever the answer to such a metaphysical question, there can be no doubt that there are considerable differences between languages in their treatments of what we in the West refer to as color, and that there exist seemingly less abstract ways of perceiving such a phenomenon. In chapter 2, I will discuss how Pound uses the linguistic relativism of color categorization in his translations of Chinese poetry.

To conclude this chapter, I will suggest an even further interpretation of what a non-universal idea of the reality of color as such might imply. Having established that color may in some
ways be a Western idea, not as a spectrum of phenomena, but as a generalization or an abstraction, I will venture to move on to question whether the very word “language” itself must count as a similar abstraction. As much is suggested in a perceptive passage in an article written by Sydney M. Lamb, which leads the discussion back to Whorf and what his relativism actually implies:

It is easy [to take] these concepts, like language, thought, perception, behaviour, as actual objects or entities or some kind, as if they had existence apart from human beings; to be more exact, as if they had some life of their own, apart from the human mind. But I’d like to suggest that thinking in such terms is in itself an example of just the kind of phenomenon Whorf was talking about, an example of language influencing thought – in this case, through the process of reification, in which we are reifying “language”, “thought”, and so forth, and treating them as independent objects. (Lamb 2000, 179–80)

Such an argument, where the very terms “language” and “thought” may be considered reified, certainly complicates the whole picture of a discussion of the relation between language and thought. Even in this instance I find it useful to refer to Heidegger, who in his aforementioned conversation with a Japanese professor, asks:

What does the Japanese world understand by language? Asked more cautiously: Do you have in your language a word for what we call language? If not, how do you experience what with us is called language? (Heidegger 1982, 23)

The sensitivity for linguistic differences at play in this passage, and the relation they have with the diversity of human experience in various cultures, indicates that we should be wary that the idea of language might not be something universally recognized as an entity in itself. Not that there are not sounds, and signs, or ways of naming – but are these really meaningfully subsumed under the category “language”? Heidegger intimates that they may not be, and, the way I see it, points to a possible new direction in our understanding of Pound.

When Harold H. Watts in his 1948 article “Philosopher at Bay” suggested that Pound was a nominalist, the editors of Cronos, the journal that published the article, decided to send a copy to Pound in order to have him comment on it. Pound never published such a comment, only making some dismissive marginal notes to Watt’s article, having his wife Dorothy write to the editors signaling that Watt’s “abstract discussion” was “largely irrelevant” (Dorothy Pound, quoted in Dowthwaite 2019, 175). Anecdotal as such a piece of evidence is, I would claim that it says
something important about Pound’s own perspective. The following remark of Dowthwaite’s is very much to the point:

Because Pound’s project is not one which treats language qua language, but rather always language in a particular use or context, his ultimate appeals are outside of the linguistic system: to broader contexts and wider realities. (Dowthwaite 2019, 199)

Not treating language qua language is quite characteristic of Pound’s approach, making the whole idea of discussing “Pound’s theory of language” rather paradoxical. Even if Pound occasionally expresses an impatience with theorizing as such, it is not this impatience that prevents him from articulating ideas of language in the abstract. It would be much more meaningful to say that Pound’s unwillingness to talk about language as such, rather than of a language, or of linguistic expressions used in a specific situation, is itself a sort of response to a query about “language”. For if “language” has been reified in Western scientific linguistics in a way that makes it hard to recognize as one given entity given other intellectual traditions, this should lead the whole linguistic line of questioning back to the very notions of the abstract and of abstraction that is at the heart of Pound’s critical attitude toward the English language of the present day. Not that Pound desires a return to a previous linguistic state – as Dowthwaite makes clear, he most certainly does not; rather, in Pound’s perspective, modern language is a “symptom of a usurious culture”, where “words are used to mislead people” (cf. Dowthwaite 2019, 121). The reason this has to do with linguistic relativism is that Pound, as we have seen, regarded linguistic characteristics of modern languages as a root cause of political inequality and corruption. Pound was concerned with the use of language as something having political impact in the present. In his view, usurious capitalism misled people by abstraction in a way that could be countered by concretion, precision and renewed attention to detail. In Pound’s perspective, this meant counting on abilities pertaining to the artist, not least to the poet. This leads us to the final section of this chapter, where I will discuss the relevance of linguistic relativism for poetry.

1.10. Linguistic relativism and poetry

Is there something about linguistic relativism that has a special bearing on poetry? This seems to be the implication for a literary theorist like George Steiner, who in his After Babel (1975) states that, even if a good deal of Whorf’s work “cannot be verified”, his papers are “a statement of vital possibility, an exploration of consciousness relevant not only to the linguist but also to the poet and, decisively, to the translator” (Steiner 1992, 91). One of the most important proponents of the value of linking the ideas about linguistic relativism to poetry is Paul Friedrich, himself (among other
things) a poet. In his study *The Language Parallax: Linguistic Relativism and Poetic Indeterminacy* (1986), Friedrich states the following: “Poetic language, in sum, is the locus of the most interesting differences between languages and should be the focus of the study of such differences.” (Friedrich 1986, 17) Poetry, in other words, is a genre where the actual distance between different languages is at its greatest, or where the differences between languages is made most intractable. This point brings to mind the adage attributed to Robert Frost: “Poetry is what gets lost in translation.”38 In a letter to Jean Cocteau, Pound himself states: “La poésie ne se traduit PAS” (*P&P*, vol. 9, 430). As Leavitt comments, with Friedrich’s “reformulation of the Sapir hypothesis”, poetic language is put back in the center of the argument – “as indeed it was for Humboldt and Sapir” (Leavitt 2011, 199).39 This is a point worth underscoring: For both Humboldt and Sapir, poetic language was a primary scene one should investigate when trying to understand the relativity of languages.

Even if it is not my point that there is any causal link between Sapir’s writings and Pound’s linguistic thinking, this is not to say that there is no link whatsoever between the two. In an article published prior to his monograph on Pound and twentieth-century theories of language, Dowthwaite makes it clear that Sapir was an avid reader of poetry, especially contemporary poetry:

> It was in his engagement with his literary contemporaries that Sapir was able to conceive of his understanding of language in its true complexity, and this complexity can only be fully recovered in the context of modernist poetry. (Dowthwaite 2018, 256)

Where Dowthwaite is out to discuss how modernist poetry influenced Sapir, my investigation here is more concerned with how a poet such as Pound set out congenial ideas in his poetry. This does not mean that Dowthwaite’s findings are not of interest to me. It is striking, for example, that he has discovered a letter from Sapir to Harriet Monroe, editor of the Chicago-based journal *Poetry*, dated 28 October 1918, where Sapir actually expresses his admiration for, among others, Pound, whose work he had found to be “unexpectedly fine-grained and attractive” (Sapir, quoted in Dowthwaite 2018, 257).40 Sapir also published poetry himself (cf. Dowthwaite 2019, 107).

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38 What Frost actually said is that “I could define poetry this way: it is that which is lost out of both prose and verse in translation” (Frost 1995, 856).

39 Friedrich’s work is only of tangential relevance to the subject of this dissertation, being quite unconcerned with multilingual poetics. He does, however, make an interesting critical comment on Whorf’s scientism: “I think that his [Whorf’s] writings must be criticized for their scientism, the occasional misuse of theory from the natural sciences, an overemphasis on morphology and structure in Amerind (as against acts of discourse), and his almost total neglect of the unique individual.” (Friedrich 1986, 6)

40 This is just over a year after Pound had published his three “Ur-Cantos” known as “Three Cantos”, precisely in *Poetry*, making it tempting to suppose that Sapir is referring to these poems. Another assumption would be that Sapir is referring to the poems taken from *Cathay* that were published in *Poetry* in 1915. The latter seems in fact more likely, since Sapir, at least according to Dowthwaite, expressed a “staunch rejection” of the later development taken by Pound, as well as by T. S. Eliot (Dowthwaite 2018, 271).
When we come to Pound’s mature *Cantos*, we find that the differences between languages is often put to the forefront by being juxtaposed on the page. That Pound in Canto 79 does something like Basic English as such does – namely, create “intelligible English” by making “a translation of complexity into simplicity”, as Dowthwaite claims with reference to the last line of this passage – are in my view misleading indications. As we can see from the passage, this form of expression is anything but simple:

\[
\text{in discourse \, 言辞 \, what matters is to get it across e poi basta \, 達} \quad (C, 79/506)
\]

The latter line might be taken as an indication that Pound thinks of communication as something that should prioritize meaning-content and simple expression. But this is not what this passage is all about. As observed by Peter Liebregts (cf. Liebregts 2004, 262), the source of this passage is a maxim from the Confucian classic text known as the *Analects*, rendered like this by Pound in his *Confucius* volume: “Get the meaning across and then STOP” (*Con*, 269). In the canto, we see that three different languages are present in these four lines of verse: English, Italian and Chinese. These are the same three that Pound had suggested could be used as basis for a trilingual set of universal languages, and that Dowthwaite observed are the three most frequently found in *The Cantos*. The two Chinese characters repeated here, Latinized as *ci da*, and drawn from *Analects*, are normally taken to mean something like “[to use] words to get ideas across”, although Pound apparently interpreted the first character as “lead the sheep out to pasture” (cf. Lan 2008 [2004], 80). The line “to get it across and poi basta” comes in a sort of punchline, the slightly foreign-sounding Italian words indicating that there is something to the *foreignness* of a language that adds to the meaning. This alone should tell us that we are not talking about any reductive idea of communication as information (a conception that Heidegger considered to be uniquely characteristic of the modern Western world, and of which he was profoundly critical).

A reading suggesting that the passage states that the point in discourse is simply to get the intended information across would be highly misleading. The very *it* that one is to get across in this passage is, as I understand it, not at all the verbal message’s so-called content. To grasp the statement rendered here, it is imperative that we understand Pound’s three categories of *melopoeia* ("wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning"; *LE*, 25), *phanopoeia* ("a casting of images upon the visual imagination"; ibid.) and *logopoeia* ("the dance of the intellect among words"; ibid.),
which according to Pound together constitute “the art of writing” (ibid., 29). These three categories are all in play in writing generally and in poetry specifically: Working together, they are, as Pound underscores, ways of “charging language with meaning” (ibid.). In other words, it is by such a complex charging that meaning comes across. The “subject matter” of this passage is not any underlying idea, but the simultaneous presence of melopoeia, phanopoeia and logopoeia as harbingers of meaning. The Chinese characters and the indentations in the quoted passage are themselves relevant to the creation of a meaningful verbal expression. We are not talking about “talking straight” or “making sense”. We are rather talking about language charged with meaning to the utmost degree, among other vehicles by the “graphic poetics”, but also by the sound of the syllables themselves. Pound’s idea of charging is presumably a reference to electric circuitry.41 The charge in question here arguably comes from the friction generated by different languages placed in relation.

Everyone who has read any of Ezra Pound’s statements on poetry will know how concerned he is with the music involved in it, poetry’s melopoeia. The quoted passage is arguably an effort not to stress the primary importance of communication as information, but something entirely different: a lesson for the reader in how to read musically. The idea that we could here be talking about a sort of poetic musical lesson is enforced by the spacing of the word on the page, by the indentations.42 If the rhythm seems somewhat loose in the first three lines, the line breaks that give such a minimal amount of syllables per line at the same time indicates a slowing down of the reading process. When it comes to “to get it across and poi basta”, however, the rhythm is striking: After an upbeat (“to”), we have what is most conveniently scanned as two dactyls (“get it across e poi”) before ending in what is arguably a trochee, or possibly a spondee (“basta”). Such metrical terms are not capable of rendering the musicality of the phrase, however: What I have described as two dactyls could more illuminatingly be referred to as musical triplets. Even if the statement is possible to misunderstand as stressing communication as information, the very aural and visual aspects of the passage suggests that we are much closer to a poetry aspiring to a form of music.

41 Early in his career, Pound often sought to point out possible equivalences between electrics and poetry, as in this passage: “I once saw a small child go to an electric light switch and say, ‘Mamma, can I open the light?’ She was using the age-old language of exploration, the language of art. It was a sort of metaphor, but she was not using it as ornamentation.” (GB, 102)

42 The spacings in Pound’s writings must originally have been achieved by using not only single blanks, but by deploying what is known as tab stops on the typewriter, i.e., the mechanical device that makes it easy to indent the paragraphs. If one can get the impression that Pound’s spacing on the pages of his poetry and his letters was largely “improvised”, more a kind of raw, asemantic gesture than anything else, this is most certainly not the case in all instances. One way of understanding Pound’s use of tab stops is to think of them as historical markers, devices that signal the historical character of the text as something produced precisely in the age of machinery like the typewriter. D. S. Carne-Ross’s remark seems pertinent: “Pound has always made full use of the typewriter’s resources” (Carne-Ross 2006 [1979], 190). In a short letter to Pound dated 22 January 1957, Marshall McLuhan states his opinion that Pound was in fact “the one man of our time who had seen the typewriter as a new art form and had used it imaginatively” (EPP, Box 32, folder 1336). Jessica Pressman (2014) says that Pound replied to this letter but refused to comment on the historical role of the typewriter.
In some interesting instances, Heidegger seems congenial to this kind of thinking. This is illustrated by Peter Hanly in his 2013 article “Dark Celebration: Heidegger’s Silent Music”. Initially, Hanly points to something Heidegger says toward the end of his lecture-course The Principle of Reason (Der Satz vom Grund, 1955–56). Speaking here about a certain “resounding together” (Einklang) of words, Heidegger asserts that a full understanding of the notion Satz vom Grund requires us to take the word Satz in its musical sense as well (with Satz meaning not only “a proposition” but also “a movement [in classical music]”). Hanly concludes that Heidegger implies that a “kind of thinking is to be made possible in this hearing, then, a thinking that is possible only in and through a kind of music” (Hanly 2013, 242). Quoting from Heidegger’s commentary on Stefan George’s poem “The Word” (“Das Wort”) in On the Way to Language, Hanly shows Heidegger using the Greek word μέλος (the word that underlies Pound’s melopoeia), expressing the following: “[T]his poem is a song.” Heidegger uses the word “song” and “singer” in his commentaries on Hölderlin as well, insisting that he is not referring to any “retroactive setting to music of what is spoken and written”, but instead emphasizing, as Hanly paraphrases him, “the necessity of listening to the poem, in a way that cannot be separated out from its performance, its sounding” (ibid., 246). Indeed, Hanly convincingly argues that Heidegger is out to “radically displace the classical opposition of sound and sense” (ibid.) and thereby to indicate that the melody and rhythm of language itself must not be thought of as “some kind of ornament, an unnecessary addition to a plenitude of meaning” (ibid., 247). Heidegger says simply: “Song is not the opposite of discourse (Gespräch), but rather the most intimate kinship (innigste Verwandtschaft) with it; for song is language.” (Heidegger, quoted in Hanly 2013, 254)

Still commenting on George’s “Das Wort”, Heidegger introduces the notion of rhythm:

Rhythm, ῥυθμός, does not mean here flux and flowing, but rather form/arrangement (Fügung). Rhythm is what is at rest (das Ruhende), what occasions (fügt) the moving (Bewegung) of dance and song, and so lets it rest within itself. (ibid., 250–51)

It seems relevant to remark on the German words Fügung and fügt in this passage. In “A Packet for Ezra Pound”, the text William Butler Yeats chose to add to the second edition of his mystical-philosophical work A Vision, published in 1937, Yeats used the etymologically related word “Fugue” to describe Pound’s method of composing his poetry. Yeats refers to a conversation he had with Pound about The Cantos:

Now at last he [Pound] explains that it [the entire poem] will, when the hundredth canto is finished, display a structure like that of a Bach Fugue. There will be no plot, no chronicle of
events, no logic of discourse, but two themes, the descent into Hades from Homer, a metamorphosis from Ovid, and mixed with these mediaeval or modern historical characters. […] He has scribbled on the back of an envelope certain sets of letters that represent emotions or archetypal events – I cannot find any adequate definition – A B C D and then J K L M, and then each set of letters repeated, and then A B C D inverted and this repeated and then a new element X Y Z, then certain letters that never recur […] and all set whirling together. (Yeats 1962 [1937], 3–5)

Pound found this rendering very misleading, and wrote the following, the same year that Yeats had published his specimen of anecdotal evidence: “If Yeats had known a fugue from a frog, he might have transmitted what I told him in some way that would have helped rather than obfuscated his readers.” (SL, 293) Pound repeated this view in his late interview with D. G. Bridson of the BBC: “I mean to say, his [Yeats’s] idea of fugue was very vague so he can’t have known what the hell he was talking about.” (Pound, quoted in Bridson 2006 [1961], 247) To be sure, Pound’s readers are not obliged to accept every judgment of his work made by its author. Perhaps Yeats did not know what a fugue was. But there is no reason to doubt that Pound had himself used the word “fugue” to describe his idea of a compositional principle for The Cantos, implying an understanding of rhythm that can be compared to Heidegger’s.43

1.11. Conclusion

In Pound’s view, usurious capitalism meant misleading people, and such misleading was facilitated by abstraction and could be countered by concretion. Such a change might be achieved both by poetry and by propaganda, he implied: In the case of poetry, this meant searching various languages

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43 These are not the only interesting parallels between Pound and Heidegger. In the introduction to his rich study Language, Sexuality and Ideology in Ezra Pound’s Cantos (1986), Jean-Michel Rabaté suggests another: “Pound and Heidegger have both attempted a general survey of the question of language in its relation to ‘metaphysics’ at large, without eschewing the problems of politics, art and even changes in the modern way of life.” (Rabaté 1986, 2) Before jumping to conclusions about the correspondence between Heidegger’s Nazi allegiances and Pound’s Fascist ones, it should be said that, at least according to Rabaté, when giving his 1936 lecture on Hölderlin, Heidegger was out to distance himself from certain aspects of Nazi ideology, an ideology that he had infamously endorsed wholeheartedly a few years earlier. More specifically, says Rabaté, with a phrase that may seem overly apologetic, Heidegger was “fighting against the exploitation of Hölderlin as a purely nationalist poet by Nazi propaganda” (ibid., 300n). When Heidegger comments on Hölderlin’s poem “Friedensfeier” (“Peace Celebration”) he strikingly says that every stanza of this poem turns around in a vortex (Wirbel), positing a different subject at a different place, that is, “if […] one still can speak of ‘places’ in a vortex” (Heidegger, quoted in Rabaté 1986, 6). In Rabaté’s rendition, one of Heidegger’s main points is that “we must enter the vortex in order to understand what language has to say” (Rabaté 1986, 6). Rabaté interprets the general implication of this as follows: “Poetry implies an experience of language as a circle of hearing and uttering, for no one can speak from outside the Wirbel since it predetermines the dialogic nature of the subject.” (ibid., 6) This might lead us to think of Pound’s allegiance to Vorticism, a movement that, says Miranda B. Hickman, Pound was campaigning to renew in the 1930s, by then also pointing out its similarity to Futurism (cf. Hickman 2005, 101 and 104). Pound’s idea of the Vortex was among other things intended to serve as an expansion of the Image precisely in underscoring the dynamic relationship between artwork and audience, and as such perhaps indicating that the reader of a poem takes an active part in it, invited, as it were, to join in its revolving.
for a precision wanting in English, that is, by a multilingual poetics. The next chapter will be devoted to an investigation of the multilingual aspects of Pound’s earliest poetry, from the time of the unpublished 1906–7 fragment bearing the Latin title “Orbi Cantum Primum” and up to the versions of Chinese Classical poetry he made basing himself on Fenollosa’s rudimentary versions and published in *Cathay* (1915).
Chapter 2: Literary cosmopolitanism in Pound’s early work

Even if recent studies of literary modernism, such as those by Jessica Berman (2001) and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (2006), have drawn interesting parallels between modernism and cosmopolitanism, no systematic investigation has been made of Ezra Pound’s relation to cosmopolitanism. And yet the concept of cosmopolitanism seems highly relevant, at least when it comes to the young Pound. When Pound refers to cosmopolitanism both in his early poetry and in his contemporary prose, it is in a self-conscious manner: The young American artist-intellectual is a cosmopolitan, that is, a citizen of the world. Pound presents cosmopolitanism as unambiguously a positive category. Pound’s cosmopolitanism may be seen as an extension of his linguistic relativism, which is also a form of cultural relativism, in other words a position that presupposes that there are important differences not only between language, but between cultures, that ought to be studied in order to enlarge one’s worldview and expand the existing horizon of poetry. In this chapter, I will discuss not only Pound’s stated cosmopolitanism, but also how he engages himself in a sort of study of the seeming minutiae of poetic cosmopolitanism, with his forays into foreign languages and foreign traditions, with their specific forms, motifs and metrics.

2.1. Pound and cosmopolitanism: the “Orbi Cantum Primum” fragment (1906–7)

In 1906, or most likely in 1907, the year he abandoned his formal studies in Romance philology at the University of Pennsylvania, Ezra Pound wrote a multi-page poetic fragment that begins with the Latin words “Orbi Cantum Primum” (see Appendix).44 The fragment has a grand overture, but as David Moody rightly observes, “the high song soon breaks into fragments and notes” (Moody 1996–7, 72). These fragments and notes are interesting in themselves, as they show us an early work in progress, occasionally giving us lines reminiscent of some of Pound’s cantos, such as these:

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first gloomy, oily, green, grey. rain beaten
then emerald in the shallows
and sapphire. Oh tumultuous sapphire crying with light
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With their colors and gems and light, these lines connote a high lyrical style that Pound never gave completely up on. It is nonetheless the fragment’s opening that is most interesting to my investigation here, both because it signals the poet’s interest in adapting a worldwide, cosmopolitan

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44 David Moody indicates that the fragment may stem from as early as 1906, but his conjecture is 1907 – the fragment’s “grand opening in Whitman’s manner would accord with his [Pound’s] liberation from the prison-house of philology” (Moody 1996–7, 71).
perspective, and because it introduces a multilingual dimension with its Latin and Greek expressions. Such deployment of foreign languages is certainly not unique to Pound; in fact, Greek and Latin expressions are to be found in a wide selection of English-language post-Romantic verse. I will nevertheless claim that there is something about the very mixing of languages that makes this early fragment of special interest – it is as though the stated cosmopolitan outlook is morphologically enacted at the poetic microlevel.

The fragment’s first line is in Latin, while the second line suggests a translation of it, albeit one that playfully keeps some of the Latin syntax, thereby achieving an English line with a distinctive foreignizing effect. The fragment’s opening is, as Moody indicates, clearly influenced by Walt Whitman (cf. Moody 1996–7, 71). Furthermore, in line five, the fragment makes what is probably an allusion to Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind”, implicating that the “I” of the passage is also like Shelley’s “Wild Spirit […] moving everywhere”. Subsequently, the fragment refers to “one going before me”, a reference to Rudyard Kipling, who in the opening of “The Ballad of East and West” says that there is “nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face”. Ultimately, the fragment turns to a description of the poet himself as a man of spirit:

ORBI CANTUM PRIMUM COSMOPOLITI E TOLERENTIAE CANO
THE First Great Song Of All The World Cosmopolite Of Tolerance I sing
For I have stripped off the bands of custom
and the swaddling clouts of shame
And my heart is free as the West wind
And as one going before me hath sung
There is nor creed nor birth when two strong men meet
tho they come from the ends of earth
So it is of the spirit, of men of the spirit
and of things spiritual
Wherefor, I being of no set and land bound country
But of that country of the spirit wherein I am at one
with them of the spirit
Whose word I am: being of my self nothing,
A hollow reed thru whom is the song

45 Cf. Moody 1996–7, 75. In his edition of the fragment, Moody reproduces Pound’s double spacing between each word. Since this is simply Pound’s conventional use of the typewriter, which is normally corrected to single spacing in printed versions of this work, I have opted for single spacing here.
If the poet is to be believed, this fragment commences the “First Great” song of a cosmopolitan and tolerant world: The twenty-one-year-old Pound was clearly already searching for poetic novelties.46 Having quoted the beginning and end of this opening section of Pound’s poetic fragment, Leah Culligan Flack convincingly argues that the poet here aims to sing in a “denationalised voice”, and that the reference to a “country of the spirit” connotes “an image of a republic of arts that would enable him to distance himself from the most culturally insular versions of the American epic” such as Whitman’s *Song of Myself* (Flack 2015, 31). The aim of a “denationalised voice” relates intimately to the first line of the fragment,47 introducing as it does the word “COSMOPOLITI”, a form of the Ancient Greek noun κοσμοπολίτης (kosmopolites), which itself joins together the words κόσμος (kosmos, “world”) and πολίτης (polites, “citizen”), giving a combined sense of something like “citizen of the world”. The specific Latin form of the word *cosmopolites* to be found here brings up some philological questions: The noun *cosmopolites* as a Greek loanword in Latin would normally have had the dative singular form *cosmopolitae*. So why does Pound have *cosmopoliti*?48 One contention would be to assume that Pound transcribed the word directly from the Greek, where the dative singular form is τῷ κοσμοπολιτῇ, and that he in his transcription chose the Latin letter *i* (instead of the more common *e*) for the final Greek letter η, giving the form *cosmopoliti*. This seems to me an unlikely interpretation, however, especially since Pound’s own English translation suggests that he did not intend a noun at all, but an adjective. A philologist would probably conclude that Pound in this instance has constructed a non-existent third declension Latin adjective *cosmopolitis* (rather than *cosmopoliticus*), which would have had *cosmopoliti* in the dative singular case.49 This seeming inaccuracy should be taken as Pound’s attempt to combine an Ancient Greek original via Latin into “modern” English, that is, an attempt to construct a form of language that never historically existed but that collapses historical temporalities into its present use. In other words, even in this early fragment, Pound takes philological liberties, twisting terms to get the sense he is after, here a modern sense of the word “cosmopolite” or “cosmopolitan”, a sense in fact

46 A pendant to the word “Great” is not to be found in the Latin first line of the fragment, where the song is simply said to be the first (*primum*).
47 The first line may be intended as the title of the whole fragment. This would in the case accord with the tendency in the early Pound to use foreign language terms and expressions in the titles of his poems, as I will demonstrate.
48 I here presume that *cosmopoliti* is in the dative case and meant to agree with *orbi*. If it is in the ablative case and meant to agree with *tolerentiae*, the latter word is in the wrong case. This is not entirely unlikely, though, since the Latin expression “E TOLERENTIAE” is also a bit of a grammatical conundrum: If Pound with “E” intended the short version of the preposition “EX”, then one would expect the ablative form TOLERENTIA to follow. Pound may possibly have intended “E” to stand for “ET”, choosing the shorter form either because the next word begins with a *t*, or because he was thinking of the Italian word for “and”, with is simply the letter *e*. This, however, leaves us with quite a strange and “un-Latinesque” construction.
49 Even if the adjective *cosmopolitis* is not to be found in any Latin dictionary, the corresponding Greek form is, so Pound is hardly being completely original.
influenced by modern English, in such a way as to make the Latin first line of the fragment somewhere between classical and modern, or rather classical imbued with a certain modern “impurity”.

Pound’s spelling “Tolerance” in the second line I take not to be a typing error but a play on the Latin orthography of the first line: It indicates how the poet seeks a language of hybridity, deploying the poetic form to give the reader a sense of languages intersecting, as I, in chapter 1, indicated would count as a “relativistic” take on languages. Given how great the Whitmanian influence is on this fragment, we can draw an important parallel between Pound’s hybrid English and what Steve G. Kellman has referred to as Whitman’s “grandiose […] conception of English as the supreme syncretic language” (Kellman 2018, 27), as witnessed in the opening of Whitman’s prose text “Slang in America”:

View’d freely, the English language is the accretion and growth of every dialect, race, and range of time, and is both the free and compacted composite of all. From this point of view, it stands for Language in the largest sense, and is really the greatest of studies. It involves so much; is indeed a sort of universal absorber, combiner, and conqueror. (Whitman, quoted in Kellman 2018, 27)

There is something about this perspective, where English is the “absorbed, combiner, and conqueror” of other languages, which seems related to the way the young Pound twists the Latin and Greek words to create a hybrid or “composite” language. And still, there is also a hint in the opening of “Orbi Cantum Primum” that Pound wants to let certain key concepts retain their foreign character when included in his poetry. A fundamental question concerning Pound’s multilingual poetics is whether Pound with his mixing of languages really was after a radical mélange (as it would seem with the word “Tolerance”) or whether he, as I will claim is often the case in his Cantos, wants to keep the varied linguistic logics intact, formally separated and only breaking against each other by being assembled together. The hybrid forms of this early fragment seem on the whole to deviate from the more typical manner in which Pound deployed multiple languages.

Linguistic hybridity was to become a central characteristic of James Joyce’s Finnegans Wake (1939), a work Pound expressed deep reservations about after having been an important ally of Joyce’s when it came to agitating for Ulysses (1922) and getting the novel published. In The Poet’s Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature, Leonard Forster makes the important observation that keeping the different languages distinct was more pressing for Pound than for Joyce (Forster 1970, 78). This I interpret as meaning that the language of Joyce’s late work seems to be some sort of hybrid on the morphological microlevel, while the languages used in The Cantos largely remain
combined in unaltered form. It is as if Joyce created his poetic prose in any possible language, while Pound created his poetry in English, equipping it with borrowings from foreign languages, making The Cantos, as Michael Lee Warner suggests, “a work which does not seek a utopian reunification of language, but leaves languages as they are” (Warner 1986, xiv). In The Cantos, Pound tends to splice together already existing text from various sources, where Joyce on his part kneaded each morpheme into new, composite words. This suggests that the small tokens of hybridity observable in an instance such as the “Orbi Cantum Primum” fragment may not only be untypical of Pound, but indicative of an early, exploratory stage of linguistic intermixing that he eventually moved on from. In chapter 3, I will discuss how the so-called Malatesta Cantos (Cantos 8–11) instead are examples of Pound juxtaposing different languages in what is arguably a collage-like manner.

Even if Moody says that the opening passage of the “Orbi Cantum Primum” indicates that the poet “does not want to sing in Whitman’s spirit, and that he is more in accord with Dante’s spirit” (Moody 1996–7, 72), we should be aware that the early Pound seemed to see Dante and Whitman as very closely related indeed, as made clear in Pound’s 1909 prose piece “What I Feel About Walt Whitman”:

[T]o be frank, Whitman is to my fatherland (Patriam quam odi et amo for no uncertain reasons) what Dante is to Italy and I at my best can only be a strife for a renaissance in America of all the lost or temporarily mislaid beauty, truth, valour, glory of Greece, Italy, England and all the rest of it.

[…] Like Dante he wrote in the “vulgar tongue”, in a new metric. The first great man to write in the language of his people. (SP, 145–46)

Thus, Pound sees Whitman as an American Dante writing in and promoting the “vulgar tongue”. Dante not only chose the language of his people in The Divine Comedy, but also defended the choice of Italian over Latin in his unfinished work of linguistics and literary criticism (somewhat paradoxically itself written in Latin), De vulgari eloquentia, which became a standard reference for Pound during his entire life, and over which his lecture series at the London Polytechnic in 1909, published in 1910 year as The Spirit of Romance, may be seen to have been calqued.50 It seems relevant that the De vulgari eloquentia, labeled by Marianne Shapiro as “Dante’s work of exile” (Shapiro 1990), contains this clearly cosmopolitan passage:

50 Cf. Dowthwaite 2019, 43. Maria Rosa Menocal even claims that The Spirit of Romance “in its direct impact on the developments of poetry of its own time most closely resembles Dante’s achievement through the De vulgari eloquentia” (Menocal 1993, 115–16). Pound continued to be influenced by Dante’s treatise, signaling that his essay “On Criticism in General” (1923) was his own “De Vulgaris Eloquio” (cf. P&P, vol. 1, ix) – the title Pound always used for Dante’s work. Tim Redman considers not only The Spirit of Romance, but also Pound’s ABC of Reading (1934) to be profoundly influenced by this work of Dante’s (cf. Redman 2010, 193).
To me […] the whole world is a homeland, like the sea to the fish – though I drank from the Arno before cutting my teeth, and love Florence so much that, because I loved her, I suffer exile unjustly – and I will weigh the balance of my judgement more with reason than with sentiment. (Dante, De vulgari eloquentia, I.vi)\(^{51}\)

The attitude expressed here, where the I (or “we”, nos) sees the world (mundus) as a homeland (patria), seems close to Pound’s own. In the first paragraph of “What I feel about Walt Whitman”, the young poet explicitly writes about his own “world citizenship” (SP, 145). If arguably one of “the slipperiest terms in literary studies today” (Agathocleus 2010, 453), it will be worthwhile pondering the sense of the term “cosmopolitanism” to better understand Pound’s poetry and his intellectual outlook.

2.2. The semantics of cosmopolitanism

In the eighteenth century, when the Western cosmopolitan tradition arguably reached a peak, the word “cosmopolitanism” was often used merely to indicate an attitude of openness and impartiality, and the noun “cosmopolitan” could designate someone with an urban lifestyle, who traveled widely or had a network of international contacts (cf. Kleingeld and Brown 2019). But assuming that the early Pound of the “Orbi Cantum Primum” fragment had such a general idea of cosmopolitanism in mind, and that the self-image of one “being of no set and land bound country” is the main point, simply avoids the fact that the young poet, when intimating that he is a cosmopolitan, places himself in a long tradition going as far back as to antiquity.\(^{52}\) This is not to say that Pound simply inscribes himself uncritically in this tradition. While there is arguably an idea of universal government and universal peace linking together works separated by long stretches of time, such as Dante’s De monarchia (written sometime after 1308) and Immanuel Kant’s Perpetual Peace (Zum ewigen Frieden; 1795), Pound’s cosmopolitanism is not a moral or a geopolitical cosmopolitanism.\(^{53}\)

\(^{51}\) Steven Botterill’s translation (in Dante Aligheri 1996). This is Dante’s original Latin: “Nos […], cui mundus est patria velut piscibus equor, quamquam Sarnum biberimus ante dentes et Florentiam adeo diligamus ut, quia dileximus, exilium patiamur iniuste, rationi magis quam sensui spatulas nostri iudicii podiamus.”

\(^{52}\) According to Diogenes Laertius (Lives of the Philosophers VI, 63), his namesake Diogenes of Sinope, father of the Cynic school of philosophy, when asked about his place of origin, answered that he was a kosmopolitēs (ἐρωτηθεὶς πόθεν εἴη, “κοσμοπολίτης,” ἔφη). Later, Stoic philosophers, both Greek and Roman, developed an idea of the cosmos as itself a polis governed by reason and universal law. This in turn influenced Christian ideals.

\(^{53}\) Dante’s De monarchia has been referred to as a “plea for a universal monarchy” (Kleingeld and Brown 2019). Dante composed his treatise when in exile from his home city of Florence, having, says Nicolai Rubinstein, “no ear for the exclusive patriotism of his town” (Rubinstein 1942, 218). Even if the De monarchia is highly theoretical, Dante himself was deeply involved in the political feuds on the Italian peninsula at the time – as such, his treatise is not only a plea for universal monarchy, but a plea for universal peace (pax universalis; I, iv). This links Dante’s work to later cosmopolitan thinking, such as we find it in Kant, whose Perpetual Peace is one of the most influential philosophical
Indeed, it is arguably a specifically American form of cosmopolitanism, to which Pound gives his own characteristics. We ought, in other words, to engage in a more localized *Begriffsgeschichte* to contextualize Pound’s use of the term.

According to Jessica Berman in her study *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community* (2001), the British sense of the term “cosmopolitanism” prevalent in the first half of the nineteenth century was largely pejorative, while the term in the United States, in the second half of the century, underwent “an American transformation” and was figured as “a positive quality” (Berman 2001, 37). Berman says that it was Ralph Waldo Emerson who in his 1844 “Letter to a Young American” coined this “distinctly American sense” of the word “cosmopolitan” (ibid., 35). Quite unlike Kant’s advocating a league of nations in his *Perpetual Peace*, Emerson writes that “the legislation of this country should become more catholic and more cosmopolitan than that of any other” (Emerson, quoted in Berman 2001, 35). Berman concludes that “[c]osmopolitanism in this context seems to grow directly out of the strength of individual men, almost bypassing the community entirely, and in this manner the tension between local and universal appears to be resolved” (Berman 2001, 36). We take note of the emphasis laid on “the strength of individual men”: Whitman was seen by many, Emerson included, to be an individual of extraordinary strength, and Pound, never coy, may have judged himself in the same way.

The term “cosmopolitan” was widely used in the United States toward the end of the nineteenth century. Since March 1886, the popular magazine named *Cosmopolitan* had been published in New York. By the time media mogul William Randolph Hearst purchased it in 1905, the magazine, says Berman, had turned “international in title only” (ibid., 30). Still, the magazine’s early history represents

the wanderlust and desire for exotica that also fuels the expansion of worldwide exploration, the establishment of journals such as *National Geographic* (1888), and the fervor over the Chicago World Columbian Exhibition in 1892. (ibid., 30)

Berman tells us that there was “an enormous explosion” of the term “cosmopolitanism” in the United States in the 1890s, and more specifically around 1892 (ibid., 37). She quotes from an 1892 *Cosmopolitan* article called “A Cosmopolitan Language”, written by one Maltus Questell Holyoake:

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explications of cosmopolitanism, among other things advocating a “league of nations”. This clearly amounts not only to a *moral* cosmopolitanism (cf. Cavallar 2012), but to a *geopolitical* cosmopolitanism (cf. Mignolo 2002, 173). Both these may, however, be deemed “too philosophical” for Pound, not sufficiently imbued with a historical perspective.
Internationalism is on the increase [...] The creation of an international language would undoubtedly result in immense advantages to trade, commerce and labor, and to literature its service would be infinite. (Holyoake, quoted in Berman 2001, 28)

In chapter 1, we saw Pound being critical of the way Ogden’s Basic English was designed to facilitate trade, even implying that the primary purpose of its simplified language was to aid the exportation of British goods. Even if he was, at least at one point, largely positive toward Ogden’s idea of an international auxiliary language, Pound explicitly saw it as a language not for poetry, but rather for propaganda. The idea than an international language would be of “service” to “literature” was far from Pound’s horizon (although “literature” may have been used by Holyoake in a more general sense than the artistic one). Still, the “Orbi Cantum Primum” fragment may give the impression that Pound himself was seeking out “an international language”, in the sense of a language able to incorporate words and forms from other languages. It is arguably in precisely this endeavor that the young Pound was most cosmopolitan: He was not simply a cosmopolitan in a general sense, nor was he a moral, geopolitical or philosophical cosmopolitan. He was, as Robert Casillo remarks in passing, a literary cosmopolitan: Casillo observes that Pound, in a letter to William Carlos Williams, written on November 10, 1917, “quotes Gourmont’s defense of literary cosmopolitanism” (Casillo 1988, 55), while clearly implying that Pound himself was a defender of the same type of cosmopolitanism. The French symbolist author and critic Remy de Gourmont (1858–1915) was, it should be underscored, a very important influence on Pound: His essays were, in Pound’s opinion, “the best portrait available, the best record that is, of the civilized mind from 1885 to 1915” (LE, 344); in his book on Pound and Gourmont, Richard Sieburth observes that “between 1912 and 1922 [Pound] was to devote more pages of enthusiastic appreciation and translation of Gourmont than to any other single contemporary” (Sieburth 1978, 1). Gourmont, says Erin M. Williams, was “the foremost literary critic” at the Mercure de France, a journal, she observes, that itself was strongly marked by “the desire to forge cosmopolitan intellectual solidarities” (Williams 2004, 63). Let us have a closer look at the letter to William Carlos Williams, where Pound quotes Gourmont in French as follows:

“Si le cosmopolitisme littéraire gagnait encore et qu’il réussit à éteindre ce que les différences de race ont allumé de haine de sang parmi les hommes, j’y verrais un gain pour la civilisation et pour humanité tout entière. …

“L’amour excessif et exclusif d’une patrie a pour immédiat corollaire l’horreur des patries étrangères. Non seulement on craint de quitter la jupe de sa maman, d’aller voir
Here, Gourmont talks about a certain “literary cosmopolitanism” (cosmopolitisme littéraire) that he hopes will gain ground and benefit civilization and humanity. Pound, who in the same year as he wrote this letter to Williams had published the article “Provincialism the Enemy” in four segments in the New Age, is unsurprisingly endorsing such a cosmopolitanism, which rejects “staying at home” and “closing the door”. Commenting on the letter, Sieburth says that Pound prescribes a collection of Gourmont’s writings “as a medicine against what he considered his friend’s provincialism” (Sieburth 1978, 80).

The last paragraph of the quotation from Gourmont is best taken as a criticism of an antiquarian attitude to the teaching of literature, one that would overlook a modern author like Ibsen, lauded by Gourmont. More striking, given what later, in the 1950s, would become a stance close to white supremacism on Pound’s part (cf. Marsh 2015), is the idea that this literary cosmopolitanism is supported by the French author for its ability to “extinguish the blood hatred that the differences between the races has ignited between men”. If we should take this point to be an expression of Pound’s own views, we could be tempted to see this as an instance of anti-racism. Here one should, however, beware: The quotation is explicitly opposing “blood hatred”, but at the same time it seems to treat “the differences between the races” not only as something real, but arguably even as a cause of the blood hatred “ignited between men”. Even if Pound in his early cosmopolitanism may have been largely free of racial prejudice, this does not mean that he denied the existence and importance of differences between races. We should note that for a modern antiracist theorist such as Ibram X. Kendi (2019), being free of prejudice does not in itself constitute antiracism; instead, antiracism

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54 This is the wording given in Selected Letters, while Pound/Williams: Selected Correspondence of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams has the more logical “en sortant d’expliquer le Cid ou Don Juan” (P/W, 31–32).

55 “If literary cosmopolitanism would still prevail and succeed in extinguishing the blood hatred that the differences between the races has ignited between men, I would view in it a gain for civilization and for all humanity. The excessive and exclusive love for a single fatherland has as its immediate corollary the fear of foreign countries. One does not only dread to leave the skirt of one’s mother, to travel to see how other people live, to engage in their struggles, to share in their work, not only does one stay at home, but one ends up by closing the door. This madness benefits certain literary men, and the same professor, attempting to explain the Cid or Don Juan, commits gracious harm to Ibsen and, alas, the too illusory influence of his work, which is nevertheless all light and beauty.” My translation.

56 In a 1917 article in The North American Review, James Gibbon Huneker refers to Gourmont as a “spiritual cosmopolitan”, if only to observe that he was, “like most Frenchmen”, a patriot (Huneker 1917, 937). Erin M. Williams makes it clear that Gourmont actively went against what he referred to as “le faux patriottisme”, and that he sought to make of culture “an alternative politics, a substitute patrie” (Williams 2004, 63).
means actively supporting an antiracist policy, and an antiracist policy “is any measure that produces or sustains racial equity between racial groups” (Kendi 2019, 18). Importantly, Kendi stresses that noticing differences between races can sometimes be an important step toward the elimination of racist inequality. This does admittedly not extend to “difference” in terms of inborn physical prowess or intellectual capacity, but it does mean noticing and acknowledging racial difference as a social index. In our context, we might provisionally conclude that Pound, if not antiracist in Kendi’s sense, attempted to be unprejudiced in questions of race. This again may stem from or be associated with a sense of humankind sharing basic universal characteristics, something that once again leads us back to the question of cosmopolitanism in a more general sense.

If Pound’s is a specifically American and literary form of cosmopolitanism, this does not mean that the more general idea of cosmopolitanism dating from the Enlightenment is irrelevant when discussing his work. For example, the term “Tolerance” (sic) in the second line of the “Orbi Cantum Primum” fragment, translating the Latin concept of tolerentia in the first line, might indicate that the poet was hinting at such an idea. In the Enlightenment era, tolerance – not least religious tolerance – was often held up as an ideal (cf. Warman 2016). As we have seen, the line “There is nor creed nor birth when two strong men meet” plays on Kipling’s “The Ballad of East and West”, while transforming “Breed” into “creed”. The implication in Kipling would be that strong men are able to free themselves from their origins, and, in Pound’s version, from their religious upbringing, so long as they are “men of spirit”. The poem’s idealization of “things spiritual” is clearly not a reference to the spiritual in a religious sense, but rather in what we might call a supra-religious sense, indicating that man’s intellectual capacity is elevated above petty differences of race, religion, confession and class. These lines of the fragment seem to be an endorsement of the general Enlightenment concept of cosmopolitanism. This should make us ask whether Pound’s cosmopolitanism is not solely a literary one, and whether there are parallels to be drawn between it and a moral cosmopolitanism after all.

