

## “Down in a Bhud Mess” Ezra Pound, Ernest Fenollosa and Buddhism

ダレン・ダグラス・モートソン  
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In late 1913, U.S. poet Ezra Pound began to receive a series of packages from Mary McNeil Fenollosa, author and wife of art historian Ernest Fenollosa, containing notebooks written by her late husband on the arts of China and Japan. Mary Fenollosa had met Pound earlier that year in London, and had decided that he was precisely the man she required to bring the hundreds of pages of her husband's notes into order and eventual publication. These pages, being mostly about poetry and the theatre, “demanded not an editor but a poet” (Kenner 197). Among the works that Pound was able in subsequent years to compile and publish were *Cathay*, “*Noh*,” or *Accomplishment* and “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry.” Each of these very quickly went on to become exceptionally influential, with T.S. Eliot, for example, commenting that with *Cathay* “Pound invented Chinese poetry for our time” (quoted in Fields 164). Yet it was Pound's edition of Fenollosa's essay on “The Chinese Written Character” that would have the most profound impact on twentieth century poetry and poetics.

Pound recognized the significance of “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry” almost immediately. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1917, Pound wrote to his friend, the art collector and patron John Quinn, that he had just “sealed up” Fenollosa's essay and had sent it to a publisher. Despite it being, in Pound's estimation, “one of the most important essays of our time” and “basic for all aesthetics,”—Fenollosa seeing and anticipating “a good deal of what has happened in art (painting and poetry) during the last ten years”—Pound rightfully surmised that it would be rejected for publication (Materer 1991 93). However, when it was finally published as a four-part series by the *Little Review* literary journal in 1919, and subsequently included at the end of Pound's *Instigations* in 1920 (Saussy 2008 4), its influence

was rapidly felt by an ever wider circle of literati, ultimately affecting the work of generations of poets and other writers.

As a result of the essay's continuing importance (although not without facing intense criticism), both in Pound studies and in poetry, interest has also grown in the ideas of Ernest Fenollosa apart from the editorial mediation of Pound, and specifically in the question of what exactly Pound edited out of "The Chinese Written Character". Until quite recently this was a difficult question to answer as Fenollosa's original notebooks and manuscripts have been passed on to Yale University, unpublished and out of general circulation. In 2008, however, Pound scholars Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling and Lucas Klein published a critical edition of "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry", including Fenollosa's previously unpublished early drafts of the essay and, crucially, textual indications of what Pound chose to strike out of Fenollosa's work. With introductory guidance from the editors, though, it appears that one thing that Pound decided to omit or underplay was Fenollosa's strongly Buddhist perspective. It becomes obvious that Fenollosa's Japanese Buddhist understanding permeates the original essay and, with this intention in mind or not, Pound's omission of certain passages in the early drafts, which most clearly reflect Fenollosa's Buddhism, subtly alters the meaning and thrust of the essay. It is the argument of the present paper that this alteration would come to have widespread ramifications.

In contrast to Fenollosa's Buddhism, Pound increasingly adopts a "Confucian" worldview from which, and especially in his "China Cantos," he often expresses hostility or frustration towards Buddhism and other religions. After the devastation of World War One, in which Pound personally suffered the loss of several close friends and creative allies, Pound's interests became emphatically more political and economic. His overarching concern becomes to ascertain the causes of the war and, by doing so, to prevent another. His Confucianism sustains him in this quest, and its fundamental stress on the "rectification of names" (*cheng ming*), the requirement for words to correspond precisely to what they signify in the real world, assists him in cutting through the political and economic corruption and deception of the interwar period.

During this time Pound becomes sympathetic to Mussolini's fascist regime in Italy, settling there in 1924, and as war sadly approaches once again, he begins to express his fascist sympathies quite openly, coupling them with an increasingly virulent anti-Semitism. During this whole process of political radicalization, however, Pound's Confucianism remains

steadfast, Pound viewing his fascism and anti-Semitism as logically stemming from his Confucian beliefs rather than deviating from them. And continuing in combination with this entire system of Pound’s thought, in fact remaining the baseline of it, is “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry”.

There are of course several reasons why Ezra Pound made his turn to fascism and anti-Semitism. It is my contention here, however, that, given his lifelong devotion to “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry”, Pound’s editing out of certain passages in Fenollosa’s original drafts, which can be characterized as Buddhist and decentralizing rather than Confucian and authoritarian/fascist,—and in doing so altering the tone and thrust of the essay—provides a significant foreshadowing of this turning.

