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Pharmaka and *Volgar' Eloquio*: Speech and Ideogrammic Writing in Ezra Pound's Canto XCVIII

Orphée: Admirez le pouvoir insigne
 Et la noblesse de la ligne:
 Elle est la voix que la lumière fit entendre
 Et dont parle Hermès Trismégiste en son Pimandre.
 Guillaume Apollinaire

Ezra Pound's Canto XCVIII from *Thrones*,¹ along with Canto XCIX, was by and large based on a vernacular Chinese text written in 1726, in the middle years of the Qing dynasty. This Chinese text was titled *A Literal Paraphrase of the Amplified Instructions of the Sacred Edict* (*Shengyu guangxun zhijie* 聖諭廣訓直解); it was meant to render in the vernacular language – and thereby to facilitate its dissemination – a writing in literary Chinese by the Yongzheng 雍正 emperor (r. 1723–

THIS PAPER was developed in connection with a seminar on literary theory that I initiated at Vassar College in 2005. I would like to thank all the students who participated over various semesters. Thanks are also due to Mr. Cyrus Hamlin, professor emeritus of Yale University, to Professor Bryan van Norden of Vassar College, and to Professor Qianshen Bai of Boston Univeristy, who all offered valuable advice. Miss Dorothy H. Walter was my research assistant when this paper was written, and to her I owe a great deal for research aid. I also thank *Asia Major*'s two anonymous reviewers for advice concerning revision. Finally, I cannot express my gratitude enough for the patience, encouragement, and kindness of this magazine's editors Howard L. Goodman and John Kieschnick.

Pound uses inconsistent Romanization systems in the *Cantos*. To conform to today's standard usage, pinyin is used throughout. However, Pound's spellings are given in parenthesis following pinyin at least at the first occurrence, for the sake of easier cross-references to his texts. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations into English are my own.

¹ *Thrones* is the last organized and completed group of cantos, XCVI–CIX, published by the poet in 1959, which, together with those published before it, such as the *Pisan Cantos* (1948) and *Rock-Drill* (1955), and drafts and fragments after it (1966 and 1969), constitutes the body of poetical texts known as *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. Pound started this epic poem in 1930 and kept adding new cantos throughout his life, but he did not finish. The edition of *The Cantos* used in this paper is *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1996), where c. XCVIII is found on pp. 704–13. In documentation, “c.” in lower case before capitalized Roman numerals refers to a particular canto thus numbered; and “l.” in lower case before Arabic numerals refers to particular lines from a particular canto or from other poetical works already identified in the context. When both the number of a specific canto and the line(s) from it are documented, l. is not used before the line number, e.g. c. XCIII, 14.

1736, spelled “Yong Tching” in the canto) that, as the title suggests, “amplified” the more succinct “Sacred Edict” (1670) of his late father and predecessor the Kangxi 康熙 emperor (“Kang Hi”; r. 1662–1723).² The author was Wang Youpu 王又樸 (“Ouang Iu-p’uh”; 1681–1763), a *jinshi* 進士 (advanced scholar) degree-holder of the class of 1723 and

The scholarship on Pound and China is considerable in size and varieties of topics, thus I shall mention only contributions to the study of Pound’s use of Chinese writing and to his use of the *Sacred Edict*. The most relevant to the discussion in this paper are studies by Hugh Kenner, esp. the chaps. “The Persistent East” and “Inventing Confucius” in idem, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1971), pp. 223–31 and 445–59, respectively; Hwa Yol Jung, “Misreading the Ideogram: From Fenollosa to Derrida and McLuhan,” *Paideuma* 13.2 (1984), pp. 211–27; Cordell D. K. Yee, “Discourse on Ideagrammatic Method: Epistemology and Pound’s Poetics,” *American Literature* 59.2 (1987), pp. 242–56; Haun Saussy, “The Prestige of Writing, Letter, Picture, Image, Ideography,” in idem, *The Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Asia Center, 2001), pp. 35–74; and the study of Canto XCVIII by Carroll F. Terrell, “The Sacred Edict of K’ang-Hsi,” *Paideuma* 2 (1973), pp. 69–112; David M. Gordon, “Thought Built on Sagetrieb,” *Paideuma* 3.2 (1974), pp. 169–90; and idem, “Pound’s Use of the Sacred Edict in Canto 98,” *Paideuma* 4.1 (1975), pp. 121–68; and Chao-ming Chou, “The Teachings of the Sacred Edict: Pound’s Cantos 98 and 99,” *Studies in English Literature and Linguistics* 18 (1992), pp. 13–27.

² The *Sacred Edict*, authored and issued by Kangxi, consists of sixteen mottos written in literary Chinese, known as *wen-li* (文理, pinyin: *wenli*) in the canto (l. 104), a term for literary Chinese commonly used among Western missionaries in the 19th and early-20th centuries but no longer current today. Today *wenyan* 文言 is generally used instead of *wenli*. The edict was developed from the *Edict in Six Mottos* 六諭 promulgated by the Shunzhi 順治 emperor (r. 1644–60), which was in turn based upon the *Sacred Edict in Six Mottos* 六條聖諭 published by the first emperor of the Ming dynasty (r. 1368–98). Kangxi’s *Sacred Edict* exhorts public and private ethics and morality on officials and plebeians alike. Kangxi’s long and illustrious reign and his charisma and authority added no small measure of weight to the succinct document as a statement of the founding principles of the empire. Yongzheng amplified these mottos, also in literary Chinese, into a booklet of about ten thousand characters titled the *Amplified Instructions of the Sacred Edict* 聖諭廣訓. Wang Youpu paraphrased and further amplified Yongzheng’s text in the vernacular language in order for it to be disseminated among the masses. In fact, Wang’s vernacular amplification was not the only vernacular version ever produced. But it was by far the most popular one on account of its literary merits. Moreover, the extant version of Wang’s text has a complicated history involving revisions of the title and possible rearrangement of the contents by later publishers. For all the relevant imperial texts and vernacular renditions, a critical collection has just appeared: Zhou Zhenhe 周振鶴, *Shengyu guangxun: jijie yu yanjiu* 聖諭廣訓, 集解與研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2006). F. W. Baller’s (also see below, n. 4) English translation, *The Sacred Edict of K’ang-Hsi*, 6th edn. (Shanghai: China Inland Mission, 1924; facs. rpt. Orono, Maine: the National Poetry Foundation, 1979), which Pound used, was based upon Wang’s vernacular version and was intended as a reader for Western missionaries to learn colloquial Mandarin. The edition was bilingual with notes on vocabulary and grammar. It also included the entire text of Yongzheng’s amplification, though without providing a translation. Existing research on the *Sacred Edict* and its derivative texts, not in relation to Pound’s canto, includes Victor H. Mair, “Language and Ideology in the Written Popularization of the Sacred Edict,” in David Johnson et al., eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1985), pp. 325–59, for the complicated history of the textual formation, see especially p. 338, and Zhou Zhenhe, “*Shengyu, Shengyu guangxun* jiqi xiangguan de wenhua xianxiang” 聖諭, 聖諭廣訓及其相關的文化現象, first published in *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢 66.2 (2001), pp. 262–335, later collected in the above mentioned collection, pp. 581–632. The collection also includes another study by another scholar, Wang Ermin 王爾敏, “Qingting *Shengyu guangxun* zhi banxing ji minjian zhi xuanjiang shiyi” 清廷聖諭廣訓之頒行及民間之宣講拾遺, pp. 633–49.

later a salt commissioner in Shaanxi (Shensi).³ For the purpose of his canto, Pound relied on a bilingual edition of Wang's text prepared by W. F. Baller of the China Inland Mission and first published in 1892 in Shanghai.⁴

Canto XCVIII is important also for much wider reasons: in it some of the *Cantos'* most persistent themes and arguments converge. The first third of the canto interweaves ancient Egyptian myths with Greek allusions to and quotations from, mostly, the *Odyssey*. Only near the end of that part (l. 41) is Wang Youpu mentioned by name for the first time. From that point onward, however, the canto becomes a summary of Wang's *Literal Paraphrase*, peppered with, as is usual with the *Cantos* as a whole, occasional references to Dante and to other old or modern Western events and texts. In this paper I argue that despite its ostensible moral message,⁵ which has been the focus of most scholarly discussions concerning Pound's use of Chinese and particularly Confucian texts within and without the *Cantos*,⁶ Canto XCVIII, in a manner more cryptic than obvious, actually focuses on the issue of writing and its relation to speech; that in the canto the poet not only continues, but indeed expands his life-long contemplation on the nature of Chinese writing and its poetic implications by taking into consideration, for the first time in his writing career, the oral aspect of the Chinese language.

