

THE INSTIGATIONS OF EZRA POUND BY  
ERNEST FENOLLOSA, II, LARCENY:  
POUND, THE TELLURIC MASS OF MISS  
LOWELL, AND THE PILFERING OF  
‘THE CHINESE WRITTEN  
CHARACTER AS A MEDIUM  
FOR POETRY’, 1914–1921\*

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Ezra Pound’s edition of Ernest Fenollosa’s ‘The Chinese Written Language as a Medium for Poetry’, better known by the title Pound gave it, ‘The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry’ (hereafter CWC), is central to understanding Pound’s mediation of East-Asian subjects and forms, Pound’s ‘ideogramic method’, and the larger study of his poetics. It also, therefore, by way of Pound’s influence, is central to understanding the literary history and poetics of Anglophone literary modernism. The history and reception of the essay, though, is a convoluted affair. It nearly did not see print at all, and when it did decades would pass before anyone but Pound made notice of its importance, few even of its existence.

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\*This is the second of a series of essays which trace the literary history and reception of Ezra Pound’s version of Ernest Fenollosa’s ‘The Chinese Written Language as a Medium for Poetry’, better known under Pound’s title as ‘The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry’. Part I of the larger study, ‘The Chinese Written Character, Atlantic Crossings, Texts Misaid, and the Machinations of a Divinely-Inspired Char Woman’, will appear in 『東京女子大学紀要: 論集』/ *Essays and Studies* (Tokyo Woman’s Christian University) 66.1 (Sept. 2015). Part III, ‘Intertextuality, the Invention of China, and the Scholarship of Elision: Ezra Pound and a Chap Named Waley’, will be in print within a year or so. I am grateful to Lucas Klein, Dorsey Kleitz, and Michael Lewis for generosities which have helped with this essay. Errors and infelicities, of course, are mine.

Pound's attempts to publish CWC spanned nearly five years. He received the manuscript from Mary Fenollosa in midsummer 1914, and shortly thereafter made his editorial emendations. These carefully are tracked, in what is now and surely will remain the standard critical edition of CWC, by Saussy, Stalling, and Klein (75–104). Pound prepared two typescripts of the edited version, the first of which was in the mail to Alice Corbin Henderson at *Poetry* by January 1915 (*EP/ACH* 92–93). Pound would write in coming months and years that the essay was 'enlightening' and 'extremely important', an '*ars poetica*' and a cornerstone of Imagist practice, a 'profound' work which formed a 'whole basis of aesthetics', a study of 'the fundamentals of all aesthetics', and 'one of the most important essays of our time' (*EP/L* 61; *EP/MA* 206; 'Imagisme' 185; *EP/JQ* 86, 93; CWC, *Little Review* 6.5: 62). But the manuscript was rejected by *Poetry*, *The Dial*, *Yale Review*, *Seven Arts*, either *The Open Court* or *The Monist* or in effect both, Knopf, Macmillan, and probably *Quarterly Review*, *Fortnightly Review* and the *Hibbert Journal*, as well (see Ewick, 'Instigations', I). Taken together the typescripts seven times crossed the Atlantic, to and from Pound at 5 Holland Place, Kensington, to and from various editorial offices in the United States. During this period Pound wrote in correspondence that he believed one or the other of the typescripts 'stolen', 'misland', 'hid', 'lost', 'delayed', 'detained', 'extracted', 'hindered', 'destroyed', 'ate' (twice), and possibly burnt by a divinely-inspired char woman (*EP/P* 61, 419; *EP/ACH* 102, 109–110, 129, 167; *EP/MA* 244–45, 258–59).