True, Pound does not see the “solely literary” as a particularly limited field. On the contrary, his very thinking about literature’s function indicates that there is hardly such a thing as “mere literature”: Literature is always about the societal function of language as such, at its best being able to rejuvenate language and bring society forward. Nevertheless, when Pound chooses the term “cosmopolitanism”, he is most probably claiming something more than Gourmont does with his concept of cosmopolitisme littéraire. Pound is arguably after not only something relating to literature, art and language, but rather an idea of humans as sharing universal spiritual capacity. That Pound would endorse such an idea, which surely can be labeled “universalist”, seems slightly paradoxical, since he, as we saw in chapter 1, clearly expressed views akin to linguistic relativism, which is normally taken as representing an opposite pole to universalism. How to explain this
paradox? One possible interpretation is that the young Pound had not yet come to a relativist view of language. Another, which I find more illuminating, is that the Pound of the “Orbi Cantum Primum” fragment did not think of the universal spiritual capacity pertaining to humans to be essentially the same, but rather different varieties of understanding and cognition all worthy of respect: In this sense, it would not be a straightforward universalism, but rather a cultural relativism Pound intends or presupposes. If we opt for this second interpretation, the term “cosmopolitanism” comes into question again: Is cosmopolitanism not a statement of humankind having a fundamentally common form of cognition (or rationality or, indeed, spirit)? This is not obvious. In an article that can shed light on Pound’s cosmopolitanism in an extended sense, “The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies” (2002), sociologist Ulrich Beck understands cosmopolitanism as an alternative to “the national perspective”, which he sees as “a monological imagination which excludes the otherness of the other” (Beck 2002, 18). Importantly, Beck’s idea of a cosmopolitan perspective implies not only that one acknowledges the otherness of those who are culturally different, but that one strives to imagine “alternative ways of life and rationalities” (ibid.). This may indeed be something intended by Pound when he pointed to Gourmont’s ideas of literary cosmopolitanism, and was arguably important for him in the years prior to his referring to them: His interest in the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, for example, and in the traditional Japanese Noh theatre, testifies to such an understanding of cosmopolitanism. The same can be said to hold for Pound’s translations of Classical Chinese poetry in Cathay (1915), to which I will devote much of this chapter.

In a sense, such an openness for alternative ways of life and rationalities is present even in the image of the “hollow reed” that is the poet’s image of himself in the “Orbi Cantum Primum” fragment. Pound may here be alluding to the ancient Greek aulos, and thereby the cult of Dionysus with its song and music, or he may simply be indicating any wind instrument as such, something in dire need of someone breathing into it to be able to create sound. It is important to notice that this hollow reed is portrayed as a vehicle through which “the many” (“HOI POLLOI”) can express themselves. Commenting on the deployment of the Ancient Greek expression “HOI POLLOI” – most often used to refer to “the people”, although literally simply indicating “the many” – Flack sees it as a sign that Pound “rejects singing for a specifically American audience” (Flack 2005, 32). Wanting a universal audience is not the only possible interpretation of the poet’s inclusion of this expression, however. It is just as important that the poet presents himself as being “THE VOICE” of the people or the multitude: This does not necessarily only suggest that the poet is addressing a certain audience, but that he sees himself as having a representative role as some sort of poetic medium, that he intends to address a global subject matter, and that he is experimenting with the mixing of languages. The poet, it is indicated, is a “hollow reed” for a song that is sung by
humankind as such, but this is not necessarily a humankind characterized by similarity and oneness, but just as possibly by being fundamentally different and multitudinous. It is highly significant that the multitudinous people of the world are not referred to in English, but by using a foreign language term. Pound would later refer to epic poetry as the “tale of the tribe” (*LE*, 86; *GK*, 194),\(^{57}\) and, when in the 1950s asked of what tribe his *Cantos* were the tale, answered, “the tribe of the human race, of Man” (Pound, quoted in Moody 2015, 394). Importantly, this “global tribe” is multilingual, as James J. Wilhelm points out: “If a poet is going to tell the ‘tale of the tribe,’ he has to acknowledge the fact that the tribe does not speak one language.” (Wilhelm 1985, 137) The “Orbi Cantum Primum” fragment bespeaks that a similar hunch was important even to the very young Pound. Whether we are right in assuming a continuity from Pound’s self-image and cosmopolitical perspective at the time and those at stake in his later *Cantos*, however, is all but evident. This will be an important subject for discussion throughout my dissertation.

2.3. A further statement of cosmopolitanism: “Redondillas” (1910–11)

The term “cosmopolite” in the “Orbi Cantum Primum” fragment is not a *hapax legomenon* in Pound’s poetry. We find the same term in “Redondillas, or Something of that Sort” (*P&T*, 175–82). This long poem was originally supposed to form part of Pound’s *Canzoni* (1911), but was withdrawn and not published in its entirety until 1967. Rebecca Strauss comments that it “oscillates between America and world citizenship, between national and transnational” (Strauss 2012, 86). The poem may serve as a starting point for an extended and more nuanced discussion of Pound’s literary cosmopolitanism.

Pound wrote “Redondillas, or Something of that Sort” between late 1910 (when on a visit to the United States) and early 1911, when back in Europe (he had moved to London in 1908). At the outset of the poem, we find a Whitmanian lyrical I largely similar to the one from the opening of the “Orbi Cantum Primum” fragment, announcing what he is about to sing, and in the first line once again using the word “cosmopolite”:

I sing the gaudy to-day and cosmopolite civilization
Of my hatred of crudities, of my weariness of banalities,
I sing of the ways that I love, of Beauty and delicate savours.

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\(^{57}\) Pound gave credit to Kipling for having invented the phrase, although one finds the expression *mots de la tribu* also in the writings of Stéphane Mallarmé (cf. Bernstein 1980, 7).

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The poem goes on to announce some subjects that the poet “would sing”, among which we find additional signs of a cosmopolitan outlook, at least in the sense that the poet seems to consider himself able to sing with equal facility the peoples and nations of both sides of the Atlantic:

I would sing the American people,
    God send them some civilization;
I would sing of the nations of Europe,
    God grant them some method of cleansing
    The fetid extent of their evils.

In her commentary on the first two lines quoted here, Strauss says that the poet’s cosmopolitanism “stands in marked contrast to the States” (Strauss 2012, 79). The poet is, in other words, not only cosmopolitan in his choice of subject matter, but even in being able to diagnose a lack of “civilization” in the American people. When pointing to the need for a “cleansing” of the “evils” of Europe, the poet’s spirit (or at least his self-image) seems larger than the two continents themselves. One should probably not take this at face value, though. The passage quoted may even be regarded as a sort of parody, notably of Whitman. There is a precedent to this, namely, the explicit parody of Whitman that Pound had written into his *Spirit of Romance*, which was published the year before he composed “Redondillas”:

Lo, behold, I eat water-melons. When I eat water-melons the world eats water-melons
    through me
When the world eats water-melons, I partake of the world’s water-melons.
    The bugs,  
    The worms,  
    The negroes, etc.
Eat water-melons; All nature eats water-melons.
Those eidolons and particles of the Cosmos
Which do not now partake of water-melons
Will at some future time partake of water-melons
Praised be Allah or Ramanathanath Khrishna! (SR, 168–69)

This satirical stab ends a comparison made by Pound between François Villon and Whitman, where the latter is said to “pretend to be conferring a philanthropic benefit on the race by recording his own self-complacency” (ibid.). Although influenced by Whitman, Pound was obviously also very
critical of his American forerunner. Even if “Redondillas, or Something of that Sort” is, as Strauss has observed, “strikingly Whitmanian in style and content” (Strauss 2012, 76), the content bit is most convincingly taken to be the young poet parodying Whitman’s grandiose ambitions. When it comes to style, however, Whitman’s metrical freedoms are more straightforwardly apprehended by Pound. This does not mean that this apprehension is uncomplicated or without tension, as we can see in a passage in the poem that refers to its “metre”. This “metre” is, as it were, highly irregular, and the poet himself calls it a “hobbledy metre”, that is, one that limps:

I don’t like this hobbledy metre
   but find it easy to write in,
I would sing to the tune of “Mi Plattz”
   were it not for the trouble of riming,
Besides, not six men believe me
   when I sing in a beautiful measure.

The poet rejects the beautiful for a formal pattern that is “easy to write in”, not containing rhymes (as opposed to “Mi platz”, a war poem by the twelfth-century Provençal troubadour Bertran de Born). We are certainly not talking about redondillas, even if the title suggests so: A redondilla is a Castilian stanza form prevalent from the sixteenth century onward, consisting of four trochaic and usually octosyllabic lines, normally rhyming ABAB. In other words, it is a highly stringent poetic form, while Pound’s poem on its part is characterized by its formal liberties: It does not rhyme, it does not have any set number of lines per stanza, it does not have any set number of syllables per line, and, as if to make the irony complete, it is largely iambic. At one point, there is an indication that the free form is chosen because of the nature of the age in which the poet speaks:

We speak to a surfeited age,
   Grant us keen weapons for speaking.

The “surfeited” character of the age must find response in “keen weapons for speaking”, intimating that these weapons are poetic forms that are themselves somewhat “surfeited”. Redondillas in their standard form, we must assume, would be wasted beauty on this age. However, there are clear indications that the poet does not want to conform to the demands of the age:

They tell me to “Mirror my age,”
   God pity the age if I do it,
Perhaps I myself would prefer
to sing of the dead and the buried:
At times I am wrapped in my dream
of my mistress “To-morrow”
We ever live in the now
it is better to live in than sing of.

The poet seemingly refuses to “mirror his age”. Still, it is as though the formal lyrical liberties in
themselves say something about the age: The title “Redondillas, or Something of that Sort”
combines the high courtly poetic form of Castilian tradition with what is arguably an American
expression like the modern “whatever”, indicating a lack of will to conform to traditional forms,
and even a certain disinterest or sloppiness; as Strauss says, referring to the poem’s title, “it is much
more the *something* than the *redondilla* that actually constitutes the poem’s formal structure”
(Strauss 2012, 78). The choice of such a combination of high and low, and of a form that almost
overflows its own borders, seems to indicate a modern expansionist spirit, cosmopolitan in what is
almost an esurient sense. The poet later presents himself as a product of American culture, a “terrible
thing”:

I am that terrible thing,
the product of American culture,
Or rather that product improved
by considerable care and attention.
I am really quite modern, you know,
Despite my affecting the ancients.

The traditionalism intimated in the use of the word *redondillas* in the title of the poem does not
prevent the poet from insisting on being “quite modern”. And yet not solely “the product of
American culture”, as is soon made apparent:

To return to me and my status;
I’m not specifically local,
I’m more or less Europe itself,
More or less Strauss and De Bussy.
One ought to look no further for a statement of cosmopolitan spirit: “I’m not specifically local”. As to the poet declaring himself to be “Europe itself”, with reference to what must be the composers Richard Strauss and Claude Debussy, we note that the name of the latter is transcribed in a manner that seems like it itself is a “product of American culture”, pointing to the slight irony that pervades “Redondillas, or Something of that Sort” as a whole. Toward the end of the poem, we find these two lines:

I know not much save myself,
I know myself pretty completely.

The assertion that “I know not much save myself”, although in accord with the Ancient Greek imperative *gnothi seathon* (“know thyself”) seems, on its part, not particularly cosmopolitan, not in any sense of the word. One could probably view it as an implicit criticism of an age that, although expansive in spirit, is first and foremost self-obsessed. Strikingly, then, it is by being libertarian in poetic form and self-obsessed in subject matter that the poet is, after all, mirroring his age – although this expansive self-obsession in the latter’s case is poetic rather than commercial, stylistic rather than economic.

It should be noted that “Redondillas” is not typical for Pound’s early poetry, which often observe strict formal patterns (notably the poems he made in imitation of Provençal poetic forms). In fact, I will argue that Pound’s literary cosmopolitanism in striking ways is a *cosmopolitanism of literary forms and traditions*, indicating an openness not only for foreign words and expressions, but also for foreign stanza forms, rhythms, images, *topoi*, syntactical constructions and ways of phrasing. In the following section, I will discuss Pound’s importation of foreign words, then subsequently move on to more formal imports.

2.4. Importing foreign words into English: “Salvationists” (1914)

Pound’s poetry contains words, expressions and whole passages from several foreign languages, among them Latin, Occitan, Italian, French, German, Greek and Chinese. In his early poetry, the lexical borrowings are largely from Latin and the Romance languages, these being languages Pound had studied at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York (1903–5) and at the University of Pennsylvania (1901–3 and 1906–7). Still, like most of Pound’s early poetry, “Orbi Cantum

58 This insistence on not being local may be seen as a (more or less friendly) stab at William Carlos Williams, whom we saw Pound addressing in letter form to endorse Remy de Gourmont’s literary cosmopolitanism. Williams, on his part, and although being influenced by Chinese poetry, was mostly content to remain locally orientated in his choice of poetical motifs.

59 Cf. the point made by Pound much later, in his *Guide to Kulchur* (1938), that “our time has overshadowed the mysteries by an overemphasis on the individual” (*GK*, 299).
Primum” is predominantly in English, notwithstanding some distinct bits of foreign language such as the first line. In fact, aside from the Latin first line and the expression “HOI POLLOI”, there are few striking deployments of other languages in the fragment, though we at one point find the liturgical Latin phrase “Magnificat anima mea”, and furthermore quite a few proper names of foreign origin, such as “Tyre”, “Madrid” and “Place de la Triumpe de l’étoile” (sic). When compared to his later deployments of a catalogue of different languages in The Cantos, however, Pound’s early poems are clearly not permeated with foreign language to the same extent. Significantly, not only are the foreign language terms and expressions in Pound’s early poetry almost entirely in Latin and Romance languages, they are also predominantly deployed not in the actual body text of poems but in their titles, subtitles and epigraphs – in short, they are peritextual, to use the term coined by French literary theorist Gérard Genette (1997). This is significant not least because it shows that Pound at this point in time probably did not conceive of a cosmopolitan poetry as being itself multilingual, even if this would have been a tempting exegesis of the lines from “Orbi Cantum Primum” designating the poet as a “hollow reed” for the voice of “HOI POLLOI”. It is as though the young Pound borders on the idea of a multilingual poetics, while not going so far as to put other languages on a par with English.

While I later in this chapter will focus on Pound’s formal and thematic borrowings from foreign traditions, I should here discuss an example of how Pound makes individual lexical borrowings, namely, in the poem “Salvationists” from 1914, later included in Lustra (1916). The choice to analyze this poem is particularly motivated by how it makes lexical borrowing a subject of the poem itself. The poem consists of three parts (P&T, 278):

I

Come, my songs, let us speak of perfection –
We shall get ourselves rather disliked.

II

Ah yes, my songs, let us resurrect
The very excellent term Rusticus.
Let us apply it in all its opprobrium
To those to whom it applies.
And you may decline to make them immortal,
For we shall consider them and their state
In delicate
Opulent silence.

III

Come, my songs,
Let us take arms against this sea of stupidities –
Beginning with Mumpodorus;
And against this sea of vulgarities –
Beginning with Nimmim;
And against this sea of imbeciles –
All the Bulmenian literati.

The poet in all three parts of his poem addresses himself to his own songs, thereby following a convention in Provençal troubadour poetry. Traditionally deployed, however, this poetic technique is usually only part of the final stanza of a canso, what in Occitan is known as the envoi or the tornada, where the poet typically addresses the poem and sends it out on its journey toward its readers and listeners. In “Salvationists”, on the contrary, all the parts of the poem consist of the poet speaking to his songs. The reader or listener is, as it were, kept out, arguably being referred to only implicitly in the opening as someone who will “dislike” the poet and his poems. In the second part, it is clear that at least part of the audience would be met with “[o]pulent silence” by the poet. This treatment of reader and audience, turning one’s back to them, ignoring them and even insulting them, may bring one’s thoughts to the Provençal mode of poetical composition known as trobar clus, a “secret” or “hermetic” mode only directed at the already initiated. Such an ideal may have motivated the rather hermetic elements in the third part of the poem, “Mumpodorus”, “Nimmim” and the “Bulmenian literati”. In her Guide to Ezra Pound’s Personae (1966), K. K. Ruthven quotes Pound to the effect that “one should name names in satire”, going on to speculate that “Bulmenian” may refer to the Bloomsbury group. “Salvationists” is clearly a poem expressing both the poet’s self-assurance of his depreciation of much of his intellectual environment. At the same time, the poem presents itself as the singer simply addressing his songs, something that suggests that it is not only a piece of satire, but possibly also a key to some aspect of Pound’s poetics. It is in this manner I will suggest that we read the second part of this poem, namely, as making a motif out of Pound’s lexical borrowings from foreign languages.

Even if the whole proposal seems tongue-in-cheek, we find the poet in the second part of the poem arguing for “resurrecting” a Latin term, namely, Rusticus (Latin for “peasant” or “farmer”),
later made into an adjective implying not only “rural”, but also “rough” or “simple”). The poet suggests making a linguistic borrowing from Latin, in this way introducing a neologism in his own language, thereby expanding the semantic reach or the possibilities of precision (and insult) in English. Being explicit about having discovered an excellent foreign language term, the poet ironically treats it as something resembling a terminus technicus, thereby indicating that there is no obvious single term corresponding to Rusticus in English – this must be why the term needs to be, as it were, “resurrected”.

The fact that Rusticus is italicized in the poem highlights that we are dealing with a foreign language term. By “resurrecting” this Latin term, the poet suggests importing it, making it part of English. The English language already has the word “rustic”, but this is apparently not sufficient. What would be new about Rusticus? Surely its pejorative meaning, making it “apply” not only to something pertaining to or connoting the countryside, but to every human being characterized by a certain simplicity of mind. The poet encourages his songs not only to use the term Rusticus to characterize everyone to whom it applies, but also to apply it “in all its opprobrium”. Not printed in italics, but evidently a Latinate word, “opprobrium” was already a term found in English dictionaries. It was, in other words, already a loanword, the meaning of which is something like “infamy”, “shame” and/or “reproach”. If the instances of opprobrium as an already established loanword and Rusticus as a suggested newcomer among loanwords stand out in the poem, this is, however, not the whole story.

If we consider more attentively the lexicon of the second part of “Salvationists”, we discover several Latinate examples: The words “resurrect”, “excellent”, “apply”, “decline”, “immortal”, “consider”, “state”, “delicate”, “opulent” and “silence”, as well as the three striking final words in lines two, four and six of the third part – that is, “stupidities”, “vulgarities” and “imbeciles” – all stem from Latin, as does the poem’s very title “Salvationists”. It is as if the poem plays with the reader, who might find the idea of importing the word Rusticus somewhat eccentric. But, the poem intimates, such lexical imports are far from being a new phenomenon. It is as if they are shown to be constitutive of the English language itself.

As we will see in the upcoming section, Pound’s contemporary prose exposes English as already a composite language, signaling the potential in exploiting the different layers of historical influences on the language as a literary device. I take Pound’s multilingual poetics to be an effort to continue expanding the limits of the English language by way of lexical (and other kinds of) borrowings. Maybe even the title “Salvationists” should be taken to refer to all the Latinate words in English, which, by equipping the English speaker with a nuanced terminological palette, might save him or her from a state of linguistic poverty, purveying some sort of cognitive deliverance?
2.5. Linguistic purism and anti-purism

Pound was preoccupied with English as a language that has assimilated elements from other languages, or even as a language consisting of such assimilations. In an issue of the magazine *T. P.’s Weekly* from February 1915, Pound simply states: “The English language is composed, roughly speaking, of Anglo-Saxon, Latin and French.” (*P&P*, vol. 2, 19) By making note of this, Pound was perhaps already indicating that he was not himself out to promote any (supposed) purity of the English language. Such a purity had been advocated by among others the priest and poet William Barnes (1801–86) and his followers. Barnes had invented “Saxon English”, that is, a version of English that avoided terms of Latin or French origin. Barnes himself had suggested inventing new words with Saxon roots to replace Latinate ones, such as “faith-law” for “religion” (cf. Philips 1996, 26).

Similar purifying or purist attitudes toward the English language reach back at least to the sixteenth century, where a writer like Sir John Cheke (1514–57) stated the following: “I am of this opinion that our own tung shold be written cleane and pure, unmixt and unmanged with borowing of other tunges” (Cheke, quoted in Baugh and Cable 2002, 217). Conversely, Thomas Elyot (1490–1546) was an early advocate of the use of neologisms and of enriching the English language by borrowing from other languages: Elyot’s neologist borrowings include words such as “dedicate” and “education”, unremarkable words in modern English, but of which Elyot is the first attested user (cf. Baugh and Cable 2002, 215).

These two positions, the purist and the anti-purist, became the main two involved in the so-called inkhorn controversy that reached its height in the sixteenth century, before the first monolingual English-language dictionaries began to emerge in the seventeenth, and the practice of borrowing words of Latinate provenience had become largely accepted. Complex Latinate terms coined by scholars writing in English had become known as “inkhorn terms” (attested as early as 1543) or “inkhornisms”; the reason was that the early ink containers were made of animal horn – the underlying idea was that the long, Latinate terms demanded more ink than pithier English equivalents.60

If one is tempted to see Pound’s inclusion of Latinate terms in English as a sign that he was in some ways a late-coming inkhornist, this is misleading. In a 1915 letter to Harriet Monroe, Pound vehemently went against “book words”: “Every literaryism, every book word, fritters away a scrap of the reader’s patience, a scrap of his sense of your sincerity.” (*SL*, 49) In other words, the differences between Pound and the inkhornists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

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60 Sixteenth-century linguistic purists did not only object to *inkhorn terms*, but also to what they characterized as *oversea language* and *Chaucerisms*, i.e., not only words from Latin (and Greek), but from French, Italian and Spanish, as well as about fifty other languages from which contemporary English authors adopted vocabulary (cf. Baugh and Cable 2002, 227–28).
outnumber the similarities: Even as Pound shared the will to expand the English language by borrowing from foreign languages, he was also influenced by Dante’s idea of using the people’s common tongue as a literary language. Pound’s insistence on the spoken nature of poetry does not only stand in contrast to the inkhornists’ reliance on written language, but more specifically runs counter to the Latinisms of a poet like Milton. In a 1922 letter to his former teacher Felix E. Schelling, Pound criticized how Milton was not only lexically, but grammatically too influenced by Latin:

Milton ruined his work by not understanding that the genius of English is not the genius of Latin, and that one can NOT write an uninflected language in the same way, using the same word-order that serves in an inflected language. (SL, 179)

In one of his essays, Pound expands on this point, accusing Milton of *Latinization*, defining the latter term as follows:

By Latinization I mean here the attempt to use an uninflected language as if it were an inflected one, i.e. as if each word had a little label or postscript telling the reader at once what part it takes in the sentence, and specifying its several relations. Not only does such usage – with remnants of Latin order – ruin the word order in English, but it shows a fundamental mis-comprehension of the organism of the language, and fundamental stupidity of this kind is bound to spread its effects through the whole fibre of a man’s writing. (LE, 169)

Here we see Pound stressing the need to stick to conventional word order, that is, word order as practiced by speakers of English, and resist the will to use grammatical structures influenced by Latin. This is, he says, “a fundamental mis-comprehension of the organism of the language”, clearly expressing an organicist view of language close to Fenollosa’s understanding as presented in chapter 1, where we saw the latter stressing the need, especially in poetry, “to keep words as flexible as possible, as full of the sap of nature” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 51). In these respects, it seems more reasonable to see Pound as heir to the critics of the inkhornists.

Still, Pound was never a purist in matters linguistic. When it comes to the importance of foreign language influence on English poetry, he wrote the following in *The New Age* in September 1913, in the second of seven installments under the title “The Approach to Paris”:
For the best part of a thousand years English poets have gone to school to the French, or one might as well say that there never were any English poets until they began to study the French. (*P&P*, vol. 1, 154)

And he added: “The history of English poetic glory is a history of steals from the French.” The conclusion Pound draws from this is that the “greatest periods of English” have been when the poets “showed greatest powers of assimilation”, that is, by letting their English language assimilate words, formal traits and poetic innovations from foreign language traditions. This is of great importance for my understanding of Pound’s conception of literary cosmopolitanism and of poetry. In reading Pound, one may learn to see poetry as an open form, open as it were not least to the otherness of foreign languages and foreign artistic traditions. In his article “A Study in French Poets”, published in *The Little Review* in February 1918, Pound wrote the following:

> The time when the intellectual affair of America could be conducted on a monolingual basis is over. It has been irksome for long. We offer no apology for printing most of this number in French. The intellectual life of London is dependent on people who understand this language about as well as their own. America’s part in contemporary culture is based chiefly upon two men familiar with Paris: Whistler and Henry James. (*P&P*, vol. 3, 17)

Later in the same article, Pound added:

> I am convinced that mediocre poetry is the same everywhere; there is not the slightest need to import it; we search foreign tongues for *maestria*, and for discoveries not yet revealed in the home product. (ibid., 18)

This point also brings translations into the picture. The different languages present in Pound’s poetry are not only there as ostentatious testimony of the apparent polyglot abilities of the poet, but as elements included to expand the English language be exposing it to different semantic, aural and visual traditions. Toward the end of this chapter, I will discuss *Cathay*, concluding that Pound with this work strove (and indeed, at least partly succeeded) in creating an English idiom foreign to the English poetic tradition itself. This seems to correlate with his stated cosmopolitanism. The question of what happened to his literary cosmopolitanism as Pound continued to deploy foreign languages in his later poetry will be a central subject in my third chapter. Now I turn to a discussion of the formal importations Pound made in his early poetry.
2.6. Quantitative English verse: “Apparuit” (1912)

So far, I have primarily been focusing on Pound’s lexical borrowings from foreign languages. The multilingual aspects of Pound’s poetry are, however, not limited to these. Just as important, if not more important, are the poetic forms and motifs drawn from different literary traditions. It seems reasonable to read the multilingual elements in Pound’s poetry – not only the foreign words, but also the foreign poetic forms – as aspects of his literary cosmopolitanism. This raises the question, what function does the exploration of foreignness serve? I would suggest understanding Pound’s cultivation of the cosmopolitan side of his poetic craft as an epistemological project, implying that the immersion in different languages and different poetic forms brings with it not only a non-provincial outlook, but also certain “alternative ways of life and rationalities”, to stick to Ulrich Beck’s phrasing.

How is it that poetic forms by themselves can bring the poet into contact with such alternative ways of life and rationalities? It arguably has something to do with what is stated by Roland Greene in his study Post-Petrarchism (1991), namely, that forms “move their authors and readers to treat certain received issues” (Greene 1991, 17). Hugh Kenner makes a related claim at a certain point in The Pound Era, namely, that “forms remember” (Kenner 1971, 369). In other words, poems that are explicitly calqued across formal and/or thematic genre conventions bring with them something that is not only a product of the poet’s own creative genius.

As a first example of Pound revealing something about the strength and limitations of traditional English verse by borrowing a poetic form from a foreign literary tradition, I will take his attempt at Greek quantitative metrics in the poem “Apparuit”, first published in Poetry Review in June 1912 and then included in Pound’s poetry collection Ripostes later that October. “Apparuit” fits in with the tendency I have observed in Pound’s early poetry, where the title of the poem is borrowed from a foreign language, while the body text remains seemingly monolingual.61

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61 As is often the case in Pound’s early production, “Apparuit” has a foreign language title, which serves as an allusion: “Apparuit” is a direct quotation from Dante. The word apparuit is the Latin verb apparire in the past tense, giving the sense of “he/she/it appeared”. The expression is drawn from Dante’s Vita nuova, where it is used by the protagonist to describe Beatrice’s appearance the first time he saw her: Apparuit jam beatitudo vestra – here, Dante himself uses a Latin line in what is predominantly an Italian-language text; it is the “animate spirit” of the male protagonist that speaks, saying something to the effect of “your beatitude has now appeared”, or, as Dante Gabriel Rossetti has it in the translation Pound read, “Your beatitude hath now been made manifest unto you” (cf. Ruthven 1969, 38). “It is tempting”, says W. G. Regier in his article on “Apparuit”, published in Paideuma in 1980, “to regard the poem as a 1912 imitation of a Victorian imitation of Dante” (Regier 1980, 320). In his chapter on Dante in The Spirit of Romance, Pound contends that readers who are attuned to Dante’s intelligence, as well as to a certain passion, should realize that the idealization of the woman in the Vita nuova is not solely an abstraction but must be based on the real-life experience of encountering an actual woman (SR, 126). We should, then, given the title of “Apparuit”, expect the poem to be “the idealization of a real woman”. Still, Guy Davenport sees “Apparuit” as “a ghostly and splendid evocation of Persephone”, the Greek goddess of vegetation and wife of Hades (Davenport 1969, 147). David Moody is also reminded of Persephone when reading the poem, as well as of Venus’s descent from heaven to speak with Aeneas in the first book of Virgil’s The Aeneid (cf. Moody 2007, 168).
A closer investigation of “Apparuit”, however, will make manifest that the poem is deeply influenced by Ancient Greek poetry, not in terms of lexical borrowings but in its very poetic structure, since Pound here deploys the so-called Sapphic meter.

Classical Greek prosody was based on *quantity*, that is, the meter was defined by a fixed number of syllables as well as a fixed structure of *long* and *short* syllables. The Sapphic meter consists of three hendecasyllabic lines, and a fourth and final line consisting of five syllables, known as the Adonic line, conforming to the following schema, where a macron (“¯”) stands for a long syllable, a breve (“˘”) for a short one, and “x” for an optionally long or short one:

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- - - x - - - - - -
- - - x - - - - - -
- - - x - - - - - -
- - - - - - - - - -
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In contrast to Greek quantitative verse, English verse depends on *accent*. When rendering Greco-Roman poetry in English, poets have therefore traditionally relied on *accentuated* and *unaccentuated* syllables rather than long and short ones. This has to do with the very character of English language: One can hardly imagine English-language poetry being scanned without accent. And yet it is such a thing Pound attempts in “Apparuit”: He tries to challenge the idea that English verse needs accent, intimating that the classical Greek sense of meter can be approached by sticking to the amount of syllables in the Sapphic meter and choosing specific words that, given a plain pronunciation, would not have a clear accent. This is the first stanza of Pound’s poem (*P&T*, 231):

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Golden rose the house, in the portal I saw
thee, a marvel, carven in subtle stuff, a
portent. Life died down in the lamp and flickered,
caught at the wonder.
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By *not* scanning the poem out with a clear stress – GÔL – den – RÔSE – the – HÔUSE etc. – but instead letting the o’s of the passage stay *long*, one comes closer to a classical quantitative form of verse. This is not to say that Pound fully succeeds in convincing the reader to prolong the vowels at regular intervals in the stanzas of the poem. But his attempt at quantitative verse was clearly an experiment exploring alternative metrical principles in English verse.

There can be no doubt that Pound was trying to adapt the Sapphic meter for his own poetry when composing “Apparuit”. In his memoir *A Number of People* (1938), Edward Marsh – an art
patron and editor, notably of the five anthologies titled *Georgian Poetry* published in 1912–22 – makes what must be a reference to this specific poem:

In the middle of dinner [Pound] asked me if I was up in the new system of quantitative verse; and as I had studied William Stone’s paper on the subject and been further indoctrinated by Robert Bridges, I admitted that I was. Thereupon he produced a version of Sappho’s ode to Aphrodite, and begged me to tell him if he had made any mistakes. He had; and when I pointed them out, he put the paper back in his pocket, blushing murkily, and muttering that it was only a first attempt. “Judge of my surprise” when some weeks later it appeared in the Poetry Review without a single amendment. (Marsh, quoted in Ruthven 1969, 38)

Although Marsh was mistaken in assuming that the poem was an attempt to render Sappho’s ode to Aphrodite, he must be referring to “Apparuit” here, not only since it appeared in *Poetry Review*, but also since it, as Stephen J. Adams has pointed out, stands as Pound’s sole attempt at “pure quantitative sapphics” (Adams 2005, 229). Several critics have in fact remarked on the actual link to Sappho. In a 1969 article, Guy Davenport claimed that “Apparuit” has “the touch of Sappho more finely upon it than any translation yet of Sappho into English” (Davenport 1969, 147). Two years earlier, D. S. Carne-Ross referred to “Apparuit” as “an act of formal homage” to Sappho (Carne-Ross 1967, 222). In his biography of Pound, David Moody still calls Sappho’s ode to Aphrodite the “immediate model” of Pound’s poem (Moody 2007, 168).

In his article entry on “Greek Translations” in *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia* (2005), Peter Liebregts, although generally skeptical about whether the quantitative rules of Greek poetry can be applied to accent-based English poetry, contends that Pound “can be said to have sometimes succeeded in adapting Greek meter for his own poetry”, citing “Apparuit” as an example (Liebregts 2005, 137). In his later study *Translations of Greek Tragedy in the Work of Ezra Pound*, Liebregts seemingly modifies his assessment slightly, now claiming that Pound is “(almost) successfully employing the Sapphic stanza” in the poem (Liebregts 2019, 16).

Moody and Adams have made some critical remarks on the actual prosody of “Apparuit”, focusing on the second stanza (*P&T*, 232):

Crimson, frosty with dew, the roses bend where
thou afar, moving in the glamorous sun,
drinkst in life of earth, of the air, the tissue
golden about thee.
According to Adams, “Pound leaves one problematic line”, referring to the first line of this stanza, “that seems to violate the paradigm” (Adams 2005, 229), that is, that does not conform to the prosodic requirements of the Sapphic stanza. This verdict seems legitimate. Especially “frosty with dew” is hard to scan in Sapphics: According to the scheme, these words should scan long – optionally long or short – long – short (¯ x ˘), but the word “with” is hard to imagine pronounced as a long syllable, and “dew”, as J. Alison Rosenblitt observes, “certainly does not sound short” (Rosenblitt 2013, 190). In addition, the ending -ous in the word “glamourous” in the subsequent line is short where the rhyme scheme would indicate a long syllable (cf. Moody 2007, 168). Still, Moody sees the poem as a whole as “writing that sings itself” and as a “technical tour de force” (ibid.).

The technical achievement in “Apparuit” shows that Pound wants more than simply to import lexical items from foreign languages into his poems. Here, he is striving to chisel out a more subtle carving imitative of a specific foreign language tradition. The whole endeavor of trying out an Ancient Greek poetic form, Liebregts says, based itself on Pound’s belief that “the wide range of complicated metrical patterns of Greek poetry could show modern poets how to liberate themselves from the restrictions of conventional English meter” (Liebregts 2005, 137). This did not mean that one should copy the classical meters in any strict sense. In the article titled “Re Vers Libre” (1917), Pound claimed that “progress lies rather in an attempt to approximate classical quantitative meters (NOT to copy them)” (LE, 13). Whether this is Pound’s belated recognition that his prosodic attempt in “Apparuit” was misguided, as Meredith Martin claims (cf. Martin 2012, 182–83), or whether even “Apparuit” should be conceived of as based on such an unorthodox or “approximate” prosody, is unclear. At any rate, Pound soon became very skeptical of traditional varieties of prosodic theory, and, in Liebregts’ words, “rejected what he saw as the Alexandrian ‘counting’ of feet and syllables in favour of a more ‘gut-feeling’ approach for the rhythm of a poem” (Liebregts 2019, 17) – the term “Alexandrian” here refers to the philologists in Hellenic Alexandria who constructed elaborate theoretical systems for analyzing poems as consisting of metric units, themselves having little experience with listening to poetry being sung.

In 1916 Pound wrote to Iris Barry that “Greek seems to me a storehouse of wonderful rhythms, possibly impracticable rhythms” (SL, 87). In 1920, he again returned to the subject of Greek quantitative prosody:

[T]he ‘laws’ of Greek quantitative prosody do not correspond with an English reality. No one has succeeded in writing satisfactory English quantitative verse, according to these ‘rules’, though, on the other hand, no English poet has seriously tried to write quantitative verse without by this effort improving his cadence. (P&P, vol. 4, 123)
Here, we see that Pound, even if he considers trying to emulate Greek quantitative prosody as fundamentally impossible in English, still sees the effort to do so worthwhile, since it teaches the poet lessons of “cadence”, which I take in the musical sense. Pound stresses the need to school oneself as a poet by delving into the different specific characteristics pertaining to the diverse poetic traditions of the world. One may wonder why Pound would attempt to transpose classical metrics, at the same time as he vituperated Milton for writing English verse with Latin syntax. A possible explanation for this is precisely that Pound saw Greek verse as key to the art of melopoeia, and as such opposed to what he saw as the flaws in Milton: While the latter, in Pound’s perspective, ended up with a stilted form of diction, the influence of Greek metrics brought a fluidity to what was too often a generally metronomic sense of rhythm in English verse.

His taking Sappho as a model in “Apparuit” indicates something crucial about Pound’s poetic output, namely, that it is marked by a clear link between translations and original writing. Pound’s multilingual poetics combines different languages, different logics and different literary conventions, where both translation, collage and multilingualism play their respective and important parts. So do direct and indirect quotations: In his work in “quotology”, La seconde main, ou le travail de la citation (1979), Antoine Compagnon states something that seems quite Poundian when he says that “every textual practice is always quotation” (Compagnon 1979, 34). Pound’s early texts are exemplary instances of a writer working with such a postulate as a premise: The intermingling of quotation, translation and original solutions indicates that the latter category largely consists of variations over the two former ones. In other words, there is no original writing. On the other hand, when it comes to the poems that Pound published as translations, these are, as we will see in the case of Cathay, best understood as interventions in contemporary English-language poetry. Even the early Pound was systematically seeking out poetical potentials to be found in foreign poetic traditions, searching for specific effects that such potentials could have on the art of composing verse in English.

Even if “Apparuit” was not, technically speaking, a translation, one can imagine that the reader was meant to detect a Greek tone in the English of the poem, much as William Butler Yeats, in his introduction to his 1936 edition of The Oxford Book of English Verse 1892–1935, said of Pound’s vers libre poem “The Return” (P&T, 244–5), also printed in Ripostes: It was as if Pound was “a brilliant improvisor translating at sight from an unknown Greek masterpiece” (Yeats 1936, xxvi). Yeats was also very pleased with “Apparuit” (cf. Moody 2007, 169). These poems could, in other words, be regarded as English-language poems posing as translations. Rosenblitt says that “what Pound succeeds in doing with ‘Apparuit’ is making an English poem sound not very much like it was written in English” (Rosenblitt 2013, 194). This is an important observation, since it
points to how Pound was striving to go beyond the borders of the traditional English poetic idioms as well as rhythms. In other words, Pound wanted to let his language “be affected by the foreign tongue”, as Rudolf Pannwitz says in the quote included toward the end of Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator” (1923). This point is so well stated by Pannwitz, and so important to our understanding of Pound’s literary cosmopolitanism, not least when it comes to his Cathay translations, that we should have a closer look at the passage. This is Pannwitz:

Our translators, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works. [...] The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. (Pannwitz, quoted in Benjamin 1999, 81)62

Even if “Apparuit” is not a translation in any traditional sense, it can be said to translate one aspect of Ancient Greek lyric poetry, namely, its metrical conventions. This makes the quotation from Pannwitz relevant even in the case of “Apparuit”, at the same time as it throws light on Pound’s entire poetic project: The ideal advocated by Pannwitz points to how Pound searches for translingual and transhistoric poetic resources with the aim not only of renewing English-language poetry but of fundamentally altering this poetry. As such, both Pound’s own compositions and his translations partake in the same cosmopolitanism of literary traditions. This literary cosmopolitanism has a fundamentally innovative function, that is, it is about activating, enriching and altering poetry in the present.

2.7. Pound’s importation of medieval lyric genres: Provença (1910) and Canzoni (1911)

Almost from the very beginning of his published production, Pound attempted to reproduce historical poetic forms in English. In the preceding section, I discussed Pound’s arguably single attempt at quantitative verse.63 More prevalent in Pound’s production are the poems based on his

62 With an idiosyncratic non-capitalization of nouns, the German original has: “[U]nsere übertragungen auch die besten gehen von einem falschen grundsatz aus sie wollen das indische griechische englische verdeutschen anstatt das deutsche zu verindischen vergriechischen verenglischen, sie haben eine viel bedeutendere ehrfurcht vor den eigenen sprachgebrauchern als vor dem geiste des fremden werks [...] der grundsätzliche irrtum des übertragenden ist dass er den zufälligen stand der eignen spräche festhält anstatt sie durch die fremde sprache gewaltig bewegen zu lassen [...]” (Benjamin 1980, 60).

63 When it comes to poems influenced by Greek antiquity, we also find the poem called “Greek Epigram” from A Quinzaine for This Yule (1908), which does not follow any strict formal principle, but suggests an attempt at imitation of the short epigrammatic form that came to fruition in the Alexandrian Era. These pithy poems are mainly handed over in the so-called Greek Anthology, which contains about 4100 epigrams by over 360 poets, covering the period from the
study of the Provençal troubadours and their early Italian successors. The fact that Pound published books with titles such as *Provença* (1910) and *Canzoni* (1911) shows how indebted he was to these poetic traditions. As examples of Pound’s literary cosmopolitanism, Pound’s engagement with medieval poetry would be worthy of a more profound study. Here I must pass over this whole matter somewhat more rapidly, only referring the reader to the book-lengths studies by Stuart Y. McDougal (1972) and Peter Makin (1978) on the subject of Pound and the Provençal troubadour tradition; for case studies on Pound’s translations of Arnaut Daniel, see Daniel Katz (2012) and Andrew Eastman (2013); for his translations of Cavalcanti, see David Anderson’s *Pound’s Cavalcanti* (1983), Richard Sieburth (2003a) and Luke McMullan (2019). The fundamental point in this section is that Pound’s early literary cosmopolitanism is about much more than metrical imitation of Ancient Greek poetry, being to a larger degree devoted to forms and motifs from Provençal and early Italian poetic traditions.

In 1913, Pound claimed that “any study of European poetry is unsound if it does not commence with a study of that art in Provence” (*LE*, 101). Several of the poems in *Provença* are so explicit about being attempts to render traditional generic forms that they bear the name of a poetic genre in their title. For example, among the poems selected from *Exultations* (1909), we find the poem “Alba Innominata” (*P&T*, 120–1), two poems called “Planh for the Young English King” (*P&T*, 119–20) and simply “Planh” (*P&T*, 121–2) respectively, as well as Pound’s early masterpiece “Sestina: Altaforte” (*P&T*, 105–7). The titles of these four poems refer to genres that originated with the Provençal troubadours.

In the case of “Sestina: Altaforte”, the formal requirements of the original genre are strictly observed by Pound. The *sestina* as such, and Pound’s poem specifically, is a seven-stanza poem where each stanza consists of six lines, except the seventh, the *envoi* or *tornada*, which is often shorter and, as mentioned in the analysis of “Salvationists”, most commonly presents the poet as “sending” his poem out to its receivers, although this is not the case in “Sestina: Altaforte”. Each of the six “main” stanzas of a *sestina* should have six different words at the end of each of the six lines, but these six words should be the same in each stanza, only in a different order; so is the case also with “Sestina: Altaforte”. Altaforte is the name of the castle of the baron and troubadour Bertran de Born (spelled Bertrans by Pound), who with his longing for war is the one who speaks...
in Pound’s poem.\textsuperscript{65} We are, in other words, here talking about what Pound himself referred to as one of his \textit{personae}, this set of “poetic re-creations of historical characters” (McDougal 1972, 6) functioning as “complete masks for the self” (\textit{GB}, 85). According to Peter Makin, in Pound’s perspective, Bertran stood for un-puritan vigour, anti-usurious honesty, and a certain limited, but still honest charm (cf. Makin 1978, 5).