### 1.

The first incarnations of what would become “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry” (henceforth the CWC) appeared as several notes and drafts of a lecture presented by Fenollosa on Chinese and Japanese poetry. This was just one of many lectures given by Fenollosa during his years of lecture-touring across the U.S. from 1899 to 1908, the year of his sudden death in London (Saussy 2008 14-5). These notes and drafts morphed and developed over the years, yet according to Haun Saussy a final draft of the essay gelled in 1906 (Saussy 2008 17). It was this draft that Mary Fenollosa presented to Ezra Pound in 1913, allowing him full editorial license. In 1958, Pound recalled receiving the essay and adds “From his lecture on the Chinese Character I took what seemed to me most needed, omitting the passages re/ sound” (CWC 174). Pound may be underplaying his omissions here, but his statement that these involved “sound” is itself revealing.

Before turning to the actual text, though, it should be mentioned that however influential Pound’s version of the essay was to be, it did not escape serious and often harsh critical attention. Jonathan Stalling outlines a portion of this negative reception to the CWC. The critical responses range from Hugh Kenner’s critique that much of the essay has been derived from Emersonian Transcendentalism, to sinologist George A. Kennedy calling it “a mass of confusion” mostly because it neglects the significant phonetic component of written Chinese, and to literary critic Robert Kern characterizing “Fenollosa’s reading of Chinese characters as an Orientalist imposition” (Stalling 23-4). Stalling accepts that Fenollosa (and Pound) made errors in his interpretation of Chinese written language, but he argues that Fenollosa’s critics have also largely neglected or overlooked the genuinely Buddhist intention

and tone expressed in the essay. For Stalling this particular neglect is unsurprising as critics have examined the CWC through the lens of Pound, the poet himself being largely ignorant of Fenollosa's Buddhism (Stalling 25).

Akiko Miyake writes that when Mary Fenollosa "handed Pound her late husband's notebooks she carefully withheld those documents that could have suggested to Pound Fenollosa's ardent Buddhism" (Miyake 1981 537). Many of these documents were acquired by Harvard University and Miyake notes that she does not believe that Pound read the Fenollosa collection at Harvard. Miyake also adds that "All of Fenollosa's drafts preserved at Yale Library were held by Pound until he was arrested in Italy [in 1945]" (Miyake 1981 535 n.7). Even with Pound's editing, however, Fenollosa's Buddhist perspective, in its emphasis on self-emptiness and interconnection, shines through. It is worth citing sections of the CWC as it appears in Pound's *Instigations* to make this point. To quote an influential passage:

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.  
(Pound 1920 364)

Both nouns and abstract verbs are an impossibility in nature, every "point" being a temporary convergence of different forces or actions. Chinese characters, in Fenollosa's view, depict this sense of nouns in constant motion, always in interaction with other things and forces. In a sentence in any language, he writes, "motion leaks everywhere, like electricity from an exposed wire" (Pound 1920 365). Fenollosa continues: "All processes in nature are inter-related; and thus there could be no complete sentence (according to this definition) save one which it would take all time to pronounce" (Pound 1920 365). No sentence is closed or complete in itself except for the impossible sentence that would contain the entire universe. Fenollosa later describes the natural sentence as a "flash of lightning" where power is transferred through the sentence from a term representing an "agent" to another term representing an "object;" "acts" or verbs conducting force like a lightning bolt firing between "a cloud and the earth" (Pound 1920 366-7). This lightning-like transference of force is most readily apparent within the sentences of uninflected languages like English and Chinese (Pound 1920 367) and it is in such languages where poetry can be most powerful, Chinese

especially. Towards the end of the essay Fenollosa concludes:

The more concretely and vividly we express the interactions of things the better the poetry. We need in poetry thousands of active words, each doing its utmost to show forth the motive and vital forces. We can not exhibit the wealth of nature by mere summation, by the piling of sentences. Poetic thought works by suggestion, crowding maximum meaning into the single phrase pregnant, charged, and luminous from within.

In Chinese character each work accumulated this sort of energy in itself.  
(Pound 1920 382-3)

Whether or not written Chinese functions in the manner that Fenollosa explains is a matter for linguists to determine, but that the essay acts as an impetus or a propellant for poetic inspiration is undeniable. Ezra Pound and his generation were inspired by it, and it continues to inspire poets today. Pound was perhaps almost singularly suited to receive its message. In the year prior to meeting Mary Fenollosa, Pound had co-founded the Imagist poetic movement, and had advised his fellow Imagists, whilst writing poetry, to avoid superfluous words and especially adjectives, to fear abstractions, to be cautious of ornament, and to present and not describe (Saussy 2008 9).