The essay finally saw print in four monthly instalments of Margaret Anderson's *Little Review*, September to December 1919, and was reprinted in Pound's *Instigations*, Boni & Liveright, New York, 1920. But even then, despite Pound's repeated claims for its importance, CWC hardly was noticed. Following the *Little Review* publication only one contemporary review, by Israel Solon in January 1920, so much as mentioned CWC, never mind placed it centrally as an '*ars poetica*' of modernist verse. But for what Pound himself wrote about it no one posited it even so much as minor artillery in the skirmishes over English poetry that characterized the time. Likewise, Pound's *Instigations* instigated the usual reviews in the usual journals by the usual suspects, but of these only Padraic Colum took note

of CWC. Pound was 'a notable editor' who with the inclusion of this 'notable essay that has the effect of being a review and a criticism of Western culture' has 'added genius to his editorial efforts to make current the discoveries of Ernest Fenollosa', Colum wrote (52), and that was it in the press.

Pound's last letter of the period to mention CWC was dated 31 October 1919, just after the second instalment had appeared in *Little Review*, printed in a testy exchange with T. S. Eliot which took place in the pages of *The Athenaeum*. Pound declared himself 'most decidedly indebted... to Ernest Fenollosa's profound insight into the Chinese Written Character as a poetic medium'. 'The debt is so great', Pound wrote, 'that I would not have it lightly forgotten' (qtd. in Eliot 414). But it was forgotten but by Pound, lightly, for years. Even after *Instigations* CWC had a cheering section of only one.

Thereafter, despite the clamour in Pound's letters of five years, following the appearance of CWC in *Instigations* Pound went quiet about the essay for the better part of a decade, no doubt stung by its lack of reception. But there is more to the story than this. In the months and years after CWC appeared in *Little Review* and *Instigations* Pound had two problems on his hands regarding the essay, not counting that only Israel Solon and Padraic Colum had mentioned it in a review. One was a by-then feared eccentric genius in London by way of Tunbridge Wells and Cambridge, four years Pound's junior, named Arthur Waley (see Ewick 'Intertextuality') and the other was a by-then despised cigar-smoking heiress from Brookline, Massachusetts, eleven years Pound's senior, named Amy Lowell. It is to the latter of these to which the remainder of this essay will turn.

The Pound-Lowell acrimony is well known, but no account of it brings CWC fully into the picture, where in fact it holds a centrally important position. The part of the story usually told has to do with Imagism, Lowell's appropriation of the term and the project of promoting it, of promoting herself as its chief proponent, and at least partly as a result Pound's abandonment of it, or at least of its name, to become a 'Vorticist', founding member of a *new* new avant-garde. Both in the spring of 1913 and the summer of 1914 Lowell steamed across the Atlantic on a Cunard Line lux-

ury liner to take up residence in a five-room penthouse atop the Berkeley Hotel in Knightsbridge, overlooking Green Park and Piccadilly Square, to inquire about and to lend her weight to the new poetic theories and practices then much in the London air. On both occasions she was accompanied by a maroon Pierce Arrow touring car, a chauffeur in matching livery, one or more maids, and luggage enough to solicit unconcealed amusement in several accounts of it. Her principal purpose for the 1913 voyage was to meet Pound. A part of her luggage on that crossing was a letter of introduction to him from Harriet Monroe. On the 1914 trip the letter of introduction to Pound was replaced by Ada Dwyer Russell but otherwise the entourage seems mainly to have been the same.

The centrepiece of most accounts of the hostility that ensued is an 'Imagist Dinner' Lowell hosted on the evening of 17 July 1914, fifteen days after Wyndham Lewis, Pound and others publicly had proclaimed the birth of Vorticism and their 'Vorticist Manifesto' in the first issue of *Blast*, dated 20 June but as usual with anything Pound had a hand in during these years delayed, if in this case only until 2 July. Pound had met Mary Fenollosa ten months earlier, 29 September 1913, and had been in possession of 'all old Fenollosa's treasures' for seven months, according to the earliest mention of the Fenollosa notebooks in Pound's published correspondence, in a letter to William Carlos Williams of 19 December 1913 (*EP/L* 27). On the evening Lowell and her guests gathered at the Dieudonné restaurant on Ryder Street, St. James, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria had eleven days to live, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska ten months.