These are the first two stanzas of the poem (\textit{P&T}, 105–7):

\begin{verbatim}
I
Damn it all! all this our South stinks peace.
You whoreson dog, Papiols, come! Let’s to music!
I have no life save when the swords clash.
But ah! when I see the standards gold, vair, purple, opposing
And the broad fields beneath them turn crimson,
Then howl I my heart nigh mad with rejoicing.

II
In hot summer have I great rejoicing
When the tempests kill the earth’s foul peace,
And the light’nings from black heav’n flash crimson,
And the fierce thunders roar me their music
And the winds shriek through the clouds mad, opposing,
And through all the riven skies God’s swords clash.
\end{verbatim}

The first line of the poem sets the tone. It is a poem in the voice of a warrior praising war. In “How I Began” (1913) Pound said of this poem: “Technically it is one of my best, though a poem on such a theme could never be very important.” (\textit{P&P}, vol. 1, 147). “Sestina: Altaforte” is not only an attempt at a Provençal poetic genre, the poem’s epigraphic introduction also features an obvious lexical borrowings from Latin, Occitan and Italian, in the style of Robert Browning’s \textit{Sordello} (1840), a poetic work that Pound later came to see as a forerunner of some of the compositional techniques in his own \textit{Cantos}.\textsuperscript{66} Prior to the poem itself, one finds the Latin “LOQUITUR” (“he speaks”) the Occitan “\textit{En}” (“Sir”) and finally the Italian “Eccovi!” (“Behold!”) used as an apostrophe to the reader:

\textsuperscript{65} Somewhat ironically, there is no extant poem by Bertran in the \textit{sestina} form (cf. Bacigalupo 2013, 184).

\textsuperscript{66} The first so-called Ur-canto begins with the line: “Hang it all, there can be but one \textit{Sordello}” (\textit{P&T}, 318). After Pound’s revision, a version of this line opens Canto 2: “Hang it all, Robert Browning, / there can be but the one ‘Sordello.’” (\textit{C}, 2/6)
LOQUITUR: *En* Bertrans de Born.

Dante Alighieri put his man in hell for that he was a stirrer-up of strife.

Eccovi!

Judge ye!

Have I dug him up again?

The use of foreign language expression puts the reader in contact with Dante’s language, and, as it turns out, the introductory apostrophe asks the reader to reevaluate Dante’s judgment of the poem’s main character, whom Dante thought “a stirrer-up of strife” (as Pound has it). Pound addresses the reader in Dante’s tongue, maybe hinting at Dante’s rendering of the Provençal troubadour Arnaut Daniel in his Occitan tongue in Canto XXVI of the *Purgatorio*, itself an early example of literary multilingualism. It is here that Dante refers to Arnaut as *il miglior fabbro* (*del parlar materno*), the epithet made in famous in the modern era by being added as a dedication to Pound in the 1925 printing of T. S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” (it was, in other words, not present in the original 1922 publication). The expression is often translated as “the better craftsman” or “the best craftsman (of the maternal language)”. In “On a Recent Piece of Criticism” (1938) Eliot denied that what he meant to imply was that that Pound was solely a craftsman. He had simply wanted to “honour the technical mastery and critical ability manifest in [Pound’s] own work, which had also done so much to turn The Waste Land from a jumble of good and bad passages into a poem” (Eliot, quoted in Gardner 2001 [1973], 78). Arnaut is also quoted by Dante in the *De vulgari eloquentia*: In the second and last book of this unfinished work, where Dante expounds the technical aspect of the art of poetry, Arnaut is referred to twice (II.x and II.iii), indicating that it was not least as a technical master that Dante valued Arnaut. This would in some ways be in keeping with Pound’s view of the Provençal poet, the entire extant production of which he translated. In a 1922 letter to Felix E. Schelling, at whose lectures he had been present while a student at the University of Pennsylvania, Pound wrote:

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67 In 1911, at the age of twenty-five, Pound was planning to produce a bilingual volume consisting solely of transcriptions and translations of all the extant poems of Arnaut. Pound studied the poems in the Ambrosian Library in Milan during the summer. The library held manuscripts that are very rare in that they contain not only words, but also a kind of musical notation for the *cansos* in question. Pound’s plan was to use the material from this article series to publish an entire Arnaut volume with Stephen Swift and Company, but some months after they had published Pound’s bilingual *Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti* in May 1912, the publishing house went bankrupt. Pound did not give up hope of producing an Arnaut book, though, and in December 1917 the Clerk’s Press in Cleveland accepted to print a limited edition of eighty copies. Pound mailed his manuscript to the publisher, but it disappeared in the mail (Sieburth 2003b, 1299–1300). As it turned out, this meant that Pound would never see a book entirely devoted to his translations of Arnaut. Still, Pound did publish his Arnaut translations in 1917–20, some of them being completely new versions of the poems he had translated in 1911.
Note that the English “poet” en masse had simply said: “these forms are impossible in English, they are too complicated, we haven’t the rhymes”. […] I have proved that the Provençal rhyme schemes are not impossible in English. They are simply inadvisable. (SL, 179)

Pound saw Arnaut as the prime representative of the troubadours’ ability to fuse words and music (*motz el son*), and one of his ambitions in rendering Arnaut’s poetry into English was to recreate the demanding rhyme schemes that characterize it, demonstrating that they were possible even in English, if not advisable, as he says – this latter indication might be read as a rare instance of humility on Pound’s part. According to Pound, “[t]he culture of Provence finds perhaps its finest expression in the works of Arnaut Daniel” (SR, 39).

Arguably the only one to rival Arnaut as what Massimo Bacigalupo calls “an early major persona for Pound” was Bertran de Born (Bacigalupo 2013, 184). Not only in “Sestina: Altaforte” and in the equally celebrated “Na Audiart” (P&T, 26–8) – which is based on the fifth stanza of Bertran’s *canso* “Dompna Pois de me No’us cal” – but also in the programmatic poem “Near Perigord” from 1915, included in *Lustra* (1916), the Occitan troubadour plays a significant role (P&T, 302–8):

And our en Bertrans was in Altafort,
Hub of the wheel, the stirrer-up of strife,
As caught by Dante in the last wallow of hell –
The headless trunk “that made its head a lamp,”
For separation wrought out separation,
And he who set the strife between brother and brother
And had his way with the old English king,
Viced in such torture for the “counterpass.”

Once again we see Pound returning to Dante’s verdict on Bertran, whom he placed in *Inferno* XXVIII, where Bertran carries his own decapitated head in front of him as a lamp. At the end of this stanza Pound deploys a Dantean term that is commonly given in its Italian original, namely, *contrapasso*. In translating *contrapasso* as “counterpass”, Pound borrows the name for what is

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68 Charles Norman claims that Pound “identified with Bertran de Born quite thoroughly; in […] ‘Near Perigord’ he even wonders if the troubadour had ‘a straggling beard’ and green eyes, like himself” (Norman, quoted in McDougal 1972, 51).

69 Programmatic not least because of statements such as the one in the beginning of the second section of the poem: “End fact. Try fiction.” (P&T, 305)
habitually taken as the one defining principle of punishment in Dante’s Hell, and, even as he anglicizes it, tries to keep it intact – it is as though this is also an attempt at expanding the English language by finding room in it for a foreign concept.

Let me now turn to the poems in Provença that are grouped together as Canzoniere. Here, the young aspiring poet has seemingly moved on from the Provençal troubadours to their historical successors in Italy. Of the fourteen poems in question, one finds one genre-determined as an octave, two as sonnets, and six as canzoni. The octave is, as the name suggest, an eight-line poem. The sonnet as a poetic form is jocularly referred to by Pound in a 1915 piece in the magazine Poetry, which is interesting for other reasons as well, since it deals with Pound’s (slightly problematic) claim that China, India and Greece all had “free verse” early in their poetic history, “before some forgotten Italian got stuck in the beginning of a canzone and called the fragment a sonnet” (P&P, vol. 2, 111). Although hardly an accurate version of events, the sonnet is actually a unique Italian invention. This is not the case for the canzone, which was an Italian adaptation of the Provençal canso. The canso and the canzone are, as I have indicated, less formally rigid than the sonnet.

It should also be noted that one of Pound’s sonnets bears the title “Sonnets in Tenzone”, and that the Italian tenzone (from the Occitan tenso) is a “debate poem”. Dante famously wrote some poems like these to a man named Forese or Bicci Donati, which, as Elizabeth Bartlett and Antonio Illiano observe in a 1967 article, have given rise to “harsh criticism by those who see in them the reflection of characteristics generally denoting the ‘beatnik’ of today” (Bartlett and Iliano 1967, 282). These very characteristics may indeed have been what drew the perhaps not entirely proto-beatnik, but certainly somewhat bohemian and artistically rebellious Ezra Pound to the tenzone.

According to Madeline Bassnett, the collection titled Canzoni (1911) proper is often said to be a collection about translation, letting Pound “experiment with free translation of, among others, the canzone, sonnet, and ballad forms” (Bassnett 2005, 81). After Canzoni, she observes, “Pound was to diminish his reliance on imitation and traditional form” (ibid.). Massimo Bacigalupo characterizes Canzoni as “a whole book based on Provençal rhyme-schemes”, and observes that Pound later rejected “the rather insipid results” (Bacigalupo 2013, 186). It should be mentioned that Pound even later, after having made a trip to Provence in 1912, composed poems titled simply

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70 Bacigalupo’s aesthetic dismissal is understandable, but he simplifies somewhat when he says that the whole book is based on Provençal rhyme schemes. The extensive poem “Ung Drang”, for example, characterized by Bruce Fogelman as “a significant cornerstone in [Pound’s] poetic development” (Fogelman 1988, 191), does not rhyme at all. That said, Bacigalupo may be thinking of rhyme schemes in an extended sense, a sense referred to by Pound himself: “Rhyme, in Provence culminating in A. Daniel, used to mark rhythm (the Latin word for the two things is the same; vide De Vulgari Eloquio).” (P&P, vol. 4, 273)

71 Pound made a journal during this trip, which remained unpublished until Richard Sieburth made an edition of it in 1992 (WTSF).
“Alba” and “Tenzone”, but once again, poems such as these two arguably do not constitute formal borrowings at all, but are rather poems inspired by and toying with thematic genre conventions.

Poems inspired by Provençal and early Italian traditions, as well as by Greek metrics, played a very important part of the young Pound’s poetic development. All this he had tried out when he was handed the notebooks left after Fenollosa. These notebooks brought new challenges to the expatriate American poet: The Classical Chinese poetry annotated and translated by Fenollosa was poetry in which, to an untrained Western eye, there were no formal patterns to imitate, no fixed meters or rhyme schemes, nor, for that matter, easily recognizable genres indicating specific thematic directions to the reader and/or translator. The lack of such elements may be partly why Pound embraced Fenollosa’s theories about the Chinese written character being endowed with a certain inherent poetic potential – here, it could seem, lay the key to the strange attraction of this exotic poetry. In chapter 1, we saw how Fenollosa indicated a possible “semi-pictorial” interpretation of Chinese poetry. In this connection it is very important to be aware, as George A. Kennedy is, that the notes of Fenollosa’s that Pound used to create Cathay are not based on such an interpretation. Instead, in the notes concerning the poems the Chinese written characters are, as Kennedy says, given a “conventional interpretation” (Kennedy 1964 [1958], 460). This does not mean, however, that the indications given by Fenollosa concerning the characteristics of Chinese language were not important for the general strategy and the specific choices Pound went for as a translator. On the contrary, as I will demonstrate, it is in his stress on the verbal value of the Chinese written characters that we find a possible key to some of Pound’s more ingenious translational solutions in Cathay.

2.8. The Fenollosa notebooks: Crib and paraphrase

The advent of the Fenollosa material was “the single most important event in the development of Pound’s poetics”, Herbert Schneidau has claimed (Schneidau, quoted in Géfin 1982, xii). In the rest of this chapter, I will, by examining Pound’s reworking of the material in the Fenollosa notebooks, investigate the relation between Pound’s literary cosmopolitanism and Fenollosa’s linguistic relativism. I will intimate that Pound was working with an idea of linguistic difference as key to the Chinese poems in Fenollosa’s notebooks, and that his idea of linguistic difference is visible in the poetic results. My central claim is that the poetics of Cathay encode a direct response to Fenollosa’s theories of the Chinese language, especially the idea that Chinese written characters, according to Fenollosa, are “shorthand pictures of actions and processes” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 46).

Before I delve into some selected passages from Cathay, I should say something about the relation between the Fenollosa notebooks and Pound’s completed versions of the poems, using as my tool the groundbreaking critical edition of Cathay compiled by Timothy Billings (2019).
Fenollosa’s notebooks include more than a hundred Classical Chinese poems, while the original version of *Cathay* just fourteen poems, among them Pound’s 1911 translation of the Old English poem “The Seafarer” (printed as part of *Ripostes* in 1912). Zhaoming Qian relates that Pound first had chosen only twelve poems for *Cathay*, of which only “Song of the Bowmen of Shu” was explicitly about war, but that he, “probably because the war was getting worse”, at a very late stage chose to add “Lament of the Frontier Guard” and “South-Folk in Cold Country”, to “augment [the] anti-war theme” of the book (Qian 2005, 53). Hugh Kenner sees *Cathay* as “largely a war-book”, claiming that Pound made his selection from the wealth of notebook material “by a sensibility responsive to torn Belgium and disrupted London”, the poems being “among the most durable of all poetic responses to World War I” (Kenner 1971, 202).72

The thirteen Chinese poems in *Cathay*, however, translate fourteen original Chinese poems, as attested by Wai-lim Yip in his *Ezra Pound’s Cathay* (1969). In the case of the third poem of *Cathay*, “The River Song”, Pound, Yip explains, fuses two of Li Po’s original poems into one, misreading the title of the second poem in Fenollosa’s manuscript as if it were a line in the middle of a single poem. Yip comments that this “has long been regarded as Pound’s principal ‘howler’” in *Cathay* (Yip 1969, 148). In his critical edition of *Cathay*, Billings says that several scholars, among them Yip, Kenner, Sanehide Kodama and Zhaoming Qian, “have argued that the conflation must have been intentional on Pound’s part as a sort of modernist experiment” (Billings 2019b, 109), but he is wrong to count Yip among these critical scholars: Yip obviously agrees with Billings that we are here talking about “an honest mistake” on Pound’s part (ibid., 109).73 Nevertheless, it is notable that scholars would even think of suggesting that this “honest mistake” could be seen as an instance of poetic license. What does such an idea tell us about the idea of translation and fidelity to the original? Obviously that some critics consider Pound capable of disregarding traditional ideas of fidelity to a large extent. Admittedly, Pound was in some cases only committed to being faithful to the original insofar as it was able to lay the grounds for an interesting poem in English. Still, Billings must be right to see the conflation of the two Chinese poems as an “honest mistake”.

Another honest mistake is one of the proper names that stand out as exotic ciphers in *Cathay*, namely, the “River Kiang” in “Separation on the River Kiang”, which is, as Paul Morrison comments, a result of Pound mistaking the common noun *kiang* (“river”) for a proper name (cf. Morrison 1996, 17).

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72 As we can see from him being quoted by Wai-lim Yip, Kenner first made these claims in 1967, in his article “The Invention of China” (Yip 1969, 4).

73 According to Ming Ming Du in his dissertation on *Cathay*, Yip’s book remains “the most extensive study” of Pound’s early translations from Chinese (Du 2018, 37). Of course, Du is here writing before Billings’s critical edition was published, while taking into account Ming Xie’s *Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry* (1999).
In addition to the thirteen Chinese poems that Pound included in *Cathay*, four more were added when the work (with the exception of “The Seafarer”) was reprinted as part of Pound’s *Lustra* (1916). Billings offers the notebook entries related to each of the total of eighteen poems, line by line, annotating them along the way. He also supplies Chinese characters for each line of poetry, characters that are not to be found in the notebooks. This is in and of itself an important clarification, since many scholars seem to have assumed that the original Chinese characters were to be found in the notebooks, though in fact “the vast majority of the cribs contain no Chinese characters whatsoever, but merely Sino-Japanese romanizations for each logograph” (Billings 2019a, 29). As plainly stated by Christopher Bush in his introduction to Billings’s critical edition, “the fact is that Pound never saw the Chinese for the majority of these poems” (Bush 2019, 3).

To further illustrate what is to be found in Fenollosa’s notebooks and in Billings’s edition, let us look at a line from the poem called “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter”, perhaps the most celebrated of all the poems in *Cathay*: “You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse” (*Cathay*, 39).

Billings first gives us the Chinese original: 郎騎竹馬來, not to be found in the notebooks. He then prints Fenollosa’s Japanese-influenced pronunciation guide for the five characters: “rō + Ki + Chiku + ba + rai”; and then Fenollosa’s crib: “second person masculine, you, young man! lit. ‘young man’ + ride on + bamboo + horse + come”. Then follows Fenollosa’s paraphrase of the line: “When you came riding on bamboo stilts” (cf. Billings 2019b, 119). We can see that while Pound used Fenollosa’s paraphrase, he also added an interpretation of the image to be found only in Fenollosa’s crib, namely, that of “playing horse”. Billings says that the initial word-for-word glosses of the crib are correct, “suggesting a hobbyhorse”, but that Fenollosa’s Japanese teachers Mori and Ariga, without whom there would have been no notebook versions of these poems in the first place, must have been misled when they saw in the compound term (“bamboo + horse”) the specifically Japanese expression “bamboo stilts”. Pound, in short, went for both solutions, inventing, Billings concludes, “a uniquely Anglo-Sino-Japanese line” (Billings 2019b, 127). Billings tells his readers that he expected to find many such “Japanese” mistakes when examining the notebooks, since Fenollosa was working with Japanese teachers, but in fact found only two or three significant instances among the hundreds of glosses for the poems included in *Cathay*.

To illustrate once more that Pound in interesting instances makes his version closer to Fenollosa’s crib than to his paraphrase, let me also quote a line from “Lament on Frontier Guard”.

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74 On the title page of *Cathay*, it said: “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.” (*Cathay*, 33) This very title page can be said to make explicit a history of transmissions and “socialized” textual production that itself can be labeled cosmopolitan. Fenollosa refers to Mori as “probably the greatest living authority on Chinese poetry” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 43). Pound, in a 1919 “Letter to the Editor” printed in *Athenaeum*, claims that it was “Mori who taught Fenollosa to find more in the ideograph than is to be found in the dictionary” (*P&P*, vol. 3, 346).
Pound’s line runs “Desolate castle, the sky, the wide desert” (*Cathay*, 42). Here Fenollosa’s crib has “desolate + castle + sky {vacant} + large + desert”, while his paraphrase has “I see a [erased d] ruined fortress in a {vast} blank desert”. Pound’s solution goes against the meaning of the original poem, Billings states, because, although *Kong* [ku] 空 can mean both “sky” and “vacant”, it is the latter sense that is in play here (cf. Billings 2019b, 157). Billings concludes that “Mori & Ariga’s paraphrase is thus correct, but as usual Pound chooses the gloss instead (and the wrong one of the two options here) without understanding Mori’s two-stage *kundoku*-inspired pedagogy” (ibid., 157). This is a central point in Billings’s critical edition: that the precise nature of Fenollosa’s notes has been misunderstood by scholars ignorant of the tradition of *kundoku*, a specific practice of Japanese gloss-reading of Chinese written characters. In the editor’s introduction to the volume, we find *kundoku* defined (by David Lurie in his 2011 *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing*) as

> a complex of practices that: (1) associate logographs of Chinese origin with Japanese words and (2) transpose the resulting words into Japanese order while (3) adding necessary grammatical elements, thereby producing an actual or imagined vocalization in Japanese.

(Lurie, quoted in Billings 2019a, 20)

As Billings underscores, the fact that Fenollosa’s teacher Mori practiced *kundoku* with his American student is of great importance for the understanding of Fenollosa’s notes: not least, it explains why the glosses and the paraphrases often contradict one another, since Fenollosa after all probability initially was asked to find a one-word gloss for each character before subsequently searching out the meaning of the entire line. These observations lead Billings to the following crucial insight into the nature of the notes: “Invariably, where contradictions do occur, Mori’s paraphrases ‘correct’ the earlier glosses” (Billings 2019a, 21). In other words: It is the paraphrases that are the true “decipherings” in the Fenollosa notes, while Pound tended to prefer the crib (what Billings refers to as the “preparatory notes”). This means that Pound’s versions depart from the originals *to a degree that the manuscript paraphrases do not*. It must be underscored, however, that the tendency Pound had to follow the crib rather than the occasionally somewhat verbose paraphrase is crucial for what he achieved artistically in these poems. Although Pound, probably unintentionally, wandered off from the de facto interpretations of the originals present in Fenollosa’s manuscript, this does not mean that he was not, in a sense, faithful to Fenollosa’s ideals. The Chinese written

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75 The text to be found between the braces – the “{“ and “}” – represents insertions found in the notes themselves.

76 Arguably, the very term “crib” has connotations of cheating, or at least of short-cut taking. However, as used by Billings and myself, it refers solely to the pedagogical dimension.
characters were, according to Fenollosa, “shorthand pictures of actions and processes” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 46). The very idea of something processual at play in Cathay will be the focus in the following section, since it says something important about the poems’ subject matter as well as their linguistic form.

2.9. Flux and process in Cathay (1915)

Flux is a, maybe even the, principle of translation in Pound’s engagement with Chinese. The word “flux” means both “movement” and “change”. It is by setting these concepts into play that Pound achieves the most characteristic solutions in his translations from Chinese in Cathay. The solutions that are of particular interest to my investigation are those that relate to Fenollosa’s theories of Chinese language as analyzed in chapter 1. One central claim I will make is that Pound was working with an idea of linguistic difference as a key to the Chinese poems in Fenollosa’s notebooks, and that his idea of linguistic difference is visible in the poetic results: The translations confront the question of the verbal character of Chinese language, as stated by Fenollosa. According to Fenollosa, this verbal character was central even to the words that are not verbs but that still have a verbal function to them. This alleged phenomenon of the verbal traits in Chinese gives additional meaning to the description of flux and processes of nature in the poems, as will become increasingly clear as this section unfolds.

One could easily claim that the poems of Cathay give the reader a sense of process simply through their motifs. One such motif is water, which flows through several of them: In “The City of Choan”, “the river flows on alone” (Cathay, 51); in “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter”, we can read about “the river of swirling eddies” (ibid., 39); in “Taking Leave of a Friend”, two lines go “Blue mountains to the north of the walls / White river winding about them” (ibid., 50). These images indicate water flowing, and thereby also a more general process of continual change in nature itself. The same could be said of the striking image from “Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin”: “The sea’s colour moves at dawn” (ibid., 41). But if the process involved in these poems was indicated merely by the choice of motifs, the influence specifically due to Chinese foreignness would have been negligible, or, at the very least, not particularly new, since the likes of British sinologist Herbert Giles – in Chinese Poetry in English Verse (1898) and A History of Chinese Literature (1901) – had made translations of Classical Chinese poetry introducing some of its distinctive motifs.77

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77 According to Billings, Giles’s translations from Chinese in A History of Chinese Literature laid the ground for three of Pound’s own poems: “Fan-Piece, For Her Imperial Lord”, “After Ch’u Yuan”, and “Liu Ch’è”. These poems were all published in Lustra, but according to Billings, and pace Lionel Kelly (2005, 187), they were written before Pound became acquainted with the Fenollosa material. Billings opines that these rewritings for the most part are characterized
What I am after is something else, namely, something that has to do with Chinese linguistic structure. A case in point could be the line from “The River Song”, where the seafarers “drift with the drifting water” (Cathay, 37). Not only is the motif one of water, and the verb semantically indicating that the water is constantly in flux – the very repetition of the verb “drift” suggests movement everywhere. This, it turns out, is Pound’s invention, since there is no repetition to be found in the line as annotated by Fenollosa, nor in the original as reconstituted by Billings. Even if one cannot trace the verbal coining to the original in this specific case, it seems as though it is inspired by the general tendency in Chinese poetry to double up written characters.

The verb “drift” is used less literally in “Exile’s Letter”: “Intelligent men came drifting in from the sea and from the west border” (Cathay, 43). It is as if the men that come drifting illustrate Fenollosa’s idea of the Chinese words as being “alive and plastic” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 45); a less romantic word choice would be “dynamic”. It is some of this dynamism or plasticity that Pound achieves by deploying the verb scatter in this line later in the same poem: “And before the end of the day we were scattered like stars, or rain.” (Cathay, 43) Also striking is the simile: “like stars, or rain” – the stars may seem fixed, the rain more processual, but the fact that both phenomena are characterized as scattered, and that this in turn is made into an image of feasting friends, indicate parallels that stretch the habitual idea of the oneness of the universe. 78 The image of the stars as connected to the rain brings to mind the passage on the “process” from Canto 74, the first of the Pisan Cantos:

To build the city of Dioce whose terraces are the colour of stars.
The suave eyes, quiet, not scornful,
rain is also of the process. (C, 74/445)

It might be deemed somewhat problematic to quote these three lines together (at least while leaving out what comes before or after), since the first one, about building “the city of Dioce” (Pound’s ideal city, referred to by its name Ecbatan in Canto 5), ends the elegiac encomium to Mussolini that constitutes the first ten lines of this particular canto. 79 What is important is that “stars” and “rain” by “chiseling their [the translations by Giles] statuesque prolixity down into dazzling little imagistic figurines” (Billings 2019, 15). Zhaoming Qian says that also “Ts’ai Chi’h” is calqued over Giles’s versions, while agreeing with Billings in that Pound composed all four of these poems before being handed the Fenollosa notebooks (Qian 2005, 53).

78 Pound chose “scattered” rather than “dispersed”, which is the verb used in Fenollosa’s paraphrase. A main reason for Pound’s choice may simply be prosodic.

79 Mark Byron, reiterating a point first made by Ronald Bush, writes that a typescript made by Pound of this opening passage introduces a space in the text between these first ten lines – lines that were “added in a later stage of composition as a politically motivated afterthought” (Byron 2003, 234) – and what was Pound’s original opening, namely, “The suave eyes, quiet, not scornful, / rain is also of the process” (ibid., 236). Massimo Bacigalupo does not seem convinced that this was an afterthought on Pound’s part, commenting that Pound made what are now the opening lines “early on,
are put in an impactful proximity in this canto, something that might recall the translation from Chinese over thirty years earlier. In the canto, the rain is explicitly linked to the “process”, “process” being Pound’s translation of the tao or dao (traditionally rendered in English as “the way”, the Chinese character for which is to be found in Canto 78: 道). In his *Ezra Pound and Confucianism* (2004), Feng Lan comments on how Pound’s understanding differs from other Western commentators, who “tend to construe this Dao in terms of a static form of permanent truth” (Lan 2008 [2004], 175).

Readers of Pound’s Chinese History Cantos will know that Pound was explicitly critical of Taoists and Buddhists (rather than Confucianists), but as Hugh Kenner has shown, Taoism has a profound influence on Pound’s Confucianism (cf. Kenner 1971, 446). Reed Way Dasenbrock explains that the Taoist “conception of language’s relation to the world” closely resembles Fenollosa’s idea of the ideogram, and moreover that it implies that “the universe is dynamic, in a state of flux, and [that] the role of language is to encode or represent that flux” (Dasenbrock 1985, 223–24). This brings us back to the issue of flux and process in *Cathay*.

In chapter 1, we saw Fenollosa warning against using intransitive forms of the verb when translating Chinese verse. Ming Xie observes that Pound in *Cathay* “seldom went by Fenollosa’s theory and often produced versions using many verbs which are not strong transitive verbs at all” (Xie 1999, 138). This is largely correct. There are other instances, however, that are clear signs of Pound trying to live up to Fenollosa’s imperative.80 For examples the verbs “cut” and “drive” in “Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin”:

At morning there are flowers to cut the heart,
And evening drives them on the eastward-flowing waters.
Petals are on the gone waters and on the going,
And on the back-swirling eddies (*Cathay*, 41)

And not only are “cut” and “drive” of great interest; the last two lines here are also fascinating. Xie considers them to be “somewhat tautological in both syntactical and semantic structure” (Xie 1999, 78). I find this choice of the word “tautological” slightly puzzling: In poetry, in contrast to a philosophical dissertation for example, repetition can hardly be said to have no semantic bearing.

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80 In his study *The China Cantos of Ezra Pound*, John Driscoll observes that even in the Chinese History Cantos section of *The Cantos*, published in 1940, Pound’s poetry is at certain points characterized by a “vivid use of verbs”, compared to the primary source from which he worked, a French eighteenth-century translation and emendation of a Chinese work of history, the latter being “flatter and more prosaic” (Driscoll 1983, 47).
find, pace Xie, the way the poem’s petals are said to be “on the gone waters and on the going” as an ingenious portrayal of the ever-changing, ever-moving forces of nature. In this case, Pound did get his repetition from the original, although the word repeated there is in fact the one Fenollosa glosses as “water”, the Chinese *shui* [sui] 水. In the original this specific character is not only to be found twice in this line, but once in the line before as well.

Another example from *Cathay* of what I take to be a “strong and individual verb” is the almost drooling verb “soaks” in the second of the two opening lines of the four-line poem “The Jewel Stair’s Grievance”:81

The jewelled steps are already quite white with dew,
It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stockings,
And I let down the crystal curtain
And watch the moon through the clear autumn. (*Cathay*, 40)

This expression seems to me to be particularly memorable: *soaks my gauze stockings*. The word “gauze” is indeed to be found in Fenollosa’s notes, both in the crib and in the paraphrase, but the paraphrase itself is rather unpoetic compared to the line we find in *Cathay*:

Far gone in the night, the dew had come up to my
gauze sock. (cf. Billings 2019b, 133)

What Pound does to the manuscript he works from is striking, the *Cathay* version being a musical unit with fascinating combinations of alliteration and assonance, that have an almost onomatopoetic function: as if we one can *hear* the squishing of the wet socks in the *s*- and *z*-sounds: *soaks my gauze stockings*.

In the first poem of *Cathay*, “Song of the Bowmen of Shu”, one could imagine that the translator strives to avoid a simple “it was spring” (or something similar) when the bowmen set out, in the fourth-to-last line of the poem; instead the willows “were drooping with spring” (*Cathay*, 35). This seems close to the Chinese original, at least as annotated by Fenollosa – and Billings, who is not slow to anger when his interpretation of the original differs, does not quarrel in this instance. Ming Ming Du, who suggests the translation “willows gently sway”, says that the verb “droop” in this instance is “precise and elegant” (Du 2018, 57). Pound has arguably found something that is

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81 The poem also has a note attached by Pound: “Jewel stairs, therefore a palace. Grievance, therefore there is something to complain of. Gauze stockings, therefor a court lady, not a servant who complains. Clear autumn, therefore he has no excuse on account of weather. Also she has come early, for the dew has not merely whitened the stairs, but also soaked her stocking. The poem is especially prized because she utters no direct reproach.” (*Cathay*, 40)
once again characteristic of a certain *verb-like* character of Chinese language, which refreshes the presence of spring, arguably a grand lyrical cliché, by finding a word that points to and insists on the very process involved in seasonal change.

Let us also look at the verb “clings” in this passage from “Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin”:

> And the moon falls over the portals of Sei-go-yo,
> And clings to the walls and the gate-top. (*Cathay*, 41)

Apparently, the sense of the original is that the moons sets, that is, disappears behind the palace. The way I read the *Cathay* version, however, the moon in the first of these lines functions as a metonymy, with the word “moon” standing for the light of the moon – *this*, the moonlight, is in other words what *falls* over the portals. Then, in the second of these lines, the moon takes an active function as though its light is alive, when it, in the following line, *clings* to the walls and the gate-top.

Let me quote a somewhat more extensive passage, from “Exile’s Letter”:

> And you would walk out with me to the western corner of the castle,
> 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 courtesans, 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. (*Cathay*, 44)

To be noted is that this whole passage is one single sentence, or in grammatical terms one single syntactical period, that is, it has no periods until the final line. The use of the word “and” as a paratactical device makes this possible. And then there is the masterly use of participles: The boats are *floating*, the ripples are *going grass green on the water*, the courtesans are *coming and going*,
the water is reflecting green eyebrows, the girls are singing and dancing, while the wind is interrupting, lifting the song and tossing it up. This extraordinary use of participles – according to Richard Sieburth “without tense, without aspect, verbs of sheer process […] handled masterfully, almost to a stream-of-consciousness effect” (Sieburth et al. 2015, 175) – turns this passage, it seems to me, into an extraordinary instance of a single image, a single moment, living as process.

The observations on the processual qualities of Cathay may immediately seem related to what William Butler Yeats was to say about Pound in the introduction to the 1936 Oxford Book of Modern Verse, edited by Yeats himself: “Ezra Pound made flux his theme” (Yeats 1936, xxiv). Admittedly, Yeats did not have Cathay in mind when he wrote his introduction. He was referring to Pound’s later poetry, where flux does not simply dominate the poetical motifs and tinge the linguistic structures, but occurs in more or less every aspect of the work, representing what Yeats took to be a defiant attitude to the formal repertoire of traditional literature, as we can see from what he writes in the following:

Ezra Pound made flux his theme: plot, characterization, logical discourse, seem to him unsuitable to a man of his generation. He is mid-way in an immense poem in vers libre called for the moment The Cantos, where the metamorphosis of Dionysus, the descent of Odysseus into Hades, repeat themselves in various disguises, always in association with some third that is not repeated. (ibid.)

Pound’s Cantos seem governed by flux in a sense that widely differs from the poems of Cathay, which, however fresh they were and still are, in comparison do not distinguish themselves from classical lyric ideals to the same degree. Still, the poetry of Cathay may by its fluctuating character be considered as bringing Pound one step closer to The Cantos.

The processual in Cathay should also be linked to the use of color terms in the work, which is of clear relevance to what I said in chapter 1 about the importance of color in linguistic relativism.

2.10. Color in Cathay

In “The River Song” color is described in a strange manner:

South of the pond the willow-tips are half-blue and bluer,

Their cords tangle in mist, against the brocade-like palace. (Cathay, 37)
Fenollosa’s crib for the end of the first line is “half + blue + blue”, and his paraphrase for the whole line is “South of the pond (sunny) the willows are already half blue” (cf. Billings 2019b, 104). After quoting all of this, Andrés Claro, in his PhD dissertation on Pound’s translations, comments:

As he turns back from Fenollosa’s paraphrase to shape his line on the original crib’s repetition, Pound’s creative construction of the adjective/comparative progression –“half[-]blue and bluer” – and avoidance of Fenollosa’s “already”, help to assure the visual impact of the colour blue as a “quality” in the making, a process of becoming rather than an accomplished and permanent “state”. (Claro 2004, 125)

I entirely agree with Claro on this point. Pound’s “half-blue and bluer” points to a specific instance of his achievement in Cathay, namely, that he was able to find solutions that strengthen the verbal quality – Claro’s “process of becoming” – even when not actually using verbs. It is as if Pound has taken to heart Fenollosa’s insistence on the general verbal quality even of the Chinese words that are not verbs. As such, the phrasing “half-blue and bluer”, which certainly adds an interpretation to be found neither in the crib nor in the paraphrase, rests on an interpretation of the presumed characteristics of Chinese language, and as such on the sense of linguistic difference or relativity.

In 1917 Pound wrote a letter to Kate Buss, stating that “I think you will find all the verbal constructions of Cathay already tried in ‘Provincia Deserta’” (SL, 101), referring to a poem he had published before even beginning to work on Cathay. Even if we accept this statement, there is no construction like “half-blue and bluer” in “Provincia Deserta”.

In the introductory passage to what Pound names “Four Poems of Departure”, we find a seemingly related idea of colors as indicators of process:

Light rain is on the light dust
The willows of the inn-yard
Will be going greener and greener (Cathay, 49)

The word rendered as “greener” here is in fact the same rendered as “blue” and “bluer” in “The River Song”, what Billings refers to as “the notorious word qing [sei] 青” (Billings 2019b, 95).

Given what I have analyzed concerning the phenomenon known as color in chapter 1, this is worth a closer inspection. In his Pound e la Cina (1974), Girolamo Mancuso states that the sense of this Chinese character is to be located somewhere mid-between the Italian verde (“green”) and azzurro (“sky blue”), reminiscent of Boas who I, toward the end of my last chapter, cited claiming about many Amerindian languages that they combine green and blue into one concept. Mancuso on his
part is referring to the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev’s analysis of the nonidentical referents of English “green”, French *vert* and Welsh *glas* (cf. Mancuso 1974, 11). As Louis Schreel has pointed out, Hjelmslev shows that the names for colors in the color spectrum are prototypical examples of linguistic relativity (Schreel 2016, 58). Here we may be reminded of some fabulous lines from Canto 99:

Till the blue grass turn yellow
and the yellow leaves float in air (*C*, 99/714)

The point about color, as I have stressed, is not only that the compartmentalization of the spectrum diverges considerably in different languages’ palettes, but that what in the West is referred to as color tends in others cultures to be *less abstract* and more closely linked to what it is the color *of*, as it were. Let us keep this in mind as we ponder this wonderful gloss on *qing* 青 given by sinologist Peter Boodberg:

Like our “green,” [*qing* 青] seems to be a cognate of “to grow,” Ch. sheng¹ 生, which enters into the composition of the protograph. … [It] refers above all to the color of vernal growth (in the cosmological color-scheme, it symbolizes the east, spring verdure, and youth). … As an attribute, it may be rendered cerulean, azure, perse, leek-green, peacock-blue, cyaneous, bice, verdigris, gris, or livid, but it rarely designates “yellowish green” and lighter shades of green, such as citrine, lime-green, reseda, or lettuce-green. (Boodberg, quoted in Billings 2019b, 95)

We see here an idea of color that is not *only* an abstract quality of a certain part of the spectrum (and, inasmuch as it is, it may evidently be hard to find a single English synonym for a foreign language color term!), but is somehow *more closely related to what it symbolizes*. In *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, Fenollosa states that green “is only a certain rapidity of vibration” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 52). This somewhat quirky phrase, with its combination of a surprisingly scholastic form of expression and what might be an attempt at modern physics, is not entirely unrepresentative of Fenollosa’s style of writing. It is, in short, as if Pound on numerous occasions is better at taking the consequences of Fenollosa’s general advice on how to express oneself in English that Fenollosa himself was. This could even be said to be the case when it comes to the wording of the paraphrases in Fenollosa’s notebooks (while it is perhaps unfair to treat these paraphrases as if they were meant to be published as completed translations in their own right).
As for the beginning of “The Beautiful Toilet”, it runs like this in Pound’s version, the word “blue” once again translating the Chinese *qing* [sei] 青, to be found twice in the Chinese original line as given by Billings (as is the case for “white” – the Chinese *jiao* [ko] 皎 – in the fourth line):

Blue, blue is the grass of the river  
And the willows have overfilled the close garden.  
And within, the mistress, in the midmost of her youth,  
White, white of face, hesitates, passing the door. (*Cathay*, 36)

Fenollosa’s paraphrase in this case qualifies both colors: “quite blue grass” and “very white face”. In Claro’s opinion, Pound here again chooses to stick to a character-for-character rendering, and by duplicating the concrete quality embodied in the adjective […] not only avoids diluting the visual strength of the colour images, but also succeeds in intensifying the quality through the addition of vivid detail just as, by the same logic, more abstract Chinese characters are shaped from simpler pictographic ones (Claro 2004, 119).

Here Claro is arguably going too far in accepting the Fenollosa–Pound perspective on Chinese written characters. Still, I concur as to the effects achieved by Pound by following Fenollosa’s crib rather than his paraphrase. This is not an incidental distinction, but rather a key to Pound’s entire achievement in *Cathay*.

In “Lament of the Frontier Guard”, autumn is introduced by a botanic indication: “Trees fall, the grass goes yellow with autumn.” (*Cathay*, 42). Here, Billings comments, Pound “as usual […] calques the glosses for a foreignizing effect instead of following Mori & Ariga’s paraphrase that the trees (rather boringly) ‘drop leaves’” (Billings 2019b, 157). And once again, a process is being depicted in that the grass *is* not simply yellow but *goes* yellow – while the paraphrase in the notes has “autumn grasses are yellow”. I remind the reader that Fenollosa’s *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* contains a passage about English-speaking people that does not say that a tree “greens itself” but that “the tree is green”, something that Fenollosa views as “an ultimate weakness of language” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 49)

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82 While focusing on the question of color here, I must point the reader to J. H. Prynne’s ingenious comment on the second line of the quotation: “[T]he presence of the willows is suggestive of delicate but over-luxuriant enclosure, the qualities of nature metaphorically transferred to the isolation of the mistress by a brilliant internal chiasmus of sound-values (willows, overfilled) and an implicit comparison of trailing branches with the tresses of the mistress, calling up by further implication the dampening mist of the low water-meadows and the subdued implication and distress in the western associations of the weeping willow.” (Prynne 1983, 676)
As for autumn in “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter”, it is once again pointed to by the word “autumn” itself, but something happens to the autumn leaves that is striking in its untypical wording: “The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.” (Cathay, 39) Here, the expression “in wind” (rather than “in the wind”) is surely a foreignizing device. Once again Pound seems to be taking his cue from Fenollosa, in this case the following advice (even if one might wonder if Fenollosa had such a simple device as removing a “the” in mind here):

Frequently it is possible by omitting English particles to make a literal word-for-word translation which will be not only intelligible in English, but even the strongest and most poetical English. (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 50)

The tendency toward such a concordant translation is clearly attempted by Pound in his Canto 49, the “Seven Lakes Canto”, which he translated from an album of calligraphy given to him by his parents, and which begins with these lines:

For the seven lakes, and by no man these verses:
Rain; empty river; a voyage,
Fire from frozen cloud, heavy rain in the twilight
Under the cabin roof was one lantern.
The reeds are heavy; bent;
and the bamboos speak as if weeping. (C, 49/244)

It is striking that Pound in the first three lines of this passage avoids not only intransitive verbs but verbs altogether. And it is as if the semicolons try to suggest a different sort of relation between the words than what the reader would expect from an English-language presentation, as also toward the end of the Canto:

Sun up; work;
sundown; to rest (C, 49/245)

The punctuation marks are of course not literally concordant – there are no such signs in the original manuscripts. Still, this seems to be yet another way of presenting the verbal quality of the words-that-are-not-verbs that Fenollosa had indicated as characteristic of Chinese language. One might also interpret the expression “by no man these verses” not only as an un-Western idea, perhaps
included in opposition to Western subjectivity, but also as a poetic device directly stemming from the nature of Chinese language, which does not have grammatical subjects.

2.11. Poems from the Fenollosa notebooks not included in Cathay

As I have indicated, there was an additional set of four poems appended to Cathay when the collection was published as part of Lustra a year later. Among these four is “To-em-mei’s ‘The Unmoving Cloud’”. Here, a passage goes as follows:

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

And men say the sun and moon keep on moving
because they can’t find a soft seat. (Cathay, 60)

We saw that Fenollosa stated that the Chinese written language is not “cut and dried like a walking-stick”, but “retains the old primitive sap” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 55). The expression “bursting out with new twigs”, trying to “stir new affection”, seems to put such a sap literally in play. The sun and the moon that keep on moving are, we may assume, part of the overall process of nature.