All of this, exemplified in Pound's haiku-resembling "In a Station of a Metro," was confirmed/anticipated by the CWC. And although Imagism lacks the emphasis on motion expressed in the CWC; in Vorticism—a subsequent poetic movement also co-founded by Pound and emerging in 1914—the motion and dynamism central to Fenollosa's essay is implied in its very name (Saussy 2008 23). Yet along with the artistic movements it seemed to prophesy is Fenollosa's Buddhism, quite apparent in the essay for those familiar with its philosophy, and present even if Pound remained unaware of it. As Saussy, Stalling and Miyake separately point out, however, without Pound's specific editorial omissions of the CWC its intrinsic Buddhist character and message would be all the more apparent. A few examples of Pound's omissions should suffice before turning to Fenollosa's and Pound's respective views of Buddhism.

## 2.

Miyake, working with what she calls the “earlier chaotic draft of the essay” held at Yale, finds this passage by Fenollosa:

Thus, in all poetry, a word is like a sun, with its corona and chromosphere revealed, words crowd upon words, and enwrap each other in their luminous envelopes, until sentences become more like continuous bands of colored light, than the grouping of separate stone in steely points. (Miyake 1991 50)

In the 2008 *Critical Edition* this passage appears in the earlier drafts although the clause “than the grouping of separate stone in steely points” is missing (CWC 60). In Pound’s final version the passage is omitted entirely. Close to the above, Saussy points out another Fenollosa passage:

All arts follow the same law; refined harmony lies in the delicate balance of the overtones. In music the whole possibility and theory of harmony is based upon the overtones. In painting, great color beauty springs not from the main color masses, but from the refined modifications or overtones which each throws into the other, just as tints are etherealized in a flower by reflection from petal to petal. One false radiation, one suspicion of conflict between any two of these overtones, breaks up the magic impression, and deadens art to the commonplace. (Saussy 2008 17-8)

In the published version, Pound reduces this and two following paragraphs to: “All arts follow the same law; refined harmony lies in the balance of overtones. In music the whole possibility and theory of harmony are based on the overtones. In this sense poetry seems a more difficult art” (Saussy 2008 18). The elimination or drastic reduction of the above passages reflect Pound’s stress on lucid and precise language and the need for an economy of style, but it also alters the nuance of Fenollosa’s writing. Stalling explains that in Pound’s deletion of images like “interpenetrating overtones,” or “intermingling tones,” he is also curtailing Fenollosa’s Buddhist rhetoric. “Pound cut sections where Fenollosa expounds on the blending of ‘colours of sympathetic tones of orchestral instruments, lost in the harmony of their chord’” (Stalling 25).

In passages like these, Pound would not only have seen excessive and flowery prose, but also a kind of boundary-dissolving imprecision that runs directly counter to his own aesthetic and philosophical requirement for clear categorization and bold outlines between things. As Saussy presented in a lecture on "Buddhist Modernism," Fenollosa's essay often "suggests a synaesthetic mingling of the different senses, in which a meadow is like a symphony," while Pound ascribed to a poetics "in which the detail had to stay sharp and individual in order to convey its maximum of implication," and "where sharp perceptions were needed" (Saussy 2009 7). Yet as Stalling concludes:

While Pound succeeded in eliminating most of Fenollosa's explicit Buddhist language and the second half of the essay that begins to present Fenollosa's valuation of Chinese correlative poetics as a possible foundation for Western poetry, the theoretical and aesthetic gist or essence of these heterocultural elements remain a vital part of the published version. (Stalling 36)

### 3.

Fenollosa's own Buddhist beliefs permeated his life and works. After coming to Japan in 1878, as a young professor of philosophy at the Imperial University in Tokyo, Fenollosa's engagement with Buddhism grew to the point where he received the precepts of Tendai Buddhism on September 21, 1885 (Fields 147, 152). Although Fenollosa embraced Tendai, it is evident from his writing that he became familiar with several forms of Japanese Buddhism, including Zen, Kegon and new Buddhist sects arising in the Meiji period. In his masterwork, the two volumes of *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* which his wife had had published in 1912, he frequently discusses various Buddhist groups in the context of art history. For the purposes of the present essay it should suffice to present some of his insights on Tendai and Zen, these two sects being most relevant to Fenollosa's argument in the CWC.