Eleven courses were served to the thirteen in attendance, Lowell and Ada Russell, Ezra and Dorothy Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska, Ford Madox Hueffer and Violet Hunt, Richard Aldington and H. D., F. S. Flint, John Gould Fletcher, Allen Upward, and John Cournos. During after-dinner speeches an argument broke out between Aldington and Gaudier-Brzeska—both had been signatories of the Vorticist Manifesto but they disagreed about Greek art—and then Pound behaved badly at Lowell's expense in a prank involving a tin bathtub. The most entertaining if also the most vicious account of the evening appears in an article on Gaudier-Brzeska published by Ford Madox Hueffer in the October 1919 *English Re-*

view, but the story in various permutations appears in many other works, two by others who were there, Cournos (271–72) and Fletcher (*Life*, 147–52), and twenty or so strangely variant secondary versions by others who were not. Lowell herself published a poem about the evening, ‘The Dinner Party’—“‘So...’ they said, / With their wine-glasses delicately poised, / Mocking at the thing they cannot understand’, etc. (*Men, Women and Ghosts* 338)—and Pound recalled a detail from it three decades later, at Pisa. Campari and Voisin also are restaurants lost to Pound, memories of Milan and Paris, respectively:

Well, Campari is gone since that day  
with Dieudonné and with Voisin  
and Gaudier’s eye on the telluric mass of Miss Lowell (77/469)

What the standard accounts leave out is that nearly all of the frequent dinner parties Lowell hosted in London in 1913 and 1914, at many of which Pound was a guest, were held in her rooms at the Berkeley, and one in particular, as remembered by one of its attendees, directly connects the subsequent events with CWC. Lowell and Florence Ayscough’s later *Fir-Flower Tablets* implicitly would do that well enough, anyway, in time, but John Gould Fletcher’s memory makes the connection explicit. The exact date of the evening is uncertain. Fletcher’s account published more than twenty years after the fact seems to place it during Lowell’s 1913 London visit, but this cannot be correct. Lowell departed London to return to Brookline the month before Pound met Mary Fenollosa. The more likely date is early July 1914, soon after Lowell’s second arrival at the Berkeley. In any case, according to Fletcher, the guests in attendance in Lowell’s rooms that evening included himself, Pound, and Hueffer; the number of courses by Lowell’s standards was a modest six; and after dinner Pound ‘launched... into an involved explanation’ of poetics ‘accompanied by many gestures and jerks of the head’, which ‘took in... the late Professor Ernest Fenollosa’s essay on the Chinese written character, which Ezra had recently found among the unpublished papers which Fenellosa [*sic*] had left after his death’ (*Life* 88).

The significance of this is twofold. First, it places CWC in Pound's hands as early as that, midsummer 1914 at the latest. Mary Fenollosa sent the notebooks to Pound 'in several batches', as Saussy, Stalling, and Klein note, and 'it is difficult to determine the contents of each' (178n10). 'I know you are pining for hieroglyphs and ideographs: but I must keep to our plan to send the Nō stuff first', Mary Fenollosa had written to Pound on 24 November 1913, as she was preparing to send the first package (qtd. in Kodama 6). In a later letter, 24 July 1916, after *Cathay* and several of the Noh plays had been published, she promises more 'if there is hope... of future volumes', and seems to suggest that she had not yet sent CWC (qtd. in Kodama 10), but another note in Saussy, Stalling, and Klein records that the adorning of the cover of the first edition of *Cathay* with the character 耀, which is highlighted in CWC, 'confirms that "The Chinese Written Character," or at least the Chinese calligraphy illustrating it, was already in Pound's hands by spring 1915', when *Cathay* appeared (178n11). Pound's 1913 letter to Williams in which he wrote that he had 'all old Fenollosa's treasures in mss' is not determinative, since Pound may not have known what Mary Fenollosa had in store, and his own earliest mention of CWC in published correspondence is the letter to Henderson of January 1915 noted above. Some accounts suggest that CWC was included in the first package Mary Fenollosa sent to Pound late in 1913, but none of these provides documentation for the speculation, and so unless Fletcher completely mangles the memory—Lowell departed the Berkeley and London for the last time in September 1914—we have CWC definitively in Pound's hands earlier than any other account.