Pound’s translations from Chinese are not limited to the poems to be found in Cathay and Lustra. In his “Ur-Cantos”, “Three Cantos” (1917), we also find inserted a Classical Chinese poem he drew from Fenollosa’s notebook, one not included in the critical edition of Cathay. In the second of these three cantos, one finds a translation of Bai Juyi’s (the pinyin transliteration of the name for which the Wade–Giles system has Po Chü-I) “Song of the Lute”:

Yin-yo laps in the reeds, my guest departs,
The maple leaves blot up their shadows,
The sky is full of Autumn,
We drink our parting in saki.
Out of the night comes troubling lute music,
And we cry out, asking the singer’s name,
And get this answer:
“Many a one
Brought me rich presents, my hair was full of jade,
And my slashed skirts were drenched in the secret dyes,
Well dipped in crimson, and sprinkled with rare wines;
I was well taught my arts at Ga-ma-rio
And then one year I faded out and married.”
The lute-bowl hid her face. We heard her weeping. (P&T, 323)

Once again, not disregarding the strong emotional story narrated, I will draw attention to the verbal quality of parts of this passage. For example, where maple leaves would presumably, in more ordinary speech, “cast their shadows”, this would, although verbal (and transitive), seem like a more static image than the one evoked by the poet, where the maple leaves blot up their shadows. As for the lute music, it is not simply present, it comes out of the night. Fenollosa commented on how grammatical parts of speech are (supposedly) derived from verbs. The way he sees it, this process has already taken place in English, but is in the process of doing so in Chinese. At one point, however, he indicates that such a process of derivation is ongoing even in contemporary English, namely, how participles are “passing over into adjectives” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 52). Look once again at the use in this passage of adjectivized verbs – “slashed”, “drenched”, “dipped” and “sprinkled”:

And my slashed skirts were drenched in the secret dyes,
Well dipped in crimson, and sprinkled with rare wines

There are also beautiful alliterations to be found here, with the four adjectivized verbs interacting with the other words to create a shifting mix of s- and d-sounds. The verbs here passing over into adjectives once more points not only to Pound’s linguistic sensibility, but even to an intuition that Chinese poetry may not be bound by word classes the way English and other European languages are, as intimated in chapter 1.

2.12. Imagism and Vorticism: Pound’s poetological statements at the time of Cathay
When discussing the cosmopolitan poetics of Cathay, it is necessary to consider the poetological labels Pound chose to describe his own poetry at the time. 20 February 1915, six weeks prior to the publication of Cathay, Pound published the article “Imagisme and England” in T. P.’s Weekly, in which he stated that “[w]e have sought the force of Chinese ideographs without knowing it” (P&P, vol. 2, 19). Apparently, the poet–translator felt that the Chinese poems and Fenollosa’s analysis of the Chinese written character were close to his own poetic ideals at the time. I should remark on the
fact that Pound by 1915 not only referred to himself as an “Imagiste”, but also considered himself part of the “Vorticist” movement, which must be said to have originated with the painter Wyndham Lewis, even if it was Pound who, in May or June 1914, came up with the name Vorticism (cf. Dasenbrock 1985, 14). It is true that Pound, in a letter to Lewis dated 24 June 1916, proposes to send a copy of Cathay to him so that he “may be able to understand what is imagisme” (Pound, quoted in Xie 1999, 13), so he evidently continued to see his work as Imagist. But I will not so easily let go of the idea that Cathay is to some extent a work that finds itself staging a shift between Imagism and Vorticism, a shift toward a more explicitly energetic, kinetic metaphor.

It should be unnecessary to counter the possible misunderstanding that Imagism has any specific relation to the visual. Such a “disclaimer” was made as early as by Herbert Schneidau (1969) and subsequently by Daniel Tiffany, who asserts that “it is clear that the principles of Imagism depart in some fundamental sense from the realm of the visible” (Tiffany 1995, 32). Tiffany makes this statement as part of his investigation concerning “the psychological character of the Image and the corresponding associations with ghosts and phantoms” (ibid., 89). He importantly observes the following:

The formalist rhetoric of the Image, which Pound hammered out between 1912 and 1914 and which is the basis of what most people understand to be Imagism, […] displaces an earlier, spectral figure of the Image. (ibid., 91)

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83 At least initially, Pound preferred spelling the word like this, with an e at the end, not only in the French title of his (English-language) anthology Des Imagistes, but also when writing in English – itself a cosmopolitan signaling. I will follow the common critical practice of spelling the word without Pound’s final e.

84 Cf. Pound’s “Vortex” manifesto in the first issue of the Vorticist magazine BLAST in June 1914, later in an extended version as “Vorticism” in the Fortnightly Review September 1914 and reprinted as such in Gaudier-Brzeska (GB, 94–109).

85 The reasons for Pound’s going public as a Vorticist are, to be sure, many and varied, among them apparently Pound’s critical attitude toward Amy Lowell, whom he somehow felt had “colonized” the Imagist movement for her own purposes, not least in “making it mean any writing of vers libre”, as Pound claims in a 1915 letter to Harriet Monroe (SL, 48). 1914 had seen the publication of the anthology Des Imagistes, edited by Pound, which included one poem by Lowell, “In a Garden”, among the total of eleven contributors, all chosen by the editor. Pound was arguably the Pope of Imagism at the time. But later that year, Lowell’s publisher labeled her “the foremost member of the ‘Imagistes’”, resulting in Pound’s threatening to sue (cf. Bellew 2017, 23). Pound now coined the condescending term Amygism, according to Ruthven because he considered Lowell’s version to be “a flabby alternative to the lean clarity of Imagism” (Ruthven 1990, 107). In the following years Lowell, although not acknowledged as an editor and denying being one (cf. Bellew 2017, 36), had publish three anthologies: Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology (1915), Some Imagist Poets: An Annual Anthology (1916), and Some Imagist Poets: An Annual Anthology (1917). One could also suspect that Pound, by shifting from Imagist to Vorticist, was simply attempting to “brand” himself anew in order to stay interesting, something the fellow Imagist Richard Aldington seems to have assumed when he in his novel Death of a Hero (1929) made what is considered to be a caricature of Pound in the character Frank Upjohn who, in Ira B. Nadell’s paraphrase, “invents a new school of painting every season” (Nadell 2010, 166). This impression can perhaps be strengthened by this quote from a letter from Pound to Alice Corbin Henderson, the editor of Poetry, in May 1916: “I was about to declare the imagist movement over, when the first anthology came out. Like a damn fool, I didn’t.” (L/ACH, 142) These possible interpretations of Pound’s shift ought not, however, stop us from trying to understand what differences may be said to exist between Imagism and Vorticism.
Pound’s early poetry is clearly marked by a fascination with motifs relating to death, to the haunting presence of the dead, and to the underworld, so Tiffany’s interpretative focus seems justified, if mainly for the books prior to the launching of the Imagist movement. Tiffany acknowledges that the aim of Imagism was “to lay the dead to rest, to extinguish dead language, dead poetry, and the influence of dead minds” (ibid., 121), but he still sees a poem such as “In a Station of the Metro” as, as it were, haunted by “other conceptions of the Image” than the “modern, formalist Image” (ibid., 101), referring to Hugh Kenner’s interpretation of the poem, where the “descent underground” is taken as recalling Odysseus’s encounter with the dead in Hades (cf. Kenner 1971, 184–85).

When looking back on his 1913 coining of the term Imagisme, in an article in a 1925 issue of Poetry, Pound remarked that “[w]ithin two years the new word was being currently applied to a brand of irregular verse which was just as tumid and padded and cliché-stuffed, as any of the old-century stand-bys” (P&P, vol. 4, 366). Whatever the accuracy of this somewhat disillusioned a posteriori assessment, it gives us a clear indication of what kind of poetry Pound was trying to counter with his Imagiste neologism, namely, the moribund English-language poetry of the 1890s and 1900s that Marjorie Perloff summarizes as being full of “[f]uzzy vague diction, conventional phrasing, circumlocution, pseudoclassical cliché, lofty sentiment, and tum-ti-tum meters” (Perloff 2005, 224). Here I should remind the reader that when Pound’s first two collections of poetry, A Lume Spento (1908) and A Quinzaine for this Yule (1909), were republished in 1965, the author himself referred to his youthful poems in a succinct foreword dated 1964 as “stale creampuffs”, adding that the reprint gave “no lesson to be learned save the depth of ignorance, or rather the superficiality of non-perception – neither eye nor ear” (Pound, quoted in Sieburth 2003b, 1256). It should be clear then that Pound, at the very least the late Pound, did not exempt his own early poetry from the criticism he made of its contemporaries.

When Cathay came out in 1915, Pound had not published a book of poetry since Ripostes (1912). Should we then, consider the Chinese poems in Cathay to be Vorticist responses to the Imagist work from three years earlier? As already discussed, this must certainly be qualified: Not only did Pound not clearly distinguish between Imagism and Vorticism, he also consistently maintained that Imagist principles were to be found in poetry from a wide variety of eras and cultures. This whole idea can by turned on its head, however: It is arguably by reading cosmopolitically that Pound “discovered” Imagism in the first place. He was a student of

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86 Strictly speaking, Pound first wrote about “Les Imagistes, the descendants of the forgotten school of 1909” (Sieburth 2003b, 1273) in a “Prefatory Note” to T. E. Hulme’s “Complete Poetical Works” added at the end of Pound’s own Ripostes. Richard Sieburth refers to this as a “playful publicity stunt” (Sieburth 2003b, 1272).
comparative literature, reading Latin, French, Italian Spanish and Occitan long before he was an Imagist. Imagism can, then, be seen as a function and a consequence of comparative, translational reading practices, in other words, of a literary cosmopolitanism.

Pound continued to see the Image as a key to Vorticist artistic practices, in fact he defined the Image as a Vortex (P&P, vol. 1, 260), making Vorticism, in Daniel Tiffany’s accurate description, “essentially a revision and expansion of the Image concept” (Tiffany 1995, 50). What did this revision and expansion consist in? One could suggest that the Image had become somewhat more mobile by the time it had been equated with the Vortex. Wyndham Lewis’s idea of Vorticism indicated that it was essentially dynamic, at least compared to Cubism, which he considered too reliant on traditional genres such as the still life (cf. Materer 2005, 231). Lewis concisely defined Vorticism in 1915 as “Activity as opposed to the tasteful Passivity of Picasso” (Lewis, quoted in Dassenbrock 1985, 95). This, of course, refers to painting, but it seems to me relevant also for the poems of Cathay. Pound’s summing-up in ABC of Reading (1934) is to the point:

The defect of the earlier imagist propaganda was not in misstatement but in incomplete statement. The diluters took the handiest and easiest meaning, and thought only of the STATIONARY image. If you can’t think of imagism or phanopoeia as including the moving image, you will have to make a really needless division of fixed image and praxis or action.

I have taken to using the term phanopoeia to get away from irrelevant particular connotations tangled with a particular group of young people who were writing in 1912. (ABCR, 52)

Pound is here referring to Imagism and phanopoiea, and even if one may question Pound’s version of history from a position twenty years later, this whole passage seems to indicate that Pound, when labeling himself a Vorticist, was doing so precisely in order to highlight his interest in “the moving image”.

In his article in the Ezra Pound Encyclopedia on Lewis’s (and Pound’s) magazine BLAST, which folded after only the second issue in 1915 (the first being from 1914), Craig Monk remarks that “[m]oving beyond what they saw as the motionlessness of Cubism, Vorticists privileged a focal point in the creative artefact while stressing the need for a dynamic engagement with its audience” (Monk 2005, 21). The weight Monk puts on a dynamic engagement with its audience underscores that Pound at this stage may well have thought of his earlier poetry as somewhat inward-looking, not so much responding to the literary culture it was part of as works that strived to capture “eternal

87 Miranda B. Hickman notes, in her The Geometry of Modernism (2005), that Lewis was still entertaining the idea of another issue of BLAST as late as 1920 (Hickman 2005, 100).
moods”, as he put it one of his early masterpieces, the exquisitely serene “Δόρτα” (P&T, 241), published both in Ripostes and in the Des Imagistes anthology. It is true that Pound never seems to have given up on the idea of capturing “eternal moods” in words, a case in point surely being his statement that a “god is an eternal state of mind” (SP, 47). Still, if we return to the year 1915, I consider it important to read Cathay as a direct response to reigning expectations about poetic language.

2.13. Cathay as foreignizing translation

When discussing Pound’s translations, Claro uses Pound’s triad of melopoeia, logopoeia and phanopoeia as a classificatory tool. Claro observes that the translation Pound made of the Provençal troubadours and Cavalcanti privileged melopoeia. He in fact says of the Arnaut translations that they “were never planned or could never be read as independent and successful English verse”, adding that “[i]t is only as a form of criticism and study of Provençal sound technique, as a guide to the original’s melopoeia, that they can be recommended” (Claro 2004, 77–78). As for Pound’s Homage to Sextus Propertius, Claro states that this semi-translation privileged logopoeia.88 Making his analysis complete in its symmetry, Claro states that Pound, in the Chinese poems to be found in Cathay, had an “almost exclusive focus” on their phanopoeia (“[t]hat part of your poetry which strikes upon the imaginative eye of the reader”; LE, 7; “a casting of images upon the visual imagination”; LE, 25; cf. Claro 2004, 116). Claro adds that Pound came to see Chinese poetry and poetics as a new model that could be as important for phanopoeia as Greek and medieval poetry had been for melopoeia (Claro 2004, 104). It seems to be the case that Pound had no idea of how the Chinese poems would have sounded in their original form (even if, as we have seen, very rudimentary and Japanese-influenced transcriptions of the supposed pronunciation of the written characters of the originals were to be found in Fenollosa’s notes). This must be at least one of the reasons Pound chose to render the poems of Cathay in free verse, although he was aware that the originals observed formal criteria, chiefly consisting of lines with five or seven monosyllables. As such, Chinese meter is monosyllabic rather than accentuated and therefore, according to Ming Xie in his Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry, “impossible to replicate in English” (Xie 1999, 177).

If it is true that Pound disregard the melopoeia of the originals, this may strengthen Claro’s claim that Pound was almost exclusively concerned with phanopoeia when translating these poems of Cathay. However, one could certainly question this premise. There is much melopoeia to be

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88 Logopoeia (“the dance of the intellect among words”; LE, 25; or “a play in the shading of words themselves”; P&P, vol. 4, 270) is, pace James J. Wilhelm, not to be understood as a focus on “ideas” (Wilhelm 1985, 138), but rather a form of literary irony.
found in Pound’s versions of the Chinese poems in Cathay. We may ask why Cathay was published as a monolingual volume. In the case of his Cavalcanti translations, Pound was eager to have a bilingual edition, which he got: The Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti (1912) – Richard Sieburth reminds his readers that such a bilingual setup was “unusual for the period in a non-academic book” (Sieburth 2003a, 277). The planned book of Arnaut Daniel poems, which never materialized, was also to be bilingual. But for Cathay, the idea of a bilingual edition seems never to have been on the table. Might this be because phanopoeia “will lose nothing by translation into a foreign tongue” (LE, 7), as Pound wrote in 1913? Were the translations in Cathay meant to stand as replacements for the originals, in a way that did not apply to the Cavalcanti and Arnaut translations, since these two were, to use the expression Pound himself uses in the introduction to his book of Cavalcanti translations, “translations of ‘accompaniment’” (PC, 12), that is, meant for readers who would also consult the originals? This seems to be Claro’s contention. But could it not have been the sheer impracticality, if not the outright impossibility, of getting a bilingual edition of Chinese and English produced in 1915, that decided the matter? In the article “H. D.’s Choruses from Euripides” in an issue of The Little Review from November 1918, Pound indicates that even Greek font was hard to come by: “bitter experience has led me to suspect that the man who prints this magazine has no hellenic font at his elbow” (P&P, vol. 3, 225). The question remains: Is phanopoeia what Cathay is all about? The answer is quite plainly no. One should not forget that Cathay, in addition to Classical Chinese poems, also included “The Seafarer”, which is clearly marked by a willingness to render the melopoeia of the original. Sieburth also finds that Pound “applies Anglo-Saxon alliteration and appositional structures” to the Chinese poems as well as to “The Seafarer” (Sieburth et al. 2015, 175). In one of the articles in the series “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris” (1911–12), Pound wrote that his translation of “The Seafarer” was “as nearly literal, I think, as any translation can be” (SP, 39), obviously using the word “literal” in a sense that does not imply a “prosy” translation, but one that tries to render the signifiant rather than just the signifié aspect of the original, much as Louis Zukofsky, when publishing his hyper-signifiant-based translation of Catullus (together with his wife Celia), used the word “literal” in his one-sentence “Translator’s Preface”: “This translation of Catullus follows the sound, rhythm, and syntax of his Latin – tries, as is said, to breathe the literal meaning with him.” (Zukofsky 1991, 243)

When Lawrence Venuti, one of the most influential theoreticians in modern translation studies, discusses Pound in his history of translation, The Translator’s Invisibility (1995), it is as a translator with a distinct foreignizing program, as such seemingly in solidarity with Venuti himself, seeking translations willing to deviate “enough from native norms to stage an alien reading
experience” (Venuti 1995, 20). Such a foreignizing strategy is itself a sign that one presupposes important differences between languages and that these have cognitive implications, that is, that one is inclined toward one form of linguistic relativism.

When commenting on Pound’s 1911 translation into modern English of “The Seafarer”, Venuti not only makes his general point about foreignization, showing that Pound here stages an alien reading experience by “adhering closely to the Anglo-Saxon text, imitating its compound words, alliteration, and accentual meter” (Venuti 1995, 34), that is, by translating concordantly rather than idiomatically. He also notes that not all of Pound’s foreignizing devices in this translation can be labeled concordant: Pound’s “departures from modern English also include archaisms drawn from later periods of English literature” (ibid., 35); here, the translation is foreignizing not because it is concordant but because it is anachronistic. It is as if Pound thinks of the whole history of a language as a reservoir for fetching terms and expressions, even if these are not legion in the present: The fact that they have been used means they are candidates good enough to be used again. Pound’s different historical layers of language are fragments linking together the remote past by partial means of the not-quite-so-remote past. Different languages complement each other, but so do languages internally and by themselves, as we saw Pound presupposing when commenting on the Italian language of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

So, if different languages complement each other and even complement themselves, what does such a “complementation” amount to? It is tempting to see the different diachronic and synchronic linguistic strata as representing parts of an undefined whole toward which poets and translators strive, not unlike the fragments of a vessel in the example to be found in Walter Benjamin’s classical text “The Task of the Translator” (“Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers”, written in 1921):

Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translations recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel. For this very reason

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89 Venuti deems Pound’s translations of the Provençal troubadour Arnaut Daniel his “most experimental” translations, since these were where he developed his “most heterogeneous discourses” (Venuti 1995, 198). In an article devoted to these translations, Andrew Eastman claims that heterogeneity is “a problematic criterion for the value of a translation”, adding that Venuti “can tell us little about how Pound translates rhythm as continuum” (Eastman 2014, 65). This is surely a valid point: When Eastman focuses on how Pound tries to reproduce “animal rhythms” and onomatopoeia in his 1917 translation of Arnaut’s poem “L’aura amara”, he is clearly able to highlight some qualities of Pound’s translations that go deeper than Venuti’s generalization. That said, I will insist that we should not let go entirely of Venuti’s foreignizing perspective, for it is in fact highly relevant to our understanding of Pound’s ideas about languages.
translation must in large measure refrain from wanting to communicate something, from rendering the sense, and in this the original is important only insofar as it has already relieved the translator and his translation of the effort of assembling and expressing what is to be conveyed. (Benjamin 1999, 79)

In a sense, this seems like a version of the history of the tower of Babel, where the original unity of language has been broken up, resulting in a multiplicity of languages, mutually incomprehensible. Benjamin is not, however, suggesting a universal language as a “debabelizing” act, instead intimating that a “counter-babelizing” can be achieved by means of translation, that is, by a joining together of the fragments of the broken vessel. It is itself problematic to treat Benjamin’s “fragments of a greater language” as something that of necessity aspires toward a fully completed whole. As Paul de Man has made clear, this is hardly the meaning of the image of the “vessel” or “amphora” (Gefäßes). The different fragments referred to in the image, that is, the original and its translation, seemingly together constitute a symbolon, that is, a tally stick in two parts that, though unequal, match each other perfectly, indicating, says de Man, that Benjamin’s statement is “a religious statement about the fundamental unity of language” (de Man 1986, 90). But de Man goes on to demonstrate that this understanding, even if logical given the above-quoted passage as translated by Harry Zohn, is fundamentally misleading. Especially important is the phrase where Benjamin, in Zohn’s translation, says that “a translation […] must […] incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel”. Instead of accepting Zohn’s version, de Man follows Carol Jacobs, who opts for the following translation of the same phrase: “the translation must […] form itself according to the manner of meaning [Art des Meinens] of the original, to make both recognizable as parts of the greater language, just as fragments are the broken parts of a vessel” (de Man 1986, 91). I find de Man’s conclusion convincing: Benjamin “is not saying that the fragments constitute a totality, he says the fragments are fragments, and that they remain essentially fragmentary” (ibid.). Even if a translator seeks to bring the fragments together, this does not mean that any form of return to the original unity is possible, given that any cracks resulting from the breaking of the vessel will always remain there. In fact, more radically, Benjamin’s image suggests a set of fragments that are not two but multiple, indicating not a

90 This is the passage in German: “Wie nämlich Scherben eines Gefäßes, um sich zusammenfügen zu lassen, in den kleinsten Einzelheiten einander zu folgen, doch nicht so zu gleichen haben, so muß, anstatt dem Sinn des Originals sich ähnlich zu machen, die Übersetzung liebend vielmehr und bis ins Einzelne hinein dessen Art des Meinens in der eigenen Sprache sich anbilden, um so beide wie Scherben als Bruchstück eines Gefäßes, als Bruchstück einer größeren Sprache erkennbar zu machen. Eben darum muß sie von der Absicht, etwas mitzuteilen, vom Sinn in sehr hohem Maße absehen und das Original ist ihr in diesem nur insofern wesentlich, als es der Mühe und Ordnung des Mitzuteilenden den Übersetzer und sein Werk schon entzogen hat.” (Benjamin 1980, 59).
demanding original and a *correct* or *perfect* translation, but a whole range of possible translations as responses to the original, thereby supplying some part of the greater language, although this greater language will never be unified or complete.

This slight Benjaminian detour may again lead us back to Venuti, who as an epigraph to his book deploys a quotation from Maurice Blanchot’s essay “Translation” (“Traduire”), a 1971 commentary precisely on “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers”:

The translator is the secret master of the difference of languages, a difference he is not out to abolish, but rather one he puts to use as he brings violent or subtle changes to bear on his own language, thus awakening within it the presence of that which is at origin different in the original.91

As my reference to George Steiner in chapter 1 suggested, being the “master of the difference of languages” is a privilege sometimes accorded both the poet and the translator. In Blanchot’s essay, it is, one may assume, accorded the translator as a “secret” master of this difference, where the poet’s said mastery is traditionally more overt – and part of Blanchot’s agenda may be to render this secret less secret, as it were. This would at least explain Venuti’s attraction to the passage quoted, since he is out to fight against what he sees as a prevailing tendency in post-World War II Anglo-American literary culture, where critics tend to praise translations for being “crisp” and “elegant” and for flowing “gracefully” (Venuti’s examples), thus concealing the fact that there is a translator behind the translation, making several choices that are not at all obvious, and anyway only ones among a dizzying amount of possible choices. This makes the translator seemingly invisible, as it says in the title of Venuti’s book, and as such perhaps a more secret “master of the difference of languages” than the poet.

If claiming that the beautiful poems of Cathay seem unlikely to have been able to bring “violent […] changes” to *any* language, to echo Blanchot, we must not forget that every work has its context, in which it is, as it were, thrown. Pointing this out may seem like a truism, but it is still important for several reasons, including how Pound in his poetological adventures in the 1910s obviously was relating his work to the poetic practices of his contemporaries, and therefore must be assumed to think of his translations as engaging with a certain set of expectations shared by his contemporary readers.

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91 Blanchot, quoted in Venuti 1995, 307. The translation is by Richard Sieburth. Blanchot’s text in French is collected in his book *L’amitié*: “[Il] [le traducteur] est le maître secret de la différence des langues, non pas pour l’abolir, mais pour l’utiliser, afin d’éveiller, dans la sienne, par les changements violents ou subtils qu’il lui apporte, une présence de ce qu’il y a de différent, originellement, dans l’original.” (Blanchot 1971, 71)
In his *Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry*, Ming Xie makes numerous parallel readings of English-language renderings of Chinese poetry both before and after *Cathay*, an effort that is certainly worthwhile. A comparison between the aforementioned British sinologist Herbert Giles’s version of a Chinese poem and Pound’s version of the same, composed before Pound had become acquainted with the Fenollosa notebooks, attests to considerable differences in stylistic register.92 This is Giles’s version, from 1901:

In sound of rustling silk is stilled,
With dust the marble courtyard filled;
No footfalls echo on the floor,
Fallen leaves in heaps block up the door….
For she, my pride, my lovely one, is lost,
And I am left, in hopeless anguish tossed. (quoted in Xie 1999, 55)

This is Pound’s version, titled “Liu Ch’e”:

The rustling of the silk is discontinued,
Dust drifts over the court-yard,
There is no sound of foot-fall, and the leaves
Scurry into heaps and lie still,
And she the rejoicer of the heart is beneath them:

A wet leaf that clings to the threshold. (quoted in Xie 1999, 56)

Not only does Pound’s version depart from the unfashionable insistence on rhymed couplets in Giles’s translation, he also detaches the last line and makes it, as Xie observes, an “almost entirely autonomous image” that is “purely Pound’s addition”. Xie goes on to say:

Pound has substituted what is only a vaguely abstract naming of emotion (“hopeless anguish”) with his concrete image (“A wet leaf that clings to the threshold”), thus transferring the emotion onto and into the scene of that emotion itself. (Xie 1999, 56)

92 Not only Xie, but also Hugh Kenner in *The Pound Era* juxtaposes these two poems (Kenner 1971, 196).
This makes clear not only that Pound was ready to make substantive changes to the existing version he used as his starting point, but also that there is a gulf separating the existing English versions of Chinese poetry from those he was about to conceive.

2.14. Pound’s early style and the idiom of Cathay

Even if the twenty-nine-year-old Pound based himself on the (more or less) mistaken hints to be found in Fenollosa’s *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, this does not mean that he was not able to achieve something by using Fenollosa’s essay as his guide: It made him able to wrestle out a form of English seldom if ever seen before. Pound’s friend Ford Madox Hueffer (later known as Ford Madox Ford) simply commented, as to *Cathay*: “If these were original verses, then, Pound was the greatest poet of the day.” (Hueffer, quoted in Qian 2010, 337) This is the same Hueffer who in August 1911, when Pound had presented him with a copy of the newly published *Canzoni*, had “rolled on the floor, with his hands over his head”, apparently as a frustrated and/or parodical reaction to what Pound himself admits was the volume’s “jejune provincial effort to learn, mehercule, the stilted language that passed for ‘good English’ in the artistic milieu that held control of the respected British circles” at the time (*SP*, 462). Pound adds that “that roll saved me at least two years, perhaps more”, by sending him back “toward using the living tongue” (ibid.). This is admittedly written as late as in 1939, in Pound’s obituary to his friend, but seems in keeping with Pound’s attitude toward his own poetry and that of his contemporaries even at the time. Shortly after Hueffer’s roll, Pound repudiated what he referred to as the “corpse language” of Victorian poetry, including most of his own early poems (cf. Tiffany 1995, 20). We should make note of how strikingly this contrasts with Fenollosa’s idea that the Chinese written characters are, as it were, alive.

But now I am arguably comparing poetry translated into English with poetry written in English. Why? The claim could be made that to read *Cathay* as a work that negotiates between translation and poetic creation is merely to follow Pound’s lead, when he, in his book *Umbra* (1920), classified “The Seafarer” and “Exile’s Letter” (and *Cathay* in general) among his “Major Personae”, together with “Homage to Sextus Propertius”, whereas his versions of Cavalcanti and Provençal poets like Arnaut Daniel were labeled “Etudes”. While these *études* were, as David Anderson says, “study guides to foreign text” (Anderson, quoted in Venuti 1995, 191), Pound must have wanted *Cathay*, as Lawrence Venuti puts it, “to be judged according to the same standards as his ‘original writing’” (Venuti 1995, 191). Taking my cue from this idea of comparing *Cathay* and Pound’s “original writing”, I find that there are some striking observations to be made between Pound’s style in his early poetry and that which he developed when rendering the Chinese Classical poems.
Where Pound’s early collections of poetry abound in archaisms such as “doth”, “hath” and “thou” – or, to quote Thomas F. Grieve’s example, “Me seemeth some-wise thy hair wandereth” (Grieve 1997, 38) – such forms are strikingly absent when he translates Classical Chinese poetry. Here the difference between archaist and concordant choices in translation become particularly relevant: The fact that Pound omitted these kinds of archaisms in the Chinese poems he translated for *Cathay* does not mean that there are not interesting examples of concordant choices to be found in these poems. In his translations of the Chinese poems in *Cathay*, Pound begins to actively utilize poetical potential of linguistic relativism, and thereby of the resources involved in concordant translation. This, in turn, had much to do with his becoming acquainted with the theories of Fenollosa.

When translating the Chinese poems of *Cathay*, Pound laid off the archaisms that had been prominent even in his own early poetry and instead rendered the poems in free verse with relatively idiomatic English. Still there are some interesting concordant choices in these poems. These seem to stem from the crib of the Fenollosa notebooks. Following the word-for-word crib rather than the more extensive interpretations of the Chinese verses to be found in Fenollosa’s paraphrases, Pound achieved something as a translator. He found there a certain non-ornamental directness, as well as some characteristic ways of phrasing that he could adopt in order to let his language “be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue”, as Rudolf Pannwitz put it.

In part, the characteristics of Pound’s translations of Classical Chinese poems in *Cathay* were clearly influenced by Fenollosa’s postulates concerning the verbal character of Chinese written characters. These postulates seem to have led Pound to search for expressions of processual change, for images that illustrate flux. As such, *Cathay* is affiliated with the Vorticist distancing from the stillness of Cubist painting, seeking a more dynamic set of images. “Foreignization” in translation is in this case a symptom of deeper engagement with language, epistemology and poetics.

Having lauded Pound’s achievements as a translator, given the way he conducted a nearly total break with certain poetic conventions in English verse translations of Chinese verse, one might still question the more ideological implications of his translational practice: Is there a certain “Orientalism” at play? Does Pound as a single individual attempt to *colonize* the entire Chinese Classical tradition in poetry? Or is he attentive and receptive to cultural and linguistic difference? I take there to be a clear continuity between the young Pound’s stated cosmopolitanism and his undertaking in *Cathay*: He must at the very least have believed himself to be primarily a mediator of the original poems. According to Qian, he also succeeded in this: “*Cathay* is first and foremost a beautiful translation of excellent Chinese poems.” (Qian 1995, 65).
When it comes to the inclusion of “The Seafarer” in Cathay, however, things become more problematic. In his initial note to the collection, Pound stated that the poem “is of about” the eighth century of our era, the same time Rihaku flourished. Sieburth adds to this contemporaneity/synchrony that there are thematic similarities between the Old English poem and the Chinese ones (exile, solitude, etc.), but even that “there is a line structure in common” (Sieburth et al. 2015, 175). Sieburth here refers to a comment by Pound in ABC of Reading that he had once got a man to start translating “The Seafarer” into Chinese, and that “[i]t came out almost directly in Chinese verse, with two solid ideograms in each half line” (ABCR, 51). Still, Pound’s only explicit justification for including the Old English poem in Cathay is its contemporaneity with most of the Chinese poems in the book, a decision that may be seen in light of an earlier statement by Pound:

> All ages are contemporaneous. It is B. C., let us say, in Morocco. The Middle Ages are in Russia. The future stirs already in the minds of the few. This is especially true of literature, where the real time is independent of the apparent. (SR, 8)

This conflation of all cultures into one development scheme does not exactly smack of sensitivity to the particularities of individual cultures and their respective trajectories. And for all his poetic sensitivity, Pound’s ideas of Chinese and literature were arguably also quite schematic: He was early on deeply taken with Chinese poetry, but remaining concerned with the historical expressions of “mainstream Chinese culture” (cf. Qian 2017, 94), keeping modern China at a distance – until he, from 1954 onward, would become interested in the Naxi people, the language of which is referred to by Zhaoming Qian as a “surviving pictographic language” (ibid., 17). I will discuss Pound’s perspective on imperial China to a greater extent in chapter 3. For now, I suggest we note that Pound’s cosmopolitanism remained with him as long as he related to a culture such as the Chinese, but not when it came to the cultures of the “savages”, as he expressed it (cf. what I said about Pound and anthropology in chapter 1).

### 2.15. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the expatriate Pound himself deployed and endorsed the concept of cosmopolitanism. If not a Kantian geopolitical cosmopolitanism, Pound’s version certainly has affinities with a general idea of mankind’s common spiritual capacity. Furthermore, I have argued that Pound’s studies of Classical and Romance languages sparked in him an interest in what I have called, with reference to Remy de Gourmont, a literary cosmopolitanism: Pound not only deployed terms and expressions from these languages in his own poetry, he also strove to imitate various metrical forms, genres and motifs from ancient and medieval literary traditions. His involvement
with these traditions was not solely backward-looking; on the contrary, Pound’s engagement with them was crucial for him in his project to renew the English-language poetry of the twentieth century, expanding its register both when it comes to *melopoeia*, *logopoeia* and *phanopoeia*.

At one point, I asked whether one can be a cosmopolitan and a literary relativist at the same time. Pound, I argue, exemplifies that one can. Even if Pound presupposed that languages vary considerably in their lexicon, their grammar and the specific kinds of thought they tend to privilege, he took this not as an incentive to stick to his own primary language, but instead as a challenge: By expanding one’s own lexicon and by practicing ancient and/or foreign traditional forms, one also opens up for an expansion of one’s own thinking. This means emphasizing an understanding of cosmopolitanism that is open for other rationalities, that is, for a radical alterity in ways of life and ways of thinking. His combining such a cosmopolitanism with a linguistic relativism is, I claim, a key to Pound’s translations of Classical Chinese poems in *Cathay*: Pound used the (more or less mistaken) statements on the characteristics of Chinese language made by Fenollosa as a tool to navigate in the, for him, unknown realm of Chinese poetry. By privileging forms that indicate *process*, Pound tried to capture what Fenollosa had intimated concerning the *verbal* nature of Chinese written characters. This was not only a question of poetic form, but of trying to expose oneself for a view of the world that was fresher and less stiff than the contemporary Western one.

Pound’s fascination with Chinese civilization never withered. This could lead one to conclude that he remained in the orbit of his youthful cosmopolitanism. In the upcoming chapter, however, I will argue that the question is complicated by Pound’s later political and economic thinking. Although open to the alterity of Ancient Chinese language, literature and society, Pound was profoundly committed to a Fascist and totalitarian view of society that is hard to square with an all-out cosmopolitan outlook.
Chapter 3. Pound’s documentary poetics and Fascist politics

Having shown how Pound in his early poetry delved into foreign languages and traditions to enrich English-language poetry both lexically and formally, I will devote this chapter to an investigation of his multilingual poetics from the 1920s onward. From this point in time, Pound begins to devote his poetry to historiographical work. This shift in attention also represents a development of his multilingual poetics: Now his poetry emerges as not only formally influenced by literary traditions and equipped with intertextual allusions and individual terms from languages other than English, that is, characterized by literary cosmopolitanism and linguistic anti-purism, but in addition as saturated by often lengthy direct quotations of written source material. This source material is often strikingly unpoetic when compared to the reigning poetic conventions at the time. In what has been called a documentary poetics, Pound actively seeks out nonliterary texts and includes them in his poetry like collage elements, notably in the Malatesta Cantos (Cantos 8–11).

A central question in this chapter is how one can understand the relation between Pound’s documentary poetics and his Fascist and anti-Semitic convictions. In the fourteen years since Pound stopped working on the Malatesta Cantos in 1923 and began to compose the so-called Chinese History Cantos (Cantos 52–61) in 1937, he continued to base his poetry on paraphrases and quotations from written sources. The main source for the Chinese History Cantos is an eighteenth-century French translation and emendation of a Chinese work of history. In Canto 60 (included in Appendix) Pound not only follows his source but also presents his own highly politicized view of history. This again is relevant to our understanding of Pound’s multilingual poetics: The canto in question is largely monolingual, but the predominantly English text concludes by including the Chinese characters 正名, or zhengming. These characters represent the Confucian concept often referred to in English as “the Rectification of Names”, a linguistic-political ideal that had become of huge importance for Pound. My investigation will suggest that the concept of zhengming is not only relevant to the emperor Kangxi, portrayed in Canto 60 as an ideal ruler whose policies are specifically linked to this concept, but that it can shed light even on Mussolini and his Fascist policies as endorsed by Pound, particularly as concerns the issues of censorship, free speech and Pound’s own broadcasts for Radio Rome during World War II.

In Canto 60, Pound portrays the Chinese Empire of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as free of usury, and the Western Jesuit missionaries there as benevolent explorers. In the fragment “Addendum for C” (included in Appendix), written a few years after Canto 60, this historical era has seemingly given way to an era of Western usury, as exemplified in the opium trade and the Opium Wars of the nineteenth century. “Addendum for C” explicitly links this era to the Hebrew term for usury, neschek (in Pound’s spelling), put up against the Classical Greek concept of beauty,
tò kalón. Where Pound’s earlier deployment of foreign language terms often functioned as challenges to the reader – as stimuli to acquire not only a broader conceptual palette but also to ponder the possible pitfalls of facile ideas about translation – they now seem to gain a dubious political relevance. “Addendum for C” marks a development in Pound’s multilingual poetics, approaching the anti-Semitic propaganda of Pound’s radio broadcasts, contemporary with the composition of this fragment. What this suggests is that a multilingual poetics may well be not only cosmopolitan, but linked to ethnicist ideas of linguistic difference as well.

3.1. Malatesta and/or Mussolini

The Malatesta Cantos (Cantos 8–11) were written over a period of ten months, from June 1922 to April 1923, and published in the fourth issue of T. S. Eliot’s journal The Criterion in July 1923. Later, these cantos were published as parts of the books A Draft of XVI Cantos (1925) and A Draft of XXX Cantos (1930) – this indicates that the key word here may indeed be “draft”: The Malatesta Cantos constitute a call to enhance the necessarily limited investigation begun by the poet, and as such constitute an exemplary investigation into any historical character or any historical era. The apparent main subject matter of these cantos is, however, quite specific: They speak of the times and the character of the Italian condottiere, or military leader, Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta (1417–68), who reigned in Rimini, Fano and Cesena. As a professional military man, it should be mentioned, Sigismondo (also spelled “Sigismundo” by Pound and others) at one time or another served most of the major Italian city-states.

The cantos devoted to him bear out that Malatesta was characterized not solely by lust for money and power but also by a passion for art. He is presented as a patron of the arts, but even more importantly, he is presented as himself being an artist, much like Benito Mussolini later was to be conceived by Pound. In his pamphlet Jefferson and/or Mussolini (written 1933, published 1935), Pound made this point explicit: “Take him [Mussolini] as anything save the artist and you will get muddled in contradictions.” (J/M, 33–34) Robert Casillo claims that this idea of Mussolini as “a willful political artist” probably “derives ultimately from his [Pound’s] misreading of Jacob Burckhardt’s The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy”, where Burckhardt describes the Renaissance state as a “work of art” – the misreading in question being that Pound “took the phrase literally” (Casillo 1998, 109).

The later parts of this chapter will largely discuss the relation between Pound’s poetics and his politics. I will anticipate this discussion here by pointing to the possible parallel between Malatesta and Mussolini. I should remind the reader that Mussolini’s so-called March on Rome took place in October 1922, that is, while Pound was working on the Malatesta sequence. In his 2013 study Ezra Pound’s Fascist Propaganda, 1935–45, Matthew Feldman says that “Pound’s
research on Sigismondo in the Rimini archives in Spring 1923 […] marked his first real engagement with Italian Fascism” (Feldman 2013, 12). In Rimini, Pound had planned on seeing the manuscripts of Gaspare Broglio di Tartaglia da Lavello, referred to by Pound simply as Broglio, who had worked as a political advisor to and ambassador for Sigismondo and written a work called *Cronaca Universale*, sometimes referred to simply as *Cronaca malatestiana*. The manuscripts were located at Rimini’s Biblioteca Gambalunga, but since the town librarian was home ill with the flu, Pound found the building closed. A week later he experienced the same thing, but then his hotel keeper, Averardo Marchetti, came to his aid. Marchetti, who was co-founder of the Fascio Riminese that had brought down Rimini’s socialist administration, complained on Pound’s behalf to the town’s Fascist comandante, who insisted that the librarian come and open the library – this is the comandante referred to as “the commandante della piazza” in Canto 16. Pound was so impressed by this that he praised the comandante’s “sense of responsibility”, his ability to “cut the red tape” of bureaucracy, and not least his “devotion” to the “regenerated Italy” (Pound, quoted in Feldman 2013, 12).

While researching Malatesta, Pound also consulted a biography of him by Italian journalist Antonio Beltramelli, written in 1912. Beltramelli had by the time of Pound’s research become a devoted Fascist, and in 1923 he authored a biography of Mussolini called *L’Uomo nuovo* (The new man), which Pound also read. In the latter book, Beltramelli explicitly suggested that Malatesta was Mussolini’s forerunner, pointing out that both hailed from the village of Romagna (cf. Feldman 2013, 13), just as Beltramelli himself (cf. Chapman 2011, 545).

Lawrence S. Rainey has argued that Pound was drawing parallels between Malatesta and Mussolini as early as when working on the Malatesta Cantos. According to Rainey, Pound saw Sigismondo as “a new man” with a “restless individuality and unbridled will” who would “address the endemic crisis that was gripping liberal bourgeois culture” (Rainey, quoted in Feldman 2013, 12), much like Mussolini. Chris Chapman makes an entirely different argument, namely, that “Pound was never enamoured of Sigismundo Malatesta” (Chapman 2011, 55); at the very least, Chapman’s argues, Pound’s interest in Malatesta was always split between “admiration of his talents as a fierce leader and his role in preserving and supporting the humanities” (ibid., 556). What is certain, as noted by Feldman, is that Pound himself, in an article published in *The Criterion* in July 1933, pointed out the possible parallel between Mussolini and Malatesta (cf. Feldman 2013, 19).

Pound’s longtime publisher James Laughlin arguably went even further than Rainey, not only indicating that Pound saw a new Malatesta in Mussolini, but that his infatuation with the latter stemmed from his admiration for the former:
One of my theories about his fascism […] is that Pound identified Mussolini with one of his great heroes of the Renaissance, Sigismondo Malatesta of Rimini, to whom Cantos 8–11 are devoted. Sigismondo was not only a great warrior but a patron of artists and humanistic learning. Is it not possible that Pound imagined that he could persuade Mussolini to grant state patronage to writers and artists? Unfortunately, the only borsa that Mussolini gave was to Pirandello, who was a fascist. (Laughlin 1987, 20)

It is quite likely, as Laughlin suggests, that Pound saw in Mussolini a possible patron of arts. Laughlin is arguably also simplifying things when he claims that Mussolini only granted patronage to Pirandello. In fact, as Catherine E. Paul states in her study of Pound’s prose writings from the 1930s, Fascist Directive (2016), “the Fascist regime sponsored numerous art prizes and offered arts patronage to employ modernist artists in building a Fascist infrastructure” (Paul 2016, 99). She adds that for Pound “this Fascist practice embodied his vision of how state-sponsored arts patronage could make and sustain a rich artistic culture” (ibid.). This is an important indication of how Pound saw a totalitarian state project not as limiting artistic freedom, but instead facilitating artistic expression, an idea that was only to become more and more important to him up through the 1930s.

It should be underscored that Pound was not actively endorsing Mussolini in 1923, when the Malatesta Cantos were published. Pound’s Fascist sympathies were in fact not clearly expressed until the 1930s, when his politics arguably began influencing his poetry much more strongly. In the Malatesta Cantos, it is aesthetic concerns that remain Pound’s primary focus, although these aesthetic concerns of course have political and historiographical implications. What is particularly interesting in the context of this dissertation is how the Malatesta Cantos represent a development of Pound’s multilingual poetics. Before addressing this issue, I should place these cantos among The Cantos as such.

3.2. Placing the Malatesta Cantos (1923) among The Cantos

In his book on the Malatesta Cantos, Ezra Pound and the Monument of Culture (1991), Rainey observes that there has gradually evolved a substantial consensus among commentators on The Cantos, namely, that the “decisive event” in the formation of the entire work occurred when Pound composed these four cantos (cf. Rainey 1991, 4). The four Malatesta Cantos stand out in comparison with the prior seven cantos, which are full of literary and mythological references. In Canto 1, Pound for the most part translates Andreas Divus’s Renaissance Latin translation of Odysseus’s conversation with the dead in book 11 of the Odyssey into English, using Anglo-Saxon rhythms, in what has been referred to as “a modernist palimpsest” (Rabaté 2018 [2016], 113).
introduces the motif of metamorphosis,\textsuperscript{93} which can be said to tie together the whole string of Cantos 2–7; the motif of metamorphosis may even be said to characterize The Cantos as a whole, but I will suggest that there is something about the Malatesta Cantos that is \textit{not} about metamorphosis, but rather about \textit{preservation} – of languages, discourses and forms of textual transmission.