In order to unfold this central argument of writing versus speech we need, in Pound's words, gather all the "Luminous Details" as if

³ Wang Youpu, a native of Tianjin 天津, held various other offices in his public career besides the office of Salt Commissioner.

⁴ It is worth pointing out that Baller played an important role in the production of the most authoritative vernacular Chinese translation of the Bible, the so-called "Union Version" 和合本. For a detailed account of his involvement in the translation, see Jost Oliver Zetzsche, *The Bible in China: The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China* (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Institute, 1999), *passim*. Baller was also a pioneer in introducing *baihua* to the curriculum, albeit for Western missionaries only. With the *Sacred Edict* being included, he published several textbooks, readers, and dictionaries in vernacular Chinese instruction, indeed several decades ahead of the adoption of *baihua* in national curricula in China. Among them, *A Mandarin Primer*, enlarged 2d edn. (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1891) continued to be reprinted well into the 1930s.

⁵ Existing scholarship on the canto and its use of the *Sacred Edict* focuses mainly on moral issues, see David M. Gordon, "Pound's Use of the Sacred Edict" and Chou, "Teachings of the Sacred Edict."

⁶ See Kenner, *Pound Era*, pp. 445-59, Terrell, "Sacred Edict," Gordon, "Thought Built on Sagetrieb" and "Pound's Use of the Sacred Edict," and Chou, "Teachings of the Sacred Edict" mentioned in note 1. For more recent discussions of the Confucianist contents of the *Cantos*, see the eighth chapter titled "Confucianism in *The Cantos*," in Mary Paterson Cheadle, *Ezra Pound's Confucian Translations* (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan P., 1997), pp. 217-66, Steven Yao, "better gift can no man make to a nation"; Pound's Confucian Translation and the Internationalisation of the *Cantos*, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 26.1 (1999-2003), pp. 107-17, and Zhaoming Qian, ed., *Ezra Pound & China* (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan P., 2003).

they were Osiris' *dissecta membra*,⁷ and we must then put them back in place by reading them anagrammatically – as says Jacques Derrida of reading Plato,⁸ a method (discussed below) not altogether dissimilar to the ideogrammic method Pound urges literary criticism to adopt.⁹ More specifically, since the canto starts with dense references first to Egyptian then to Greek mythologies, I set out my argument accordingly by examinations in those areas, in order to uncover one of the two major latent themes of the canto, namely writing as a *pharmakon*. In conjunction, I invoke relatively recent philosophical discussions on the problem of writing, especially that found in Jacques Derrida, in order to establish a theoretical framework for my ensuing argument. I then expand the philosophical discussion of writing to include speech in the context of Pound's perception of the Chinese written character. With this theoretical framework in place, it becomes possible to examine Pound's inclusion of Wang Youpu's text as part and parcel of this philosophy of writing and speech.

Indeed, speech has hardly been considered in the study of Pound's view of the Chinese language. With the inclusion of Wang Youpu's vernacular text, however, I argue that Canto XCVIII supplies this hitherto missing piece in Pound's theory of the Chinese language. An examination of Pound's view of the vernacular side of the Chinese language reveals that Pound conceives the Chinese writing in a literary, philosophical, and indeed theological framework grander and more exquisite than most people had realized. The inclusion of speech in Pound's theory of the Chinese writing testifies to the ultimate validity of this theory. By unfolding the dialectics of writing and speech in Pound's conception of the Chinese language contained in this important late canto, this paper aims to deepen our understanding of Pound's view of the ideogrammic writing.

“ΤΑ ΕΞ ΑΙΓΥΠΤΟΥ ΦΑΡΜΑΚΑ,” OR POTIONS FROM EGYPT

The first “luminous detail” in Canto XCVIII is Egyptian – the canto begins with a mention of two major Egyptian deities in the syncretic form Ra-Set, before moving to Homeric allusions. Pound fuses the separate gods, Ra the sun-god and Set the moon-goddess, into one female deity to represent the full solar and lunar cycle.¹⁰ This union

⁷ Pound, “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris: A Rather Dull Introduction,” in idem, *Selected Prose: 1909–1965*, ed. William Clarkson (London: Faber & Faber, 1973; hereafter, *SP*), p. 21.

⁸ Derridas, “La pharmacie de Platon,” *La dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 111.

⁹ Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1934; 1960 edn.), pp. 25–26.

¹⁰ See Boris de Rachewiltz, “Pagan and Magic Elements in Ezra Pound's Works,” in Eva

of Ra and Set, with the complex myths associated with them, evokes in the reader first Osiris, a major mythical figure closely involved in the stories of Ra and Set,¹¹ and then – via Osiris – Thoth, another major god in Egyptian mythology, who arguably serves as the prototypical figure within the canto.¹²

The connection between Ra-Set and Osiris rests on the fact that both possess symbiotic, so to speak, solar-lunar qualities. Ancient accounts and modern scholarship alike have shown that to the person of Osiris are assigned two otherwise distinct and contrasted astronomical qualities: solar and lunar; and in his single being are condensed the qualities which otherwise belong to Ra and Set, respectively.¹³ Pound's "Ra-Set," therefore, if not an alternate name for Osiris, may be read as a hidden but unmistakable allusion to him.¹⁴

Hesse, ed., *New Approaches to Ezra Pound: A Co-ordinated Investigation of Pound's Poetry and Ideas* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1969), pp. 174–97.

¹¹ That the myth of Osiris and Isis attracted Pound in his overall obsession with the Eleusinian Mysteries may be evidenced in the pagan calendar Pound crafted and published anonymously in 1922, which features Isis as the deity that rules the male, winter months; see Pound's calendar in *The Little Review* 8.2 (Spring, 1922), p. 40.

¹² As de Rachewiltz has shown, Pound's sources for Egyptian mythology in his composition of *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones* were miscellaneous (de Rachewiltz, "Pagan and Magic Elements," p. 179). Yet among them, two integral accounts of the Egyptian myths, one modern and one ancient, were crucial, see Akiko Miyake, "The Greek-Egyptian Mysteries in Pound's 'The Little Review Calendar' and in Cantos 1–7," *Paideuma* 7.1 (1978), p. 74. The ancient one is Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* (J. Gwyn Griffiths ed. and trans., with introduction and commentary [Cambridge: U. of Wales P., 1970]), the only extant integral account of the major Egyptian myth from the antiquity; the modern one is found in the two volumes both titled *Adonis, Attis, Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion*, in Sir James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3d edn. (London: Macmillan, 1913), an anthropological classic "which," says T. S. Eliot in his own notes on *The Waste Land*, "has influenced our generation profoundly" (*Collected Poems* 1909–1962, London: Faber, 1963, p. 80). Frazer's *The Golden Bough* contains a chapter entitled "Osiris and the Sun" (*Adonis*, pp. 121–28); he observes that "there appear to have been few gods in Egypt [including Osiris] who were not at one time or other identified with him [sc. Ra]" (p. 123).