Second, and of more tangible consequence, Fletcher's recollection places CWC not only in Pound's hands but also in Lowell's conceptual field, and she would run with it, or what she understood of it. At this 'crucial stage of Imagist development', William Pratt has written, his focus on Imagism as is always the case in commentaries on the Pound-Lowell rancour, 'one master propagandist was vanquished by another' (33–34), and the vanquished was the smaller, red-headed one who did not smoke cigars. But what has not been remembered in print is that along with Amygism Lowell returned to Brookline with an ill-understood conception of the

Chinese written character as a medium for poetry as part of her loot.

Lowell and Florence Ayscough's translations of Chinese poems 'Chinese Written Wall Pictures' appeared in *Poetry* in February 1919, seven months before Pound managed to get CWC into print at all. Selections soon were reprinted in *Asia*, *The Bookman*, *Literary Digest*, *North American Review*, and other journals, and then along with other Lowell-Ayscough poems from the Chinese were collected in *Fir-Flower Tablets*, Houghton Mifflin in Boston and Constable in London, in December 1921. 'Let me state at the outset that I know no Chinese' was the first sentence of Lowell's preface (v). The 'literal translations' were said to be by Ayscough with 'English versions' by Lowell, although the cover of *Poetry* which included 'Wall Pictures' had them 'translated by Florence Ayscough and Amy Lowell'. Most of *Fir-Flower Tablets* was devoted to the poet Lowell and Ayscough called Li T'ai-Po (Lǐ Bó 李白), whose work under the Japanese transliteration of his name, Rihaku, had been the focus of Pound's *Cathay*. The 'root theory' or 'split-ups', as Lowell came to call the practice she and Ayscough adopted for the translations, involved the extraction of component elements of individual Chinese characters into multiple English images, a misunderstood theory and practice taken over wholly, directly, and without attribution from Pound's early understanding of CWC.

'Very early in our studies, we realized that the component parts of the Chinese written character counted for more in the composition of poetry than has generally been recognized', Lowell wrote in her preface. The 'poet chose one character rather than another which meant practically the same thing, because of the descriptive allusion in the make-up of that particular character ;... the poem was enriched precisely through this undercurrent of meaning in the structure of its characters' (*Fir-Flower* vii-viii). '[I]t must not be forgotten that Chinese is an ideographic, or picture language', Ayscough added in her following introduction of seventy-two-pages:

These marvellous collections of brushstrokes which we call Chinese characters are really separate pictographic representations of complete thoughts. Complex characters are not spontaneously composed, but are built up of simple characters, each having its own peculiar mean-

ing and usage; these, when used in combination, each play their part in modifying... the sense... of the complex.' (lxxxvii)

Lowell's childhood friend Ayscough had visited Lowell in Brookline in November 1917 from Shanghai, where Ayscough had been born and once again resided. Ayscough brought with her several Chinese calligraphic scrolls with word-for-word translations of their written characters. These are said in some sources to have been aids for a series of lectures she was to deliver in Boston and New York, but according to Shen she was in the United States to arrange the sale of a collection of Chinese art (65–68). In *The Pound Era*, Hugh Kenner, not ordinarily at his best addressing Pound's East-Asian interests, offers an entertaining account of what ensued (291–



"Let me state at the outset that I know no Chinese."

'Let me state at the outset that I know no Chinese'. Illustration accompanying Richard Le Gallienne's review of *Fir-Flower Tablets*, *New York Times Book Review*, 15 Jan. 1922



98). Kenner draws largely on the correspondence between Ayscough and Lowell about their Chinese collaboration, *Florence Ayscough and Amy Lowell: Correspondence of a Friendship*. This is a cringe-worthy collection which Ayscough's second husband, Harley Farnsworth MacNair, should have had better sense than to have published after both Lowell and Ayscough had died and could not stop him, leaving both correspondents open to posthumous ridicule for shameless self-congratulation and sanctimonious bile against 'rival translators' of a sort they managed mainly to avoid in the publications which contained the Chinese translations themselves, at least partly aware of the minefield they were entering.