Tendai (in China, T'ien Tai) was established in Japan by Saichō in the first decade of the 800s C.E. Its doctrines were derived from the *Lotus Sutra* as well as certain tantric texts (Matsunaga & Matsunaga 143). When Saichō studied T'ien Tai in China, the latter was already heavily infused with the doctrines of Hua-yen (in Japan, Kegon), and this he brought back with him to Japan. This helps to explain Fenollosa's understanding of both schools. Of Tendai, he writes in *Epochs*:

This great esoteric sect, which ascribes magical power and direct contact with spirit to the human soul, was called, from its central sect, the Tendai sect.... But the mysticism of the Tendai sect went to a range of psychological analysis which dwarfs the neo-Platonist. It assumes the world to be real rather than illusory; striving, evolution: a salvation through process—a salvation to be achieved within the body of society and human law—a salvation of personal freedom and self-directed illumination—a salvation by renouncing salvation for loving work. (Fenollosa 170)

The key point to be taken here is that Tendai affirms both the spiritual and the mundane or material spheres simultaneously, one interpenetrates the other. Unlike Platonism or Neoplatonism—and this becomes crucial in regard to Pound's own wider philosophy—the “soul” or self within Tendai does not strive to attain a lost spiritual transcendence in a realm separate from our everyday lives. Instead, enlightenment involves witnessing mystic truth within nature and society. He explains how these doctrines provide Tendai visual art with its vivid and “piercing imagination.” The presences of dazzling Buddhas and bodhisattvas are seen by the waking eye, “the inner circulation of native affinities and sympathies working in intertwined lines of physical and moral law” are directly beheld, as are “the psychologic armies of elementals working through storms of molecules and currents” (Fenollosa 170). The link to passages in the CWC, especially those concerning the transference of force or electricity, is obvious.

And in his discussion of Zen (a later school of Japanese Mahāyāna Buddhism), the ties of its esoteric/exoteric philosophy and the message of the CWC become even closer. Fenollosa explicitly discusses the comparison of poetry with Zen in words that almost repeat those of his essay. Fenollosa explains how “all real poetry” is simply an “underground perception of organic relation.” To the vision of early humans, the natural world “was so plastic and transparent” that poetic metaphor “flashed upon him as a spiritual identity to be embodied at once in language, in poetry and in myth” (Fenollosa 302). And Zen, in this manner, “only tried to get back to that primitive *éclaircissement*.” Chinese poetry also reflects this understanding of multiple and interpenetrating meanings in nature and in words. In it there is “extreme condensation” as every word, containing at least two meanings, is maximally packed with intention. Only poets, Fenollosa explains, are able to use a word “with a hint of its original colour” (Fenollosa 302). Here, therefore, he is expressly connecting primitive myth-making and Chinese poetry, as he did in the CWC, with Zen Buddhism.

Kegon (Hua-yen or Avataṃsaka) Buddhism is mentioned only once in *Epochs*, and then only in passing. However, Fenollosa would have certainly been aware of its doctrine through his studies of Tendai, Zen and the Mahāyāna in general. Saussy skillfully explains the doctrine of Kegon through its development in Tendai. Tendai refers to a "threefold truth": "First, all things are empty (of inherent existence); second, all things have a provisional or interrelated reality, and third, all things are both empty of ultimate reality and provisionally real at the same time" (Saussy 2008 20-1). Thus each "thing" is only real in its provisional or changing relation with other "things." The parallel of this with the relation between words and sentences according to Fenollosa in the CWC is quite apparent.

Kegon, Saussy goes on to illustrate, teaches four levels of consciousness. In the first, things are held to be autonomous and separate: the common sense view. In the second level things are viewed as being mere manifestations of a underlying, primary principle. In the third, the boundaries between things and their principles dissolve into one another; and in the fourth level of consciousness there is the recognition of "the unobstructed mutual interpenetration of all things" (Saussy 2008 23). Matsunaga and Matsunaga also explain that while other sects, like Tendai, teach the first three levels, this fourth level, the "Dharmadhātu of the Unity of Phenomenon and Phenomenon," is a unique Kegon contribution to Mahāyāna Buddhism (Matsunaga & Matsunaga 101). Employing a metaphor that must have arisen within Kegon itself, they describe the four levels in terms of the waves and the water of the sea. At first, each wave is viewed as being separate from every other; secondly, the water of the sea is seen and not the waves at all; thirdly, the interdependence of the waves and water is realized; and finally, each wave is seen to manifest both water and every other wave (Matsunaga & Matsunaga 101). In an earlier lecture, Fenollosa invokes the identical image, pointing once more to his familiarity with this doctrine:

If we take an instantaneous photograph of the sea in motion, we may fix the momentary form of a wave, and call it a thing; yet it was only an incessant vibration of water. So other things, apparently more stable, are only large vibrations of living substance; and when we trace them to their origin and decay, they are seen to be only parts of something else. And these essential processes of nature are not simple; there are waves upon waves, processes below processes, systems within systems;—and apparently so on forever. (Saussy 2008 22)

Of course, the most famous image or metaphor from the Kegon or Avataṃsaka (flower-garland) school, and found in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (Cleary), is that of “Indra’s Net.” This vast net stretches across the whole cosmos, each node in the net being a jewel which reflects and so encompasses every other node in the entire net. Thus the holistic interpenetration of the all with the all is captured in metaphoric image. Fenollosa does not mention Indra’s Net in his writing, but he would have been aware of its appearance and meaning in his former student and good friend Kakuzo Okakura’s book, *Ideals of the East: The Spirit of Japanese Art*, published in 1903.

For art, like the diamond net of Indra, reflects the whole chain in every link. It exists at no period in any final mould. It is always a growth, defying the dissecting knife of the chronologist. (Okakura 4)

Just as Okakura applied the image of Indra’s Net to art in general, Fenollosa held that in real poetry each element penetrated both every other element and the whole of poetry itself, as is more or less expressed in the CWC and his other writings.

#### 4,

Ezra Pound, despite not being able to entirely dislodge the Buddhist aspects of Fenollosa’s essay—it being Buddhist to the core—had a much different take on the CWC. His edition reflected both his anti-Buddhism and his later Confucianist outlook, and may have influenced, or at least dovetailed with, his turn towards fascism and anti-Semitism. Pound’s anti-Buddhism, as is well known, is most evident in his “China Cantos” (Cantos LII-LXI), and this certainly mirrors the anti-Buddhist stance of the source for these cantos, Moyriac de Mailla’s *Histoire générale de la Chine*. However, there is evidence that Pound’s distaste for Buddhism goes much further back than when he was writing the “China Cantos” in the 1930s. Leon Surette points out that Pound’s hostility towards Buddhism and other Indian mystical traditions began in his London period, and specifically in his disdain for the spirit-medium based “Esoteric Buddhism” of Madame Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott (Surette 25). Pound wrote a two-part article for *The New Age* literary journal which negatively contrasted Buddhism to Confucianism as far back as July of 1917. This article, entitled “Provincialism the Enemy,” was also eventually published in *Selected Prose 1909-1965* in 1973:

I doubt if Confucius has ever been the seed of fanatics. After his death his

country was cursed with Buddhism, which is very much the same as part of the pest which spread over mediaeval Europe, clothed in the lamb's wool of Christ. It showed in China many resembling symptoms. But this had nothing to do with Confucius, "the first man who did not receive a divine inspiration." (Pound 1973 194)

This is as revealing a statement on Pound's aversion to Buddhism as anything found in the "China Cantos." Its characterization of both Buddhism and Christianity as fanatical, pestilential and decadent, combined with the idea that a Confucian social order was corrupted by an impure and outside influence, are themes that will recur throughout Pound's career. Miyake points out that, given the evidence of a letter sent to his father in March of 1914 which recommends that Homer Pound read the preface to Fenollosa's *Epochs*, Pound must have also read the book (Miyake 1981 544 n.52). This seems somewhat surprising, for if Pound had read *Epochs*, he would have seen statements throughout the book blaming Confucians for being rigid and puritanical. In fact, throughout the book, Fenollosa's viewpoint is virtually the opposite of Pound's, as with this rather blunt passage:

Of the more honest of those Confucians, it was no doubt a definite desire to make China into a moral machine, where every rite, ceremony, industry, and even thought should be conducted along pre-established formulæ. Their ideal is uniformity; their standard is not insight but authority; their conception of literature is bounded by the dictionary; what they hate most is any manifestation of human freedom. (Fenollosa 522-3)