¹³ In *De Iside et Osiride*, Plutarch associates Osiris, a god otherwise primarily identified as the god of the underworld, with solar qualities (Plutarch, *De Iside* 51. 371f–372a). Also see Griffiths' commentary *ad hoc*: "The increasing ascendancy of Osiris in the later phases of Egyptian religion involves the attribution to him of many solar qualities," Griffiths, *De Iside*, p. 497. As a king on earth, Osiris brought civilization, especially agriculture, to the Egyptians. In *The Golden Bough*, Frazer has demonstrated how closely the myth of Osiris models after the properties of the moon, see chap. VIII, "Osiris and the Moon," *Adonis*, pp. 129–39. In particular, that the body of Osiris was said to have been rent into fourteen pieces and that Typhon – the Greek name for Set, the antagonist of Osiris (for the equation, see Griffiths' comment on chap. 2 of Plutarch, Griffiths, *De Iside*, p. 259; also cf. Frazer, *Adonis*, p. 6), who murdered and dismembered him, was said to have found the body at the full moon seem to confirm that the dismembered body of Osiris may be interpreted as the waning moon, see *ibid.*, pp. 129–30.

¹⁴ It makes sense to understand Χρόνος (c. XCVIII, 7) not as time but as a variant for Κρόνος, father of Osiris, or at least a pun on the time god and Cronus since the word is capitalized. The identification of Cronus with the time god Chronus was common in ancient times. Plutarch mentions that "the Greeks explain Cronus allegorically as time," see Plutarch 32.

The importance of Osiris in the *Cantos* has been generally acknowledged thanks to studies published by Boris de Rachewiltz and Akiko Miyake.¹⁵ Yet Osiris is not – as far as Canto XCVIII is concerned at least – the whole story. In this canto, the reference to Osiris only serves to introduce Thoth. In numerous mythical accounts involving Osiris, Thoth has a pivotal role as one of the *dramatis personae*.¹⁶ He often comes to Osiris' rescue, and what he did for Osiris, according to those accounts, in fact instances some of Thoth's major divine functions: 1) god of draughts and dice; 2) god of medicine; 3) god of mantic power, magic, and theurgy. But among all the powers attributed to him, Thoth's medical function is essential. For a major Egyptian deity, this is only appropriate. This is because, in Western antiquity, Egypt was closely linked to medicine. In Homeric times, the Egyptians were considered

363d (Griffiths, *De Iside*, pp. 166–67). In any case, that *Χρόνος* is part of the myths concerning Ra-Set, Osiris-Isis, and Thoth is reinforced in the reference to Osiris, Horus, and perhaps Isis. For Pound's invoking Chronos as a god, see "The Serious Artist," in Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954; hereafter, *LE*), p. 49.

¹⁵ See note 12.

¹⁶ The various myths involving Thoth and Osiris are as follows: 1) Osiris was the child of the earth-god Seb and sky-god Nut. The Greeks identified his parents with Rhea and Cronus, respectively. When the sun-god Ra learned that his wife Nut (Rhea) had been unfaithful to him, he declared with a curse that she should deliver the child in no month and no year. But the goddess had another lover, the god Thoth, known to the Greeks as Hermes, and he played draughts against the moon. He won the seventieth part of each of her illuminations, and having put together five days out of the whole of his gains, he added them to the three hundred and sixty. This was the mythical origin of these five epagomenal days which the Egyptians annually inserted at the end of each year to establish the harmony between lunar and solar time (Frazer, *Adonis*, p. 6). 2) Thoth also saved Osiris' infant son, the younger Horus, from a deadly sting by a scorpion at the command of Ra. After Osiris' murder and subsequent disappearance, Isis, Osiris' sister and wife, gave birth to a son in the swamp of the Nile delta while searching for her missing husband. The infant is the younger Horus. The infant was almost dead from a sting by a scorpion while she was away. She pleaded help from Ra who staid his bark in the sky and sent Thoth to cure the infant for her. Thoth taught her the spell by which she restored her son to life. Afterwards Thoth ascended up into the sky and took his place once more in the bark of the sun, see *ibid.*, p. 8. The first line of c. XCVIII, barring the addition of Set to the person of Ra, most likely refers to the scene in the myth relating how Ra staid his bark in the sky so as to allow Thoth to descend to the earth to come to Horus' rescue. 3) Later when Set alleged that Horus was not the son of Osiris, Thoth played the role of Horus' advocate to defend his legitimacy (*ibid.*, pp. 32–36; Plutarch chap. 55, and Griffiths, *De Iside*, pp. 507–8 *ad hoc*). 4) He restored to Horus his eye stolen by Set as Horus was the god of light whose two eyes were sun and moon. 5) After Osiris' dismemberment as the result of the malicious device of his antagonistic brother the older Horus, Thoth put his *dissecta membra* together and restored him to life. In particular, Osiris' brother Set plotted against him. Set took the measure of his brother's body by stealth and had a coffer of the exact size made. He tricked Osiris into the coffer and then slammed the lid on him, nailed it fast, soldered it with molten lead and flung it into the Nile. When Isis heard of it she sheared off a lock of her hair, put on mourning attire and wandered disconsolately up and down, in search for the body (Frazer, *Adonis*, p. 7). In Pyramid texts, many functions in regard to Osiris are assigned to Thoth. Among these functions, Thoth was said to be the guardian of the dead, as such he put together the *dissecta membra* of Osiris, see Patrick Boylan, *Thoth: The Hermes of Egypt: A Study of Some Aspects of Theological Thought in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1922), p. 21.

to be “of the race of Paieon,” namely the physician of the gods, and it was believed that in their country “everyone was a physician”¹⁷ and that Egypt was a land of, as Pound would say, pharmacopia.¹⁸ Book IV of the *Odyssey*, in which these quotations are found, establishes a linkage between drugs/medicine and Egypt that is crucial to Pound’s canto under discussion. It is true that Pound did not directly quote this Homeric passage. However, he indeed quoted from another ancient text a Greek phrase, [τ]ὰ ἐξ Αἰγύπτου φάρμακα, “potions from Egypt” (l. 5),¹⁹ which in its original context referred precisely to this Homeric passage. The Greek phrase in Pound’s canto starts a chain of poetical argument that eventually leads to Wang Youpu’s *Literal Paraphrase* of the *Sacred Edict*. The Egyptian-Greek references in the first third of the canto help place the issue of writing and speech, latent in Wang’s text, in a broad mythical, philosophical, and literary context.

If Thoth was the tutelary god of medicine in Egypt, however, medicine was hardly his only divine function. Along with medicine –

¹⁷ *Od.* 4.230–3: “[Egypt was a place] where the earth, the giver of grain, bears greatest store / of drugs (φάρμακα), many that are beneficial (ἔσθλα) when mixed, and many that are baneful (λυγρὰ); / there every man is a physician, wiser than all / men; for they are of the race of Paieon”; Peter von der Mühl, ed., *Homeri Odyssea* (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1946).

¹⁸ c. XCIX, 24.