Already a canto such as Canto 5 may be said to have approached both a similar subject matter and a related narrative technique as those of the Malatesta Cantos, but there are also some important differences between these cantos. Canto 5, says Ira B. Nadel, “enters history with the anxieties and uncertainties of events, while elaborating voices other than the poet’s” (Nadel 2004, 99). Among other textual sources, Pound here deploys the Renaissance historian Benedetto Varchi (1503–65). Pound admired Varchi for his “impartiality” (cf. Albright 1999, 68), but in his own rendering of the events narrated he does not seek a conventionally impartial voice, but rather musters all his poetic bravura, as witnesses in this passage pertaining to the murder of Giovanni Borgia on 14 June 1497:

\begin{verbatim}
John Borgia is bathed at last. (Clock-tick pierces the vision)
Tiber, dark with the cloak, wet cat gleaming in patches.
Click of the hooves, through garbage,
Clutching the greasy stone. “And the cloak floated”
Slander is up betimes. (C, 5/18–19)
\end{verbatim}

The surreptitious manner of relating this murder (“is bathed”), the innuendo, is here coupled with strong invitations to visualize the river Tiber with Borgia’s cloak floating on it, and to imagine the cat gleaming and the “[c]lick of the hooves” on the “greasy stone” – it is a passage dense with sense impressions. This poetic bravura is often suspended in the Malatesta Cantos, where a more sober tone breaks through, as here in the seven concluding lines of Canto 8:

\begin{verbatim}
And he was twelve at the time, Sigismundo,
And no dues had been paid for three years,
And his elder brother gone pious;
And that year they fought in the streets,
And that year he got out to Cesena
And brought back the levies,
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{93} The second canto is largely written in imitation of Ovid and his translator Arthur Golding, whose \textit{Metamorphoses} (1567) Pound would later refer to as “the most beautiful book in the [English] language” (\textit{ABCR}, 127).
And that year he crossed by night over Foglia, and … (C, 8/33)

The anaphoric use of the word “and” suggests that Pound here consciously lets his poetry approach the paratactical stylistic register of annals and chronicles, no longer presenting a drama for the senses of the reader, but rather meticulously enumerating a set of historical facts. We happen to know that Pound had done intensive research into Sigismondo’s life and times. Touring libraries in Paris, Rome, Milan, Florence, Bologna, Venice and the smaller municipalities of Modena, Ravenna, Cesena, Rimini, Pesaro, Fano and Pennabilli, Pound gathered more than 700 pages of notes that eventually worked as the basis for the Malatesta Cantos – the earliest of these notes date from June 1922, the latest from April 1923. Rainey writes that researching the subject and revising his drafts would consume Pound’s attention for the entire span of these ten months.

3.3. Preservation of languages and discourses in the Malatesta Cantos

Among the things that impressed Pound about Sigismondo was that he initiated the reconstruction of the church of San Francesco in Rimini, the so-called Tempio Malatestiano, believed at the time of composition of the Malatesta Cantos to be in honor of his beloved mistress (and later third wife) Isotta degli Atti, as elliptically related toward the end of Canto 9, in a passage that, characteristically for these cantos, mixes Latin, Italian and English, primarily quoting, translating and paraphrasing original manuscripts dating from the time of Sigismondo, but also interpolating three words from a Horatian ode, constans in proposito (“Constant in purpose”), that will be echoed in Canto 34 (there deployed to describe John Quincy Adams):

“et amava perditamente Isotta degli Atti”
e “ne fu degna”
“constans in proposito
“Placuit oculis principis
“pulchra aspectu”
“populo grata (Italiaeque decus)
“and built a temple so full of pagan works”
i. e. Sigismund
and in the style “Past ruin’d Latium” (C, 9/41)

In his A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound Carroll F. Terrell translates the first lines as follows: “And he loved Isotta degli Atti to distraction / and she was worthy of it / constant in purpose / She delighted the eye of the prince / lovely to look at / pleasing to the people (and the ornament
of Italy)” (Terrell 1993 [1980], 48). The passage continues in English, and we understand that not only did Malatesta erect a temple, albeit unfinished, he also filled it with “pagan [art]works”. This in turn was criticized by Pope Pius II (whose Commentaries is one of the sources from which Pound quotes here), something that probably just added to the heroic status Pound attributed to Sigismondo. “He, Sigismundo, templum aedificavit” (C, 8/32), he built a temple, it says toward the end of the first of the Malatesta Cantos, and he employed the greatest artists of his time to do so: not only Leon Battisti Alberti, who functioned as chief architect, but also Matteo da Pasti, Simone Ferruci and Agostino di Duccio (cf. Terrell 1993 [1980], 41), as well as – according to Pound – Giovanni Bellini (“Zuan Bellin”) and Pier della Francesca (cf. GK, 191).

Now let us take a closer look at the multilingual characteristics of this passage. In chapter 2, I commented on how Pound in his early work tends to use foreign language terms peritextually, that is, in the titles, subtitles and epigraphs to the poems rather than in their body text, and that this may be seen as Pound going only halfway toward a multilingual poetics. In the passage quoted, we can observe how the Malatesta Cantos represent something different: English is now just one of the languages of the body text of the poem. I intimated that the multilingualism of the Malatesta Cantos has something to do with preservation of languages and discourses. This idea of preservation relates to the point I made about the “Orbi Cantum Primum” fragment in chapter 2, which I claimed was untypical of Pound in that it represented a striving for hybridity. In that connection I quoted Michael Lee Warner, who says that The Cantos is a work that “does not seek a utopian reunification of language, but leaves languages as they are” (Warner 1986, xiv). This seems to me a key to the Malatesta Cantos: The different languages are not there to be mixed. The poet does not strive for any unification of them, nor does he seek any form of in-between compromise. Instead, the languages are juxtaposed, with the reader left to ponder their differences, as such creating a lesson in linguistic relativism.

In several instances in the Malatesta Cantos, the poet transcribes text directly from manuscript sources. According to Rainey, the inclusion of original language quotations of manuscripts functions as a guarantee of Pound having done “direct study of the texts themselves” (Rainey 1991, 69). Commenting on the lines of Canto 9 that I quoted in the beginning of this section, Rainey states: “Two are given in Italian, then four in Latin, suggesting the author’s familiarity with original sources, and thereby the veracity of his claims.” (ibid., 159–60) Rainey’s interpretation of Pound’s foreign language expressions used as quotations can be summed up as pointing to two slightly different forms of authenticity: in one sense, they represent a guarantee that the poet is a trustworthy scholar; in another sense, they produce the (more or less illusory) impression that there is something truthful about what the poet narrates. Anderson Araujo also refers to the inclusion in the Malatesta Cantos of the original languages of the source texts as a means “to give authenticity
“to the poem” (Araujo 2018, 104) “Authenticity” is the term employed by Ross Hair as well, when discussing the “multilingual montage of Canto XI” (Hair 2010, 62).

Given the largely similar claims made by these critics, it may come as a surprise that Rainey, in an article published some sixteen years after his book-length study of the Malatesta Cantos (Rainey 2007), returns to the question of Pound as manuscript scholar, but does not seem to comprehend the extent to which Pound wanted to reproduce the direct impression of studying the texts in manuscript form. Rainey alleges that Pound lacked training in paleography, “the study of ancient, medieval and Renaissance writing systems […] that is indispensable to anyone who wishes to work, as Pound did, with primary documents and sources” (Rainey 2007, 104; cf. similar claims in Bornstein 1981, 286). Pound was probably unversed in this discipline, but this does not make all of Rainey’s critical comments plausible. According to Rainey, Pound inadvertently reproduced the spelling of the manuscripts he consulted, as when he, in Canto 11, quoted the source as saying “grādment”, not the full version “grandement”. This is a puzzling conjecture on Rainey’s part: Such an emendation is not only a very basic part of any transcription of manuscripts, it is also completely logical for anyone with even a basic knowledge of Latin. The reason Pound did not write the word “grandement” out in full cannot be that he did not understand that this was what the scribe had intended. The reason must have been that he wanted to keep all his quotations as close to the original source as possible. This I take as part of Pound’s seeking a radical heterogeneity by using the “exhibition room” of poetry to present languages, discourses, linguistic forms and manuscript forms that had something unique about them. Poetry, contrary to propaganda, is – or should be – inimitable. This inimitability is at play also in Pound’s interest in deluxe editions of his cantos: As a matter of fact, the first three editions of The Cantos were such limited editions: A Draft of XVI Cantos (Paris: Three Mountains Press, 1925), A Draft of Cantos 17–27 (London: John Rodker, 1928) and A Draft of XXX Cantos (Paris: Hours Press, 1930). Vincent Sherry has even claimed that typographically the 1925 edition “mimics the architectural motifs of the Tempio” erected by Malatesta (Sherry, quoted in Hickman 2005, 122).

In his article “Bibliographic Technography: Ezra Pound’s Cantos as Philological Machine”, Mark Byron sees Pound’s magnum opus as “presenting the history of textual technologies as an ongoing poetic enterprise” (Byron 2016, 153). Commenting on the Chinese character that functions as a frontispiece or epigram for the Chinese History Cantos, Byron says that it “preserves the image and the memory of hand-written script in a mechanically produced volume” (ibid., 154). Byron also

94 In a short note he wrote in the 1950s, Pound explained that “I am a total dudd [sic] when it comes to deciphering any calligraphy later that [sic] 1487” (Pound, quoted in Saussy et al. 2009, 175). Even if we grant that Pound was not a perfect judge of his own capabilities, this suggests that he hardly could have been totally incapable of deciphering calligraphy stemming from before 1487. Rainey’s 2007 article seems to me to be an instance of overcritical commentary on Pound. Should we not, at the very least, appreciate that Pound did not want to overinterpret his sources, but instead leave the interpretation of them to his readers?
mentions Pound’s interest in early modern printing technologies, observing that the Venice-based printer Aldus Manutius appears “at pivotal points in *The Cantos*” (ibid., 158), and that Pound’s poem “emulates the physical properties of Aldine texts in the printed capitals of deluxe editions and in an ostentatious textual apparatus” (ibid., 163). It is precisely given the very graphic devices that constitute the visual impact of the pages of *The Cantos* that we get a sense of what Derrida was after when he referred to Pound’s (as well as Mallarmé’s) “irreducibly graphic poetics” (Derrida 1976, 92), as we saw in chapter 1.

In other words, these cantos incorporate not only different languages and different discourses, but different transcription methods. This, to my mind, is in part a way of preserving a variety of textual transmission techniques in the era of standardized typography and is as such also a way of expanding the traditional realms of poetry. Michael Kindellan relates from a private conversation with Pound’s daughter Mary de Rachewiltz that Pound “would have preferred to publish facsimiles of his notebooks rather than submit his writing to the more intrusive processes of mediation also known as print publication” (Kindellan 2020, 96). This piece of information, albeit anecdotal, indicates Pound’s will to preserve a traditional textual diversity that risks getting lost in the modern era of standardization. This again points to the sense of historicity that characterizes Pound’s intellectual horizon. It is precisely in the dynamic combination of grand historical subject matter and avant-garde poetical technique at the microlevel that the originality of the Malatesta Cantos lies.

3.4. Historical subject matter and poetical technique in the Malatesta Cantos

All modern editions of the Malatesta Cantos open with a line that plays on the line “These fragments I have shored against my ruins”, found toward the very end of the ultimate section of Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, which was published the year prior to them.95 This is a singular point in Eliot’s poem, where what is arguably a voice close to the poet’s own breaks through. The line is a key to the composition of Eliot’s poem, which integrates quotations from a wide variety of literary sources: These must be the fragments the poet has “shored against [his] ruins”. If we turn to Pound’s response to Eliot’s line, we see that he makes a slight adjustment: “These fragments you have shelved (shored)” (C, 8/28).96 Here, the addressee (“you”) must be taken to be Eliot. And while Eliot’s “I” had “shored” the fragments, this original wording is only kept in parenthesis in the canto, being

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95 Originally, though, when Pound’s four Malatesta Cantos appeared in *The Criterion* in July 1923, this opening allusion to *The Waste Land* was dropped, since Eliot had objected to it “strongly on tactical grounds” (Eliot, quoted in Moody 2014, 48). Pound chose, however, to reintegrate it in later editions.

96 As late as in Canto 110, Pound returned to this line of Eliot’s, now stating: “From time’s wreckage shored / these fragments shored against ruin”.

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replaced by the puzzling and arguably even dismissive “shelved”. According to Thomas McKeown, Pound chose to alter Eliot’s line

to emphasize that his fragments of Malatesta’s character are not shelved in testimony to the bleakness of a modern waste land, but rather shored up against the current of the time, just as despite the opposition of his society, Malatesta had been able to accomplish acts of creativity like the erection of the Tempio. (McKeown 1983, 232)

In a spirit not unlike McKeown’s, but more concerned with the poetic method and the with the imagined reader of The Waste Land and the Malatesta Cantos, Aaron Jaffe says:

Pound’s proposed revision of Eliot’s Waste Land line [...] suggests that the Eliotic citational method risks leading others to book shelves alone. When tradition serves merely as a display of erudition, it becomes but an expedient means of shoring up the damaged poetic self with shoddy literary-citational plaster. (Jaffe 2018, 53)

Jaffe’s point is useful to comprehend how Pound may have conceived of the differences between The Waste Land and his own poetical project in the Malatesta Cantos: Where Eliot had found fragments from literary sources, and subsequently put them in his more or less private bookshelves (he had “shelved” them), Pound sees himself as having discovered something that has to do not only with the literary or the mythological, but with history itself, even with plain Realpolitik. A further interpretation might suggest that, where Eliot saw the decay of Western civilization as a deep, almost irredeemable, tendency, Pound on his part had more pragmatic ideas about this supposed decay. Even if superficially agreeing with Eliot’s diagnosis, Pound seems to have thought that a singular individual with an intellectual or artistic vision, as well as political power, might be able to reverse this process of civilizational decay. Which in turn suggests that Sigismondo Malatesta in Pound’s perspective was a relevant example of a statesman, even for the modern age. That this was Pound’s attitude hardly becomes any less likely when we take into account his later fascination with Mussolini.

The second and third lines of the first Malatesta Canto introduces two Classical muses, namely, Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, and Clio or “Truth”, the muse of history:

“Slut!” “Bitch!” Truth and Calliope
Slanging each other sous les lauriers (C, 8/28)
The two muses “slang” each other “under the (French language) laurels”, that is, they move like vines under the poet’s crown – but they also, we can assume, call each other names in slang. Terrell sees the quarrel between Calliope and Truth as referring to “the persistent denigration that has followed Sigismundo for centuries, owing mainly to the campaign of character assassination initiated against him by Pius II in his Commentaries” (Terrell 1993 [1980], 37). This idea seems to lack a certain dialectic suppleness, since it puts Pound on the side of Truth, against Calliope and epic poetry, while Pound was concerned not only with truth, but also with telling an epic tale: Pound surely wanted to right what he conceived to be a false impression of Sigismondo handed down by historians, the way he later attempted to do for Mussolini, for example in the elliptical formulation of Canto 116: “Mus, wrecked for an error”. But Pound most certainly did not wish to do so solely by being historically accurate, but also by creating a “poem including history”, as Pound himself defined the epic (LE, 86). Araujo’s exegesis seems more to the point: “To Clio, Calliope is a ‘Slut’ because she does not adhere to strict truth, while Clio is a ‘Bitch’ in Calliope’s eyes because she complains of any deviation from strict historical accuracy.” (Araujo 2018, 96) The quarrel between the two muses indicates a central tension in these cantos, between being a historian and an artist.

In a 2018 article on Canto 11, Ronald Bush says that there “[s]till exists no consensus about whether to understand the Malatesta Cantos primarily as science or art” (Bush 2018, 109), referring specifically to “the vehement exchange” between Lawrence Rainey and Marjorie Perloff. Perloff had stated that “if you were to read the Malatesta Cantos for their thematic interest, your patience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself” (Perloff 1981, 181); instead, Perloff suggests, their interest lies in how “history becomes the impetus for the play of language” (ibid., 189). Rainey attacks Perloff as well as other Poundian critics for being too occupied with formal issues of poetics at the expense of the subject matter of The Cantos: “Pound, it is clear, was far more eager to address the issue of subject matter and contents than his critics have been.” (Rainey 1991, 70). May the right angle to approach the Malatesta Cantos be found somewhere in between these positions?

Pound was undeniably very concerned with the subject matter of the Malatesta Cantos. These cantos do tell a story about the protagonist’s life and achievements, and ultimate downfall, but it is a twisted story, clearly an instance of what Luke McMullan (2019) calls Pound’s Counter-Philology, in short his idea that philology is much too important to be left to philologers and should instead be practiced by artists. In this sense, the Malatesta Cantos are heirs to Pound’s thinking about the Luminous Detail ten years prior to the Malatesta sequence. On 30 November 1911, Pound began publishing a series of twelve articles under the common title “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris” in the review The New Age. In this series, Pound launched the method he named Luminous Detail as an ideal in scholarship, as a contrast to the method he claimed was the prevailing one, that of
multitudinous detail. Here, Pound’s critical attitude toward a certain form of philology shows itself in full bloom. Pound wants scholarship, but he wants artistic scholarship, that is, scholarship done by the actual artist, who is not out to bring any complete picture full of meticulously collected data, but instead find the exact poem or artwork able to make the audience appreciate an artist or even an entire artistic epoch. This is, we understand, not done by any sort of prosy introduction, but by locating and simply presenting the detail: “The artist seeks out the luminous detail and presents it. He does not comment.” (SP, 23) When he says that the luminous details “govern knowledge as the switchboard the electric circuit” (SP, 23), we can see Pound, as often, playing on the parallel between modern art and modern science.97 In the fourth installment of the article series, Pound wrote: “What I must now do – as the scholar – in pursuance of my announced ‘method’ is to justify my use of Arnaut’s work as a strategic position, as ‘luminous detail.’” (SP, 26) In fact, most of the rest of the series was devoted to Pound’s work on Arnaut. Ten years later, Sigismondo Malatesta himself has the function of a luminous detail, that is, he stands as a prime exponent of the ethos of an entire historical era. Malatesta is presented for the reader as the ideal example of the new, secular, self-conscious, powerful and art-loving man of the Renaissance. He was, as Ronald Bush says, “a true Renaissance man” (Bush 2018, 119), or in the words of Araujo, an “out-and-out Renaissance man” (Araujo 2018, 99). By selecting him as a focal point, the artist rivals the historian not in the amount of data, but in the quality of the data.

Stating that the Malatesta sequence is yet another example of Counter-Philology and Luminous Detail might give the impression that little has happened to Pound’s poetical practice in the decade leading up to the composition of the Malatesta Cantos. Such an assessment would certainly be misleading, for these cantos are rightly said to herald new-found poetical techniques, such as the mixing not only of different languages, but also of different genres and discourses.

3.5. Mixing of languages, genres and discourses in the Malatesta Cantos
It is a key point that Pound actively imports not only different languages but different discourses into the Malatesta Cantos: The repetitive style of chronicles coupled with bureaucratic Latin interspersed with a quotation from the Horatian ode, for example, radically stretches the extent of what poetry at the time was taken to be able to include. If the novel had begun to be rumored to be almost all-encompassing, Pound now expanded poetry to be able to encompass just as diverse sets of materials, if not more diverse. In his article “Epic and Novel”, Russian literary theoretician Mikhail Bakhtin claims that “the novel is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet

97 “Certain poets, especially Pound, aspired to a genuinely quantum-mechanical view of the poetic act, as if poetry and physics were the same thing”, says Daniel Albright in his Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism (Albright 1997, 2).
The Malatesta Cantos were signs that even poetry as a genre was “uncompleted”, or, to put it in terms probably more Bakhtinian, that these cantos themselves were novelistic. The copresence of multiple discourses charges the Malatesta Cantos with semantic collisions between the poetic and the unpoetic, between the old and the new, between the archival researcher and the avantgarde poet. In this way Pound highlights how historiography is not only a neutral transmission of what is to be found in historical sources, but necessarily a set of interpretative and creative acts of selecting, combining and presenting source material. In trying to bring a fresh view of Sigismondo Malatesta to his readers, Pound engages his poetry in a form of historiographical work; poetry’s role seems to be to open history up before it becomes sedimented as “History”. At the same time, the juxtaposition of different languages in these cantos can be viewed as a means of pondering the issues of linguistic relativism, putting weight on the considerable historical and interlinguistic differences to be reckoned with when one deals with historical textual sources, as well as the intralinguistic differences such as those between different discourses.

The multilingual poetics of the Malatesta Cantos is characterized not only by actual quotations of the original Latin or Italian of the documents Pound had consulted in his research, but by the striking copresence of literary and nonliterary discourses. The cantos are radical in their genre-mixing. These cantos may be called “prosimetric”, that is, they have the character of prosimetron, the genre that combines poetry and prose. More specifically, they are poetry incorporating what Rainey calls “aggressively quotidian and antiliterary” prose, something that constitutes a radical break with the expectations the reader would have to something called a “canto”:

The source texts are aggressively quotidian and antiliterary, invoking materials so alien to conventional notions of the “poetic” as to reconstitute the boundaries of subject matter acceptable in poetic discourse. Moreover, they are presented without ragged right margins, miming the graphic characteristics of prose as if to emphasize their departure from poetic form. (Rainey 1991, 58)

It is not entirely accurate that all the source text in the Malatesta Cantos are presented without ragged margins. But in Canto 10, one finds a long prose passage in Latin, which is presented without such margins. This is the most extensive single foreign language quotation not only in the Malatesta Cantos, but in The Cantos as a whole. The capitalized passage includes “SIGISMUNDUS HIC EGO SUM” – “SIGISMONDO HERE I AM” – which might seem to stand out as example of Sigismondo’s self-conscious attitude, but in fact points to the striking likeness between Sigismondo
and the effigy of him that was burned by the Pope on the auto-da-fé of which the passage treats.\footnote{This effigy being in fact the second effigy, the first one “not having shown a sufficient resemblance” (Terrell 1993 [1980], 52).}

This is the passage in question:

\begin{verbatim}
INTEREA PRO GRADIBUS BASILICAE S. PIETRI EX ARIDA MATERIA
INGENS PYRA EXTRUITUR IN CUJUS SUMMITATE IMAGO SIGIS-MUNDI
COLLOCATUR HOMINIS LINEAMENTA, ET VESTIMENTI MODUS ADEO
PROPIE REDDENS, UT VERA MAGIS PERSONA, QUAM IMAGO
VIDERETUR; NE QUEM TAMEN IMAGO FALLERET, ET SCRIPTURA EX
ORE PRODIIT, QUAE DICERET:

SIGISMUNDUS HIC EGO SUM
MALATESTA, FILIUS PANDULPHI, REX PRODITORUM,
DEO ATQUE HOMINBUS INFESTUS, SACRI CENSURA SENATUS IGNI
DAMNATUS;

SCRIPTURAM
MULTI Legerunt. DEINDE ASTANTE POPULO, IGNE IMMISSO, ET PYRA
SIMULACRUM REPENTE FLAGRAVIT.

Yriarte, p. 288. (C, 10/43–44)\footnote{This is the translation offered by Terrell, made by Florence A. Gragg: “Meantime in front of the steps of St. Peter’s there was built a great pyre of dry wood, on top of which was placed an effigy of Sigismondo imitating the [wicked and accursed] man’s features and dressed so exactly that it seemed a real person rather than an image. But that no one should make any mistake about it, an inscription issued from the figure’s mouth, which read: SIGISMUNDO MALATESTA, SON OF PANDOLFO, KING OF TRAITORS, HATED OF GOD AND MAN, CONDEMNED TO THE FLAMES BY VOTE OF THE HOLY SENATE. This writing was read by many. Then, while the populace stood by, fire was applied to the pyre and the image, which at once blazed up.” (Terrell 1993 [1980], 52).}
\end{verbatim}

The ultimate “\textit{Com. Pio II, Liv. VII, p. 85.” and “Yriarte, p. 288.” are page references to Pound’s sources for the passage: the aforementioned \textit{Commentaries} of Pope Pius II, and an 1882 book on Sigismondo Malatesta titled \textit{Un Condottiere au XVe siècle} by the French journalist and art historian Charles Yriarte (1832–98). Yriarte’s book included a large appendix consisting of documentary transcriptions, such as the \textit{Commentaries}, and Pound used this secondary source “as a guide to the primary sources” (Bornstein 1981, 284). According to Rainey, it was Pound’s reading of this appendix in late 1922 that would spark his first attempts to reproduce “historical” quotations rendered with the graphic conventions of prose (cf. Rainey 1991, 65–66).

The bulk of foreign language snippets to be found in the Malatesta Cantos stem from manuscripts and letters from the time of Sigismondo Malatesta, but for example in Canto 9 one also
encounters a Homeric expression such as “POLUMETIS”, that is, “many-minded”: Homer’s epithet for Odysseus here becomes an epithet for Sigismondo, as it ten years later will later be used by Pound as an epithet for Thomas Jefferson (J/M, 89). In this case, Pound seemingly deploys Greek language to try to associate different historical eras, separated by vast stretches of time, but nevertheless combined in the poem. I will, however, suggest a further interpretation: The inclusion of the Greek expression, although in Latin letters, is a clear instance of an unwillingness on the poet’s part to translate. Not only does this indicate that we might have to do with a somewhat “untranslatable” concept, there is also a particular aesthetic effect involved here, as if the Ancient Greek expression “POLUMETIS” charges the poetry with a certain dynamic energy. These observations are hardly only relevant to this specific expression, though. Not only does the inclusion of a foreign language energize the seemingly hyperformal passages in English, they also signal to the reader that so-called code switching is needed in order to approach the poems: In the case of the foreign languages, English language would be the unmarked or expected code and the foreign language passages or terms the marked or unexpected code; as such, the newfound technique represents a break in Pound’s use of foreign languages in his poems, implying not an enlargement of English as such, but instead signaling the importance of switching between different codes. This does not mean that these non-English languages are to be studied – it is not at all obvious that they are there to be interpreted in the sense of being translated by the reader. On the contrary, they may as well be read as elements that insist on the importance of non-translation, stressing that the strangeness of foreign languages is not to be overcome. Such an insistence would be in tune with Pound’s linguistic relativism. English language is not enough, it is intimated, if one is to grasp what is at stake in the poet’s treatment of for example the Italian Renaissance in the Malatesta Cantos.

To put it another way: What is the reader supposed to understand when confronted by the foreign language sections or words of The Cantos? Is this Pound trying to be pedagogical, trying to teach the reader the actual foreign languages or words therefrom? It would be tempting to see it the other way around, that is, to see the use of foreign language passages and expressions as dismissals of the reader who does not already know these languages. In other words, as Massimo Bacigalupo says, “the reader of The Cantos is expected to be equipped with Pound’s own knowledge, no more and no less” (Bacigalupo 2020, 188). If this may seem like a solipsistic premise, I must insist that the Malatesta Cantos is not in any way trying to woo the reader. Still, they have obviously had their attraction for many readers. This has not only to do with the way Pound treats historical subject matter in a poetic manner. My clam is that this poetic manner is characterized by juxtaposition of languages, genres and discourses. This is what makes these cantos an innovation in his multilingual poetics.
It is worth remarking on the striking tension between Pound’s multilingual poetics in the Malatesta Cantos on the one hand, and his allegiance to a totalitarian project on the other. How does the heterogeneity of languages and techniques of textual transfer in Pound’s poetry square with a project that arguably tries to make society more homogeneous, hierarchical and streamlined? Although this paradox remains difficultly reconcilable, I will make three points that may aid our understanding somewhat:

First of all, there is a tendency that as Pound grew more infatuated with Fascism, his language and poetic technique also simplified to a degree. According to Catherine Paul, Pound “loved Mussolini’s rhetorical simplicity” (Paul 2016, 96), and, as I will demonstrate in my analysis of Canto 60, written toward the end of the 1930s, Pound both endorsed such a simplifying language policy and arguably himself made efforts at practicing it at the time.

Second, Pound saw in Mussolini not only an artist, but an artifex, a Latin word he uses in Jefferson and/or Mussolini and that combines the senses of artist, builder, sculptor and poet. Using the term in reference to Mussolini was not something invented by Pound; as Catherine Paul says, the Italian version of the term, artifice, was on the contrary “a significant part of Fascist ideology” (Paul 2016, 136). Pound also compared Mussolini to Constantin Brâncuși (J/M, ix) and as such, suggests Paul, made him not only a sculptor but a modernist. In this context, it is interesting that Miranda B. Hickman claims that the physical characteristics of the Pound books published in the 1920s and 1930s “tellingly document [Pound’s] philosophical and ideological allegiances of the time” (Hickman 2005, 99). As we have seen, in the 1920s Pound sought limited editions with “inimitable” fonts. By the beginning of the 1930s, however, Pound turned toward simpler formats, no longer publishing deluxe editions, but plain trade editions through commercial firms such as Faber and Faber and Rinehart, that is, says Hickman, “he began to modify his notion of streamlining” and now had a “desire to mimic […] the streamlined designs associated with Mussolini’s regime” (Hickman 2005, 124).

Third, unlike the regime of Nazi Germany, the Italian Fascist regime did not launch any purist policy against any Entartete Kunst, but instead employed avant-garde artists in a series of exhibitions, among which the first was the Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista (“Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution”), which opened at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome on 29 October 1932. Pound was among the over 3.8 million people who saw the exhibition in the two years it stood, and

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100 Even if one may argue, as does Paul Morrison, that Fascist Italy was not totalitarian, although the Fascist intellectual Giovanni Gentile launched the term totalitarian to characterize the ambitions of the Fascist regime (cf. Morrison 1996, 6), this does not mean that Pound was not drawn to totalitarianism: He explicitly used the term totalitarian at repeated instances (for example GK, 32 and 167). In other words: If Fascist Italy was not totalitarian, then Pound probably saw this as a temporary weakness to be remedied.
referred to it in his Canto 46 (“Didja see the Decennio?”; C, 46/241). Jeffrey Schnapp has summarized the exhibition as follows:

It narrated the history of Fascism from 1914 through 1922, not according to the conventional methods of museum display, but rather via a kaleidoscopic fusion of Rationalist architectural schemes, a Futurist-inspired aesthetic of collage and photomontage, and an emergent mythico-heroic architectural Classicism. (Schnapp, quoted in Paul 2016, 102)

There is every reason to remark on the point about the exhibition in part being a fusion of Rationalist and Classicist architecture and “a Futurist-inspired aesthetic of collage and photomontage”. According to Paul, Pound “touted [it] as a model for how history should be told” (Paul 2016, 102–3), something that is hardly surprising, given how his own Malatesta Cantos ten years before had itself been somewhat of a kaleidoscopic exhibition of documents fused with hero-worshipping poetry, trying to launch a new model for how history should be told. That the later Fascist exhibition promoted an “aesthetic of collage” also makes it reminiscent of the Malatesta Cantos, the critical reception of which has invariably returned to this concept. It will surely be worthwhile revisiting some of the critical literature on Pound on collage, which, as it were, some commentators see as the very key compositional method of The Cantos as such (cf. for example Laughlin 1987, 120 and 177).

3.6. Collage as key to the Malatesta Cantos

According to poet Pierre Joris, The Cantos constitute no less than “the master collage poem of the [twentieth] century” (Joris, quoted in Hair 2010, 51). Commentators such as Hugh Kenner (1971), David Antin (1974), Marjorie Perloff (1981), James Laughlin (1987), George Kearns (1989), Jacob Korg (1989), Roxana Preda (2001), Ross Hair (2010) and Anderson Araujo (2018) have all pointed to the collage concept in their investigations of The Cantos.101 In The Pound Era, Kenner writes about “a collage of optical analogies” for a poem as early as “Medallion” from “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley”. The more specific sense of collage as what Kenner calls a “cubist strategy” turns up to describe Canto 3. Kenner is even more specific when commenting on the Malatesta sequence, observing that the impression it gives of being “real things passed onto the page” is comparable to the Cubists’ use of “newspaper scraps” (Kenner 1971, 418).

101 The claims about the collage character of the Malatesta Cantos has not been without its critics. In Ezra Pound and the Visual Culture of Modernism (2007), Rebecca Beasley takes Perloff to task for having chosen the term “collage” to refer to the Malatesta Cantos. Although Beasley considers collage an “immediately striking” description, “eloquently expressing the visual shock produced by the dense, foreign material” embedded in these cantos, she ultimately finds it “misleading” (Beasley 2007, 203). She also reminds her readers that Pound’s own privileged analogy for The Cantos was not collage, but sculpture carved in stone (ibid., 206–7).
One of the first to point to *The Cantos* and *The Waste Land* as being in their entirety “early collage poem[s]” was the American poet and performance artist David Antin, in a 1974 interview published in the journal *Occident*. Here, Antin elaborates on his previous suggestion to use the word “collage” to describe modern poetry:

I suppose the term is better understood in the “visual arts,” because it derives from the practice of pasting pieces of paper or other extraneous material into a painting in the manner of Picasso and Braque at about 1912. The early practice usually consisted of the introduction of a piece of wallpaper or some such thing in substitution for a painted depiction of it, but once the process of introducing these foreign, fragmentary readymade materials got underway, the whole idea was quickly generalized by the Futurists, Arp and Schwitters, the Surrealists, and even Picasso himself to a principle of construction based on the juxtaposition of objects, object fragments and materials drawn from the most disparate contexts. The result was a work that no longer yielded an iconic representation, even of a fractured sort, though bristling with significations. (Antin 1974)

This is really a key statement. It points to the fact that Pound in his monumental poem deploys several quotations from a host of different sources, often in their original languages, which together with passages marked by the poet’s own voice make up the structure of the poem. It is essential to note that what collage poetry does, according to Antin, is juxtapose textual fragments “drawn from the most disparate contexts” (ibid.). It is not least the very disparity of the sources that makes the concept of collage relevant to an understanding of the Malatesta Cantos.

In her study *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (1981), Perloff comments on the passage quoted from the Antin interview, and relates the concept of collage to what she takes to be the one “basic strategy” in *The Cantos* as such:

I would posit that Pound’s basic strategy in the *Cantos* is to create a flat surface, as in a Cubist or early Dada collage, upon which verbal elements, fragmented images, and truncated bits of narrative, drawn from the most disparate contexts, are brought into collision. (Perloff 1981, 181)

After quoting this specific passage of Perloff’s, David Ten Eyck comments that the “surface of the Malatesta Cantos” is “anything but flat” (Ten Eyck 2012, 44); instead it is “intricately layered” and leaves little doubt which “fragmented images” and “truncated bits of narrative” should be “privileged” (ibid.). This disagreement between Perloff and Ten Eyck echoes the one between
Perloff and Rainey, with Ten Eyck taking the Rainey position privileging the subject matter of the Malatesta Cantos. On the side of Perloff, privileging a reading concerned with formal poetics, we find Roxana Preda, who points to the collage technique being characterized by a “reliance on surface and texture, not on depth and interpretation” (Preda 2001, 123). This continuing front in Poundian scholarship, between those critics who privilege the subject matter of The Cantos, and those who focus on the questions of poetic technique, should not make us overlook that Perloff’s choice of the expression “flat surface” may be primarily motivated by the collage technique’s origin in the visual arts, where, as Preda says, the Cubist collage painters went against the Renaissance tradition and “surrendered perspective as the essential means of control” (Preda 2001, 124). By referring to The Cantos as collage, one is after all using the term “collage” metaphorically. The term stems from the French verb coller, which means “to glue (together)”, and is most notably used for describing the gluing of photographs, newspaper clippings or other parts of texts or colored paper onto a canvas. Preda, who goes so far as to call the invention of the modern collage by Picasso and Braque in 1912 an outright condition that “made Pound’s long poem possible” (Preda 2001, 123–24), refers to the first collage compositions, Braque’s Compotier et cartes and Picasso’s Still Life with Chair Caning, which were combinations of “charcoal drawing or oil paint and alien materials like wallpaper or oilcloth, pasted on the canvas” (Preda 2001, 123–24). She goes on to say that the two painters experimented with the form until 1915, but by 1920 they had ceased to use it altogether. By then, she implies, the technique had become so established as to be experimented with even in the non-visual arts. Although the use of the term as applied to poetry is metaphorical, we should note something interesting about Pound’s particular relation to the literal sense of the word “collage”: For as Michael Kindellan makes clear in his study of Pound’s late cantos, Pound actually did glue individually printed Chinese characters physically onto his typescripts and proofs (cf. Kindellan 2017, 120). The late cantos have, in other words, something literally collage-like about them.

It is not the late cantos that are more most frequently said to mark the introduction of the collage technique, however, and not a poem like Pound’s 1921 “Kongo Roux” (P&P, vol. 4, 165) either, even if this poem seems directly inspired by Cubist collage technique, since pieces of text here find themselves spliced together on the page, vertically as well as horizontally. This experimental piece is not representative of Pound’s poetry at the time – nor, for that matter, of his earlier or later poetry. Anyway, the part of The Cantos that is most often given the arguable privilege of introducing collage as technique is the Malatesta Cantos. What most critics see as the fundamental function of the collage principle in these cantos is that they join together different textual elements, where “text” is taken mostly to mean physical documents from archives. This is often taken as Pound’s main invention. More importantly, I will claim, is that Pound “articulates” something by juxtaposing disparate passages in his own translation as well as in their original
wording, creating a unique formation of speech sounds. By placing different languages in the same context, Pound is trying to get to a point where their differences are most keenly felt. Pure translation would efface that otherness. It’s the difference-in-articulation that Pound is after, and that, I will argue, characterizes his multilingual poetics.

The very disparity of the juxtaposed materials also suggests that it might no longer be meaningful to search for a single synthesis of the artwork. This is one reason the concept of collage may be more rewarding as a tool when analyzing The Cantos than the concept of montage, which Perloff seemingly uses as a synonym, stating that Pound’s turn from a “Symbolist mode” to the “art of montage” takes place in the Malatesta Cantos, since it is at this stage that the poet introduces a “‘documentary’ surface upon which dislocated fragments are juxtaposed” (Perloff 1981, 177). Even if she seems to use “montage” as semantically coextensive with “collage”, it would surely be possible to differentiate between the two. In a certain way “montage” may seem to suit poetry better, since it implies something sequential, whereas collage primarily refers to something visual and spatial. However, the Malatesta Cantos ought to be seen as poetry that rebels against sequentiality. In the case of the Malatesta Cantos, Perloff says, the text “becomes a surface of linguistic distortions and contradictions that force the reader to participate in the poem’s action” (ibid., 182). This statement points to how a collage, rather than (merely) representing something, does something – it acts upon the viewer of reader, who in turn must act in order to flow with the flux of the text.102

Perloff says that Pound’s collage poetry occupies “a middle space between the mimetic on the one hand and the non-objective or ‘abstract’ on the other” (Perloff 1981, 181–82). Even if the point is not to break the link between the text and what it refers to, this “referential process is […] subordinated to a concern for sequential or spatial arrangement” (ibid., 182). In this instance, I find it hard to agree completely with Perloff’s analysis. She considers the Malatesta Cantos as semi-abstract, in the sense that the referential function of the text loses some of its importance. But this is hardly the primary function achieved by means of the collage technique. After having referred to Perloff’s commentary, Jacob Korg in his article “The Dialogic Nature of Collage in Pound’s Cantos” (1989) states the following: “More attention […] needs to be given to the definitive feature of collage: namely, the introduction of some element of the external world into a work of art.” (Korg 1989, 96) This feature of the collage technique, where the artist introduces something from the

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102 The terms “collage” and “montage” obviously differ in their provenience as well, “collage” stemming from the Cubists and the Dadaists, while “montage” is often associated with the Soviet film director and theorist Sergei Eisenstein, whose theorizing of the concept has been hugely influential. Perloff highlights that the collage technique juxtaposes texts and brings them “into collision” (Perloff 1981, 181). For Eisenstein, montage is also a collision, more specifically a collision between two factors from which arises a concept (cf. Fleming 1989, 89). In other words, montage, at least in Sergei Eisenstein’s lexicon, is fundamentally about creating a dialectical synthesis, a uniting third resulting from the juxtaposition of disparate materials. Collage as such is more like an invitation to what Adorno termed negative dialectics, i.e., a process that keeps the rift between the juxtaposed materials open to ever-continuing interpretative acts.
mundane world into the work of art, seems much more important than the dubious premise about the referential function being suppressed. Korg goes on to discuss quotation as a literary equivalent of the elements that constitute a collage in the visual arts:

The literary equivalent of the painter’s collage is, of course, quotation – not conventional quotation, but the kind that presents itself as an interpolation, interrupting the text and even conflicting with the writer’s purposes, as if it were an eruption of raw reality. (ibid.)

It is not least in this sense that the concept of collage poetry is illuminating: It indicates that the poet juxtaposes languages and discourses drawn from disparate contexts, and it illustrates that “real world elements” such as letters are directly incorporated into the poem. Even if the quotations in the Malatesta Cantos have been picked out by the poet, and as such may be said to represent his “purposes” or intentions, there is also something about the ready-made character of these quotations that alters the premises of the artwork: Any traditional notion of artistic intention becomes problematic, any Romantic or Symbolist idea of the artwork as an organic whole is negated, and the very autonomy of art seems to be challenged by what Korg calls “an eruption of raw reality”.

In William Cole’s article “Pound’s Web: Hypertext in the Rock-Drill Cantos”, Cole makes some statements that seem relevant even for the Malatesta Cantos, such as the following:

The constant invocation of other texts, both literary and nonliterary, blurs the boundaries between Pound’s work and others’ and between literary and nonliterary document, overturning the traditional conception of the poem as a unique and autonomous artistic object. (Cole 1997, 141–42)

There is something about the very autonomy of the artwork that is challenged by their way of composing hypertext. In contrast to the “traditional conception of the poem”, says Cole, hypertexts are exemplary for their “increased reader-participation, fluidity of meaning, and lack of formal closure” (ibid., 147). These are also characteristics to be observed in the Malatesta Cantos.

In another article on Pound and hypertext, “An Epic is a Hypertext Containing Poetry”, also published in 1997, Tim Redman primarily treats Eleven New Cantos (1934) and discusses hypertext as a manner of editing Pound’s poetry, by providing, as Redman himself says, a set of electronic versions of footnotes (cf. Redman 1997, 141). Redman goes further than this, however, and has interesting things to say about what he calls “a poetics of hypertext” (ibid., 140). He quotes Walter Benjamin from “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, where the German thinker states that “the history of every art form shows critical epochs in which a certain art form
aspires to effects which could be fully obtained only with a changed technical standard” (Benjamin, quoted in Redman 1997, 141), and claims that The Cantos “illustrate Benjamin’s observation in that they are a kind of protohypertext, aspiring to effects that were not yet possible” (Redman 1997, 142). Redman even says that “the idea of hypertext provides a metaphor through which Pound’s intent in The Cantos can be better understood” (ibid., 142). Bringing authorial intention into the picture may seem strange, since the hypertext analogy could be understood as dethroning the author in respect to the reader. Redman seems to agree, however, that hypertext calls into question “ancient organic models for a poetic work, with their idea of unity, wholeness, and closure” (ibid., 143), bringing his analysis close to Cole’s.

I will conclude these reflections on the Malatesta Cantos by focusing on a singular “collage element”, namely, the German expression **concret Allgemeine** in Canto 8, since this single element has in itself an extensive potential meaning, as such pointing to the richness of these cantos as a whole.