Kenner highlights Lowell's nearly pathological fixation on upstaging Pound and *Cathay*, neither of which despite several obvious sideswipes is mentioned in the long commentaries accompanying 'Wall Pictures' and *Fir-Flower Tablets*. In June 1918 Lowell wrote to Ayscough that she wanted to use 'that root theory of ours' to 'make Ezra Pound and the whole caboodle of them sit up'. It 'will prove that their translations are incorrect, inasmuch as they cannot read the language and are... trusting to Japanese translators' (read: Fenollosa and his collaborators) (*FA/AL* 38). In July she wrote again to say that she wanted Ayscough to put a 'little hint of our discovery about the roots' into an introduction 'simply and solely to knock a hole in Ezra Pound's translations; he having got his things entirely from Professor Fenelosa [*sic*]... and Heaven knows how many hands they went through between the original Chinese and... Fenelosa's Japanese original' (*FA/AL* 43-44). After Ayscough had replied that she was 'perfectly incapable of saying anything that would "knock a hole" in Ezra Pound's translations' (46), Lowell explained further her relation with her 'enemy': 'Awfully sorry cannot write the article myself; not because am busy, but because my relations with Ezra Pound are such that anything I might say in regard to Chinese work would be put down to pique, and, as I am perfectly known not to understand Chinese myself, it would carry absolutely no weight'. No laugh-track required. 'I cannot directly appear to criticize his work' (48). The letters go on in this manner over a period of three and a half years and along with attendant material nearly 300 pages. Not once does Lowell manage to spell Fenollosa's name correctly.

About the poems of *Fir-Flower Tablets* themselves, Kenner finds them 'unreadable today' not because of 'a mistaken theory' or 'a theory ridden too hard' or even simple 'inaccuracy' but rather because of 'Amy Lowell's impregnable vulgarity' (298). Be that as it may—some of the poems are less impregnablely vulgar than those Kenner quotes—in the present context several points and a more central related issue are noteworthy.

First, despite Lowell's claim in a letter to Harriet Monroe, in the service of getting the poems accepted at *Poetry*, that Chinese was 'to some extent' Ayscough's 'native tongue' (*FA/AL* 252), Ayscough's Chinese was rudimentary, which Lowell knew. 'Heaven forgive me!' she wrote to Ayscough after writing to her of what she had written to Monroe, but she hoped that Ayscough would understand the importance of Monroe believing that 'she was getting the *ne plus ultra* of Chinese knowledge and understanding' along with 'the best Englisher there was going' (38), by which Lowell meant herself. Ayscough in the letters frequently admonishes herself for her difficulties with Chinese, and makes nearly a mantra of the degree to which she had to rely on 'teachers', who included mainly an elusive 'Mr. Nung', but also at various times, among others, someone from the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce Language School and 'a missionary lady' among Ayscough's Shanghai circle of friends (89, 104). 'Oh lord, if only I had a greater command of Chinese!!' Ayscough wrote to Lowell in October 1919, in exasperation at the demands being put on her from Brookline, eight months after 'Chinese Written Wall Pictures' had appeared in *Poetry* (96).