¹⁹ The phrase was in fact gleaned by Pound from a passage in an ancient text entitled *Vita Apollonii* by Flavius Philostratus (*The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, trans. F. C. Conybeare, in 2 vols.; T. E. Page and W. H. D. Rouse, eds., Loeb Classical Library [London: Heinemann, 1912]), a text of great importance to the late cantos. In *Vita Apollonii*, the phrase appears in a colloquial reference to a scene in the *Odyssey* that extols the efficacy of drugs from Egypt. In the *Odyssey*, the passage on the power of Egyptian medical art to which the phrase refers is a short digression inserted in a narrative relating a gathering at the Menelaos’, Helen’s rightful husband, of returned Greek heroes from Troy. Seeing that grief caused by recollecting the hardships at war had overcome everyone at the gathering, Helen “cast into the wine of which they were drinking a drug to quiet all pain and strife, and bring forgetfulness of every ill”; *Od.* 4.220–1. The Homeric passage was memorable enough for Apollonius of Tyana, a Pythagorean philosopher, towards the end of the 1st c. AD to invoke during his incarceration at the order of Domitian, the reigning Roman emperor. According to Philostratus, while in prison, Apollonius disagreed with his companion Damis who believed that their fellow prisoners did not want to be accosted, and he refuted Damis by invoking the passage from the *Odyssey*:

For you may remember the verses of Homer in which he relates how Helen mingled in the bowl of wine certain drugs from Egypt (τὰ ἐξ Αἰγύπτου φάρμακα) in order to drown the heartache of the heroes; well, I think that Helen must have picked up the lore of the Egyptians, and have sung spells over the dejected heroes through their bowl of wine, so healing them by a blending of words and wine. (*Vita Apollonii*, vii. 22, vol. 2, pp. 208–11)

The semi-legendary figure Apollonius features large in the late cantos. For Pound, Apollonius’ wandering along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and his trials and tribulations echo the *periplus*, or tortuous sea-coasting voyage, of Homer’s Odysseus and fit very well the main argument of the *Cantos*. References to Apollonius appear frequently in late cantos and Apollonius has become a major figure in that part of the poem. The citation of Philostratus also contributes to the anti-usury theme of the canto because in the chapter that follows, Apollonius spoke against commercial fraud (καπήλος), which is rendered in English by Conybeare as

which was one and the same with magic,²⁰ he was also god of writing. In Egyptian literature, Thoth was called “Lord of divine formulae,” and one of Thoth’s formulae was the divine book, of which he was the scribe. His position as “Scribe of Ra” and “Bearer of the Divine Book” was, next to his medical function, another fundamental quality of the deity. As scribe, he was “Lord of the Divine words,” with the term “words” always meaning written words.²¹ It is this compound identity as god of medicine and as scribe that makes him the mythical prototype of a series of figures in Canto XCVIII which end with Wang Youpu, author of the vernacular transcript, or paraphrase, of the monarch’s *Sacred Edict*.

As a primordial godhead of writing, Thoth played a central role in Western philosophical discourses on writing. A summary of the two most celebrated of such discourses, as I present below, is essential to our examination of the significance of Wang Youpu and his text in Pound’s canto.

As is now well known, the earliest appearance of Thoth in Western philosophical discourse is found in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, in which the god, whose name is therein spelled Theuth, was said to have presented to Thamus, king of all Egypt, invention of writing as one of the *pharmaka* devised by him.²² Towards the end of the famous dialogue, Socrates tells a fable about Theuth, the Egyptian god “who first discovered number and calculation, geometry and astronomy, as well as the games of draughts and dice, and, above all else, writing,”²³ that Theuth presented

“usury” (vol. 2, p. 213). Carroll F. Terrell did not identify the exact source of the Greek phrase. Instead he referred it to *Od.* 10.213 where no exact match to the quotation can be found; see his *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1984) 2, p. 628.

²⁰ In his study of Thoth, Boylan has adduced ample evidence illustrating that the function of Thoth as god of medicine was consistent with his function as god of magic, for “magic and medicine were,” in Boylan’s words, “at one time, but different names for the same science”; Boylan, *Thoth*, p. 124. For a detailed account of Thoth’s being a magician and patron of physicians, see *ibid.*, chap. 13, “Thoth in Magic,” pp. 124–35. The dual qualities of drug and magic in the godhead of Thoth can be evidenced also in the Homeric texts. The drug given to Helen by the Egyptian woman Polydamna in the scene indirectly alluded in l. 5 was indeed magical in its effect, and even more so, as we remember from another passage from the *Odyssey*, often cited in the *Cantos*, were the baneful drugs (κακὰ φάρμακα) Circe gave to Odysseus’ crew members who were thereby turned into swine; see *Od.* 10.203 ff. c. XXXIX, esp. the episode of Circe. Moreover, in the story of Circe it is said that Hermes, Thoth’s Greek counterpart, gave Odysseus a benign drug (φάρμακον ἰσθλόν) to counter Circe’s evil drug (*Od.* 10. 274–306).

²¹ Boylan, *Thoth*, p. 93.

²² That Pound was very familiar with the dialogue may be witnessed in the important chapter on Platonism and neo-Platonism in his *Guide to Kulchur* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1938; hereafter, *GK*), chap. 39, “Neo-Platonicks Etc.,” pp. 222–26.

²³ John Burnet, ed., *Platonis opera* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1901) 2, 274d. In *Phaedrus*, Theuth is described as “one to whom the bird called the ibis is sacred.” This, in addition to the functions attributed to him, makes him indubitably identical with Thoth, for the ibis is

his invention of writing to Thamus or, as he was otherwise known, Ammon, who was identified with the sun god Ra,²⁴ as, in Theuth's words, "a drug for memory and wisdom" (μνήμης τε γὰρ καὶ σοφίας φάρμακον). However, Thamus was not appreciative. He deprecated the value of the invention presented to him and said that the invention would "introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it." Thamus argued that relying on writing, people would stop practicing their memory. Being an auxiliary to memory employing external mnemonic marks, writing could usurp the use of memory, which was internal. The abandonment of internalization – incidentally this is what the German word for memory *Erinnerung* literarily means – would lead to the loss of truth and foster falsehood: "You have not invented an elixir of memory, but of reminding (οὐκ οὖν μνήμης ἀλλὰ ὑπομνήσεως φάρμακον ἦρες)," said Thamus, "and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not truth, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise."²⁵

Having related the fable that makes writing suspect, Socrates concludes with equating writing (γραφὴ) with painting (ζωγραφία) on the grounds that neither can be engaged in a spontaneous interaction with us,²⁶ nor can they defend themselves when challenged. Over this bastard son of one who speaks and who begot this son by imprinting in ink what he has uttered, Socrates favors its legitimate brother (τούτου ἀδελφὸν γνήσιον), who is the "word written with intelligence in the mind of the learner."²⁷ The word thus written is, in Socrates' interlocutor's words, "the living and breathing word of him who knows" (τὸν τοῦ εἰδότης λόγον ζῶντα καὶ ἔμψυχον), whereas the word written in ink is but the image or simulacrum (εἶδωλον). In Plato, as is well known, to equate something with painting is a serious criticism; it is tantamount to branding it for ostracism from the state. In a celebrated passage in the *Republic*, painting is said to be the imitation of phantasms (φαντάσματος μίμησις), not of truth (ἀληθείας οὐσα μίμησις), and is therefore three-fold removed from reality.²⁸

identified with Thoth through the hieroglyphic script for the name of the god, i.e. an ibis on a perch. This symbolic name was attested in texts of every age of Egyptian literature; see Boylan, *Thoth*, pp. 2, 173–200, and "Appendix A.: List of Proper Names in which The Name of Thoth Appears."

²⁴ Also see Frazer, *Adonis*, p. 123.

²⁵ 274e–275b, English translation by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in John M. Cooper, ed., and C. D. C. Reeve et al., trans., *Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), pp. 550–51.

²⁶ 275d.

²⁷ 276a.

²⁸ *Republica* X, 598b, *Opera*, vol. 4.