So we have Pound the Confucian praising order and purity, and Fenollosa the Buddhist on the side of freedom and the imagination. It is not quite so cut and dried as this, but it is almost comical to juxtapose quotations of their respective works on these subjects. Here is Pound from *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, subtitled *Fascism As I Have Seen It*:

For 2,500 years, whenever there has been order in China or in any part of China, you can look for a Confucian at the root of it. (Pound 1970 113)

Compare this to the following passage from Fenollosa's *Epochs*:

The poetry of Han, however, a noble mass of work, remained largely Taoist

or Individualistic, enforcing the prime fact which all later Chinese critics, and their European Sinologist pupils, have ignored, that almost all the great imaginative art work of the Chinese mind has sprung from those elements in Chinese genius, which, if not anti, were at least non-Confucian (Fenollosa 25)

It is difficult to believe, reading these passages, that Pound could have been so affected by the CWC, and knowing the beliefs of its author, that he spent his life in contemplation of it. Indeed, Saussy states that from 1913 to his death in 1973 “hardly a day” passed in which Pound did not “study his Chinese dictionary, paraphrase Confucius, or allude to the main point of Fenollosa’s critical study of the Chinese written character as a medium for poetry” (Saussy 2009 2). But it is obvious the CWC came to mean something very different for Pound than it did for Fenollosa.

For Pound it came to be coupled with the Confucian doctrine of “the rectification of names.” Pound continually emphasized Fenollosa’s idea that poetry should move away from the abstract and towards the particular. Pound pounces on Fenollosa’s statement that in this the “method of poetry” is identical to the scientific method, as well as to the logic of the Chinese “ideograph” (Pound 1957 20). Pound is not misquoting Fenollosa here, but one has the sense that Fenollosa would not in any way wish to limit poetry to the confines of science or to Pound’s “ideogrammic method” (Pound 1957 26). Certainly Fenollosa would object to Pound’s strict Confucian interpretation of his work.

## 5.

Turning to the “China Cantos,” Pound’s anti-Buddhism, although in part seen through the lens of de Mailla, becomes crystal clear. In these cantos the entire history of China, absent certain periods of Confucian “earthly paradise,” appears largely to be a struggle against the corruption and decadence of Buddhists, Taoists, eunuchs and others who would upset the social order. We read of emperors or other leaders who “drove out” or “cleaned out the taozers” (Pound 1981 291, 296), of the “seepage of Bhuddists” (280) of “backsheesh, taoists, bhuddists/ wars, taxes, oppressions” (281) and of “damn bhuddists” (285). More philosophically, Pound writes “Against order, lao, bhud and lamas... poisoning life with mirages, ruining order” (318). And perhaps most significantly:

Fou-Y saying they use muzzy language  
 the more to mislead folk.  
 Kung is to China as is water to fishes.  
 War, letters, to each a time.  
 Provinces by mountain and rivers divided  
 'A true prince wants his news straight' (285)

"They" of course refers to the "damn bhuddists" of the previous line and the concern is that Buddhists, aside from deceiving people with false ideas and ruining order, are using "muzzy language" to mislead people when true princes only want straight news; once more the Confucian rectification of names. And Fenollosa has yet again already prepared the perfect response several decades previously:

The pure modern Confucian recoils with horror from all taint of Buddhist thought and feeling, and in so doing, renounces and ignores the very greatest part of what makes China and Chinese art great in the great Sung. (Fenollosa 312)

Achilles Fang claims that it is not known for certain when Pound became a converted Confucian, but it is certain that he was one when he translated the *Ta Hio*, or *Great Learning of Confucius*, in 1928 (Fang xiii). A more interesting question, however, might be when Pound began to use his Confucian beliefs to justify his fascism. Nothing is simple with Pound, and his adherence to fascism is certainly complex. In his entry on "Politics" in the *Ezra Pound Encyclopedia*, Tim Redman explains that Pound identified himself as a "left-wing fascist," was antiwar, was a long-time supporter of Lenin, and yet was also an anti-Semite and a defender of both Mussolini and Hitler (Redman 233-7). It is evident, however, that Pound began combining his Confucianism with fascism by the 1920s, and became willing "to subordinate the human spirit to the principle of social order" (Kibler 255).