Second, the Lowell-Ayscough correspondence, with its obsessive eye on 'rival translators' and reviews, along with even a cursory glance at British and American avant-garde journals of the period, reminds of the degree to which the field of Chinese poetry in modernist English letters was becoming if not altogether crowded then was at least something more extensive than a rivalry between Lowell and her Vorticist adversary. Commentaries and translations, and arguments about commentaries and translations, were rife, Conrad Aiken, L. Cranmer-Byng, John Gould Fletcher, E. Powys Mathers, Harriet Monroe, Eunice Tietjens, Allen Upward, various by now mainly forgotten 'sinologues' or 'Sinos', as Ayscough called them,

by which she meant people who could read Chinese, unlike herself. Witter Bynner made his second trip to China from June 1920 to April 1921, and by 1921 his translations of canonical Tang Dynasty poems in collaboration with the political theorist Kiang Kanghu (Jiāng Kànghǔ 江亢虎) began appearing in journals on both sides of the Atlantic, and were collected in 1929 in *The Jade Mountain*. Arthur Waley's earliest translations from Chinese began appearing in literary and scholarly journals first in the United States and then in Britain in 1917, and his first major book, *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, appeared in British and American editions in July 1918, followed in 1919 by *More Translations from the Chinese*.

Ayscough in fact met both Bynner and Waley as *Fir-Flower Tablets* was being rooted together, the former in Shanghai, the latter in London. She wrote to Lowell that Bynner had a 'bee in his bonnet' and was producing "colourless" versions' of the Tang poems (*FA/AL* 173), and Ayscough later would write an uncharacteristically petulant letter to Bynner about his Chinese work 'bristl[ing] with inaccuracy' (qtd. in Shen 84–85). Lowell for her part somehow had ascertained that Bynner was 'going round [China] blowing like anything' about 'how highly his collaborator was considered there by scholars' (*FA/AL* 175), which Jiāng Kànghǔ was, and, indeed, is. In February 1922 Bynner published a thoughtful article in *Poetry* on 'Translating Wang Wei', which did not mention Lowell or Ayscough or their book, or Pound or CWC, for that matter, which Bynner also would have had in mind, and which ended with the suggestion that 'it would be as erroneous to overemphasize the component radicals of a Chinese character as to overemphasize the component meanings of such words in English as daybreak, breakfast, nightfall or landscape' (278). Pound's relation with Bynner always was cordial, and in any case Pound by 1922 had gone strangely quiet about anything Chinese, and he did not respond. But Lowell fumed to Ayscough that Bynner was 'more of a skunk than ever' in having 'tried to go for us' in such a way. She did 'not wonder that the man is sore, with everybody saying how uninteresting his translations are, although he has placed them round in a lot of magazines'. The publications notwithstanding, Lowell concluded of Bynner to Ayscough that 'we really

killed the man and he knows it' (FA/AL 184), but she was wrong: *Jade Mountain* has not been out of print since the first edition of 1929 and remains, rightly, well-regarded.

Of Waley, Ayscough found him 'a strange being' with 'no apparent enthusiasms', 'most la-de-da in fact', but 'absolutely sure of himself in every particular'. She could not 'imagine the state of mind in which one feels absolute self-confidence' and she confesses to Lowell of 'envying it greatly' (FA/AL 125). Lowell for her part had praised Waley in a 1919 endorsement Alfred Knopf solicited from her for *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, which appeared in advertisements for the American edition. 'No better translations have so far appeared of Chinese poetry... There is no other translation of Chinese poetry now available with anything like the merit of this. AMY LOWELL'. Years later Waley's bibliographer Francis Johns revealed that between the first and second sentence of the endorsement Knopf had made a strategic excision: 'I have been working lately on Chinese poetry with a friend of mine who lives in China', Lowell had written, and 'so I know whereof I speak', and also that 'while I do not always agree with Mr. Waley's renderings of those poems with which I am familiar, he has done what nobody else has' (qtd. in Johns 17). A hiss and swipe at Pound and *Cathay*, but it did not make print. After publication of 'Chinese Written Wall Pictures' in *Poetry* Waley had sent a brief note offering 'two small emendations' which was published in the April issue (55–56), and shortly after *Fir-Flower Tablets* appeared Lowell wrote to Ayscough, simply, 'I am afraid of Waley', adding in an uncharacteristic note of something like self-doubt that she was 'nervous about the split-up characters' and expected Waley to 'jump on us' (FA/AL 178).