In Plato's fable of the invention of writing, Theuth's status of being subservient to Thamus or Ammon the sun god and the scene of his presenting him writing as a tribute can, in addition to Thamus' – and Socrates' – expressed disparagement of writing as prosthetic auxiliary to the organic function of memory, be viewed as a *mise-en-scène* of the subordinate status of writing. Thamus/Ammon utters the word or *logos*, whereas it is Theuth's job to record the *logos* in writing. The deprecation of writing as lifeless and subordinate is predicated on the Platonic valorization of the living *logos* and dialectics, which alone are the gateway to truth.

The topic of writing presented in *Phaedrus* was resumed by one of the most preeminent philosophers of our own time. In his celebrated philosophical exposition of Plato's deprecation of writing, "La pharmacie de Platon" (1972),²⁹ Jacques Derrida has elaborately explored the Platonic dialectics of writing versus *logos*. Derrida's interpretation of Plato's criticism of writing has much relevance to the poetical argument of Canto XCVIII under discussion in this paper. In the essay's section titled "L'inscription des fils: Theuth, Hermès, Thot, Nabû, Nebo," Derrida expounds the intricate relationships between the solar king Thamus/Ammon and his subordinate Theuth/Thoth with his invention of writing. By pursuing the leads and hints contained in Plato's fable, Derrida has unraveled various oppositions inherent in the godhead of Thoth and, analogously, his invention of writing as *pharmakon*: sun versus moon, father versus son, capital versus interest, origin versus repetition, life versus death. Ontologically speaking, Thoth as inventor of writing is god of secondary language and linguistic difference; as such he "can become the god of creative word only by metonymic substitution just as the moon becomes the substitute of the sun at night";³⁰ and writing, being a substitute, is the repetition or *pictura inanis* of the origin and has no *vertu propre et définissable*.³¹ In other words, it fills the absence of the origin, becomes its trace, and substitutes for it therewith. According to Derrida, the fundamental opposition between the origin and its substitute gives rise to a series of subsequent oppositions evident in Plato, which can be summarized as follows:

The systems of these traits [for example, Thoth's being son, subject, death, writing, moon, night, and, further, false, evil, external, appearance] brings into play an original logic: the figure of Thoth is opposed to its other (father, sun, life, speech, origin or orient,

²⁹ Derrida, *Dissémination*, pp. 69–198.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

etc.), but as that which substitutes it. Thoth is added or stands in opposition by repeating or deputing. By the same token, the figure of Thoth takes shape and takes its shape from the very thing it both resists and substitutes for. Henceforth it opposes itself, passes into its opposite, and this messenger-god is truly a god of the absolute passage between opposites. If he had any identity – but he is precisely the god of nonidentity – he would be that *coincidentia oppositorum* [...].³²

Of this *coincidentia oppositorum* the ultimate opposition is between life and death. Not only does Plato link *logos* with life and writing with death, he also applies the opposition ideologically and geopolitically by identifying the Greeks with youth and suggesting the Egyptians to be moribund on account of the omnipresence of their writing. In *Tímaeus*, for example, Solon is reported to have been told by an Egyptian priest that “Greeks are always children: there is no such a thing as an old Greek,”³³ whereas in Egypt “all is written from of old” (πάντα γεγραμμένα ἐκ παλαιού).³⁴ The Platonic pejorative remarks on writing as being false, external, superficial, moribund, evil and subordinate thus underpin the Occidental perception of the Orient and account for the supremacy of the Occident (Greece) over the Orient (Egypt). The Platonic view of writing qua *pharmakon* has set the key for the subsequent history of Occidental metaphysics and theology.

The relevance of Derrida’s argument to Pound’s canto arises not so much from superimposing Plato on Pound as from contrasting them.³⁵ At first glance, Pound’s [τ]ὰ ἐξ Αἰγύπτου φάρμακα seems to echo perfectly Plato’s deprecation of writing. Like Thoth, Pound’s Ra-Set, being a combination of solar and lunar gods, seems to body forth precisely the *coincidentia oppositorum* deposited in writing as *pharmakon*. For in her are juxtaposed and combined the opposed qualities of sun and moon, the origin and its image, *logos* and *graphia*, light and its reflection, day and night, etc. Indeed, a form of dualism, as Boris de Rachewiltz, an Egyptologist and Pound’s son-in-law, observed, had always been discernible in Pound.³⁶ But upon closer examination, Pound’s “dualism” cannot be equated with the Platonic *coincidentia oppositorum*. It is true

³² Ibid., p. 105; elements added are in square brackets.

³³ *Opera*, vol. 4, 22b.

³⁴ Ibid., 23a.

³⁵ That writing is one of the major themes of c. XCVIII may also be evidenced in a reference to an African folklore in l. 3 “Agada, Ganna, Faasa.” These names come from the English selection of Leo Frobenius’ writings on African folklore, *African Genesis: Folktales and Myths of Africa* (New York: Stackpole, 1937). In the particular tale in Frobenius’ selection from which Pound took these names, the invention of writing is said to be driven by greed (pp. 97–98).

³⁶ Rachewiltz, “Pagan and Magic Elements,” pp. 181–82.

that if we take the father/offspring, *logos/grapheme*, and king/subject as the matrix of all the other possible oppositions in Plato concerning writing, then we no doubt can find their almost exact correspondences in Pound.

In the *Pisan Cantos*, for instance, the sun is identified with “Logos” rising from consciousness, a vision reinforced by the Chinese character 口, depicting a mouth, which Pound inserts in his text. Pound interprets it as “the sun that is god’s mouth.”³⁷ This corresponds almost completely to Plato’s Ammon figure, who assumes the double identity as king and the sun and who utters an oral judgment on Theuth’s inventions. But if the oppositional structure of the contrary elements is quite similar between Plato and Pound, the values attached by these two men to each side of the oppositions, respectively, are reversed. While Plato places the origin over its mediations such as repetitions, copies, and substitutions, Pound always places the medium and mediation over the origin. This appears most obvious in Pound’s imagination of paradise, imagery central to the *Cantos* as a whole. In Canto XCI where Ra-Set made its first appearance in the poem, the boat of Ra-Set is said to sail over crystal waves; indeed the syncretic diva is enveloped in a great cloud of crystal:

The Princess Ra-Set has climbed
 to the great knees of stone,
 She enters protection,
 the great cloud is about her,
 She has entered the protection of crystal
 convien che si mova
 la mente, amando
 XXVI, 34
 Light & the flowing crystal
 never gin in cut glass had such clarity³⁸

In this “Great Crystal,” an essential image in Pound’s conception of paradise, the origin of light and its mediation are hardly distinguishable. Light is said to travel “*per diafana*.”³⁹ Indeed, the image “lux in diafana” is recurrent in *Thrones*. The “flowing crystal” dilutes and mingles with paradisiacal light; its reflection and transparency is so clear that “never gin in cut glass had such clarity.” Thus, for Pound, the sun

³⁷ c. LXXVII, 35; Rachewiltz, “Pagan and Magic Elements,” pp. 184–85. Pound apparently conceives the character 日, meaning the sun, to be cognate of 口. But this is not supported by philological authorities.

³⁸ l. 19–21.