Pound became a fascist for the same reasons that he became a Confucian: for ethical principles and a strong sense of social responsibility. In Confucianism and in the study of written Chinese, Pound hoped to bring about a reform of language "for he thought that the disease of weakened language had strengthened the hand of liars and cheats, otherwise known as politicians and bankers, across the world" (Saussy 2009 5). In *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, Pound writes that the primary principle of Confucianism, which could be applied

to fascist Italy, or to any other country, family or even individual, is that of effective self-government:

If anyone holds the long-distance record for common-sense, that man is Confucius. And the concept I have in mind is: benefit of the world by *means* of good INTERNAL GOVERNMENT of the country. (Pound 1970 75)

To set one's own house in order before worrying about things outside is, as Pound sees it, only the best common sense; and Pound, almost above all else, viewed himself as a man of common sense. This Confucian, or at least Poundian, principle of good internal government may seem widely different than the bodhisattva vow, which Fenollosa had sworn, to defer one's own enlightenment and work for the liberation of all beings. For Buddhism the centre is everywhere and compassion can be offered in a myriad of ways, but in Pound's version of Confucianism the centre is fixed—in the person, in the family, in the nation—and work must begin at the centre.

In Pound's translation of the Confucian texts, he calls this centre "the unwobbling pivot" (Pound 1952 95), yet in a note which Pound planned to read as an address to the Chinese people during one of his infamous Rome radio broadcasts during the war, he proposed to change this to "the axis." He wrote that "when both Mussolini and Hitler have quoted Confucius," not consciously, perhaps, but when their designs for the new Europe use "the same sentences that you find in the Great Learning" then it is "time for China to seek for more intimate knowledge of the aims of the Axis powers" (quoted in Feldman 83). This is certainly horrifying in retrospect but, in his defense, Pound was at this time (1943) ignorant of Nazi atrocities.

In Pound's view of Confucianism, the virtuous ruler abides "in the central axis of the whirling motion of the lower world and of the interactions between heaven and earth." From here "the excellences from heaven are distributed in harmony, and heaven and earth stand right, in what Pound calls 'their precise modalities'" (Miyake 1991 177). When a leader is not virtuous, the pivot begins to wobble and to shift and the "excellences" are not distributed fairly, and when language is used imprecisely and deceptively, allowing for corruption and usury—when a faction "hogs the harvest"—the entire circuit is broken.

For Pound the ancient Chinese emperors *and* Thomas Jefferson *and* Benito Mussolini

were all examples of "Confucian heroes" or virtuous rulers, axes between heaven and earth, transferring power as transitive verbs do in the CWC. Just as the "muzziness" of language blurs and blunts meaning within poetry (Saussy 2008 17), decadence and usury do this within the nation or empire (both being abstractions). And ominously this is precisely where Pound's anti-Semitism enters in. This is Pound at very nearly—as the most virulently anti-Semitic radio diatribes were edited out—his worst:

And the phantom that the Anglo-Jew world is fighting, or that the Anglo-American is fighting, a Jew usurer instigation, is the German PHANTOM, NOT the reality. And that phantom has been built out of lies, till the pious and kindly American, and simple hearted British boob BY the million believe it, see it, hear it. And FAIL to grasp or to face the reality. (quoted in Doob #39)

## 6.

Pound's best intentions somehow led him down the worst path, transforming himself into something unrecognizable. How did this happen? How did the poet/translator of the beautiful Taoist poems of *Cathay* become warped into something so paranoid and ugly? There is no excuse for Pound. If it was madness, then it was a madness which stretches right back to the origins of his literary career. If he was a victim of the spirit of his time, then he was a willing victim who helped to propel that particular zeitgeist forward. No matter how beautiful his poetry, no matter how lucid and helpful his prose, this aspect of Pound, which sadly infects all of Pound, must be faced. The U.S. poet Charles Olson, a lover of Pound's work as I am, did face this, even as he came to visit Pound while he was incarcerated at St. Elizabeths:

It is not enough to call him a fascist.

He is a fascist, the worst kind, the intellectual fascist, this filthy apologist and mouther of slogans which serve men of power. It was a shame upon all writers when this man of words, this succubus, sold his voice to the enemies of the people. (Olson 16)

Yet this is not all of Pound. Akiko Miyake in her *Ezra Pound and the Mysteries of Love*, which she subtitles *A Plan for The Cantos*, makes the immensity and profundity of Pound's poetic/religious vision absolutely clear. In one of numerous similar passages she writes that "the poet had managed to unify Fenollosa's Eastern contemplation with his own Plotinian-

Dantean [and Eleusinian] mysteries of love. Out of this mystical marriage are begotten Pound's poems of images, his rose" (Miyake 1991 52). According to Miyake, Pound's philosophy is essentially a very eclectic and syncretic Neoplatonism, which only later becomes overlaid with Confucianism.