3.7. The universal and/or the particular in Canto 8: **concret Allgemeine**

Not only does Pound strive to reproduce and integrate manuscripts from the time of Sigismondo, he also turns to modern books as sources, as evinced when the German expression **concret Allgemeine** (normally spelled **konkret Allgemeine**) turns up in Canto 8. We find it in a passage that refers to the Neoplatonic philosopher Georgios Gemistos Plethon (1355–1452), who is buried in one of the sarcophagi of the Tempio Malatestiano (cf. Bacigalupo 2020, 177), and who according to Chris Chapman is “at least as important” as Malatesta for the canto sequence that bears the latter’s name (Chapman 2011, 556). Plethon, we are told in Canto 8, accompanied the reigning Greek emperor at the time of Malatesta, John Paleologus, on the latter’s trip to Italy. Plethon was known for his interest in the classical gods from Greek mythology, such as Poseidon, whose entire name is capitalized by Pound. But what, the reader wonders, are the German words **concret Allgemeine** doing as an appositive to the name of this god? This is the passage in question:

And the Greek emperor was in Florence
(Ferrara having the pest)
And with him Gemisthus Plethon
Talking of war about the temple at Delphos,
And of POSEIDON, **concret Allgemeine**,  
And telling of how Plato went to Dionysius of Syracuse
Because he had observed that tyrants
Were most efficient in all that they set their hands to,
But he was unable to persuade Dionysius
To any amelioration. (C, 8/31)

Terrell informs us that Pound culled the expression *concret Allgemeine* from Fritz Schultze’s work *Georgios Gemistos Plethon und seine reformatorischen Bestrebungen*, published in Jena in 1874 (cf. Terrel 1993, 34). Following Akiko Miyake, I interpret Schultze’s Plethon as a philosopher who treated gods like Zeus and Poseidon both as personal gods and as Neoplatonic emanations (cf. Miyake 1991, 74). Given Plethon’s perspective, Poseidon is the most perfect of Zeus’ creatures. These two find themselves at the top of the scale of numerous deities that are also ideas. This Neoplatonic kind of thinking would no doubt have appealed to Pound, not least in its willingness to see the classical gods as continuing presences in the world, as forces governing it and mediating between the abstract and the concrete. Araujo quotes historian Warren T. Treadgold, who refers to Plethon’s thought as “virtually pagan philosophy” (cf. Araujo 2018, 106). Araujo also comments that Plethon’s philosophical work *Nomoi (Book of Laws)* “assigns a generative role to Poseidon akin to the Neoplatonic nous (‘world-soul’)” (ibid., 107). Albert Gelpi observes that Plethon is “one of the Neoplatonist philosophers […] whom Pound saw as carrying forward the tradition of the pagan mysteries through the Christian Middle Ages into the Renaissance” (Gelpi 1987, 200). Gelpi also reminds his readers that Pound in Canto 83 returns to Plethon: “Gemisto stemmed all from Neptune” (C, 83/548), Neptune of course being the Latin name for Poseidon. Convincing as these exegetical comments are, one may be forgiven for seeing Pound’s elliptic use of source material as plainly hermetic. What is the point? Here, as is sometimes the case with commentaries on Pound, the exegetes I have just mentioned tend to be somewhat myopic in their delving into Pound’s alleged sources. I will claim that simply referring the reader to Schultze’s German text explains too little: There are other things at stake when the poet chooses to use a German expression than merely pointing to a singular source text. This does not mean that sending scholars off to search for sources might not have been part of Pound’s intention: Referring to Jerome McGann, who has argued that *The Cantos* is a poem that has “already theoretically imagined a critical edition of itself” (McGann, quoted in Redman 1997, 143), Tim Redman comments that such an idea “should not surprise us” since what he refers to as “the primary model for *The Cantos*”, namely, Dante’s *Commedia*, in Pound’s day “came complete with scholarly apparatus” (Redman 1997, 143). In other words, Pound may already have calculated on someone doing scholarly work to guide his readers into the mysteries of his sources.

In his late poetry, Pound made hermetic references a hallmark of his poetics. In his study of Pound’s late cantos, Michael Kindellan quotes a 1955 letter from Pound to his publisher in Milan, Vanni Scheiwiller, where the ageing poet writes that in some places his poetic quotations “devono
[sic] mantenere rapporti con un contesto non presentato” (“should keep their relationship with an absent context”; Pound, quoted in Kindellan 2017, 33).

With reference to Pound’s installment of The Cantos titled Section: Rock-Drill 85–95 de los cantares (1955), Kindellan later in his study expands on Pound’s point as follows:

> Rock-Drill is designed to damage “critical” intelligence. Pound wants his readers to have “forgotten-what-book,” what reference refers to what. Not knowing what anything refers to is normally taken as the starting point for any critical reading, its primary catalyst. But in The Cantos such an untethering operates as an ideal where understanding is unencumbered by knowledge, is indeed, the unencumbering of knowledge itself. (Kindellan 2017, 74)

Pound, in Kindellan’s perspective, is not out to teach, but instead to address readers who are somehow prone to understanding his poems with a certain immediacy. Given such an ideal, of a reader in possession of an understanding that is somehow not restrained by knowledge, one can be tempted to suggest that the poet must have believed in some more or less occult power of specific words to express something not immediately graspable by reason alone – in this context, it is especially interesting to note that the passage refers to the temple at Delphi: This can be taken as an indication that esoteric knowledge is key.

In the context of Pound’s esotericism, one should also mention what the poet himself later would refer to as “Aesopian language” (C, 100/733), which, as Kindellan explains, “conveys an innocent meaning to outsiders but holds a concealed meaning to informed members of a conspiracy or underground movement” (Kindellan 2017, 111). Kindellan intimates that a rationale for this particular type of esoteric expression may really have been “paranoid evasiveness” on the part of the poet, thereby polemicizing slightly against critics who take such esotericisms as examples of Pound’s innovative poetics. One should of course be wary of drawing lines from the 1920s to the thirteen years Pound spent at the mental hospital St. Elizabeths in Washington, DC, from 1945 to 1958, the time from which the cantos Kindellan studies stem: Pound was undoubtedly more “Aesopian” in the poetry he wrote at this stage than he had

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103 I quote Kindellan’s translation of Pound’s Italian. The English version has “absent context”, which is elegant, but somewhat opaque in comparison with the original, which simply states that it is question of “a context that is never presented”, i.e., never presented to the reader.

104 Studies like Leon Surette’s A Light from Eleusis (1979) and Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos’s The Celestial Tradition (1992) attach great importance to the mystical, occult and esoteric in Pound’s work. According to Tryphonopoulos, “Pound’s interest in the occult never waned” (Tryphonopoulos 1992, 59).

105 Canto 100 includes this passage: “And Lenin: ‘Aesopian language (under censorship) / where I wrote ‘Japan’ you might read ‘Russia’”. The reference is to Lenin’s Imperialism: The Highest State of Capitalism, a pamphlet Lenin wrote in 1916, while in exile in Zurich. In his own preface to the work, written after the February 1917 revolution, Lenin refers to “that accursed Aesopian language” as a necessary strategy when confronting tsarist censorship (cf. Pestell 2018).

106 Mediating between Kindellan and the critics he criticizes, it could of course be suggested that people can probably be innovative even if paranoid …
been before World War II, and the kind of paranoid evasiveness that might explain some characteristics of his late work does not seem as reasonable an explanation of his poetry of the early 1920s. Still, the very practice of hermetic reference to an “absent context” can be observed as early as in the Malatesta Cantos.

Digging into Pound’s esoteric sources or instead disregarding such digging for knowledge as restraining the reading of his poetry are quite different strategies. Both can be valid. Terrell is surely right in claiming that Pound must have taken the expression *concret Allgemeine* from Schultze. This does not mean that the concept is devoid of a wider significance. The inclusion of the German wording has other functions than merely pointing to a scholarly source. Standing as one of the rather few German-language expressions in *The Cantos*, the concept *concret Allgemeine* originally stems from Hegel and can be translated into English as “concrete universal”, deployed by Hegel in opposition to “abstract universal”, a contrast maintained by Schultze (cf. Miyake 1991, 74). The concept *concret Allgemeine* smacks of the Hegelian philosophical conceptualizations so influential in the nineteenth century. More specifically, it points to a tension in Hegel’s thinking, between the concrete or particular and the universal or general. In the opinion of a thinker like Karl Jaspers, Hegel was “grotesque” in his “totalizing” gestures (cf. Desmond 2005 [1994]): In other words, Hegel generalized to the extent that whatever is concrete or particular is subsumed under a totalizing concept, at the price of losing some of its singularity. In his essay “Who Thinks Abstractly?” (*Wer denkt abstrakt?*), presumably written in 1807 or 1808, Hegel seems to have given an answer to Jasper’s criticism in advance. Let us look at the example Hegel gives to illustrate what he means by abstract thinking:107

A murderer is led to the place of execution. For the common populace he is nothing but a murderer. Ladies perhaps remark that he is a strong, handsome, interesting man. The populace finds this remark terrible: What? A murderer handsome? […]

This is abstract thinking: to see nothing in the murderer except the abstract fact that he is a murderer, and to annul all other human essence in him with this simple quality. (Hegel 1966, 116–17)

Compare this with Fenollosa’s outburst: “Fancy picking up a man and telling him that he is a noun, a dead thing rather than a bundle of functions!” (Fenollosa 2009, 50) For Hegel and Fenollosa, abstract thinking is flawed because it makes us blind to what medieval logic classified as “particular” and therefore not of the same grandeur as what was said to be “universal”.

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107 The short piece also contains an example of Hegel’s orientalist slur, in this case about “quasi-Chinese” embroidery (Hegel 1966, 115).
The likes of Theodor W. Adorno, in his *Negative Dialectics* (1981 [1966]), has indicated that there is a progressive potential to Hegel’s dialectical thinking if one does not aim for the final, fulfilling synthesis, but keeps the dialectic process ever-moving. In a congenial manner, Pound may have thought of poetry as an example of the concrete that is resistant to philosophical theorizing. Although Hegel plays very little role in Pound’s work, Robert Stark claims that “Pound’s advocacy of a method of ‘luminous detail’ amounts to something like Hegel’s speculative method” (Stark 2002, 139).

When we consider the part of the passage quoted that comes after “POSEIDON, concret Allgemeine”, we see that Plethon is portrayed as a philosopher who absolutely does not limit himself to esoteric subject matter. In fact, he talks directly about the relation between philosophy and politics, referring to Plato’s infamous stint at the court of Dionysius the Elder at Syracuse in Sicily in 388 BC. Plato worked as tutor for the tyrant’s son Dionysius the Younger, thereby intending to make him into a philosopher-king, something that did not work out, as related in Plato’s seventh letter. This may be an intended reference by Plethon to his own role when accompanying the Greek emperor, and it may be an indication on Pound’s part that he has begun to regard the role of aide and advisor to a statesman a fitting role for the poet and thinker. It may even be a pointer to Hegel himself, who stated in a 1806 letter to his friend, the theologian Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, that he had just seen a “world-soul” (Weltseele) when observing Napoleon on horseback in the city of Jena; later, in the preface to his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Rechtsphilosophie, 1820), Hegel coined the memorable image of the owl of Minerva who “begins its flight only with the onset of dusk”, implying not only that intellectual recognition tends to come after the fact, but also that philosophy “can no longer imbue the age with the urge for change” (Rees 1998, 31). Often taken to be a sign of belated conservatism on the part of Hegel, this quote could be read in quite a different manner: Does not Hegel simply imply there is something about the average philosopher’s role that is not to give advice to princes, tacitly awaiting what happens in the realm of history and politics before drawing any conclusion, suggesting that a more exceptional philosopher might aspire to be a thinker who does not wait to conclude after the fact?

In a poetic context such as that of the Malatesta Cantos, the Hegelian concept concret Allgemeine also points to the question of translation as such. When one encounters concret Allgemeine used in its original language form, this raises the question: What does the poet achieve by not translating? It is as if the code switching the concept demands of the readers of the poem

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108 Later thinkers like Catherine Malabou (2005 [1996]) and Slavoj Žižek (2013 [2012]) have written studies on Hegel that demonstrate how one can think with Hegelian concepts without falling into totalizing traps.

109 Pound hardly ever mentions Hegel, and when he does, it is to dismiss him: “Marx and Hegel break down when their ideas come to be worked out in conduct.” (*SP*, 87) Fenollosa has, on his part, been referred to as a Hegelian (cf. Preda 2001, 30).
questions the possibility of translation as such. In sticking with this specific expression in its original language form, Pound’s poetry challenges the universalizing pretensions of any traditional idea of translation.

Such a point seems lost on the exegetes trying to link Pound’s use of *concret Allgemeine* to a specifically Neoplatonist Renaissance context. As far I have been able to tell, a 1972 article by Pound’s translator into German, Eva Hesse, was the first to point to Schultze’s 1874 study as a source for Pound (Hesse 1972, 148). In his grand commentary on *The Cantos*, Terrell also notes that the specific wording *concret Allgemeine* is Schultze’s, but he also clarifies a major point that seems to have been overlooked by later commentators. For Terrell says that Schultze describes Gemistos Plethon as a “realist” in the medieval sense, and in that connection quotes Pound’s take on the Aristotelian doctrine of *universalia in re* from Canto 74, in a passage which includes the Greek words for “generals” and “particulars” (*Katholou* and *hekasta*):

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philosophy is not for young men
their Katholou can not be sufficiently derived from
    their hekasta
their generalities cannot be born from a sufficient phalanx of particulars (C, 74/461)
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Poetry may aim to express something universal but insists on doing so by sticking to what is particular. Such an ideal seems to be what really motivates Pound using the Hegelian concept in its original language form. It is as if it treats poetry itself as a specific way of thinking or perceiving, of beginning in precise observations of singular sense impressions or historical data.

One ought certainly to consider the very sound of the expression *concret Allgemeine* as well, the German words qualifying the Greek name POSEIDON. The joining of the three terms breaks into the simultaneously prosaic and documentary English interspersed with Latin and Italian expressions. Not least, the inclusion of the expression “POSEIDON, concret Allgemeine” shows Pound’s willingness to combine words and concepts from different languages and different eras, even in what is seemingly “scholarly” poems – it is as if the author’s imaginative leaps forward and backward in time are there to highlight that his work is both Wissenschaft and Kunst.

One possible way of constructing a bridge between the Malatesta Cantos and Pound’s later Chinese History Cantos can be to consult an article titled “Cybernetic Modernism and the Feedback Loop: Ezra Pound’s Poetics of Transmission” (2016), where Heather A. Love says that modernist poetry such as Pound’s invites “cybernetic ways of reading […] that are essential for negotiating the data-saturated spaces of modernity” (Love 2016, 90). By way of conclusion, she writes:
Cybernetics, like Pound, operates on the premise that access to information about past behavior is essential to the process of learning. A blockage in the circulation of this information is synonymous with a rift in the cybernetic feedback loop: it can cause irreparable systemic confusion, and thus impede any individual’s ability to effectively think and creatively act within the present. (ibid., 100)

This passage points to Pound’s ever-active will to search history to find guides for good behavior: If such a continual link between the past and the present is broken, to Pound the very idea of moral conduct would be lost as well. The section of *The Cantos* that Love considers most evidently relevant to the concept of the cybernetic feedback loop is the Chinese History Cantos, which she understands as permeated by an aesthetics of transmission that not only “valorizes the capacity […] to discern patterns in the annals of history”, but more importantly makes these patterns “useful in the present” (ibid., 101). This idea, of discerning patterns in the annals of history as being useful in the present, may bring us back not only to the idea of the true thinker as being more *daring* than the average “owl of Minerva”, but to the possible parallel between Malatesta and Mussolini: Is the presentation of the former really a lesson for the latter? If not, this does not mean that the emperor Kangxi, the hero of Canto 60, may not be brought to the fore by Pound in the 1930s precisely as a lesson for Mussolini, as we will see. Love claims that “[p]erhaps the most pervasive theme within the Chinese History Cantos circulates around the concept and practice of leadership” (ibid.), a claim I will both substantiate and expand on in the following. First, however, I must say something about Pound’s poetic development between the publication of the Malatesta Cantos (1923) and the publication of the Chinese History Cantos (1940).

### 3.8. The development of Pound’s documentary poetics

In his book on the so-called Adams Cantos (Cantos 62–71), David Ten Eyck describes a development in what he refers to as Pound’s *documentary poetics*, a denomination already used by Perloff. This poetics is characterized by the poet using historical documents, often nonliterary ones, to present a *tableau* of a particular era or individual, as for example Malatesta and the Italian Renaissance in the Malatesta Cantos. Pound’s documentary poetics is, in other words, a source-based poetic presentation of historiographical material.

From its starting point in the Malatesta Cantos, this poetics underwent several changes, Ten Eyck states. He then develops a threefold set of concepts to describe the most significant of these. The concepts concern what Ten Eyck refers to as “literary modes”, more specifically the *lyrical*, *narrative* and *documentary* modes (cf. Ten Eyck 2012, 44) The lyrical mode, he says, functions “outside history”, and is used “to describe those moments when the material circumstances of a
given historical complex modulate into a vision of timeless ideas or principles” (ibid.). Conversely, the narrative mode is “immediately linked to the chronological march of historical events” (ibid.), but not confined to citations of written documents – as such it is a way of summarizing or dramatizing a given event. The documentary mode, on its part, “functions within the space delineated by a written text which Pound has found either in a published book or in the course of archival research” (ibid.).

Ten Eyck describes the Malatesta Cantos as examples of how Pound’s documentary poetics relied on the interplay of these three modes: “He extracted poetry from seemingly sterile documentary fragments by placing them within a framework that gives them unexpected resonance.” (ibid.) Still, Pound did not “allow [the documentary fragments] to determine the shape of his poetry” (ibid.). When we come to Eleven New Cantos (1934), that is, Cantos 31–41, Ten Eyck observes that the roles of the documentary and narrative modes are more or less inverted: Narrative statements are used in the documentary cantos of this section only to guide the reader through what is predominantly a set of passages drawn directly from written sources. In The Fifth Decad of Cantos (1937), that is, Cantos 42–51, the documentary mode has become predominant.110

In other words, in the period from the Malatesta Cantos to his poetry of the 1930s, Pound deploys fewer and fewer dramatizing devices in his poetry. He summarizes less and contextualizes his source-material far less. In short, it is as though Pound’s working method changes, making him go from an active, interpreting “editor” who guides his readers through the chosen material to instead simply rendering the material he has chosen as his sources. This has some far-reaching consequences for Pound’s historical thinking, as Ten Eyck puts it in a pertinent passage:

> There is a contradiction in [Pound’s] approach between his isolation of fragmentary documentary evidence from the larger contexts from which it is extracted and his insistence on the need to gain a full understanding of the historical complex towards which the evidence gestures. This is the basic paradox of Pound’s later documentary poetics. (Ten Eyck 2012, 54)

This basic paradox contrasts a formal strategy that deliberately exposes the incompleteness and the “rough edges” of the documents that are exhibited with Pound’s simultaneous indication in Guide to Kulchur that these documents may serve to reveal “the whole subject from a new angle” (GK, 51). This insistence that fragmentary evidence can transmit “the whole subject” stands in apparent

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110 If the narrative mode occupies slightly more space in the two so-called Siena Bank Cantos (Cantos 42–43), Ten Eyck says, this is “mainly due to the need to translate Italian documents into English, not because of any fundamental methodological changes in Pound’s approach” (Ten Eyck 2012, 52). He adds, referring to a study by Ben Kimpel and T. C. Duncan Eaves, that almost every line of Cantos 42 and 43 is suggested by a source.
contrast to something Pound had stated in Canto 13, where Kung (Confucius) expresses regret for
the development contemporary historians had taken:

And even I can remember
A day when the historians left blanks in their writings
I mean, for the things they did not know,
But that time seems to be passing. (C, 13/60)

Whether one regards Pound as having “forgotten” this earlier insight into the necessarily incomplete
nature of history writing, or whether one thinks of Pound’s poem as always wiser than the poet
himself, there is some truth to Tim Redman’s statement of a tendency of Pound’s at the time he
composed the cantos that were to become the Eleven New Cantos. After having quoted from Canto
31, where Pound quotes Thomas Jefferson as saying, elliptically, “English papers … their lies …”,
Redman says:

To find such a view in Jefferson provided Pound with further confirmation of his own belief.
To some extent this pattern will become typical of Pound during the period. He will arrive
at some conclusion about public affairs and then find what he takes to be the confirmation
of his views in his historical readings. (Redman 1997, 119)

This sort of confirmation bias, where one searches in historical sources to make singular points
pertaining to contemporary society, is arguably not a tendency that Pound developed after having
composed the Malatesta sequence – also the Malatesta Cantos can, as I have shown, be seen as
presenting an example of contemporary relevance, namely, as an allegory of Mussolini.
Nonetheless, Redman is right to point out a change in Pound’s use of historical sources, for from
the beginning of the 1930s one can get the impression that he searches for individual wordings in
his sources that can be construed as relating to the society and the politics of the present day, even

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111 In the original printing, the last two lines I quote here were mistakenly repeated once. When asked by Hugh Kenner
in 1956 what to do with this when the canto was to be anthologized, Pound answered: “Repeat in XIII sanctioned by
time and the author, or rather first by the author, who never objects to the typesetter making improvements.” (Kenner
1997, 26) In other instances, Pound indicated that he wanted his own wrong spellings to be kept in later editions, in one
case giving as his reason that they were somehow interesting testimony to the “author’s ignorance [sic]” (Pound, quoted
in Froula 1984, 143).

112 In his article on the Malatesta Cantos, Daniel Bornstein suggests that Broglio, whom I referred to in connection with
the Malatesta Cantos, may be the source of this specific passage, since this fifteen-century historian “had a habit of
leaving spaces for names he didn’t know”, and although filling most of them in later, leaving several of these spaces
blank, “including one in a section Pound probably read” (Bornstein 1981, 286). Bornstein goes on to suggest that
Broglio’s Cronaca universale could in fact be seen as “model for the technique not just of the Malatesta Cantos, but of
all The Cantos” (ibid., 286).
if these relations are merely tangential. A related point is made by Feng Lan in his *Ezra Pound and Confucianism* (2004), when he says that “Pound utilized Confucian doctrines in a rather ‘opportunistic’ manner” (Lan 2008 [2004], 91). We shall keep this in mind when we turn to Canto 60, a canto from the sequence known as the Chinese History Cantos. I will claim that a certain perspective on the politics of the 1930s may work as an interpretational key to unlock some of the complexities of this canto.

3.9. Pound’s ideogrammic method and *zhengming*

In the time that had passed between the composition of the Malatesta Cantos and his work on the Chinese History Cantos, Pound had coined the term “ideogrammic method” (often spelled “ideographic method” by Pound himself) to characterize his own poetics. Ross Hair talks about “two major collage principles innovated by Pound: quotation and the ‘ideogrammic method’” (Hair 2010, 52). Considering the second of these, Hair admits that it is a “rather nebulous term” (ibid., 55). As Ronald Bush has shown, Pound did not make any programmatic use of the expression “ideogram” (or “ideograph”) before 1927 (cf. Bush 1976, 4). And when he did, the point was, says Bush, simply “to redefine once again his intuitive affinity for description by particulars” (ibid., 11). Not until 1933 did Pound, in a letter to the *New English Weekly*, proclaim that *The Cantos* were composed using the ideogrammic method. Still, this new concept did, according to Pound himself, explain some characteristics of his poetic technique from very early on: In the section consisting of “exhibits” in *ABC of Reading* (1933), for example, Pound says in a note that he had used the ideogrammic method as early as in 1913, even “before having access to the Fenollosa papers” (*ABCR*, 96).

What does the ideogrammic method imply? Peter Makin simplifies it to an extent that is both excessive and liberating: Ideogrammic writing, he says, is simply “writing that specifies its meaning by examples” (Makin 2003, 126). Marjorie Perloff is more detailed. She identifies the ideogrammic method as referring to “fragmentation, collage, multilingualism, and use of citation” (Perloff 2010, 60), bringing us closer to the investigation I have carried out so far in this chapter. The question remains whether keeping Pound’s own term is illuminating or rather, as Bush suggests, obscuring – that it, together with Pound’s alleged promise to Yeats that *The Cantos* would eventually “display a structure like that of a Bach fugue”, imposes “a false set of expectations onto the work” (Bush 1976, 4). For my purpose, Perloff’s four component parts of the ideogrammic method are all very important: Fragmentation, collage, multilingualism, and use of citation are clearly all valid poetic methods at play in *The Cantos*. The way I see it, however, Bush makes an important point, namely, that the ideogrammic method as a single overarching concept promises too much. Perloff’s breaking down of the concept seems to unwittingly confirm this: As a generic
term, the ideogrammic method means both too much (the four component parts) and too little (the generic term serves no obvious function that is not better served by one or more of the components parts). Although this may make us want to give up on the expression “ideogrammic method” altogether, I want to return to the apparently much simpler understanding pointed to by Makin, not because I see it as a key to The Cantos, but because this simple understanding can teach us something important about the development of Pound’s thinking about semantics and about language more generally.

Let me ask the slightly inelegant question, if ideogrammic writing is writing that specifies its meaning by examples, to what does this represent an alternative? The answer is, I would claim, quite simply: logic, that is, the traditional logic of the syllogism. In The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry, Fenollosa had denounced “the tyranny of mediaeval logic” (Fenollosa 2009 [1919], 56). In his 1933 pamphlet ABC of Economics, Pound indicated that the ideogrammic method amounted to “heaping together the necessary components of thought” and that it stood in diametrical contrast to “Aristotelian logic” (SP, 239). In Jefferson and/or Mussolini Pound went even further by way of negative definition, claiming that he was not putting his sentences in “monolinear syllogistic arrangement” (J/M, 28) and that this was now a hallmark of his prose. In other words: There is something casuistic and linear or multilinear about the ideogrammic method.

So far so good: The ideogrammic method is opposed to logic as traditionally understood. What is striking is that Pound, having advocated the ideogrammic method for some years, toward the latter half of the 1930s suddenly seems to change his emphasis, now beginning to highlight the value of the exact definition of individual terms, which seems much closer to traditional logic again. At the very beginning of Pound’s quasi-encyclopedic prose work Guide to Kulchur (1938) we find Kung (Confucius) answering the question of what he would set his mind to if he was made head of government: “To call people and things by their proper name, that is by the correct denominations, to see that the terminology was exact.” (GK, 16) As made clear by Pound’s inclusion of the two Chinese characters in question in his book, this refers to the doctrine of 正名 zhengming. The concept of zhengming can be rendered “right name” or “the rectification of names”, or, as Carroll F. Terrell has it, “to regulate the names” or “to define the correct term” (Terrell 1993 [1980], 256). In the 1930s Pound was referring more and more to this concept, in what Peter Makin calls a “right-naming campaign”, that is, a campaign “for precision in the use of individual words” (Makin 2003, 120). True, as Feng Lan explains, zhengming did according to a traditional Chinese interpretation originally refer primarily to a feudal understanding of the respective roles people were to serve in

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113 According to Bernhard Karlgren’s Analytic Dictionary of Chinese and Sino–Japanese (1940), ming is “what is called out in the dark”, while zheng means “upright, correct, just”, the combination signifying “speaking one’s own identity honestly — not cloaking oneself in darkness – and also correctly identifying what is in darkness” (Karlgren, quoted in Moody 2014, 234).
the society understood as a hierarchy. It is in other words these feudal relations that were to be "rectified" – *ming* means "name", but is in such an overall interpretation taken as referring to the names of father and son (cf. Lan 2008 [2004], 47). However, as Lan himself explains, Pound’s understanding of the concept “reduces [its] feudalistic specificity” and “widens the scope of the term’s application to ordinary instances of linguistic activity”, laying stress on “precise terminology, or exact correspondence between words and things” (ibid., 51). This highlights that *zhengming* in Pound’s interpretation comes close to the Confucian concept of *cheng yi* 誠意, translated by Pound as “to attain precise verbal definitions” (ibid., 45). The first of these two latter characters Pound understood as implying *sincerity*, relating the concept to an individual’s moral and intellectual disposition; still, as Lan makes clear, Pound “thought that such an ethical principle must be predicated on verbal integrity” (ibid., 70). The character would later be included in Canto 76:

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the word is made
    perfect  誠
better gift can no man make to a nation
    than the sense of Kung fu Tseu (C, 76/474)
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I must remark on the very deployment Pound makes of actual Chinese characters in his writings. Among these, both 誠 *cheng* and 正名 *zhengming* occupy evident places of honor. Admittedly, the first Chinese character in a modern edition of *The Cantos* is 信, transcribed as *xin*, in Canto 34; but as Lan underscores, Pound saw *xin* as a way to practice *cheng*, and as fundamentally a part of *zhengming*. It should also be mentioned that even if Canto 34 was originally published as part of *Eleven New Cantos* in 1934, the *xin* character was not added until the 1956 edition of *The Cantos*. As early as in 1937, however, Pound deployed the two characters 正名 *zhengming* at the end of

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114 More specifically, Pound explains *cheng* as follows: “The precise definition of the word, pictorially the sun’s lance coming to rest on the precise spot verbally. The righthand half of this compound means: to perfect, bring to focus” (*Con*, 20).
115 According to Feng Lan, no evidence exists that Pound actually learned Chinese before the 1930s (Lan 2008 [2004], 19). His wife Dorothy had, on her part, been trying to teach herself Chinese, among other things by buying a seven-volume *Dictionary of the Chinese Language*, as early as at the outset of World War I (cf. Moody 2007, 272)
116 The meanings of *xin* include “trust” and “confidence”, but also “letter” and “message” (Hayot 2012, 47). In Canto 51, the character appears together with a fuller version of the quotation from Horace deployed in the second of the Malatesta Cantos, as related earlier. Now Pound has: “Constans in proposito …. / Justum et Tenacem", which can be translated “Constant in purpose …. / Just and enduring”. Pound’s understanding of the ideogram is explained by himself as “man standing by his word” (*SP*, 85), because he saw in it the combination of 言 *ren*, “a man”, and 言 *yun*, “a word”; this interpretation makes the ideogram seem quite congenial to the Latin quotation, since it invokes the same idea of justice as involving being steadfast over time.
Canto 51, the last canto in the section titled *The Fifth Decad of Cantos* (1937). He even put the two characters on the title page of the first published version of this book.

Fang Lan claims that “seeking precise terminology” remained Pound’s “lifelong commitment” (Lan 2008 [2004], 65).\(^{117}\) As early as in “Patria Mia” (1912), Pound had lauded “the love of precision” (*SP*, 122). Worth mentioning is that Sigismondo Malatesta as late as in Canto 74 is said to have transmitted “a precise definition” (*C*, 74/445). In *Guide to Kulchur* (1938) Pound insisted on the impressive precision reached by the medieval philosopher-theologians who were his personal favorites, such as John Scotus Eriugena, Robert Grosseteste, Richard of St. Victor and even Thomas Aquinas. Peter Makin has his doubts as to whether Pound really had any deep understanding of the particular terms used by these philosophers, only to make a very interesting point: “But he didn’t much need this kind of verbal precision, and we don’t much need it, because of the principle of ‘ideogrammic writing.’” (Makin 2003, 126) Ideogrammic writing assumes, says Makin, that you “cannot directly name the entity, state, or isness that is your prime aim, if it is anything more complicated than a teapot or a steel desk” (ibid., 127); ideogrammic writing is, on the contrary, a “method of indirect naming”. Put polemically, “the Fenollosa/Pound theory says, in effect, that direct naming of complex things is lies” (ibid., 127). But according to Makin, Pound seems to have overlooked his earlier insight into the problems of direct naming, and at a certain point “hijacks the example of that kind of precision [that of ideogrammic writing], to argue for the other: the precision of direct naming and the defining of terms” (ibid., 128) Makin explains how surprising this is, since Pound in all his work had seemed conscious of the perils of thinking that by defining individual terms one constructs a sufficient basis for precision:

The odd thing is that no one was more conscious than Pound of all these objections to “thinking by definitions.” Ideogram was only one of the ways he offered for getting round its falsifications. Myth was another: it allowed you, he said, to communicate an awareness without cutting off its ears and nose. Icon was yet a third: to re-erect the statue of Venus at Terracina would be “worth more than any metaphysical argument.” (ibid., 132)

Makin’s main point is that the ideal of “right naming” is really a *regression* compared to Pound’s earlier insights:

\(^{117}\) In an unpublished handwritten letter to Achilles Fang from April 1951, Pound goes so far as to state that “undoubtedly the level of nipponic precision […] is such as wd/ account for Pearl Harbor (loss of bushido etc.)” (Achilles Fang Papers, Box 1, folder 8). The “nipponic”, i.e., Japanese, “precision” is here, the immediate context tells us, a *verbal* precision, even if what is lost, it is argued, is *Bushido*, which is the name for the strict ideal code of the samurais. This loss of verbal precision is, in other words, enough to cause a world-changing event such as the attack on Pearl Harbor.
Right naming […] seems to me in effect un-Poundian, an aberration, something that starts up in about 1935, and reaches a frantic peak in about 1950. In the same period, and apparently in proportion, Pound’s interest in the much more Poundian principle of “ideogrammic writing” declines. […] The interest in right naming rises in step with Pound’s need for dogmatic authority; and the interest in ideogrammic writing falls likewise. (Makin 2003, 120)

These are observations of great interest. They lead me to ask what became of Pound’s “ideogrammic” opposition to traditional, Aristotelian logic. Did it get replaced by the ideal of “right naming” and, if so, why? The fact that the 正名 zhengming characters are the only non-English parts of Canto 60 makes this canto all the more significant in my attempt at answering these questions.

3.10. Canto 60: Introduction

Canto 60 (see Appendix) pertains to the reign of the Manchu emperor Kangxi (whom Pound refers to as Kang Hi or simply KANG), who ruled China from 1661 to 1722. It is the penultimate of the so-called Chinese History Cantos, or China Cantos (Cantos 52–61). This section was first published in 1940 as part of the book titled Cantos LII–LXXI. Pound’s main source for these cantos, which he for the most part follows very closely, is the thirteen volumes of Histoire générale de la Chine (1777–85), a translation of what John J. Nolde terms the “most prestigious of all Chinese histories” (Nolde 1983, 25), known in English as The Outline and Digest of the Comprehensive Mirror (Tongjian gangmu).118 We understand from the English title that this work belongs to the genre “mirrors for princes”. Pound makes this perfectly clear in Canto 54, writing, “‘History is a school book for princes.’” (C, 54/280). This is based on a statement in Histoire générale, “L’histoire est la leçon des princes & de la postérité” (quoted in Driscoll 1983, 5). This indication is not to be taken lightly, since it tells us something fundamental about the nature of Pound’s own work as well. In February 1940, Pound wrote a letter to Mussolini indicating that he had wished to do some “useful work” with this installment of The Cantos: “I hope I have done useful work, at least in condensing some historical facts in my CANTOS 52/71.”119 This letter may make one think of something Mary de Rachewiltz says in the 1988 documentary film Ezra Pound: An American Odyssey, namely, that

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118 This work is itself a condensation of a much larger and more detailed work made by a team of scholars led by Sima Guang (1019–86), A Comprehensive Mirror for the Aid of Government (Zizhi tongjian) (cf. Lan 2008 [2004], 172). The Tongjian gangmu was subsequently updated by various historians, the last of which was, by the time the French translation was made, the scholar Sung Lao (1643–1713) (cf. Nolde 1996, 68–69).

119 My translation. The original letter, dated 12 February 1940, is in Italian: “Spero di aver fatto un lavoro utile, almeno ne condensare alcuni fatti storici nei miei CANTOS 52/71.” (P&P, vol. 10, 93)
Pound thought that he would be able to educate Mussolini in the same way Confucius tried to educate the Chinese rulers (cf. Rachewiltz 1988).

The French translation of the *Histoire générale* was made by Joseph-Anne-Marie de Moyriac de Mailla (1669–1749), a French Jesuit who from the 1720s on resided at the court of Kangxi, where he functioned as an interpreter for the emperor. Although de Mailla knew Chinese, he did not translate the work from its original Chinese, but rather from the Manchu language, into which it had been translated on the order of Kangxi, who thereby was out to educate his Manchu clansmen in the history and tradition of the people they had conquered, and whose empire they were now to govern. Pound comments on this toward the end of Canto 60: “History translated to manchu. Set up board of translators” (C, 60/332). It is interesting to note that de Mailla opined, in his préface to the *Histoire générale*, that the Manchu language was “not subject to the ambiguities of the Chinese language” (*point sujette aux équivoques comme la Chinoise*) (cf. Nolde 1996, 69).120

Since the original source only related Chinese history up to the second half of the fourteenth century, de Mailla set out to bring the history up to his own time. It is important that we are aware that the source for Canto 60 is volume XI of the *Histoire générale*, which is *not* a translation but the work of de Mailla himself and his editor M. le Roux des Hautesrayes (1724–95), who completed the work after the death of de Mailla.121

Pound bought the *Histoire générale* in the autumn of 1937 from an antiquarian bookshop in Trieste, for a neat £200. The cantos he made after working through its volumes seem to be an attempt at “distilling” Chinese imperial history to the point where nothing but the essential lessons to be learned remain. The question remains what these lessons would be. After a short sketch of the historical context treated in the poem, I will move on to a key passage of the canto.

### 3.11. Pound’s portrayal of Jesuit missionaries to China in Canto 60

I am going to focus on two features of Canto 60, the first being Pound’s rendering of the so-called Rites Controversy, the second his deployment of the characters 正名 *zhengming* toward the end of the canto. My main point is that something must have happened to Pound’s perspective on language and on translation: His earlier linguistic relativism and the challenges involved in translation are now countered by a belief in the possibility of transparent translation even between remote languages such as Latin (and the Romance languages) and Chinese. I will end my analysis of Canto

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120 Although Kangxi was an advocate of Confucianism and his Manchu officials were “rapidly absorbing the Chinese language and culture” (Nagahata 2020, 136), Akitoshi Nagahata sees the descriptions of horses and hunting which Pound quotes from the letters written by Kangxi in Canto 60 as colored by the Manchus “originally nomadic lifestyle” (ibid., 135).

121 John J. Nolde speculates that Pound never became aware of any of this, instead assuming the whole work to be a translation (Nolde 1983, 433–434) – this, Nolde indicates, is not necessarily a sign of sloppy reading, since one would need to catch one of “two crucial footnotes” to be able to notice that the work ceases to be a translation (ibid., 433).
Franciscan missionaries began making travels to China as early as in the beginning of the fourteenth century. It was not until 1583, however, that the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and a companion opened the first Catholic mission on Chinese soil that would have any considerable impact. According to Jonathan D. Spence in his study *The Chan’s Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (1998), no Westerner had ever come near to attaining Ricci’s knowledge of Chinese culture, language and society (cf. Spence 1998, 32). Realizing that the Chinese would not embrace Christianity if it meant giving up the homage paid to their ancestors and the ritual ceremonies in the name of Confucius, Ricci stated that these ceremonies were not religions invocations, but merely acts of homage. This way, the Chinese converts were permitted to continue observing their traditional rites. Ricci also proposed translating the Christian monotheistic concept of God with the two Chinese letters 上帝 or *shangdi* in pinyin (cf. Lan 2008 [2004], 172). These connoted something like “Lord-of-all” or “Highest Ruler” (ibid.) or “all-pervasive force” (cf. Terrell 1993 [1980], 254).

As Feng Lan informs us, Ricci and the other early Jesuit priests who went as missionaries to China adopted what is known as the *accommodationist policy*, the goal of which was to create a Chinese–Christian synthesis, fusing Christian teachings with mainstream Chinese moral and social conventions (cf. Lan 2008 [2004], 25). These missionaries saw the accommodation of Confucianism as the key to achieve this and therefore tried to salvage Confucianism as something not competing with Christian faith, but rather as a natural religion based on human reason. It was given such an interpretation that Voltaire could later make the quip (of questionable validity) about Confucius that Pound eventually quoted in his *Confucius* volume: “I admire Confucius. He was the first man who did not receive a divine inspiration.” (*Con*, 191)

The Western Catholic view of Chinese civilization was from the beginning generally favorable and continued to be so even after the collapse of the Ming dynasty in 1644. Several Jesuit missionaries traveled to China and settled there under its successor, the Qing dynasty, in the late seventeenth century. In 1692, under Emperor Kangxi, the Jesuits even won toleration for the Christian religion all through the Chinese Empire and were allowed to erect churches both in the capital and in the provinces, as recorded in Canto 60:

We permit lamas, hochangs and taotsés to go to their churches
It wd/ seem unwarranted to forbid only these Europeans
to go to their temples. We deem therefore
that they be so permitted
indiscriminate to pray and burn perfumes. (*C*, 60/328)
Later, in 1717, Kangxi changed his mind and proclaimed that no Christian missionaries would be permitted to stay in China unless they agreed to follow “the rules of Matteo Ricci” (cf. Leung 1992, 27), indicating the great importance of this Jesuit in the history of Sino-Western relations.

Not every Catholic authority accepted Ricci’s view of the ancient Chinese ceremonies. This is the background for the so-called Rites Controversy. In 1699 Franciscan friars appealed to the pope, asking him to prohibit the Chinese who had converted to Christianity from practicing Confucian rites. The Jesuits on their part stuck to Ricci’s interpretation and asked the emperor Kangxi to confirm it by declaring that the Chinese converts kept Confucian rites only as a matter of protocol, and that these rites consequently did not represent idolatry. This is the historical background for a passage in Canto 60, which opens by naming some key Jesuit missionaries to China at the time of Emperor Kangxi:

Grimaldi, Pereira, Tony Thomas and Gerbillon
sent in their *placet sic*:
European litterati
having heard that the Chinese rites honour Kung-fu-tseu
and offer sacrifice to the Heaven etc/
and that their ceremonies are grounded in reason
now beg to know their true meaning and in particular
the meaning of terms for example Material
Heaven and Changti meaning? its ruler?
Does the *manes* of Confucius
accept the grain, fruit, silk, incense offered
and does he enter his cartouche?
The European church wallahs wonder if this can be reconciled. (C, 60/329–30)

The passage portrays the interest the Jesuit missionaries had in searching out the not only the “true meaning” of the Confucian “ceremonies”, but more specifically of “the meaning of terms” such as “material Heaven” and “Changti”.122 When it comes to the term Changti, it refers to 上帝 shangdi, which we saw was Ricci’s suggested translation of the Christian concept of God. Given Pound’s concern with “learning the meaning of words”, “regulating names” and “finding the correct

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122 In the passage Pound also uses a term from Classical Latin, *manes* (the meaning of which is something along the lines of “the spirits of the dead”), in order to talk about Confucius. *Manes* as spirits of the dead are also referred to in the first of the Chinese History Cantos, Canto 52, where they are brought corn as sacrifice.
“definition”, it is not surprising that he should have been fascinated by how these Europeans nearly 250 years before him had experienced the challenges associated with semantics and translation.

The whole passage deals with the Jesuits missionaries’ will to “reconcile” Christian doctrine and Confucian rites. In their placet (petition), expressed in the eleventh volume of the Histoire générale, it says, among other things:

> When it comes to sacrifices to heaven, we believe that it is not to the visible heaven – which is the heaven we have above us – that they are offered, but to the supreme master, creator & conservator of heaven & earth & everything that they enclose. These were the interpretation and meaning that we have always given to the Chinese ceremonies; but since foreigners are not supposed to be able to make statements on this important point with the same certitude as the Chinese themselves, we dare implore Your Majesty not to deny us these clarifications that we need; we await them with respect & submission.

In a footnote some pages earlier, we find stated very much the same as what is rendered by Pound, about the “contested points” (points contestés) that the Jesuit missionaries addressed in their placet:

> The contested points were to know if, by the words Tien & Chang-ti, the Chinese understood the material heaven or the Lord of heaven; & if the ceremonies that they practiced for their dead ancestors & the philosopher Confucius were religious or simply civil; sacrifices, or simple social acts. It was of the greatest importance for the purity of the Christianity of the Chinese converts to have an exact idea of the meaning they attached to these terms, & of the intention that led them to practice these rites, because if the terms Tien & Chang-ti did not express anything other than the material heaven, and the ceremonies instituted for the ancestors were real sacrifices, it was to be feared that the new converts, by continuing to

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123 In his A Companion to The Cantos of Ezra Pound, Terrell seemingly misunderstands the wording placet sic in the passage from Pound’s canto, which he says means “it is agreed, thus” and that this was a “[f]ormula used on the petition sent in”, i.e., from the missionaries to the Chinese emperor (Terrell 1993 [1980], 254). This is perhaps decent guesswork but does not seem to me to be correct. Instead, the placet in Mailla is a name for the petition itself. In actual fact, Pound has simply translated Mailla’s wording into Latin: Where Mailla says “un placet […] conçu en ces termes”, Pound condenses these five French words into two Latin ones, “placet sic”, which means, as far as sameness goes when we speak of translation, very much the same thing. This also explains why Pound deploys italics solely for the word placet and not for sic, something he also does in the typescript (EPP, Box 74, Folder 3352).