³⁹ c. XCV, 30.

attains its supreme clarity not in its unmediated presence, but in its medium, and it therein “non si disuna” – a phrase taken from Dante’s *Paradiso* in Canto XCVIII.⁴⁰ This paradisiacal scene of “lux in diafana” is emblematic of Pound’s metaphysics, – namely the origin (ἀρχή) is not privileged over its emanations (ἀπόρροιαί);⁴¹ rather, the mediated, realized state of the effulgence of the origin is preferable to the pursuit of an unmediated, apocalyptic vision of the origin. It has been recognized that love is the main argument of Pound’s epic poem, but love is conceived precisely as a form of mediation of the ἀρχή. Following Guido Cavalcanti’s (1255–1300) “Donna me prega,” a text critical to the *Cantos* as a whole, Pound conceives love to be a kind of medium similar to the flowing crystal. Canto XXXVI is mostly a translation of Cavalcanti’s canzone, and there Pound renders the first *fronte* of its second strophe as follows:

Where memory liveth,
it [that is, love] takes its state
Formed like a diafan from light on shade⁴²

The flowing crystal is the more concrete image of the diafan or transparency. Love is “[f]ormed like a diafan from light on shade” because “[h]e [that is, love] is not vertu but cometh of that perfection” whereas “the intellect”, which is a *vertu* and hence a perfection, corresponds to the sun, the ἀρχή,

Descendeth not by quality but shineth out
Himself his own effect unendingly
Not in delight but in the being aware
Nor can he leave his true likeness elsewhere.⁴³

“True likeness” translates Cavalcanti’s “simiglianza,” which later appears in the original in Canto XCVIII.⁴⁴ The more common rendition of the word is “image,” a notion otherwise central to Pound’s ideogrammic poetics. The intellect, which is a perfection as well as “the being aware” (*consideranza*), is the “ἀρχή/an awareness” of Canto XCVIII,⁴⁵ or unmediated origin. It cannot leave a “true likeness” or

⁴⁰ l. 139.

⁴¹ c. XCVIII, 40.

⁴² l. 13–14. Cavalcanti’s original runs as follows: “... – dove sta memora / prende suo stato, – si formato, – come / diaffan da lume, – d’una scuritate.” For a scholarly translation, see Lowry Nelson, Jr., trans., *The Poetry of Guido Cavalcanti* (New York: Garland, 1986), pp. 38–39.

⁴³ l. 21–24. The original runs as follows: “perché da qualitate non descende: / respolende – in sé perpetual effetto; / non ha diletto – ma consideranza; / si che non pote largir simiglianza.” For the original and its translation, see *ibid.*

⁴⁴ l. 21.

⁴⁵ l. 40.

image because its perfection precludes it. It has to emanate in order for it to “leave his true likeness elsewhere,” indeed, for it to be receivable to human sight – “UBI AMOR IBI OCULUS EST” (where love is there is the eye), so ends Canto XC – and the emanation is a mediation of or differentiation from the origin. Figuratively speaking, the mediation is light flowing “on shade.” Such emanation is therefore “a diafan from light on shade.”

When we apply the general metaphysical principle of privileging the medium and mediation over the origin to the opposition between Egypt and Greece, it is not difficult to understand why Pound prefers Egypt to Greece. In a recent article, Angus Fletcher has shown that as early as 1916 in a discussion of sculpture, Pound already reversed the long held Western verdict that proclaims the aesthetic superiority of the Greek over Egyptian sculpture.⁴⁶ The grounds for this judgment are that Pound found “realism” and “pragmatism” in Egyptian art whereas the Greeks were addicted to “inexplicable forces of destiny and nothingness and beyond.”⁴⁷ The addiction alleged here on the Greeks is an addiction to τὴν τῶν ὅλων ἀρχήν (the origin of all) before it sets out to become all through emanation; it is a longing for the origin that is realistically impossible, whereas the “realism” and “pragmatism” of the Egyptians are manifestations of the emanation from the origin since the reality of the world results from such emanation. Writing as an act of stereotyping the *logos* is to hypostasize it. As such it is an emanation from the king, the ἀρχή/awareness, who utters the *logos*. But if in Canto XCVIII Pound must resort to Thoth/Theuth the Egyptian god in order to situate the problem of writing, the writing he had in mind primarily, however, was not the Egyptian hieroglyphs. Among other things, that the Egyptian hieroglyphs ultimately proved to be phonetic in nature must be the primary reason for it not to become the writing Pound was looking for. Therefore instead of the Egyptian hieroglyphs, it is in the “ideogrammic” writing from “Cathay” – on account of its perceived graphic and visual nature – that Pound finds his ideal form of writing.

⁴⁶ Angus Fletcher, “Ezra Pound’s Egypt and the Origin of the *Cantos*,” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 48.1 (Spring, 2002), pp. 4–7. The view of Greek superiority had dominated Western art history at least since Johann Joachim Winckelmann, whose famous expression, “edle Einfalt und stille Größe” (noble simplicity and quiet grandeur), had once been the catchwords for the aesthetic of “classical” Greek sculpture. The notion of “classical” antiquity in art history, as Ernst Robert Curtius has pointed out, “ist eine Schöpfung des 18. Jahrhunderts,” see idem, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern: Francke, 1948), p. 27.

⁴⁷ Pound, “New Sculpture,” *The Egoist* 1.4 (February, 1914), p. 68.

顯 *XIAN*, OR THE SILK CORDS OF
THE SUNLIGHT, AND THE *PAIDEUMA*

If writing is one of [τ]ὰ ἐξ Αἰγύπτου φάρμακα under the tutelage of Thoth, how does the ideogrammic writing from China become its quint-essential specimen? To answer the question let us start with examining one representative Chinese character recurrent since Pound's *Pisan Cantos* and present in Canto XCVIII as well.⁴⁸ In Canto XCI, for instance, in the middle of a passage presenting the paradisiacal light featured with the boat of Ra-Set sailing on the crystal wave, the character 顯, meaning "to manifest" and "to be illustrious," is inserted.⁴⁹ This practice of inlaying Chinese characters in the text is especially common in the late cantos. The character at issue, 顯, is viewed by Pound particularly as an ideogrammic *illustration* – as opposed to the *narration* of the boat of Ra-Set in whose context the character is placed – of the idea of fusing light and its medium. For with a twist in interpretation that deviates from the best authority in philology, Pound derives what he considers the root meaning of the character, "the silk cords of the sunlight" or "sun's silk," from analyzing its radicals and their composition.⁵⁰ For him, the silk cords reflect and deflect the sunlight that goes through them in the same way as the crystal wave or *diafana* reflect and deflect paradisiacal light. For the same reason, he inserts the same character again in the passage relating paradise near the end of the canto under our discussion.⁵¹

of the light of 顯 hsien
 明 ming,
 by the silk cords of the sunlight,
 Chords of the sunlight (*Pitagora*)
 non si disuna (xiii)
 Splendor

Here, too, 顯 (*xian*, "hsien") is conceived as the most direct representation of the idea of mediating the sunlight or the origin. As an

⁴⁸ l. 180.

⁴⁹ l. 34.

⁵⁰ The oldest etymological dictionary of China, Xun Shen's 許慎 (ca. 58–147) *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, defines the ideogram 顯 as follows: "myriad fine details, seeing the sun through silk, the archaic form for the ideogram 顯" (眾微妙也, 從日中視絲. 古文以為顯字). Duan Yucai 段玉裁, the great Qing philologist, comments on the entry as follows: "Seeing the silk against the sun, meaning discerning down to fine details 日中視絲, 眾明察及微妙之意"; Duan, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字註 (facs. of 1815 Jingyunlou edn.; Shanghai: Guji, 1981), p. 307.

⁵¹ l. 180–2.

expression it is even more economic than the laconic reference to the Egyptian myth of Ra-Set, which requires at least the use of sentences or short phrases. For with one single Chinese character the poet believes to have managed to express the complex meanings contained in the imageries of the Crystal Wave and *diafana* in a most condensed fashion.