Pound's aim, his mystery of love, is that of attempting to elevate the lower soul through love and the appreciation of beauty to the higher soul Isis, and later the female bodhisattva Kuanon (see Gildersleeve 203), who dwells in the Absolute. It is the archaic story of the soul's descent to earth and its re-ascent to heaven. Miyake seems to assert that Pound's major error was that he was confused by Fenollosa's use of reason while simultaneously claiming that the absolute was beyond reason (Miyake 1991 50). Essentially, for Miyake, Fenollosa and Pound are on the same path. As we have seen, in contrast, Fenollosa and Pound seem to be poles apart. Even in Canto LII, which Miyake and others celebrate as a portrayal of the ancient Chinese earthly paradise at one with the Greek mysteries, "Between KUNG and ELEUSIS," is also found "poor yitts paying for a few big jews' vendetta on goyim" (Pound 1981 257-8). Evidently much more is occurring. Instead, Pound fundamentally misunderstands Fenollosa and his Buddhism. If Pound had understood Fenollosa, he would have known that not only between heaven and earth is power transferred, but that each thing, containing in itself heaven, transfers power to all other things; and that the unwobbling pivot is paradoxically at every spinning node of Indra's net.

Yet Pound was by no means alone, even among writers who were his contemporaries, such as Wyndham Lewis and T.S. Eliot, in his support of the extreme Right during the interwar period. One of his contemporaries, however, James Joyce, was not similarly afflicted. Joyce's divergent political and literary convictions became especially evident to Pound during Joyce's gradual publication of "Work in Progress," which was to become *Finnegans Wake*. Despite his long and dedicated support of Joyce, in a letter sent to Hilaire Hiler in 1937 Pound wrote that he had "No need of *transition* crap or Jheezus in progress. I am about thru with that diarrhoea of consciousness" (quoted in Read 257). Lewis and Eliot were equally dismissive of the supposed excesses of "Work in Progress," though Matterer explains that "the ground bass of their objections was political" (Matterer 1979 179).

Joyce, on his part, was quite aware of his growing ideological split with Pound, etc. and wrote in a letter in 1928 that "The more I hear of the political, philosophical, ethical zeal and labours of Pound's big brass band the more I wonder I was ever let into it 'with my magic

flute” (quoted in Materer 1979 178-9). Pound’s “big brass band” was increasingly ordered along Confucian and fascist lines, although conforming always to the perceived aesthetics of the CWC. Somewhat ironically, however, it is likely that Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* came far closer to Fenollosa’s original intention in the essay than Pound ever did. That Joyce was familiar with Fenollosa’s work—likely through Pound—is evident through a 1916 letter sent to Joyce from Pound presupposing Joyce’s knowledge of “the Fenollosa stuff, the Chinese part” (quoted in Read 83). Sean Golden also indicates that Joyce took notes from the CWC, and adapted it for use in *Finnegans Wake* (Golden 277). Fenollosa’s well-known statement about there being no true noun in nature is referred to quite directly:

...for if we look at it verbally perhaps there is no true noun in active nature  
where every bally being ...is becoming in its owntown eyeballs. (Joyce 523)

*Finnegans Wake*, at every point self-conscious of its own emptiness and its holistic interpenetration of every other point in the text (Mortson 148), more clearly resembles Fenollosa’s Tendai and Kegon Buddhist poetics than anything written by Pound. As with the Buddhist language condemned in the *Cantos*, as with Fenollosa’s poetic descriptions that Pound edited from the CWC, *Finnegans Wake* would be dismissed as being imprecise, “muzzy.” It is obviously at odds with Pound’s Confucian ideal of *cheng ming*, and closer to a representation of Fenollosa’s “one sentence” that would take all of time to pronounce; Indra’s Net encapsulated in a book. Joyce’s “apolitical” stance, criticized by Pound and other modernists, his refusal to truly participate in the “big brass band,” also becomes more understandable in light of this. Politics and language, even or especially poetic language, are inseparable. Ezra Pound may have understood this more than Fenollosa or Joyce, but his stress on precision, rigid classification, unidirectionality and centrality in his poetics to the expense of the free flow and swirling of the poetic imagination, the “diarrhoea of consciousness,” may have helped to justify support for dark political realities that even Pound did not anticipate.

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