124 My translation. This is the French original: “Quant aux sacrifices au ciel, nous croyons que ce n’est pas au ciel visible, qui est ce ciel que l’on fait au-dessus de nous qu’ils font offerts; mais au maître suprême, auteur & conservateur du ciel & de la terre, & de tout ce qu’ils renferment. Tels font l’interprétation & le sens que nous avons toujours donné aux cérémonies Chinoises; mais comme des étrangers ne sont pas censés pouvoir prononcer sur ce point important avec la même certitude que les Chinois eux-mêmes, nous osons supplier Votre Majesté de ne pas nous refuser les éclaircissements dont nous avons besoin: nous les attendons avec respect & soumission.” (Histoire générale, vol. 11, 303–4).
worship the true God under these names, & in assisting at these sacrifices, were making themselves culpable of an enormous idolatry.

This double question was more difficult to resolve than one had imagined: It was deeply embarrassing for the missionaries in China, who were divided in their understanding & flooded Europe with writings, wherein one finds the pros & cons argued with the greatest force.125

Terrell’s Companion and John J. Nolde’s magisterial Blossoms from the East: The China Cantos of Ezra Pound (1983) both state that this footnote was written by de Mailla. The way I see it, John Driscoll must certainly be right in his conjecture that the footnote is not by de Mailla but his editor des Hautesrayes (Driscoll 1978, 224), since the author of the footnote at one point gives his own opinion on the Rites Controversy, which is that in fact the ceremonies do represent idolatry. This was hardly de Mailla’s opinion.

More importantly, Driscoll claims that the issues of the Rites Controversy are “not well stated” in Canto 60, allegedly because Pound “did not read the relevant pages in the Histoire very carefully” (ibid., 221). Driscoll underscores that the whole point is that, even if the Jesuits were actually in “broad sympathy with […] Chinese culture”, they would, as agents of a Christian power in Rome – “in letter if not in spirit” – be in a “very weak theological position” if what they took to be the Chinese names for God, like “Changti” or 上帝 shangdi (as well as “Tien” or 天 tian)126 had “pagan polytheist connotations”, and if the “devotions to Confucius were religious or even idolatrous rather than political and social acts of homage” (ibid., 222). The Dominicans and other groups within the church were “scandalised” by the Jesuits’ “liberal attitude” to what they (the Dominicans) considered to be pagan ritual (ibid.). The placet sent by the Jesuits to the Chinese emperor was in fact construed by these rival Catholic groups as a challenge to the pope’s authority: Why would Christians consult a “pagan” emperor in matters theological? Not least, says Driscoll, pressures were starting to mount against the Jesuits residing at Kangxi’s court by “commercial groups in Europe trying to gain access to the China trade” (ibid.).

125 My translation. This is the French original: “Les points contestés étoient de savoir si, par les mots de Tien & de Chang-ti, les Chinois entendoient le ciel matériel ou le Seigneur de ciel; & si les cérémonies qu’ils pratiquoient à l’égard de leurs ancêtres morts & du philosophe Confucius, étoient religieuses, ou simplement civiles; des sacrifices, ou de simples usages de police. Il étoit de la plus grande importance, pour la pureté du Christianisme des Chinois convertis, d’avoir une idée exacte du sens qu’ils attachoient à ces termes, & de l’intention qui les portoit à la pratique de ces rits, parce que si les termes de Tien & de Chang-ti n’exprimoient que le ciel matériel, & que les cérémonies instituées à l’égard des ancêtres, fussent de sacrifices réels, il étoit à craindre que les nouveaux convertis, en continuant d’adorer le vrai Dieu sous ces dénominations, & en assistant à ses sacrifices, ne se rendissent coupables d’une idolâtrie grossière.

Cette double question étoit plus difficile à réoudre qu’on ne se l’imaginoit: elle embarrassa beaucoup les missionnaires de la Chine qui se partagèrent de sentiment, & inondèrent l’Europe d’écrits, dans lesquels on trouve le pour & le contre appuyés avec la plus grande force.” (Histoire générale, vol. 11, 300)

126 The latter term is commonly translated as “heaven” (cf. Lan 2008 [2004], 171).
Driscoll is right to point out that Pound, in the main passage from Canto 60 that I am examining here, at one point jumps from the text of the *placet* as given by the *Histoire générale* (which he follows up until “now beg to know their true meaning”), instead relying (from the point where he continues the line “and in particular”) on the long footnote I also quoted from. As rendered in the *Histoire générale*, the *placet* in itself does not ask explicitly about the meaning of the term *shangdi* and was instead formulated in a way that should make it easy for the Chinese emperor to respond to it in the affirmative, stating that the Confucian rites in fact *were* a matter of protocol. The emperor did in fact provide such a reply, thereby securing a great victory for the Jesuits in Beijing. This is, in short, Driscoll’s main point: “Pound […] brings into the *placet* precisely those points that Grimaldi and the others were criticised by their contemporaries for not including.” (ibid., 224)

Driscoll seems also to be concerned that Pound is simply too *flippant* in his treatment of this serious issue. And Pound’s whole treatment of the missionaries’ project of getting the Confucian ritualistic terms “translated” is arguably presented in a somewhat flippant manner, for example by referring to the missionaries as “church wallahs”. However, this does not mean that Pound was fundamentally *ironic* about this issue. On the contrary, he was obviously seriously *endorsing* the “translational” project of the Jesuit missionaries in question. An indication of how Pound interpreted this whole complex can be seen from his 1939 article, “On the Degrees of Honesty in Various Occidental Religions”. The article was printed in *The Aryan Path*, a theosophical publication in India with no relation to Fascism or Nazism (cf. Marsh 2011, 66), and later included in William Cookson’s edition of Pound’s *Selected Prose*:

> As I see it, the literate Christian explorer found nothing in Confucius to object to; there was nothing that the most sincere Catholic missionary could wish to remove from Confucius’s teaching. They were reduced to asking about the technical meaning of the Lord of Heaven and as to how far Kung was, or was not, incarnate or inpietrate or present in the cartouche or tablet. (*P&P*, vol. 7, 467; *SP*, 66)

This must count as a great homage paid by Pound to the Jesuits, since Pound considered himself a devout Confucian. The poet’s more or less lifelong devotion to Confucianism also indicates the full importance of his treatment of Emperor Kangxi in Canto 60.127 In the words of John Driscoll, Pound viewed Kangxi as “the epitome of the Confucian ruler” (Driscoll 1978, 219). This was in keeping

127 Zhaoming Qian sees in the treatment of the rites of the Naxi people a “turning away from Confucianism” on Pound’s part (Qian 2017, 105). This may lead us to question whether Pound’s devotion to Confucianism was indeed lifelong, but does not fundamentally affect my argument here.
with the eighteenth-century prominence of this specific Chinese emperor as an example of the “benevolent despot”, enhanced especially by the Jesuits, and promoted in François Quesnay’s *Le Despotisme de la Chine* (1767), as well as by de Mailla himself.

According to Terrell, Kangxi was “a literary man who talked philosophy with westerners and played a musical instrument” (Terrell 1973, 70). He reappears in Cantos 98 and 99, cantos that Pound himself referred to as “a summary of Confucian ethics, as put into action and practice by the splendid administration of Manchu, as State teaching” (Pound, quoted in Bacigalupo 1980, 372). Here, Pound praises Kangxi for the circulation of the Neo-Confucian work *The Sacred Edict*, which originally only consisted of sixteen maxims, each of just seven characters and in a high literary style. On Kangxi’s orders these were displayed in law courts throughout the empire. Subsequently, Kangxi’s son made several elaborations and editions to *The Sacred Edict*. Later, tradition has it, the salt commissioner of Shensi rewrote the book in a simplified style – “in volgar’ eloquio taking the sense down to the people”, to quote Pound (C, 98/708). In its enlarged and simplified form, *The Sacred Edict* became a book that, according to Rong Ou, was to be “as popular as [the] Bible in the West” (Ou 2014, 68) during the Qing dynasty, the last Chinese imperial dynasty, which lasted from the generation before Kangxi and until 1912.

Michael Kindellan remarks on the important point that Pound’s post-Fenollosa engagement with Chinese literature “is mediated by texts written, translated or edited by Christian missionaries” (Kindellan 2018, 88). Pound had been fundamentally appreciative of what Driscoll refers to as the “liberal attitude” of the Jesuit missionaries when confronted with the “entirely different world” of Chinese culture, not least their wanting to know if there was a way to “reconcile” the Christian theological terms and Chinese terms involved in the Confucian ritual practices. The version of *The Sacred Edict* that Pound worked on also made by a British missionary, Frederick W. Baller (1852–1922). Although Pound read the 1921 reissue, Baller had originally published the book in 1892, in a bilingual version, the object being that European missionaries would use it to learn Mandarin. What I will suggest is that Pound, by idealizing the attitudes and the achievement of these missionaries, arguably became prone to underestimating the challenges involved in translating from Chinese to European languages. In the next section, I will suggest that a certain political perspective might have influenced Pound’s thinking about this historical issue of translation.

### 3.12. Pound’s linguistic relativism revised

Toward the end of Canto 60 one finds again the two characters that had become of such importance to Pound, 正名, *zhengming*, “right name” or “the rectification of names”:

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128 Bacigalupo quotes Pound in English but informs his readers that the note is originally written in Italian.
qu’ils veillèrent à la pureté du langage
et qu’on n’employât que des termes propres
(namely CH’ing ming)
正名 (C, 60/332–33)

These are the two sole Chinese characters deployed in the canto. As we can see from Pound’s quoting it in French, the inclusion of the zhengming characters is inspired by a passage in the Histoire générale that obviously refers to this central Confucian concept, stating as it does that Kangxi, who was both a poet and a scholar in his own right, desired “purity of language” (la pureté du langage) and wished that one used but the “proper terms” (des termes propres). Having indicated that Pound viewed Kangxi as an ideal ruler, we should not be surprised to see that he adhered to the project of “right naming” that had come to be so important to Pound. In the context of Kangxi, Pound seems notably to see the “rectification of names” not solely as an ideal of linguistic adaequatio between word and object, but as something concerning word and society. According to Feng Lan, Pound became more and more concerned with this societal idea of language, precisely under the influence of the Confucian doctrine of zhengming (Lan 2008 [2004], 66). This suggests that Makin, in his otherwise highly interesting criticism of Pound’s “aberration”, possibly overlooks that the “right naming” project is a question not so much of language philosophy as of language policy.

Returning to what is said about Kangxi’s ideal for language in Canto 60, one can undoubtedly be puzzled by the emperor’s said ideal concerning “purity of language”. Why would this be something that appealed to Pound? Did not his own decade-long practice of multilingual poetics rather represent a conscious effort at challenging any linguistic purism? Much of Pound’s poetry can be described in this way, but his poetry had undergone important changes toward the end of the 1930s. What largely been a hermetic poetry, in the tradition of the Provençal troubadour’s so-called trobar clus, was now meant to be a useful condensation of historical fact. In a 1940 letter to Camillo Pellizzi, a former professor of Italian in London, Pound himself stated that his Cantos LII–LXXI were now “SIMPLER” (Pound, quoted in Redman 1991, 200). It is in this connection that I will claim that also Pound’s linguistic relativism undergoes a revision at this point, and that such a revision is observable in Canto 60 itself.

One might expect Pound, who clearly had expressed opinions that place him among a larger group of twentieth-century authors, poets, artist and thinkers that stood for different versions of linguistic relativism, to view the “translation” of terms stemming from Confucian rituals into European languages like Latin and French to be if not outright impossible, then very close to
impossible: the idea of finding any verbal “equivalent” to something so deeply embedded in a certain cultural tradition is, many a relativist would claim, an extremely demanding task. It should be said that other translation perspectives exist than such a focus on “finding equivalents”, but my main point about the Sino–European translation in question remains valid even given these perspectives: The passage in Canto 60 does not stress the difficulty of such an endeavor. Instead, the canto suggests that Pound envisioned the Jesuit missionaries as having an adequate and sufficient understanding of the challenges involved in linguistic transfer. In translation theory terms, while Pound in Cathay foreignized his English, these missionaries were out to domesticate the Chinese concepts. My claim is that while while Pound in the Malatesta Cantos juxtaposed different languages as if measuring them to discover their respective likenesses and differences, he in Canto 60 harmonizes the differences between languages.

Here it is also highly relevant to cite the notes that Pound put at the very beginning of Cantos LII–LXI: These consist of a short note on the transliteration of Chinese names, a table of contents and then a seemingly very significant note that states that foreign words and ideograms “both in these two decades and in earlier cantos enforce the text but seldom if ever add anything not stated in the english”. My analysis in this dissertation so far shows that this is a deeply misleading statement, that is, it is misleading precisely when it comes to the “earlier cantos’, although not when it comes to a canto such as Canto 60. In this 1940 note, Pound has profoundly altered the argumentation he set forth as late as in 1935, in the essay “Debabelization and Ogden”, which I analyzed in chapter 1. In this essay, Pound had stated that he had “never used a Greek word or a Latin one where English would have served” and that, in the case of a Italian or French word, he had “meant it to assert some meaning not current in English, some shade or gradation” (P&P, vol. 6, 251). In other words, five years after he published this essay Pound suddenly states the opposite as to the inclusion of foreign language terms in his poetry. How to account for this change?

The explanation I am about to offer is largely a historical and political one, linking the Jesuit missionaries of Canto 60 with Pound’s relations to Mussolini’s Fascism. I take my cue from some observations that the literary comparatist-cum-sinologist Haun Saussy makes in his article “In the Workshop of Equivalences: Translation, Institutions, and Media in the Jesuit Re-Formation of China” (2001). Here Saussy cites a book of questions and answers about Catholic doctrine made by a Chinese convert to Christianity named Yang Tingyun, titled Dai yi pian (A Treatise for Removing Doubts) and issued around 1620. I quote first the Western Jesuit missionary speaking, and then a Chinese scholar who expresses his astonishment at what he hears. What is especially important here is the emphasis put in the book on the role of the state, “the sages”, and censorship in the Western world compared with China:
It is the custom of the Western countries to put an extremely high value on teaching through books, and for this reason, the state becomes the ears and eyes of the people. [...] Those who are in charge of doctrine must be the sages and the worthies of the time, elevated far beyond the mass of people in intelligence, discrimination, and learning. Whatever books are to be circulated must first undergo the examiners’ personal inspection, and only when they are seen to be free of the slightest flaw are they given to the press. [...] 

Someone replied: I am amazed at what I hear, and can hardly believe it. In our country of China, there are many who chatter away in writing and spread it about through private printing, and the state is still unable to forbid the unlicensed publication of books, so that their number increases daily. (Dai yi pian, quoted in Saussy 2001, 165)

In Saussy’s summary, the missionary constructs for his Chinese hearer “a Western utopia in which the power of the press is restricted to those who possess governmental and moral authority” (Saussy 2001, 166–67). This, in turn, “connects directly with the unspoken core proposition of what the Jesuits can offer China, namely, a rationale for unlimited jurisdiction over communications” (ibid., 176), that is, a means to counter the said tendency of the time of the dialogue quoted, where the “many who chatter away in writing” weaken the traditional authority of the Confucian classics. Saussy sums it up concisely: “Yang makes Catholicism the ideal image of Confucianism, inwardly solid and unlimited in authority.” (ibid., 176) Pound, having been critical of church authorities from early on in his life, was, as we saw, strikingly positive toward the Jesuits in China. My thesis would be that the whole idea of a “Catholic Confucianism” began to appeal to him from the late 1930s onward precisely because it reminded him of Mussolini’s totalitarian policies.

Robert Casillo quotes a remark Pound made in 1941, that “Mussolini and Hitler follow through with magnificent intuition the doctrines of Confucius” (Pound, quoted in Casillo 1988, 122). He also points out that Pound in Canto 62 indicates that Hitler’s motto Schicksal is the nearest modern equivalent to the teachings of the Sacred Edict (ibid.). Feng Lan takes issue with scholars like Mary Paterson Cheadle, who has claimed that Confucianism planted the “seeds of fascism” in Pound’s political philosophy, and Peter Nicholls, who sees Pound’s Fascism as in part a product derived from his “enthusiasm” for Confucius (Cheadle and Nicholls, quoted in Lan 2004 [2008], 8). Such an idea, however, albeit rather in the reverse causal order, remains convincing to me. When Lan criticizes these interpretations on the grounds that it “splits the poet’s intellectual growth into two unrelated segments”, namely, the earlier Pound, “who was a liberal-minded artist committed to true humanist values”, and the later Pound, who was “ideologically contaminated by Confucianism” (Lan 2004 [2008], 8), then surely the negative description of being “contaminated by Confucius” renders this picture caricaturesque. Still, my analysis indicates that the idea that there exists a “split”
between the young, cosmopolitan Pound on the one side, and the one actively endorsing Fascism in
the 1930s on the other, is hard to dismiss entirely. This does not mean that Pound did not remain
“committed to true humanist values”: He clearly saw Confucianism as eminently humanist, and
Fascist policies as Confucian at least in the sense that they ran counter to the mentality of Western
modernity that Pound summed up like this: “where once we read ‘men’, we read now ‘money’”
(Pound, quoted in Lan 2008 [2004], 186).

In Saussy’s article, the Jesuits were concerned with the difference between the regimes of
the Western world and the one in China. But this was around the year 1620, decades before the rule
of Emperor Kangxi. The rule of Kangxi was viewed by both Pound and his Jesuit source text as
having restored Confucian values. As witnessed in some passages toward the end of Canto 60,
Kangxi made means of preserving and enhancing knowledge a staple of his empire, not only by
setting up the aforementioned “board of translators”, but also by personally revising a treatise
written by a Jesuit, initiating a digest of Manchu philosophy, receiving regular reports from the
“académies / des science de Paris”, setting up a laboratory in his palace, and also letting the art in
the palace be inspired by Western models. What all these examples of Emperor Kangxi’s cultural
and intellectual interests should be able tell us is that he was “something of a hero” to Pound, the
way John J. Nolde says he was to de Mailla (cf. Nolde 1983, 393). More specifically, I will argue
that Kangxi is portrayed by Pound as proto-totalitarian: That Kangxi’s endeavor to regulate the
meaning of terms, his being open to various disciplines of knowledge brought to China by the
Jesuits, such as astronomy, music, physics and mathematics, as well as his eventual resistance to
Western economic imperialism, all this suits Pound’s idea of the totalitarian leader.

Several passages in Guide to Kulchur indicate that Pound by the late 1930s had begun to
use the term “totalitarian”, and in an unequivocally positive sense. At one point he refers to the
book as “notes for a totalitarian treatise” (GK, 27). Later, he says that “poetry is totalitarian in any
confrontation with prose” (GK, 121), indicating that this has to do with poetry’s ability to condense
meaning: “There is MORE in and on two pages of poetry than in or on ten pages of prose save the
few books that rise above classification as anything save exceptions” (ibid.). As such, these loci
would indicate a rather loose use of the term “totalitarian”, but Pound also refers unambiguously to
“[t]he actual achievement of the totalitarian states” (GK, 167). In short, Pound was signing up for
totalitarianism also in its political sense. This he made abundantly clear when he on 6 February
1941 sent a suggested program note to Adriano Ungaro of the Italian foreign radio, referring to
himself as “an American gone totalitarian” (Pound, quoted in Redman 1991, 209). At about the
same time he claimed that “[a] totalitarian state uses the best of its human components” (SP, 158).
And in his 1938 article in The Criterion, “Mang Tsze (The Ethics of Confucius)”, Pound simply
claims: “The Confucian is a totalitarian.” (SP, 85) I will make an equally simple claim: It must be
the same political stance that makes Pound admire Kangxi as the epitome of the Confucian ruler, endorse the Jesuit missionaries’ undertaking in China, and support Mussolini, namely, that he conceived of them all as totalitarian.

Returning to Saussy’s interpretation, what the Jesuits in their own opinion could contribute to China was not least “a rationale for unlimited jurisdiction over communications” (Saussy 2001, 176). We ought to understand that Pound admired the idea of such a totalitarian media policy, even if he for decades had been fighting censorship, as in the case of the banning of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in the United States and the United Kingdom. In Canto 41, Pound included these lines:

“where there is no censorship by the state
there is a great deal of manipulation…” (C, 41/205)

Why the quotation marks? The answer must be that Pound here is rendering a point made by Mussolini, which he quotes in *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*: “Where the press is ‘free’ it merely serves special interests.” (J/M, 41) After having said that Pound retained an “eighteenth-century conception of politics”, Tim Redman paraphrases a point from the same work (J/M, 98) to show how Pound conceived of political movements as being “composed of a group of literate men, formed into committees of correspondence, with a few of them possessing a printing press so as to pass on their conclusions to the masses” (Redman 1991, 107). Although passages of Pound’s 1933 work can indeed be interpreted in this way, and Redman may be right that Pound continued to conceive of political movements as originating “through the understanding, will, and direction of individual men” (ibid., 112), later Pound was able to demonstrate that he was not insensitive to the significant historical changes that had occurred in the very concept of communication, and therefore in politics. On 4 August 1943, upon hearing over the BBC that he had been indicted on charges of treason by a federal grand jury in Washington, Pound would write from his home in Rapallo to Francis Biddle, the US attorney general, via the Swiss embassy in Rome, stating among other things that “free speech under modern conditions becomes a mockery if it does not include the right of free speech over the radio” (Pound, quoted in Wilhelm 1994, 199). After the war, he would express a similar sentiment in Canto 74, the first of *The Pisan Cantos*: “free speech without radio free speech is as zero” (C, 74/446).129 In other words, Pound conceived of free speech in a broad, modern sense, but this modern sense necessarily made free speech very exclusive. In what was resolutely a pre-podcast era, this undeniably makes some sense: Only a few of a country’s citizens could conceivably

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129 In Canto 102, we can read that “Eva improved that line about Freiheit” (C, 102/729), referring to this specific line, and to his German translator Eva Hesse, who translated it as follows: “dass Redefreiheit ohne Radiofreiheit gleich null ist” (cf. Rachewiltz 2014).
ever get to speak on the radio. In Pound’s perspective, I will claim, such a right should be if not reserved for, then at least granted especially to the ones he referred to as “the antennae of the race”, namely, the artists (cf. LE, 297). In a 1931 interview with the magazine Belvedere, Pound said that he dreamt of a return to an epoch “a bit similar to the fifteenth century”, and age in which “the summit of power coincided exactly with the summit of intelligence”, an idea he adds that one can find in Confucius (Pound, quoted in Redman 1991, 76–77). Kangxi, on his part, had drawn great intellectuals and artists of the day to his court, arguably in an attempt to control communication in a quasi-totalitarian manner, for example when he spread the core theses of the Sacred Edict to law courts around all around the empire, as discussed above. Mussolini’s explicitly totalitarian regime had already, with press laws passed on 20 June 1925, established control over the domestic press, in addition to controlling the airwaves, and now had the power to let regime-backed intellectuals and artists be heard. A year after the publication of Canto 60, Pound would himself become a contributor to Radio Rome. Whereas the earliest broadcasts had a shorter introduction, on 29 February 1942 his talk was preceded by a preamble beginning with this highly relevant phrase:

Rome Radio, acting in accordance with the Fascist policy of intellectual freedom and free expression for those who are qualified to hold it, has offered Dr Ezra Pound the use of the microphone twice a week. (quoted in Stock 2012 [1970], 393; my italics)

In one of his broadcasts, Pound even said: “Seems like the ONLY free speech on CERTAIN topics has been left to ME on this Radio” (EPS, 149). This peculiar totalitarian concept of free speech seems a key to how Pound conceived of communication during World War II and in the years leading up to the war.

Although having been a leading avant-gardist, resisting existing “rules and regulations”, Pound had now begun to see even his own poetry as “useful work”, having a primary function in “condensing historical fact” (P&P, vol. 10, 93). Simultaneously, what had been explorations in translation and linguistic relativism now had become a politized endorsement of a project for the precise use of words. This project stands in contrast to Pound’s earlier ideals of the ideogrammic method, which he had conceived of as an alternative to syllogistic reasoning, and which arguably represented an alternative way of thinking about semantics and precision than the traditional ideal of defining individual terms. Even as Pound’s interest in the ideogrammic method declined and he began to propagate for the policy of “right naming”, he actively deployed Chinese ideograms in his

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130 The translation from Italian is Redman’s.
131 The denomination “Dr” is not an attempt by the broadcasters at presenting Pound as having achieved a university PhD or anything of the sort. It simply translates the Italian dottore, which is a generic term designating any learned man worthy of respect.
cantos, highlighting that the ideogrammic method and the actual insertion of Chinese written characters are two very different things, the latter being based on Pound’s specific way of reading Chinese signs for their pictorial roots, what Feng Lan calls “etymopgraphic reading” (Lan 2008 [2004], 29). The most apparent multilingual device in Canto 60, the two characters 正名, are tellingly simply the ones denoting the Confucian concept for “rectifying names”. What, then, happened to Pound’s multilingual poetics, formerly so rich? What direction did it take from here? And what are the relations between these directions and Pound’s political leanings? These questions, I suggest, can be answered by drawing a link between Canto 60 and “Addendum for C”, which has to do with Pound’s particular view of the politics of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Western world in its dealings with Asia.

3.13. Realpolitik and political idealism in “Addendum for C” (circa 1941)

John Driscoll makes note of an interesting agreement between de Mailla and Pound, namely, that the two “were clearly on comfortable common ground when showing the evils of foreign mercantilism in a valuable culture like China’s” (Driscoll 1983, 226). At one point in Canto 60, Pound makes a parallel that is of great interest, portraying as it does Kangxi, the KANG of these lines, as a precursor to the American Founding Father Thomas Jefferson, here present in Pound’s idiosyncratic – or as he liked to say, “Murkn” (American) – spelling:

And too much rice wen to Batavia
so our lord KANG layed an embargo
(a bit before Tommy Juffusun’s) (C, 60/330)

Driscoll explains this allusion by way of the respective leaders’ responses to European power politics, with Kangxi first opposing European mercantilism in China and Jefferson around a century later trying to ameliorate the damage caused to American trade by the Napoleonic Wars (cf. Driscoll 1978, 220). Knowing to what extent Jefferson was an ideal American statesman in Pound’s view,132 only surpassed by John Adams, to which the whole remaining part of Cantos LII–LXXI (of which the Chinese History Cantos constitute the first part) is devoted, we begin to understand that for Pound there was a central lesson to be learned from Chinese history, namely, that of having a

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132 The and/or in the title of Pound’s Jefferson and/or Mussolini does of course not suggest that Pound was after simply equating Jefferson and Mussolini, but one thing is for certain: he did, at repeated instances, endorse both. In a 1931 interview quoted by Tim Redman in his Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism, Pound even explicitly says that Jefferson is the “American historical character who comes to mind when I consider the part of Mussolini’s effective program which includes land reclamation, the ‘battle for grain’, and the mobilization of the nation’s internal credit” (Pound, quoted in Redman 1991, 76). The translation from Italian is Redman’s.
government that took active part in economic life and made regulations not only on the press, but on trade. Though I cannot go with any depth into this interesting historical context, I must say a word about the so-called Opium Wars. These were, at least from the Chinese perspective, a result of the importation (or smuggling, according to Chinese laws) of opium into China primarily by British merchants, as well as of the British unwillingness to prohibit the growth of the poppy in their Indian dominions, while it from the British perspective at least partly was considered a war to ensure free trade against the reigning regulations upheld by the Chinese Empire (cf. Têng 1944, 2 and 48). This focus on free trade was, in any event in the perspective Pound might have seen it, partly an ideological alibi for Western economic, as well as military, dominance over Asia. Regarding Western expansion of power in the nineteenth century, Zhiguang Yin employs the concept “imperialism of free trade”, as coined by John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson (cf. Yin 2016).133

There is every reason to highlight that Pound at a certain point became deeply interested in, as well as arguably involved in, what we know as Realpolitik. To illustrate what this implied for his poetry, let us look at a passage from “Addendum for C” (see Appendix) – written around 1941, if we are to believe the dating in Drafts & Fragments of Canto CX–CXVII (1968), which, despite its title indicating that it starts with Canto 110, includes this fragment. “Addendum for C” was originally published in 1942, in the New York-based Vice Versa. The title Pound gave it at the time was “Canto Preceding (72 Circa)”. Pound later expressed a wish to name the fragment “From Canto C” (“C” as in the Roman numeral for 100), but his editor James Laughlin ultimately persuaded him to title it “Addendum for CANTO C” when he included it as the penultimate piece in Drafts & Fragments. In later editions this has been simplified to “Addendum for C”.134

In an article in Paideuma, the journal devoted to Pound scholarship, Ethan Lewis states that “Addendum for C” seems a “wholly arbitrary title chosen to accord with the symmetry of the Commedia” (Lewis 1991, 65), that is, Dante’s Divine Comedy. This might indeed be the case, and even if the implications of this are not at all clear, Pound arguably saw Dante’s work as a primary model for his own, letting us imagine that he, at a certain point, planned on himself ending up with a hundred cantos, as would explain his letter to T. S. Eliot of 18 January 1940, where Pound stated that he had “29 canters to write” (Pound, quoted in Redman 1991, 194). Given these clues, it can surely be argued that the title “Addendum for C” suggests that this is a fragment that Pound wanted to assign an extraordinary importance. Let us look at the two final stanzas of the fragment:

134 Terrell treats even the fragment on the next page as pertaining to the “Addendum for C”, but it seems to me more reasonable to me to see this as a separate fragment.
Sero, sero! learned that Spain is mercury;
that Finland is nickel. Late learning!
S…… doing evil in place of the R………
“A pity that poets have used symbol and metaphor
and no man learned anything from them
for their speaking in figures.”

All other sins are open,
Usura alone not understood.
Opium Shanghai, opium Singapore
“with the silver spilla …
amber, caught up and turned …”

Lotophagoi (C, Add/819)

Before going further, some quick exegetical remarks may be needed. The S and R followed by dots are shorthand for Sassoon and Rothschild, Terrell tells us (Terrell 1993 [1980], 725). The final word Lotophagoi is a reference to the lotus eaters in the ninth book of the Odyssey, whom Pound here chooses to parallel with opium smokers of the East, while quoting his own Canto 20 in the antepenultimate and penultimate lines. There it was also talk of Logophagoi, “Lotophagoi of the suave nails, quiet, scornful” (C, 20/93) that later were to be contrasted with the paradisiacal line from Canto 74: “The suave eyes, quiet, not scornful” (C, 74/445). Commenting on the ending of “Addendum for C”, Casillo remarks that Pound here links usury to “poisonous drugs dispensed by Jewish opium racketeers, who have turned their victims into Lotophagoi, sunk in luxurious vegetable stupor” (Casillo 1988, 237). Casillo also refers to “Addendum for C” as “hallucinatory” in itself (ibid., 305).

Of particular importance to my understanding of what Pound does in this fragment is that he clearly expresses some regretful “late learning”. Sero is also the Latin word for “late”. Here it is surely used as a play on a passage from the Confessions of St. Augustine (X, xxvii): Sero te amavi; Augustine repeats the expression later in the same syntactical period, something that Pound echoes with his own repetition of the word sero. In Pound’s canto, sero implies, we must suppose, not late did I come to love you (God), as in Augustine, but rather something like late did I come to recognize the importance of Realpolitik. For my argument, the main point here is not only the references to Realpolitik, but the political importance ascribed to specifically economic concerns, indicating that countries in a certain perspective are nothing but their natural resources, as betrayed in the
expressions “Spain is mercury” and “Finland is nickel” – a correction of a typescript version of the fragment even suggests that “Spain equals mercury” (EPP, Box 78, folder 3446).

Given Pound’s interest in Chinese history, the mention of the Chinese city of Shanghai seems especially noteworthy: “Opium Shanghai, opium Singapore”. Here, the point is not that these cities equal their natural resources, but that they are defined by being important markets and ports for the opium trade, implying that the political status of the cities in question is determined by the potential for profit-making that they present. This is only one of numerous signs that Pound’s intent was to discuss politics and history, even more recent history than the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Western dealings with China.

For Pound, the prime evil of modern Western civilization was usury, in the fragment given in its Latin form usura: “Usura alone not understood.” Pound, of course, was also heavily influenced by contemporary anti-Semitism, to the point of seeing usury as a specifically Jewish practice that had somehow contaminated the Western world as such – although qualifying this by indicating that “usury came from the disregard of Jewish law by Jews themselves”, as Jean-Michel Rabaté puts it (Rabaté 2010, 138). But in the Chinese Empire, Pound assumed, such usurious practice was nonexistent. This is made explicit by Pound in Canto 60: “their princes in concord, no usury.” As Driscoll comments, there is “no proper source” for the expression “usury” in the Histoire générale (cf. Driscoll 1978, 220). According to Paul Morrison in his Poetic of Fascism (1996), “Pound is manifestly not interested in ‘transforming’ his source materials” in the Chinese History Cantos – indeed, what these cantos are typically criticized for is “their ‘unpoetic’ fidelity to their sources” (Morrison 1996, 29–30). Nonetheless, it is striking that Pound does not follow his source in this instance, not least when we take into account how central the usury is to his thinking. This does not mean that Pound was out to manipulate his source (or his readers) – he simply, rightly or wrongly, projected his anti-capitalist ideals on Chinese tradition.

Learning the actual importance of Realpolitik does not mean that one endorses political realism. On the contrary, I would claim that Pound was very much a political idealist, that is, that he considered it both possible and necessary to have a politics influenced by ideas of justice, rather than simply accepting that, as the saying goes, might makes right. In this context, I can but wholeheartedly subscribe to Driscoll’s point when he states that Pound had an “anti-19th, pro-18th-century outlook” (Driscoll 1978, 219). Driscoll quotes the following from Adolf Reichwin’s book China and Europe: Intellectual and Artistic Contacts in the Eighteenth Century (1925): “[I]t will be well to note at once that up to 1760, the Jesuitical i.e. the benevolent view of China, as against the commercial, was the dominant view” (Reichwin, quoted in Driscoll 1983, 29). We can of course regard such a sweeping verdict of the history of Sino–Western relations as simplistic if not outright naïve, and as a matter of fact, Driscoll quotes a critic of Reichwin’s work saying that it is “replete
with errors of judgment”. Such criticism does not mean that this slightly idealistic view of pre-nineteenth-century history was not close to Pound’s own. All this implies that when Pound referenced the Jesuit missionaries to China, and was, if in other contexts deeply critical of Christianity, appreciative of the Jesuits’ relation to Chinese culture, he was signaling a defiant attitude toward the practice of nineteenth-century European trade. The whole context of Canto 60 also suggests that he is much more appreciative of the traditional Chinese Empire than of the economically imperialistic West. There is every reason to contextualize this appreciation in terms of the political situation at the time of Pound’s writing the Chinese History Cantos and “Addendum for C”.

Pound had been supportive of the war that Fascist Italy waged on Abyssinia (now Ethiopia and part of Eritrea) from October 1935 on, since he opined that Italy, as an industrial country, needed colonies. In Pound’s view, as Roxana Preda paraphrases him, Italy was “entitled to attack and possess territories in Africa, on the basis of its superior civilization” (cf. Preda 2001, 184). As Redman laconically puts it, “Pound was against war, but by that he meant war in Europe” (Redman 1991, 168). Feldman even claims that “the Abyssianian War may be seen as a catalyst in Pound’s embrace of propaganda for an organ of Fascist Italy” (Feldman 2013, 37). In other words, Pound was very much endorsing Fascist imperial ambitions. Little surprise, then, that when Mussolini declared the constitution of the Italian Fascist Empire on 9 May 1936, Pound was enthusiastic. Casillo indicates that Pound distinguished between “good and bad forms of empire building”, namely, on the one hand “a benevolent and constructive colonialism” that he associated with the Roman Empire, and on other a “corrupt, exploitative, and usurious imperialism” (Casillo 1988, 153). In Pound’s eyes, Mussolini’s imperialism was evidently of the Roman type.

Although it may be tempting to see Pound’s presentation of the Chinese Empire as a parallel to his idea of Fascist Italy, and Kangxi to Mussolini, we should beware of thinking of this as Pound’s expressing himself in an allegorical or metaphorical way. Pound himself warns against metaphor in the passage quoted. Pound had a truly high regard for the Chinese Empire, which he conceived of as based on certain stable values, such as sensibility (cf. Canto 85). One of his literary heroes, Voltaire, had a view of Chinese civilization and empire that, for all its simplified idealism, probably comes close to Pound’s own:

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136 In a way strikingly naïve for a poet, one might say, Pound here implies “that a transparent and non-metaphorical language exists” (Casillo 1988, 221). Casillo points to Pound’s idea that the Kabbalistic Jews “introduced allegorical interpretation into the world”, thus distracting men from the plain sense of words (ibid., 127).
The body of this empire has existed four thousand years, without having undergone any alteration in its laws, customs, language, or even its fashions of apparel. [...] The organization of this empire is in truth the best the world has ever seen. (Voltaire, quoted in Hong Sun 2003, 98)

For Pound as for Voltaire, the longevity of an empire was a sign that it was doing something right. All his life, Pound maintained a deep respect for Chinese culture and civilization, or at least for his own idea of this culture. Such a respect for a faraway culture of course would suit a cosmopolitan. And Pound had arguably been a cosmopolitan in this sense, as intimated in chapter 2. But he was such a cosmopolitan no longer. The clearest indication of Pound’s negating his earlier cosmopolitanism was his increasingly explicit anti-Semitism. We have already seen Pound being slightly denigrating toward African and Amerindian traditional cultures, although admiring the said traits of their languages, which Pound claimed were characterized by concrete descriptions and an insistence on the verbal. Any such mitigating circumstances seem absent when we come to Hebrew culture and language, as I will demonstrate by examining the beginning of “Addendum for C”. Since a principal point of my reading of the “Addendum” has to do with how the Hebrew term for “usury”, neschek (in Pound’s spelling), is put up as a dichotomic opposite to the Greek term for “beauty”, tò kalôn, I will, before arriving at the “Addendum” proper, trace this latter concept through Pound’s work, where it plays a singular role.

3.14. The various meanings of tò kalôn in Pound’s work
Beauty has arguably been a prominent aesthetic criterion as long as art has existed, and it was a quasi-omnipresent category for evaluating poetry when Pound started publishing poetry: Barry Ahern quotes critics praising Pound’s Personae (1909) for containing “true beauty” and “fresh beauty” and stating that the work was “unquestionably beautiful” (cf. Ahern 2010, 437). Similarly, Ford Madox Hueffer saw in the poems of Cathay “a supreme beauty” (ibid.). One particular critic who was negative toward Ripostes “could not see the art or the beauty” of the book (ibid.). The concept of beauty as such, however, remained undefined, Ahern comments: “The critics seemed to know beauty when they saw it, but apparently one had to take their word for it.” (ibid.) It is almost as though “beauty” here serves the function of what in present-day criticism goes by the name of “literary quality”.

The idea of beauty occupied Pound throughout his career. As late as in Canto 116, the existential tone of this whole passage does not prevent the poet from asking about the nature of beauty, how it may suddenly arrive:
I have brought the great ball of crystal;
   who can lift it?
Can you enter the great acorn of light?
   But the beauty is not the madness
Tho’ my errors and wrecks lie about me.
And I am not a demigod,
I cannot make it cohere.
If love be not in the house there is nothing.
The voice of famine unheard.
How came beauty against this blackness,
Twice beauty under the elms –
   To be saved by squirrels and bluejays?
   “plus j’aime le chien” (C, 116/815–16)

The poet here famously expresses that he “cannot make it cohere”, the “it” presumably being his own poem. “How came beauty against this blackness”, he muses, before referring us to the beautiful in nature, as if flora and fauna as such is fundamentally free from human “madness”, “errors” and “wrecks”. It is as if beauty in hindsight is no longer primarily something that characterizes artworks but instead characterizes nature, suggesting that it is not by artistic creation, but by letting nature be as it is, that one inadvertently lets beauty arrive. In one of the most often quoted of his late poetic drafts, catalogued under the heading “Notes for CXVII et seq.”, Pound invokes a related idea, seeing paradise as not something one can “write” or “make” but that one can experience by being still, thereby attaining a certain serenity after all:

I have tried to write Paradise

Do not move
   Let the wind speak
       that is paradise.

Let the Gods forgive what I
   have made
Let those I love try to forgive
       what I have made. (C, Notes for CXVII et seq./822)
Once again, “paradise” is not, one must suspect, the final section of *The Cantos*, the grand epic poem influenced by Dante’s *Divine Comedy*; instead it is by *not moving*, by doing nothing, that one attains paradise. Beauty and paradise were, in a sense, already there. But the artist is bent on capturing the beauty in art, and that is, as recorded earlier in Pound’s poem, “so very difficult” (*C*, 80/531). “Beauty is difficult” is a sort of refrain in *The Pisan Cantos* (1948). According to John J. Espey in his article “The Inheritance of Τὸ Καλὸν”, “the ‘difficulty’ of beauty” is the “most profound theme” of *The Cantos* (Espey 1969, 330). He adds that “the search for a solution of that difficulty underlines all of Pound’s political, economic and historical reading” (ibid.). It may seem that Espey exaggerates the importance of the difficulty of beauty, but I will claim that he touches on something very important.

The never-ending discussion of the nature and meaning of beauty should make us suspect that it is somewhat of an “untranslatable” concept.¹³⁷ No less than ten pages of the English-language edition of Barbara Cassin’s *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (originally published in French in 2004 and in English in 2014) are devoted to the concept of “beauty”, originally French *beauté*. We might suspect that even between French and English there are interesting differences between the associations these words give. The problem of establishing a valid one-word translation is presumably even greater when it comes to the Latin and Greek concepts listed by the dictionary as corresponding to “beauty”, namely, *pulchritudo* and *kallos* (*κάλλος* – germinated noun, “beauty”) or *kallon* (*καλόν* – nominalized adjective, “the beautiful”). As Jean-François Groulier and Fabienne Brugère write in their article on beauty in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, “[f]or more than a millennium, Greek thinking about the beautiful was understood almost exclusively in Latin” (Groulier and Brugère 2014, 79). Τὸ καλὸν, they continue, “has been reinterpreted through *pulchrum* and has been constantly reinterpreted in the context of new theoretical fields” (ibid.). In the medieval period, *pulchritudo* referred primarily to “a specific comprehension of Aristotle”, while the proto-aesthetic thought of the Renaissance marked “a return to Plato, and especially to the *Symposium*” (ibid.). This certainly chimes not only with the stated neo-Platonism of Pound, but also of his interest in Ancient Greek poetry.

In *The Spirit of Romance* Pound states that Dante, in Canto XXIII of the *Purgatorio*, anticipated Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “most magical definition of beauty – *καλόν quasi καλοῦν*” (*SR*, 156), and in his early poem “In Durance” (*P&T*, 89–90) Pound himself indicates that Coleridge’s idea of the Greek concept *tò kalón* being a “calling” can be understood as a key to his

¹³⁷ It is true, as Haun Saussy has claimed, that when one talks about “untranslatability” in modern theoretical discourse, one is not referring to the idea that a thorough explanation of, say, a single term in a foreign language is not possible, but simply that it is not possible to make such a translation valid using *one single word* from the target language to render the one single word from the source language – “the meanings appear to be paraphrasable enough” (Saussy 2015, 215).
own aesthetics. Pound did not cease referring to the Greek concept. In *Lustra* (1916) we find a poem bearing the title “Το Καλόν” (*P&T*, 275). Greek beauty also shows up in the poetic sequence “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley” (1919–20), where it is said that “We see τὸ καλὸν / Decreed in the market place”. The stanza is part of Pound’s satirical parallel-making between classical antiquity and the modern world. Pound was unquestionably critical of the reduction of the truly beautiful to merchandise – “in this society beauty is at the mercy of war and commercialism”, as Espey observes (Espey 1969, 328), but in this case we should be aware, as Espey seems not to be, that Pound may be referring to an actual brand of perfume named TOKALON, something that Shinji Watanabe has noted in a perceptive article (Watanabe 2013, 114).