The trope implicit in the character 顯 standing for the mediated sunlight may be proper to the particular character only, but for Pound, the very graphic efficiency itself is characteristic of ideogrammic writing as a whole.⁵² The inclusion of Chinese characters in the *Cantos* is due as much to the semantic meaning of each particular character as to their value as written signs. By our resorting to the Egyptian-Greek tradition that Pound invokes in the opening passage of Canto XCVIII as well as to Plato and Derrida, we may properly attribute the use of Chinese characters to a pharmaceutical value. This is not only because in Plato writing in general is deemed as a *pharmakon*, but also because for Pound, the Chinese ideograms and Confucian teaching as an ideogrammic culture in particular may function as *pharmakon* – in all the lexicographical senses of the word – to poetry and to the civilization of the Occident. For instance, he once declared that “[t]he image is the poet’s pigment,”⁵³ suggesting by inference that the “ideograms,” the use of which his ideogrammic poetics advocates, may also be considered pigments, and one of the meanings of the Greek word *pharmakon* is pigment;⁵⁴ much later in life, he proposed “Kung [that is, Confucius] as medicine.”⁵⁵ But if the same metaphor for writing is used in both Plato and Pound, the values attached to it, respectively, are reversed. Unlike Plato, Pound does not regard the ideogrammic writing to be equal to painting as mimesis of phantasms; in the first place he does not find it profitable to contrast truth with its mimesis; neither does he talk about seeking truth (ἀλήθεια) as absolute revelation of the *eidōs*, nor does he regard the *eidolon* to be necessarily a vacuous simulacrum without *vertu propre et définissable*. In Pound, there is no sharp separation of the *eidōs* as the origin and *eidolon* as its differentiation.

Pound’s fusion of the origin of the solar light and its effulgence in the medium – the silk cords in the conceit built on the character 顯

⁵² For an earlier paraphrase of Pound’s use of the character, see Kenner, *Pound Era*, pp. 458–59; for a critique of Kenner on a more ideological ground, see Eric Hayot, *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, Tŕel quel* (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan P., 2004), pp. 48–49.

⁵³ Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (1916; New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 86.

⁵⁴ For Plato’s use of the term *pharmakon* in this sense, see the section, “Les ingrédients: le fard, le phantasme, la fête,” in Derrida, *Dissémination*, pp. 154–63.

⁵⁵ “Immediate Need of Confucius,” *SP*, p. 79.

in Canto XCVIII and “the Great Crystal” in the imagery of the boat of Ra-Set in Cantos XCI – indicates a faith in and endeavor to create images or *eidolon* saturated with substance. Hence he refuses to follow Plato in his opposing the image with the origin and, consequently, the *graphia* with the *logos*. Accordingly, nor does he subscribe to the valorization of the origin and *logos* at the expense of the image and *graphia*, respectively, on the one hand, or to the preference of the alphabetic writing to ideogrammic writing, on the other. On the contrary, Pound everywhere advocates a reflecting or mediating image of the origin substantiated thereby which “non si disuna / da lui.” If essentially all writing is trace insofar as it is designed to represent the absent presence of that which was once present, Pound sees the Chinese writing to be the kind of trace most fully saturated with the origin or presence,⁵⁶ it is the *simiglianza* or true likeness left by the origin “otherwhere.”⁵⁷ For Pound, unlike Plato, the ideogrammic writing qua *pharmakon* is not without *vertu propre et définissable*. It is a “likeness,” yet it is nevertheless “true.” As a full-bodied substance, the ideogrammic writing – the *pharmakon* invented by Thoth according to mythical accounts in Egypt and Greece but historically practiced in China – is, in Pound’s pharmacy, beneficial (ἔσθλόν), it is a remedy; and it is by no means baneful (λυγρό), evil (κακόν), or poisonous. This reversion of the traditional Western metaphysics of the *pharmakon* underlies his preference of the Chinese characters to even the hieroglyphics since he believes the Chinese ideograms to have better retained the image or pictorial qualities as opposed not only to the European writing of more phonetic and more rhetorical nature but even to that of the Egyptians, who “finally used abbreviated pictures to represent sounds.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Writing as trace may have two meanings, i.e. as the trace of the original presence or as the trace of the voice that signifies an original presence. The first meaning was recognized early in Chinese philosophy, as such it may be understood as equivalent to the “images 象” of the *Yijing*, or *Book of Changes*. However, the notion that writing could be the trace of the original utterance, as well as that of the visual presence, first appeared in China in the 5th c., as a result of the contacts with the Sanskrit language, the oldest and the most inflexive of the Indo-European languages. In Seng You’s 曾祐 (445–518) “Hu-Han yijing wenzi yinyi tongyi ji” 胡漢譯經文字音義同異記, this is expressed epigrammatically: “夫神理無聲，因言辭以寫意；言辭無跡，緣文字以圖音。故字為言跡，言為理筌” (The sacred principles have no sound, [except that] they convey their meaning through words and utterances; words and utterances have no traces, [except that] they portray their pronunciations with scripts. Therefore writings are the horse-hoof traces of utterances, and utterances are fish-traps of the reason.) Seng You goes on to differentiate the indigenous Chinese theory of the invention of writing as modeling after the footprints of birds with that of Sanskrit, which he vaguely indicates to have modeled after heaven. See Su Jinren 蘇晉仁 and Xiao Lianzi 蕭鍊子, eds., *Chu Sanzang ji* 出三藏記集 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1995), p. 12.

⁵⁷ c. XXXVI, 24; and c. XCVIII, 21.

⁵⁸ Pound, *ABC of Reading*, p. 21. For Pound’s ambivalence toward Egypt, see Rachewiltz, “Pagan and Magic Elements,” pp. 177–78.

However, the pictorial qualities Pound sees in the characters have little in common with what Plato has said of painting, that is, *le trompe-l'œil* in its likeness to the superficial features of the imitated object but essentially illusory mimesis of phantasms.⁵⁹ Such illusory mimesis of phantasms may be regarded as equivalent to mirroring, which Pound considers to be different from image: “speculum non est imago, / mirror, not image.”⁶⁰ Clearly, Pound’s notion of the image in reference to Chinese written characters does not mean mimesis of some external likeness of the object – the Chinese written characters are not portraits of objects *quae corporum similitudine pinguntur*,⁶¹ nor are they eidetic in the sense of being the visualization of a transcendent *eidōs* – if this is not already self-contradictory, or, for that matter, in the sense of an Aristotelian essentialization of the empirically given objects.⁶²

The word ideogram, then, strictly speaking, is a misleading and imprecise characterization of what Pound sought in the Chinese scripts. Neither “pictogram” nor “logogram,” a distinction reiterated by a recent critic regarding the meaning of the term, can adequately describe it.⁶³

⁵⁹ The often cited fantastical ideograms from Athanasius Kircher’s *China Illustrata* (pars VI, “De sinensium literatura” [Amsterdam: 1667], pp. 225–36) for the purpose of demonstrating the pictorial qualities of Chinese ideograms believed to be based upon *mimema phantasies* have no basis in philology and are actually works of some Ming calligraphers for whom it was fashionable to use unusual or unorthodox (*qi* 奇) characters and who were notorious for their ignorance of philology. For the popularity of such calligraphic experiments, see Bai Qianshen, *Fu Shan’s World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Asia Center, 2003), pp. 58–68; for the correction of the trend in the early Qing, see *ibid.*, pp. 165–71. But if Pound was partly responsible for the simplistic charge against him that he promoted an etymologically and linguistically naïve, and nowadays one would say, after Edward Said, “orientalist,” view of the ideographic writing that it was pictorial because he never said plainly that by pictorial he meant something other than direct visual resemblance, the French poet Henri Michaux in his meditation on Chinese ideograms, *Idéogrammes en Chine*, of which Pound in his final years in Venice contemplated a translation, has clarified it more unequivocally: “For ages the Chinese had been subject, in this field and others, to the charm of resemblance: to an immediate resemblance, at first, and then to a distant one, and finally to the composition of resembling elements. [...] Even that of the furthest resemblance. There was no returning: all similitude was to be abandoned forever,” in Gustaf Sobin, trans., *Ideograms in China* (New York: New Directions, 2002), p. 21.