The 'split-ups', in other words what Lowell had taken from Pound's description to her of CWC and by then her reading CWC itself in *Little Review* or *Instigations* or both—she never mentioned either in print but she monitored her 'enemies' well—had been a source of concern for Ayscough from the beginning. She confided to Ada Dwyer Russell after Lowell's death that she 'should never have *applied* the use of "split-ups" if Amy had not suggested it' (FA/AL 240). Sprinkled throughout the Lowell-Ayscough correspondence are notes from Ayscough that whenever she

mentions the idea to someone who actually reads Chinese it is dismissed as ‘mad’ or worse (*FA/AL* 69, 81–84, 103, 191). But the concern about Waley and what he would write in a review was Lowell’s only traceable wavering on the issue.

In fact Waley’s review of *Fir-Flower Tablets* was charitable. It was ‘a real book of Chinese poetry’, he wrote in the 4 February 1922 *Literary Review*, and he offered what criticism he did only because he found the work ‘worth criticizing’. Some of Ayscough’s knowledge of Chinese literature, history, and geography in her long introduction Waley found ‘limited’, and some of Lowell’s ‘rhythms’ were ‘weak’, but in general he praised the effort. He noted in closing that he had the ‘courage to twist slightly Miss Lowell’s lioness’s tail’ only because he ‘admired many of her versions’ (395–96). He did not mention the ‘split-ups’.

Lowell wrote to Ayscough that she was ‘much surprised that Waley did not tear us limb from limb’ as ‘he could have done... on the “split ups”’ (*FA/AL* 195). But still she was incapable of abiding even a slight tail-twisting. Soon after Waley’s review appeared, she wrote two long letters to Ayscough on subsequent days with instructions about how *Ayscough* should respond (*FA/AL* 182–89). Waley, Lowell wrote, ‘being German, ... has no sense of humour and does not understand irony’. In addition to not being German, making strategic use of irony was among Waley’s most formidable assets. ‘It makes him mad to think that we have invented anything which has a prototype in ancient China’, Lowell continued. Waley’s review was ‘simply ludicrous’. Lowell had made enquiries with a ‘Mr. Chang’ and a ‘Dr. Chao’ to harvest evidence against Waley’s mild charges, although she confided to Ayscough: ‘I do not find it easy to understand these Chinamen; nor do they find it easy to understand me’. Two months passed before Ayscough responded. Answering Waley would be ‘very difficult’ for her, she wrote (*FA/AL* 194), and then another two months passed before she wrote again that she was thankful that Lowell believed it too late for her to answer Waley at all (201). Lowell herself, in any case, already had done so, in a letter to the editor of *Literary Review* nearly as long as Waley’s review itself in which she accused him above all of not understanding ‘polyphonic prose’ (*FA/AL* 259–61). Waley did not respond.

Other reviews of *Fir-Flower Tablets* were mixed, but several appeared in the right places, including particularly glowing remarks from Richard Le Gallienne in *The New York Times Book Review* of 15 January 1922. *Fir-Flower Tablets* was ‘a remarkable triumph’, Mrs Ayscough ‘a learned Chinese scholar’, Miss Lowell ‘a poet both temperamentally and technically in sympathy with the practical spirit and practice of China’ (4). Le Gallienne’s praise along with phrases from Waley taken out of context in ‘the time-honored practice of the selective use of ellipsis’ to give ‘readers... an impression of the book which certainly did not reflect the reviewer’s opinion of it’ (Johns 21) were used in an ad taken out in the March *Dial*. Malcolm Cowley in the same journal in May was among few reviewers of *Fir-Flower Tablets* to mention Pound at all, noting lines he had ‘funked’ in *Cathay* and finding that *Fir-Flower Tablets* in its ‘skirmishes with the enemy’, by which Cowley meant Pound and *Cathay*, ‘came off victorious’ (519). In *American Poetry Since 1900* Louis Untermeyer included back-to-back chapters on Lowell and Pound, which found *Fir-Flower Tablets* of ‘value and clarity’ and Ayscough’s introduction ‘illuminating’, while Pound, ‘deserted by his disciples, left alone now on his lonely and not too lofty eminence’, had been ‘misled’ by ‘a false erudition’ in which he mistook ‘the flicker for the flame’ (154, 157, 165).