Important in the context of this dissertation is the extraordinary use of the concept τὸ καλὸν to be found at the very end of *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, a book that was subtitled *L’Idea Statale, Fascism as I Have Seen It* (*J/M*, 127–28):

> As for a spread of fascism, if it could mean transportation of the interesting element of the decade, it would not need parades, nor hysterical Hitlerian yawping. The would-be fascists would have to make a dispassionate analysis of fascism on the hoof, the *rivoluzione continua* as it has been for over a decade, its main trend, its meaning; and they would profit by such study in considering what elements can be used in either England or America, the general sanity and not the local accidental, not the advisabilities of particular time and place but the permanent elements of sane and responsible government.

Towards which I assert again my own firm belief that the Duce will stand not with the despots and the lovers of power but with the lovers of

**ORDER**

τὸ καλὸν

There can be little doubt that Pound had moved a long way away from Coleridge’s understanding of τὸ καλὸν to embrace the idea of τὸ καλὸν as order.138 “Order” was for Pound “a radiant word, whose meaning related to both ethics and aesthetics”, writes Serenella Zanotti (Zanotti 2010, 38). One might object that what Pound does in *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* is not to establish any equivalence between τὸ καλὸν and ORDER, but that he instead attempt to “ideogrammatically” conceive a third, hitherto unknown concept. There might probably be something to this, even if, so far as I have been able to tell, no commentator on Pound has investigated such a possibility. In any case, this alternative interpretation would not fundamentally affect the way I read this passage.
In Cantos 58 and 98 Pound once again equates τὸ καλὸν and “order”, in the latter case referring to Kangxi, who, it is implied, governed in a way that lived up to Pound’s ideal of a unity of these two concepts.

*Guide to Kulchur* (1938), Pound’s prose work supposedly rushing through the whole of culture, ends with a single in-depth study, namely, of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Here, Pound says apropos Aristotle’s book III that H. Rackham, the translator of the Loeb edition of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, has chosen “a brilliant translation” of τὸ καλὸν: “Rackham has made a brilliant translation of KALON as nobility. It is at any rate a translation which incites the reader to think.” (*GK*, 316) Interestingly, Pound here indicates that different languages encode similar concepts that nevertheless extend to strangely heterogeneous semantic fields. In my context, the most striking is that Pound seems to appreciate the idea that τὸ καλὸν has a semi-aristocratic connotation as something moral. This brings us back to “Addendum for C”.

### 3.15. Τὸ καλὸν and neschek: Multilingualism and anti-Semitism in “Addendum for C”

In “Addendum for C”, the Greek τὸ καλὸν is employed with all its force, put up against the Hebrew neschek, meaning “usury”. In this section, I will discuss how the uses of the foreign languages Greek and Hebrew differ in this specific fragment. This brings in not only the question of beauty, and of the aesthetic effect of foreign languages, but equally of a conceptual take on political concerns that were of upmost importance to Pound.

“Addendum for C” itself begins as follows:

> The Evil is Usury, neschek
> the serpent
> neschek whose name is known, the defiler,
> beyond race and against race
> the defiler
> Τόκος hic mali medium est
> Here is the core of evil, the burning hell without let-up,
> The canker corrupting all things, Fafnir the worm,
> Syphilis of the State, of all kingdoms,
> Wart of the common-weal,

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139 With his interpretation of τὸ καλὸν as order, Pound may be indebted to Renaissance art theorists, who thought of the corresponding Latin and Renaissance Italian concepts *pulchritudo* and *pulchritudine* in proportional terms, as geometrical figures and other visual symmetries (cf. Groulier and Brugère 2014, 81). The influence of Neoplatonism on Pound, as examined by Peter Liebregts (2004), may also account for Pound’s thinking of τὸ καλὸν in geometrical terms.
Wenn-maker, corrupter of all things.

Darkness the defiler,

Twin evil of envy,

Snake of the seven heads, Hydra, entering all things,

Passing the doors of temples, defiling the Grove of Paphos,

*neschek*, the crawling evil,

    slime, the corrupter of all things,

Poisoner of the fount,

    of all fountains, *neschek*,

The serpent, evil against Nature’s increase,

Against beauty

    Τὸ καλὸν

    formosus nec est nec decens (C, Add/818)

As we can see from the very beginning of this passage, *neschek* is established as a synonym for usury. Richard Sieburth, commenting on the passage, writes that it suggests that usury is in fact “the malevolent double or Other of poetry” itself (Sieburth 1987, 170). Readers of Pound will be familiar with his rant against usury in his famous usury Canto, Canto 45, written years before, where it is made clear that usury is a force destroying the foundations of all true art. In *Ezra Pound and Confucianism*, Feng Lan even claims that for Pound usury is the “number one enemy” of *zhengming*. This is a very interesting point, for there is clearly some idea of *neschek* in the “Addendum” that corrupts the plain sense of words. As such, Pound, formerly an anti-purist, seems somewhat of a linguistic purist in a passage such as this.

Jean-Michel Rabaté claims that Pound in “Addendum for C” sets the Jewish *neshekh* (Rabaté’s spelling) against the Classical τὸ καλὸν in order to dramatize the antagonism between usury and wholeness (Rabaté 1986, 188). Rabaté adds, interestingly, that Pound dramatizes the antagonism between usury and wholeness “not for superficial (or ideological) and racialist reasons, but for a conceptual reason” (ibid.). Since Rabaté published his monograph on Pound’s *Cantos* in 1986, studies have emerged that arguably paint a clearer picture of Pound’s relation to anti-Semitism, making it very hard to deny that he, and certainly at some specific points in time, was an outright anti-Semite, such as Casillo’s *The Genealogy of Demons: Anti-Semitism, Fascism, and the Myths of Ezra Pound* (1988). Even if admitting that Pound fell into “the trap of antisemitism” and became “more and more fanatical” in his denunciation of usury, Rabaté repeats essentially the same point he made in 1986 in an article dating from 2010, saying that Pound “qualified this”
denunciation of usury “by saying that usury came from the disregard of Jewish law by Jews themselves” (Rabaté 2010, 138).

According to Carroll F. Terrell, Pound in the passage quoted above employs the Hebrew term in order “to show that the Jews from the time of Moses had rules against usury”. What he says in order to explain Pound’s choice is deeply interesting:

At the time this was written Pound was aware that he was being attacked for anti-Semitism, which he vigorously denied. Thus, he uses the Hebrew word to show that the Jews from the time of Moses had rules against usury. When writers in the New English Weekly and elsewhere in the 1930s were blaming the Jews for money problems in the Depression, Pound wrote: “Usurers have no race. How long the whole Jewish people is to be sacrificial goat for the usurer, I know not” [SP, 300]. But in the mid-years at St. Elizabths the record shows clearly that he was anti-Semitic, at least emotionally and at times. (Terrell 1993 [1980], 724)

Rabaté also says that the use of the Hebrew term “goes along with a refusal to identify usurers with a given race” (Rabaté 1986, 189). These seem to me to be very sympathetic readings, as they avoid positing any essentialist belief on Pound’s part between usury as a practice and the Jews as a “race”.

Both Terrell and Rabaté give a clear answer – more or less the same clear answer – to the question why the poet chooses to use a foreign language term. This is evidently not, they indicate, to render the poetry exclusive or hermetic, to show off the poet’s extensive learnedness, or to equip the passage with enticing melopoeia. No, they argue that it has to do with a simultaneous respect for ethnicity and a denial of the relevance of ethnicity: Both a denial of any importance of the all too infamous connection between Jews and usury, and also, for some reason, the relevance of an ancient Jewish prohibition on usury. But this is saying too little. There is something strange about the use of neschek in the “Addendum”. Is it obvious that what the inclusion of the Hebrew term does is to invalidate any necessary link between Jews and usury? The passage bears witness to a sort of rage, and the use of the term neschek has among its functions to render all things “Hebrew” suspect. The term neschek may have been chosen by Pound to disprove the claims that he was being anti-Semitic. But if we look at the way the term works in the text, it seems much more double-edged than what Terrell and Rabaté account for.

Read with specific attention to its sounds (most of all the alliterations, such as “canker corrupting”, “Darkness the defiler” and, not least, the first line’s respectively voiced and unvoiced fricatives in “Usury” and neschek), “Addendum for C” can be labeled an exorcism, that is, a spell, a poetic attempt to get rid of evil by naming it. The idea of the passage being a spell is only enhanced by three of the lines that comes after the “exorcist” passage:
pure light, we beseech thee
Crystal, we beseech thee
Clarity, we beseech thee (C, Add/819)

While the naming of neschek should be interpreted as a way of confronting usury head on, by naming it in all the names and guises, including foreign words, that it supposedly hides under, these three lines are striking in their traditional way of expressing sincerity, like a prayer, a litany.

Established as an opposition to neschek, we find again the Greek expression Τὸ καλὸν. Where neschek is said to be neither formosus nor decens, that is neither “shapely” nor “decent”, this contrasts with Τὸ καλὸν, which here, just like in the Rackham translation Pound referred to in Guide to Kulchur, takes on a moral dimension that is not so obviously present in the English word “beauty” – or “order” for that matter. The Greek word is presented as endowed with an almost innate “decency”. One should also note, when comparing the Hebrew and Greek elements used in “Addendum for C”, that the Greek term is written in Greek letters, the Hebrew one in Latin letters.

Why? Is it because the reader is supposed to be able to sound out the Greek ones, but not the Hebrew ones? Or has it got to do with the poet’s own competence? I stress that neschek is Pound’s spelling, in contrast to neshek as employed by for example Rabaté. This is worth remarking on, since Rabaté’s spelling seems more accurate (not that this is the only case where Pound’s philological exactitude in The Cantos may be questioned …). In Hebrew, the word is written נשק, something that indicates a soft, guttural sound at the end. This word is derived from a root meaning “to bite” or “a bite”, as Rabaté also notes (cf. Rabaté 1986, 189). Pound’s neschek, while undoubtedly intended to indicate the same word, would seem to indicate a pronunciation with a hard kk and the end, thus changing the meaning of the word, inadvertently referring to a different root. Pound’s neschek seems not to refer to usury, but to the Hebrew word נשך, which has a very different meaning, namely, “a weapon”. Whatever the motivation Pound may have had for Latinizing the orthography of the Hebrew word for usury, but not of the Greek for beauty, using the original letters of the source language seems a sign of respect, a respect that consequently is denied the Hebrew language. It seems even possible to interpret Pound using neschek transliterated into Roman script as in itself a form of contamination, as if the concept has already “infiltrated” the English language.

I will go even further. For is it not striking that the Hebrew language is used when the point is to name “usury”, which must be said to be somewhat of the ultimate “sin” in Pound’s thinking about morality, while the Greek and Latin words come in to designate “the beautiful” (as well as “order”) and the “decent”? This is admittedly a bit unfair – for the poet does also include the Greek term for “usury”, Τόκος. But as Casillo points out, the meaning “usury” derives from the primary
sense of Τόκος, namely, “childbirth, parturition, the time of parturition, and offspring of men and animals: in short, natural entities and events” (Casillo 1988, 220) – while neschek in the passage quoted adopts the familiar parasitical properties of Pound’s usury, being more obviously contra naturam (cf. Canto 45). And in any event there is no instance of any positive Hebrew word to be pointed out in “Addendum for C”. Whatever Pound’s pious intent in using the Hebrew term neschek, is it not likely that the reader will associate some sort of disgust with it, compared with the use of Greek and Latin in the same fragment? This is possibly how Pound’s editor interpreted Pound’s Canto 52, the one other canto where the term neschek appears. Here it appears numerous times, but one passage is of special interest, since Pound’s publishers, New Directions in the United States and Faber in the United Kingdom, managed to have some of the lines crossed out.140 Laughlin had originally suggested Pound remove the lines completely, but Pound insisted on them being printed in a crossed-out version (up to 1986 – the later editions have removed the crossing out; cf. Barnhisel 2005, 83). This is the passage in question:

Remarked Ben: better keep out the jews
   or yr/ grand children will curse you
jews, real jews, chazims, and neschek
also super-neschek or the international racket
specialité of the Stinkschuld
   bomb-proof under their house in Paris
where they cd/ store aht voiks
   fat slug with three body-guards
soiling our sea front with a pot bellied yacht in the offing,
government full of their gun-swine, bankbuzzards, poppinjays. (C, 52/257–8)

Ben is Benjamin Franklin, while “chazims” is a version of the Yiddish word for pigs. Earlier in the same canto, also crossed out by Laughlin, a passage goes on about “poor yitts paying for Stinkschuld / paying for a few big jews’ vendetta on goyim”, that is, poor Jews paying the price for rich Jews’ “revenge” on the “gentiles”. “Stinkschuld” is again a codeword for Rothschild. The transliteration “aht voiks” for art works is Pound imitating supposedly “Jewish” pronunciation. According to Hugh Kenner, Pound’s fury stems in part from a “pot bellied” Rothschild yacht anchored in the harbor of Rapallo (cf. Casillo 1988, 260).

140 The lines crossed out were the sixth- to second-to-last lines in the quotation given here (cf. Casillo 1988, 260).
Once again Terrell is very apologetic when commenting on this canto: He says that “Pound’s apparent intent is to deplore the way anti-Semites in the 1930s blamed all Jews, including poor ones, for the destructive financial practices of a very few” (Terrell 1993 [1980], 200). This might have been (part of) Pound’s intention. But the way the poem actually stands, the Yiddish and Hebrew terms hardly function to give any positive connotation to anything Jewish whatsoever – on the contrary, it is as though they are linked to something sinful and unclean. Any attempt at denying that Pound was thinking in this manner is easily disproven. Let us for example look at a passage from Pound’s article “Race or Illness”, printed on 12 March 1944 in *Il Popolo di Alessandria*, one of the most important newspapers in the Salò Republic. This is what Redman considers the “worst example of Pound’s anti-Semitism”:

> It is time to make an analysis. Hebrewism isn’t race, it’s illness. When a nation dies, Jews multiply like bacilli in carrion. Like an illness, there can be severe cases and lesser cases. The same Jews suffer from it in differing intensities, almost measles or smallpox. When arays or half-arays like Roosevelt and Churchill or Eden are stricken, they are real lepers. Analysis of blood can demonstrate the results. (Pound, quoted in Redman 1991, 243)

Rather incredibly, Redman still claims that, if “judged within the context of his time”, Pound was “not a racist” (Redman 1991, 158). Casillo strikes me as closer to the mark when he says that, even if racism and anti-Semitism “were far less significant in Italian Fascism than in Nazism”, from the later 1930s on “Pound stands closer to the Nazi than to the Italian Fascist position on the issue of race”, that is, in seeing race as “a biological fact of paramount importance” (Casillo 1988, 136–37). Redman’s point must be that Pound was not actively racist in the sense that he deemed people with colored skin to be less worth, or that he was not a proponent of *race hatred*, as Burton Hatlen says he was not in his article on “Racism and Anti-Semitism” in *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia*:

> Furthermore, although blacks are the principal object of racism in America, Pound never displayed animus against blacks, seeing them rather as simple, happy, natural folk, with a heightened mythic consciousness. We now regard such stereotyping as racist; but if racism implies race hatred, Pound’s attitude toward blacks is not racist. In fact, Pound’s views on blacks were relatively progressive: He denounced lynching and contributed money to a defense fund for the Scottsboro boys, the most famous victims of American racism during the 1930s. (Hatlen 2005, 252)

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141 Originally titled “Razza o malattia”. The quotation is in Tim Redman’s translation.
Reading this, one may wonder when merely denouncing lynching made someone “progressive”. The fact is that, although perhaps not under the spell of “race hatred”, Pound held strictly segregationist, that is, Apartheid-like, opinions. This is evident in a letter Pound wrote on 18 January 1940, which Redman himself quotes in his study. In the letter it says:

By RACE I do not mean what’s printed on a passport. The melting pot has been tried and FAILED. Some blends are O.K. but the others rot in three generations even when the mulatto happens to be good. [...] We want our Italians Italian; French french; ang/sax and/sax; Dutch dutch. That is enough for any man, with a very occasional hybrid. (Pound, quoted in Redman 1991, 196)

In his study *John Kasper and Ezra Pound* (2015), Alec Marsh quite simply treats Pound as a racist. On could of course argue that he thereby uses the term in what is exclusively a present-day sense, but this is contentious, since Marsh quotes Pound to the effect that “[e]ach race has its qualities”, that “[n]o race can fully perform the function of another”, and that “[a]ny attempt to obscure racial character is antiscientific” (Pound, quoted in Marsh 2015, 10). Admittedly, such views do not necessarily constitute race hatred as such. But they certainly show how important the question of race was for Pound. In his aborted, half-page long essay “For the African=American Language” (sic), possibly from the 1940s, Pound wrote the following:

One race and one race only has fostered in America a speech softer mellower and fuller than the South midland and having a charm not inferior to the 18th cent[u]ry phonetics preserved and tempered in our land, and that is the Negro race. (Pound, quoted in Marsh 2015, 21)

This statement is as such positive to the language of African Americans, but the argument may well be linked to what we saw in chapter 1: Pound’s admiration for the language of traditional societies. Here, this could imply that although the language *sounds* beautiful, this does not mean that its practitioners have the ability to generalize, for example.

Marsh says that “Pound always sees African Americans as the truest Americans, that is to say as American as himself” (Marsh 2015, 22). In short, he had a “paternalistic fondness for black people (ibid., 154). This does not mean that Pound was not a supporter of *ethnicism* of “ethnic racism”, that is, the “belief that a race has certain distinguishing features and in-bred cultural practices” (ibid., 73). Pound did not believe in Darwin’s theory of evolution, and instead became influenced by Louis Agassiz, whom Marsh calls “the most influential scientific racist of the
nineteenth century” (ibid., 64) and whose views he compares to Hitler’s (ibid., 71). Under the influence of Agassiz, Pound believed that “dark skin and joyful physicality go together”, that “Aryans” have an innate sense of justice”, while “Jews have big noses and [...] specialize in usury” (ibid., 73). Subscribing to this line of thinking, Pound was, according to Marsh, of the opinion that people of African descent “were predestined to be farmers, not legislators”, and that they were subservient to the “master races”, namely, the Greeks (and their European descendants) and the Chinese (ibid., 64). What singles Pound out from simply being an all-an-out white supremacist, Marsh argues, is that he saw not only “Aryans” but even the Chinese as a “culture-bearing race” (ibid., 151).

In addition to ethnic racism (ethnicism), Marsh operates with a second form of racism, namely, “eugenic racism”, and concludes that Pound early anti-Semitism “is above all ethnic and cultural, not primarily prejudice on eugenic grounds” (Marsh 2015, 75), and that this remains in the main the case up through the 1930s (ibid., 83). But by 1942, after having read the second volume of Hitler’s Mein Kampf in Italian, Pound was, says Marsh, “converted [...] to eugenics” (ibid., 85). All in all, however, Pound’s “main objection to Jews was cultural”, but, as Marsh comments, “culture’ easily slides over to ‘racial’” (ibid., 86). The way I myself read “Addendum for C”, it is a locus for precisely such a sliding, from the denunciation of usury as a cultural practice to a demonization of Jews as spreaders of illnesses. These illnesses could be read as metaphors, but Pound himself goes a long way to prevent such an interpretation by, in the “Addendum” itself, pointing to the need for poets to speak without using symbols or metaphors.

Elsewhere in The Cantos Pound also advocated “anti-sepsis”, that is, racial segregation, and avoidance of race-mixing (cf. Marsh 2015, 71), for example in 94, “maintain anti-sepsis, / let the light pour”. Importantly Pound seems to be indicating that segregation is not solely important when it comes to race but in all matters, as when he states that “nothing is more dammably harmful to everyone, black and white than misceg[e]nation, bastardization and mongrelization of EVERYthing” (Pound, quoted in Marsh 2015, xi–xii). This denial of the value of hybridity is of special interest to my study. For is it not the case that Pound’s early morphological experiments with multilingual hybridity, such as we saw them in the “Orbi Cantum Primum” fragment analyzed in part 2, was something Pound left behind? Did he not go from hybridity to juxtaposition in his poetry? I have argued that he did. This juxtaposition can, as early as in the Malatesta Cantos, be coupled to an ideal of preservation. When Pound in a letter to William Cookson, possibly from 1959, makes a remark on UNESCO, we can observe a similar idea of the value of preserving “the main elements of different cultures”:
Even the Victorian era with its formula: Greece for the arts, Rome for law, the Hebrews for religion was trying to preserve elements, the main elements of different cultures, not à la UNESCO, trying to melt out all distinctions and reduce the whole to a dull paste of common inhumanity (? and/or nucleosity?). (P&P, vol. 10, 232)

In other words, in a striking way there is copresence of segregationist theory and practice in Pound’s work: In his prose he sees cultures as something that needs to be kept apart to be preserved; in his poetry he moves from experimenting with a linguistic “melting pot” to instead “leav[ing] languages as they are”, to once again use Michael Lee Warner’s phrase (Warner 1986, xiv). This means I do not completely agree with Marsh when he claims that Pound’s “eclectic Cantos” is a poem where Pound “constantly brings together what his ideology concludes must be kept apart” (Marsh 2015, 159). It is of course true in one sense that Pound “brings together” a variety of different languages and cultural expressions. But it seems to me that he does this not in order to mix them. Even in his poetry, at least his mature poetry, he avoids hybridity. In other words, Pound’s poetry is segregationist not only in its statements but also at the morphological microlevel. One might take the transliteration of neschek into Latin letters as a sort of hybridity, but as I have suggested, it is more reasonable to see it as a form of contamination. The very parasitical quality attached to the Hebrew word for usury in “Addendum for C” shows how Pound conceived of the contrary, how intermingling of cultures is contaminating “pure” traditions. As such the poem mimes the said contamination, only to function as a sort of exorcism.

3.16. Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how Pound from the early 1920s on developed a documentary poetics, where he began including different forms of (mainly nonliterary) texts and including them in his poetry. This, I have argued, results in a radically heterogeneous poetry. How, then, does the heterogeneity of Pound’s poetic work square with his allegiances to Italian Fascism? My answer is basically twofold: On the one hand, Pound adapted his poetry of the 1930s and early 1940s, making it simpler and less multilingual (such as in Canto 60), and more propagandistic (such as in “Addendum for C”). On the other, there remains a tension in Pound’s work between poetry and propaganda, between “inimitable” heterogeneity in literature and totalitarian ideals for society. This has been presented by commentators as an unsolvable paradox. The way I see it, however, there are clear signs that if the early Pound experimented with linguistic hybridity, the later Pound did not want to mix languages. In this manner, his multilingual poetics in some ways regressed, becoming just as segregationist as his political leanings. This does not mean that the poetry should be dismissed. Segregation in poetry and in society are two entirely different things.
Conclusion: Multilingual poetics and/or ethnicity

When encountering polyglot poems such as those by Ezra Pound, one may wonder if their multilingualism is to be taken as some sort of intellectual challenge. However, the idea that the intellect is what is to be activated may be misleading. One can surely detect a more phenomenological effect achieved by the multilingual elements: The presence of non-English words, expressions and ways of phrasing can give the reader an outright bodily, tactile sensation. Such sensations are easy to forget or overlook when studying a poet like Pound. But for all their cerebral character, my foregoing investigations were also sparked by a certain gut reaction.

Such a reaction, and such sensations, can in turn be interpreted in academic language. They can for example be linked to the strangeness involved in encountering unusual linguistic elements, which may lead one to think of so-called formalist aesthetics. As Doris Sommer says in her work *Bilingual Aesthetics* (2004): “Wordplay, distractions, detours, foreign words are among the devices of deliberate roughness that make up literary technique for Shklovsky” (Sommer 2004, 30; italics in the original), referring to the Russian formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky. Sommer here alludes not only to the very strangeness (остранение, or ostranenie, in Russian) involved in the use of foreign words, but more generally to the idea that what this strangeness does is slow down the process of reading.

A basic premise in formalist aesthetic theory is that day-to-day perception is regularly automatized, thereby rendering things less visible in their unique reality. For theoreticians such as Shklovsky, deautomatization is the primary function of poetic language as such. There can be little doubt that there is something akin to this thinking to be found also in Pound’s use of multiple languages and discourses. Pound’s dictum Make it new could even be understood as congenial with this formalist thinking: Is it not a question of shaking up this very it, making it real once more? As if we were to say: Make it foreign = Make it new = Make it real?

This undoubtedly represents one aspect of Pound’s multilingualism, but as I have indicated, certainly not the only one. The multilingual elements in Pound’s poetry are often citations and allusions, and as such arguably ostentatious displays of learning. Seeing this as the purpose or function of Pound’s multilingualism would be much too reductive, however. I have pointed to several other functions: For example, when discussing the role of foreign language borrowings in Pound’s earlier poetry, I underscored how such borrowings are a means to expand the lexical reservoir of English poetry, endowing it with novel sonorities, fresh concepts and additional precision.

Commenting on the section of *The Cantos* known as the Malatesta Cantos, which is marked by the juxtaposition of different languages, I have suggested that one can see this as a preservation
of specimens of these languages — as well as of different discourses and different methods of transcription and textual transfer in a modern age of standardization.

There are also more linguistic or philosophical premises underlying Pound’s multilingual practice. The multilingualism of his poetry points to the differences that exist between languages, in short the relativity of languages. It is partly the untranslatable at play in the words and expressions Pound borrows from foreign languages that motivate them being rendered in their original form. As such, Pound’s work is relevant to modern discussions in the discipline of comparative literature, such as that about “world literature”. According to Erich Auerbach in his essay “Philology and ‘Weltliteratur’”, the notion of Weltliteratur would be “realized and destroyed” if mankind were to end up in “a single literary culture, only a few literary languages, and perhaps even a single literary language” (Auerbach 1969, 3). In a fundamental way, I claim, Pound’s poetry resists monolinguism. When in Against World Literature Emily Apter criticizes the concept of “world literature” for being an overeager “branding” of cultural difference, when it really is a way of domesticating foreign traditions, one could count Pound’s Cantos as a prescient answer to such a criticism. Being itself in part a “Comp.Lit.” syllabus, Pound’s vast poem lets the foreign retain its foreignness.

An additional aspect of what I have been calling Pound’s literary cosmopolitanism is his many borrowings not only of words and expressions, but of foreign forms and motifs from different literary traditions. Pound made such borrowings both as a translator and in the poetry he published under his own name, thereby trying to expand the formal repertoire of English poetry, but also to challenge the conventions of this poetry, renewing it and altering it by exposing it to the foreignness of foreign language idioms, rhythms, images and grammar.

Translation theorist Lawrence Venuti sees in Pound a foreignizing translator. My analysis shows that even Cathay should count as one of Pound’s foreignizing translations, although rarely highlighted as such. My analysis of selected passages from Cathay clearly indicates that the work is characterized by processual descriptions and wordings to render the supposedly verb-centered grammar of the Chinese originals. Whether or not the Fenollosian theories about Chinese writing and Chinese poetry that Pound based himself on are valid, Pound’s poetic choices show that he, if primarily seeking to change the course of contemporary English-language poetry, did so with a receptiveness to (what he believed to be) linguistic differences between Chinese and English.

In her study Learning to Be Modern (2003), Gail McDonald sees Pound’s attention to linguistic, literary and cultural difference as a strategic maneuver:
As Pound gained confidence, he chose the strategy of celebrating difference. Having committed himself to study of foreign language and to the cosmopolitanism they reinforced, Pound felt superior to classmates content to live in only one culture. (McDonald 1993, 14)

Pound might have chosen to “celebrate difference” to enhance his career at a certain point, but he arguably never ceased celebrating difference. What is striking is that this celebration went hand in hand with fundamentally segregationist attitudes. Pound’s cosmopolitan attitudes were influenced by ethnicist ones, in fact more and more so. Even Robert Casillo, who generally pulls no punches in his analysis of Pound’s anti-Semitism, grants that anti-Semitism was not important in Pound’s thought before the late 1920s (cf. Casillo 1988, 5). When we come to the early 1940s, however, Pound’s use of the Hebrew term neschek in “Addendum for C” is clearly testimony to an ethnic racism, and even arguably sliding over into a eugenic one. This is not so much a question of how Pound’s text presents a stated opinion, but how it presents the Hebrew term for usury as a parasitical term that has infiltrated the English language and needs to be exorcised.

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poet Charles Bernstein has stated that “Pound’s work contradicts his fascism” (Bernstein 1999, 158). What Bernstein was referring to was not the multilingual character of Pound’s poetry, but its paratactic and fragmentary character. In Bernstein’s opinion, this “un-fascist” way of composing poetry stands in stark contradiction to Pound’s explicitly stated political opinions. One could easily imagine a similar defense of Pound’s poetry on account of its many multilingual aspects. Yet Pound’s use of multilingual terms in a poem such as “Addendum for C” are clearly ethnicist, suggesting that the “multilingualism in literature” often celebrated today might need to be regarded more critically than is sometimes done. Even as much as we appreciate multilingualism as a sign of an ethnically diverse society, a multilingual poem is not necessarily a celebration of such a society.
Works by Ezra Pound


*C* = *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. Fourteenth printing. New York: New Directions, 1998. When referring to *The Cantos*, I supply first Canto number and then the page number in this edition.


*EPP* = Ezra Pound Papers at the Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University. YCAL MSS 43.


**Other works cited**

Achilles Fang Papers. Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Yale University. YCAL MSS 99.


Appendices: The “Orbi Cantum Primum” fragment, Canto 60 and “Addendum for C”
ORBI CANTUM PRIMUM

ORBI CANTUM PRIMUM COSMOPOLITI E TOLERENTIAE CANO

THE First Great Song Of All The World Cosmopolite
Of Tolerance I Sing
For I have stripped off the bands of custom
and the swaddling clouts of shame
And my heart is free as the West wind
And as one going before me hath sung
There is nor creed nor birth when two strong men meet
tho they come from the ends of earth
So it is of the spirit, of men of the spirit
and of things spiritual
Wherfor, I being of no set and land bound country
But of that country of the spirit wherein I am at one
with them of the spirit
Whose word I am: being of myself nothing,
A hollow reed thru whom is the song
I AM THE VOICE OF ‘HOI POLLOI’ CRYING IN
THE SUN

And I profane not for GODS epic is in the thirty nine
and the twenty seven
and HE hath no need of my singing
For from Alpha to Omega he hath written it
From Adam to John: from Eden unto that NEW CITY
HIS sign hath declared it
:: But out of the praise of men’s hearts
Have they caused me to fashion it
And their brotherhood is the cause mediate
between the cause ultimate and first and me ::
And there shall be no more war either of sword or
thought [3]
Nor shall spirit contend against spirit
if so be that there hath ever been strife of the spirit,
\[
\text{truly considered}
\]

Now as one goes on after this gate, gradually one sees
clearly into more and more of the lanes
even as one in the Place de la Triomphe de l’etoile
sees into many avenues beside the Champs Elysee
Or if one neared the centre of a great wheel he would
see more clearly along the many spokes
which had heretofore been obscure to him.
And so as we moved forward fewer and more few
of these ways seemed unto me divergent
And the laughter, calm, holy, musical
resounded more fully in our ears.

not out of one vision but out of many have I made it
and forty the years of my wandering
have I set apart thereto, be it the spirit shall cause
me to finish it in less, or delay me the longer therein

As were the magnet of God before and the impulse
of mankind that is swept forward to that magnet behind
me.

For when man shall have put away the things of Tyre
and Sidon
of the flesh and of the mind,
Then shall mankind be one spirit
And the bride, which is the spirit of man
shall stand naked, ready unto her LORD.
In the Vineyards of Enghedi shall the grapes be purple
to bursting
And the wine of her mouth shall be unto HIM
As a pomegranate shall she be before him
as the halves of a pomegranate white and ruddy
Dante :: Hell
The Spirit of Power dark, by the Sphinx
bidding me be strong to go forward.
I am the gate to Life. my toarch.
also in Lomax. and later back calling in THE
meeting of the Winds.

The illusion.
The Beatrice face.
The illusion. the passionate kissing
and return of dustiness of the way.
The Box garden and the child.
Her Lips. The Magnificat.
Magnificat anima mea for new things shall be
opened unto us
purity joy.
Marcel. Schwob. at the gate of Childhood.

she, as she had been, white robed bearing a dark green
palm stemn, long blowing in the wind.
Dark and long as the cedars of the Island of Peace
that Bocklin calleth Death.
And I without knowing how found myself
suddenly clad likewise
Now after this the pupils of the eyes are no more
black
and the iris is as a jewel lit within.

Because of the light within us we began to see
in the perspective, all men as pearls upon the golden
thread.

and many passing said unto him
Father. How is it that these follow thee
being of alien speech? what is thy secret
... to all one reply ' Just love them.'
I am zero and infinity, two things the intellect of man understands not.

After this (gate) the way went beneath us effortless as some great wheel that circles beneath our feet that just miss touching it, and faster and faster and more fast, whirling, even as a ballance wheel set absolute and friction was not.

And I as a potter by a wheel that I turn not that is turned sine voluntate mea, shaping this woman, this Iseult for the sorrows of men And as the potter moveth not but the wheel so are the times and the going forward not in my hand.

...... dawn,
The Hawks of Hope above the Valley Desperate
...One weeping, weeping bitterly and suddenly the sun reflected from one of their wings of gold struck him and he leapt and I to him, 'Brother?'
'Oh Oh twas dark, 'he said
'Black, black unutterable
As Christ had sinned with Magdaleen. But Now!!
( and I was stunned at his words albeit later I saw in them no blasphemy only the logic of the LOGOS annointed for by so much as this sin was not so is the clarity).
'But now! see!'
and I looking beheld his joy of the dancing light as one coming from Toledo to Madrid
at the right hour of evening
may see the last sun on the water ditches p. 2 [7]
as of a myriad little fire of bivouac
so was his beauty of the gleam and gloom
his joy for the glamour and the dark.

....... 

Vale of the seers, transparency of the soil
And I beheld that each peering at the centre
saw a different thing, because of their angles and strain

AE. Guinicelli
Yeats. Cavalcanti

Brown = 12 Rose = 3 Lily

the clear eyed spirit journeying with me.

....... Between the false dawn of my youth and the true
Dawn of high self consciousness
I beheld suddenly that I had been
in divers places and was then. In this book behold
them and me.

I being darkly shaddowed in a place of bitter air
restless yet hardly moving
as yet the sun that should reveal me to myself
had not sent even his first bloody spears above the east
When in the gloom there came one unto me 'capo
chino'
one bearing a chord in his hand and a book
But his face was from me and I followed
thru rough rocks, till we found the stone of a broken
inscription 'Lasciate'
and he said unto me 'Come and see the place where
Hell lay'
After Hell D. disappears..and after him these words lingered upon the air, but broken,
‘Unto Beatrice’ & ‘Come thou
And I saw that it was as he had said
I go unto that blessed one
Come thou after me.
/Further am I now not with thee / (this before here)
....
My joy each time at his approach.
the willow wisp of it. (in the intellect.)
and later of the illusion.

? Lightning as quick stabbing bow strokes in the concerto of the storm.
The VISION . to the time of it the flash of a heliograph
were a thousand years.
But so bright is it that I have made this much of it even yet.

............... And I said now I know that i know nothing. I will no longer seek love as I thought he should be
For I am Evarra.
But I will greet love as love is with mine eyes unbound.
....
A sea.
(????? walking on a still way in the sea ????
And hither come they that die in the sea and they from the old North that went seaward borne of the flame and the pyre. unto the lost Atlantis they steered and thence hither.
SEA to the right of the way.
first gloomy, oily, grey. rain beaten
then emerald in the shallows
and sapphire. Oh tumultuous sapphire crying with light
The wrack of folk in the first shore of it. 4 [9]
terror! save that terror had gone from me
and I beheld myself and all things
as I were something apart. As I half dreamed their
surging

clear

brown  rose  lily

dark water  grey  grey/sea  sapphire
So the Jesuits brought in astronomy (Galileo's, an heretic's) music and physics from Europe, Grimaldi, Intorcetta, Verbiest, Koupelin. Subject of yr/ Majesty, prescribed of the tribune of rites:

True that the Europeans have passed zealously many dangers and have brought us astronomy, and founded cannon which have served us in civil wars, and that one shd/ reward their services in negotiating with the ORosians.

They have not made any trouble. We permit lamas, hochangs and taotsés to go to their churches. It wd/ seem unwarranted to forbid only these Europeans to go to their temples. We deem therefore that they be so permitted indiscriminate to pray and burn perfumes.

3rd day 2nd moon of the 31st year of KANG HI 17 grandees of the Empire, whereof eleven cabinet ministers of this EMPEROR

Les pères Gerbillon, Fourtères, Bournat took quinine to the palace, anno domini 1693 Hence the Jesuit church in Pekin in the Hoang Tchang that is the palace enclosure.

And Feyenköpfl in the Kaldan war was fighting Eleutes and Mohamedans and the Emperor shot six quail de suite with six arrows and sent the Crown Prince an Eleute horse saying: I don't know that chinese bean fodder will suit him. Herewith some Kalkas sheep for prime mutton. yr affectionate father KANG HI
Hoang Ho is frozen. In fact the Ortes country seems to be pretty much as we thought it in Pekin, small huntin' quite pleasant, a lot of pheasants and hares. Pasturage excellent. Hoang Ho fruz 1/2 a ft. thick. Ortes very orderly, have lost none of their mongol habits, their princes in concord, no usury. Clever especially in lookin' after their animals, clumsy bowmen, but hit their mark. And General Feyenkopf wrote him that the Eleutes had caved in and KANG HI gave a fur cap to the envoy and his (KANG HI'S) horse sweat pink as in legend the horses of Taouen land, the Tien mä, or horses of heaven and this horse in particular had been taken in the battle of Tchaomed and they had a grand show in Pekin for next new year's Mongols, Kaldans and Eleutes. 'It is easy after this to be sure that all lamas are traitors. Keep these prisoners in separate rooms, sold to the Tipa who is a liar. I have taken the sun 38° 34' i.e. one degree 20 less here than in Pekin.'

KANG HI

Dogs bark only at strangers. And at Paichen KANG HI was pleased with the pasture land, delayed his return to the capital, stayed stag-hunting outside the great wall while Kalda had grabbed Samarkand and Bokara for the mohammeds 1699 peace year in all Tartary Grimaldi, Pereira, Tony Thomas and Gerbillon sent in their placet sic: European litterati
having heard that the Chinese rites honour Kung-fu-tseu and offer sacrifice to the Heaven etc/
and that their ceremonies are grounded in reason
now beg to know their true meaning and in particular
the meaning of terms for example Material
Heaven and Changti meaning? its ruler?
Does the manes of Confucius accept the grain, fruit, silk, incense offered and does he enter his cartouche?
The European church wallahs wonder if this can be reconciled.
And the archbishop of Antioch spent a year in Canton mousing round but not coming to Pekin
but was, next year, permitted,
Monseigneur Maillard de Tournon
from Clemens, papa (Number XI) the Kiao Hoang
and the Portagoose king sent an envoy
and they cured KANG HI with wine from the Canaries w'ich putt 'em up a jot higher
And too much rice went to Batavia
so our lord KANG layed an embargo
(a bit before Tommy Juffusun’s)
and a tsong-ping or second class mandarin putt up a petition:
AGAINST Europes and Xtianity
That there had been nine red boats into Macao
Dutchmen, red-heads or Englanders.
Japan, sez Tching mao, is the only considerable kingdom to east of us
and Japan kept peace even all through the great Ming rebellion.
Siam and Tonkin pay tribute,
only danger to us is from these Europeans by Hong-mao I mean any nordic barbarian
there are Yenkeli and Yntsa (meanin’ froggies) and Holans
all equally barbarous

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I have knocked around at sea for some years
and the Dutch are the worst of the lot of them,
poifik tigurs,
their vessels stand any wind and carry a hundred cannon
if ten of 'em get into Canton
    who knows what cd/ happen.
I think we shd/ stop this danger at source
or at least make 'em disarm before coming into our harbours
or have 'em come in one at a time
    or unlade in a fortress.
They wormed into Japan via Manilla they have been
kicked out but still try to get in again
They spend money, gather the dregs of the people, make maps
I don’t know what they are up to
    and that’s not my province
All I know is they refuged in Manilla
And now they are top dog in Manilla
I rest my case in the tribunals of Empire
trust ing that this bind-weed will not be permitted
    to root in and fortify
Humbly to yr MAJESTY
    Tching Mao, a sea captain
Dug up edict of ’69
    PERMIT only Verbiest and his colleagues
We vote to pardon all converts
provided they pull down their churches, and again May eleventh
MISSIONARIES have well served in reforming our
    mathematics
and in making us cannon
    and they are therefore permitted to stay
and to practice their own religion but
    no chinese is to get converted
and they are not to build any churches
47 europeans have permits
they may continue their cult, and no others.
Jesuits appealed that they be not confounded with Dutchmen
Let stay, if wd/ promise never see Europe again
various churches were levelled and
there came an embassy from PETER of Russia

1720

with cavalcade and drawn sabres
and a new bloke from the Kiao-hoang of Roma.
Tibet was brought under and ’22 was a peace year
The Emp’r’r went huntin’ as usual
and tiger huntin’ in Haitse and died the 20th of this month
at 8 in the evening

‘ no DYNASTY has come in with such justice
as ours has. I have not wasted the treasures of empire
considering them as the blood of the people

3 million a year on river embankments

I order that YONG TCHING succeed me

THOU SHALT NOT

lend money to sojers.
Huntin’ keeps manchu fit

avoid the hot summer in Pekin.’
He began taking trips into Tartary.
History translated to manchu. Set up board of translators
Verbiest, mathematics
Pereira professor of music, a treatise in chinese and manchu
Gerbillon and Bouvet, done in manchu

revised by the emperor as to questions of style

A digest of philosophy (manchu) and current
Reports on the mémoires des académies
des sciences de Paris.
Quinine, a laboratory set up in the palace.
He ordered ’em to prepare a total anatomy, et
qu’ils veillerent à la pureté du langage

332
et qu'on n'employât que des termes propres
(namely CH'ing ming)

正名

En son Palais divers ateliers
wanted the best European models
fer paintin' an' scuppchure, his works in one hundred volumes
wuz emperor KANG HI 61 years
from 1662 and came after him
The Evil is Usury, *neschek*
the serpent
*neschek* whose name is known, the defiler,
beyond race and against race
the defiler
Τόνος hic mali medium est
Here is the core of evil, the burning hell without let-up,
The canker corrupting all things, Fafhir the worm,
Syphilis of the State, of all kingdoms,
Wart of the common-weal,
Wenn-maker, corrupter of all things.
Darkness the defiler,
Twin evil of envy,
Snake of the seven heads, Hydra, entering all things,
Passing the doors of temples, defiling the Grove of Paphos,
*neschek*, the crawling evil,
    slime, the corrupter of all things,
Poisoner of the fount,
of all fountains, *neschek*,
The serpent, evil against Nature’s increase,
Against beauty
    Τὸ καλὸν
formosus nec est nec decens
A thousand are dead in his folds,
in the eel-fisher's basket
Xαίρη! Ω Διώνη, Χαίρη
pure Light, we beseech thee
Crystal, we beseech thee
Clarity, we beseech thee
from the labyrinth
Sero, sero! learned that Spain is mercury;
that Finland is nickel. Late learning!
S...... doing evil in place of the R.......... 
"A pity that poets have used symbol and metaphor
and no man learned anything from them
for their speaking in figures."

All other sins are open,
Usura alone not understood.
Opium Shanghai, opium Singapore
"with the silver spilla...
amber, caught up and turned..."

Lotophagoi

[Circa 1941]