Only two reviewers mentioned the ‘split-up’ method, although neither called it that. Bynner noted in ‘Translating Chinese Poetry’ in the December 1921 *Asia*, in part a cautionary note again to Pound about CWC although neither is mentioned, that to ‘drag out from an ideograph its radical metaphor lands you in a limbo-language’ (193), and Chang Hsin-Hai in the *Edinburgh Review* of July 1922 lamented the appropriation of Chinese poetry among the ‘*vers-libertines*’, and was ‘puzzled’ by the ‘mass of verbiage’ and ‘queer and strange imagisms’ in the Ayscough-Lowell translations. ‘The words for “the blue sky” are the simplest in the Chinese language’, Chang wrote, ‘but the translators have endowed them with some mysterious element which makes them look awe-inspiring instead of being two innocent little words’ (102, 108, 112).

Lowell responded in print and often at length to most of the reviews which she took to be negative, but she stayed away from Bynner, knowing

from experience that he was not as la-de-da as Waley, plus he had noted the 'split-ups' and had Jiāng Kànghǔ at his back. As for Chang, despite his reservations about turning ordinary Chinese words into images which made him feel 'as if he had been ushered into a mythological realm of unfamiliar deities', Lowell chose positive phrases in the review in her responses to other detractors, noting, for example, in response to a two-part essay on 'Translating Chinese Poetry' by Eunice Tietjens in the August and September 1922 numbers of *Poetry*, which in passing had doubted the 'essentially Chinese quality' of *Fir-Flower Tablets* ('On Translating' II 331), that both a 'Chinese gentleman' and 'a Chinese scholar', by both of which Lowell meant Chang, had shown that *Fir-Flower Tablets* had proven that 'good wine needs no bush' ('Miss Lowell' 171-72).

All this acrimonious back-and-forthing, Tietjens questioning Lowell's 'racial interpretations' ('On Translating' II 330), Lowell attacking Tietjens for attacking her 'veracity' because she wanted to promote her sister's Chinese studies ('Miss Lowell' 172), Tietjens responding in defence of her sister that she feared she had 'started so lively a hare' that she risked being 'quite outrun' ('Note' 172), Fletcher finding that Waley did not understand 'the depths of the Oriental temperament' ('Perfume' 276), Waley on the odd occasion that he descended to responding to any of it proving himself indeed absolutely sure of himself in every particular, Bynner joining the fray occasionally at least with an astute reserve lacking in the other serious business, taken together dozens of translations and commentaries and letters to editors and piqued replies followed on by piqued replies to the piqued replies, *Poetry*, *The Dial*, *The Egoist*, *The New Age*, *Literary Review*, others.... What is nearly entirely missing in it all is Pound, who was off his game. But what is missing even more than Pound, completely missing, is Fenollosa and CWC, which had started it all but was mentioned in none of it. What could Pound have said? Lowell had hoisted him with Fenollosa's petard. She had made the caboodle sit up.

'The acid could be imagined eating through Ezra', Kenner writes in a related context (397). A good line and true, but Kenner had *Cathay* in mind, failing to take CWC into account and therefore understanding maybe the half of it.

## NOTES

### Abbreviations:

CWC: 'The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry'

EP/ACH: *The Letters of Ezra Pound to Alice Corbin Henderson*

EP/JQ: *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound to John Quinn*

EP/L: *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907–1941*

EP/MA: *Pound/The Little Review: The Letters of Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson*

EP/P: *Ezra Pound to his Parents: Letters 1885–1929*

FA/AL: *Florence Ayscough and Amy Lowell: Correspondence of a Friendship*

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