⁶⁰ c CV, 37. The line in Latin is a quotation from St. Anselm, *Monologium*, lxvii, in Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus series Latina* (Paris: 1844–1864; hereafter, *PL*) 158, p. 213.

⁶¹ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Opusculæ et fragmenta inedita*, Louis Couturat, ed. (Paris: Alcan, 1903), p. 224. Incidentally, Leibniz, the Enlightenment philosopher who was obsessed with reports of Chinese writing by the Jesuit missionaries, was mentioned by Pound repeatedly as the last great philosopher in the West, see *GK*, pp. 50, 74–75, 78; and Ezra Pound, *Make It New: Essays by Ezra Pound* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), p. 6.

⁶² Werner Jaeger, ed., *Metaphysica* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957) 1031a15–1032a10, chap. 6. For the close relation between essence (*to ti esti*) with *eidōs* (species or form), see *Metaphysica* Z 4 (1030a11 ff). For a definition of the *eidōs* as essence among modern philosophers, see also Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zur einer reinen Phänomenologie*, Elisabeth Ströker, ed., *Gesammelte Schriften* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1992) 5, pp. 10–38.

⁶³ Saussy, *Great Walls*, p. 42.

To Pound, the advantage of the Chinese written characters as regards their “pictorial” quality lies in that they are “totalitarian”⁶⁴ – “ne divisibilis intellectu /not to be split by syllogization,” as he paraphrases Saint Anselm’s assertion on the mind (*mens*) as *imago*;⁶⁵ that they are able to avoid the “logic-chopping” and “dissecting” tendency of the more analytical languages of the West; and that they are as a result more capable of reaching the truth that is prerational. “Rationalizing,” Pound once wrote, “or rather trying to rationalize the prerational is poor fishing.”⁶⁶ The abstract, essentialized *eidōs* would be form deprived of “Sapor, the flavour, / pulchritudo,”⁶⁷ and must be distinguished from the “forma” Pound mentioned in *Guide to Kulchur*, which is a kind of pattern in its germinal state.⁶⁸ Therefore what one *sees* – “*idein*” inscribed in the word “ideo-gram” – is not *eidōs* either in the Platonic or in the Aristotelian sense: ideograms (characters) are valued because they are believed to be able to oppose the transcendentalizing and essentializing tendencies of Indo-European languages, two essential tendencies of Western metaphysics most typically represented by Plato and Aristotle, respectively.⁶⁹ For Pound, to see (*idein*) means neither the revelation of the transcendent form nor a grasping of the essence resulting from abstraction. His view of seeing refuses to be characterized by such simplified and absolute theories.

To understand what *idein* and the resulted image exactly mean to him, we must call to mind the following passage in *The Spirit of Romance* (1910). In that early book, having asserted a microcosmic and macrocosmic correspondence between man and the universe, Pound comes to the issue of the consciousness:

As to his consciousness, the consciousness of some seems to rest, or to have its center more properly, in what the Greek psychologists called the *phantastikon*. Their minds are, that is, circumvolved about them like soap-bubbles reflecting sundry patches of the macrocosmos. And with certain others their consciousness is “germi-

⁶⁴ *GK*, p. 121.

⁶⁵ c CV, 39. St. Anselm lxvii-lxviii, in *PL*, vol. 158, p. 214. Pound, however, might not agree with Anselm unconditionally when the latter says: “Etenim omnia hujusmodi verba, quibus res quaslibet mente dicimus, id est cogitamus, similitudines et imagines sunt rerum quarum verba sunt; et omnis similitudo, vel imago, tanto magis vel minus est vera, quanto magis vel minus imitatur rem cujus est similitudo” (xxxii, in *PL*, vol. 158, p. 184).

⁶⁶ *GK*, p. 45.

⁶⁷ c. CV, 38.

⁶⁸ *GK*, p. 152; cf. J. P. Sullivan, “Ezra Pound and the Classics,” in Hesse, ed., *New Approaches*, pp. 237–38.

⁶⁹ The opposition to essentialization underlies Pound’s opposition to the use of symbols in poetry “with an ascribed or intended meaning,” see Rachewiltz, “Pagan and Magic Elements,” p. 174, also see, 235 ff.

nal.” Their thoughts are in them as the thought of the tree is in the seed, or in the grass, or the grain, or the blossom. And these minds are the more poetic, and they affect mind about them, and transmute it as the seed the earth.⁷⁰

Though this was written before 1910, the ideas expressed therein remained central to Pound’s creative psychology and poetics throughout his life. In Canto XCIV written in his late years, for instance, Pound quotes Apollonius to assert that [φ]αντασία σοφωτέρα μιμήσεως, namely, *phantasia* is wiser than *mimesis*.⁷¹ For *phantasia* and *phantastikos* are virtually synonymous.⁷² Back in 1910 when he first invoked the term *phantastikon*, one of the “Greek psychologists” Pound had in mind must have been Aristotle, for in *De anima*, Aristotle argues that “imagination (*phantasia*) is different from either perceiving (αἰσθήσεως) or discursive thinking (διανοίας), though it is not found without sensation, or judgment without it.”⁷³

The presence of Aristotelian elements in the *Cantos*, often via Dante, is well-documented.⁷⁴ But Aristotle interests us here less than the other “Greek psychologist” Pound had in mind. Next to Aristotle, another, even more interesting “Greek psychologist” Pound was alluding to should be Plotinus, the great neo-Platonic philosopher of late antiquity. In a section on memory in the *Ennead*, Plotinus explicates the relationship between memory and imagination (*phantastikon*) as follows:

Nothing hinders the admission that to what is about to be remembered (τῷ μνημονεύσοντι), the perception (τὸ αἶσθημα) is an image (φάντασμα), and that it belongs to imagination (τῷ φανταστικῷ), which differs [from perception], to hold the memory and retention (τὴν μνήμην καὶ κατοχήν) [of these images]. It is indeed imagination in which perception leaves off; and when perception ceases, imagination preserves its representation (τὸ ὄραμα). If then this power preserves the image of the absent object, it constitutes memory.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ *The Spirit of Romance* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1910; rpt. 1952), pp. 92–93.

⁷¹ *Vita Apollonii* 6.19.24.

⁷² The term *phantasia*, a noun meaning imagination here, is well attested in classical authors, and from it is derived the adjective *phantastikos*, which appeared more often in authors of the late antiquity.

⁷³ 427b14, chap. 3.

⁷⁴ See Maria Luisa Ardizzone, “Pound as Reader of Aristotle and His Medieval Commentators and Dante’s *Commedia*,” in idem, ed., *Dante e Pound* (Ravenna: Longo, 1998), pp. 205–28. Also see Sullivan, “Classics,” esp. pp. 237 ff.

⁷⁵ Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer, eds., *Enneados* IV.3.29, in *Plotini opera* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959) 2, pp. 55–74.

One cannot overstate the relevance and importance of the passage to Pound's notion of the ideogram and indeed to the development of Western semiology. The connections between memory (*mnemosyne*) and image (*phantasma*), on the one hand, and between image and imagination (*phantastikon*), on the other, underlie the subsequent Western metaphysics of signs.

Hegel, whose pejorative view of the ideogrammic writing is notorious and thus directly opposed to Pound's high praise of it, most notably embeds his theory of signs in the section on imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) flanked by sections on memory (*Erinnerung*) and memorization (*Gedächtnis*).⁷⁶ He held that the image that makes imagination possible is what is left of the perception after its having been, by the intelligence (*Intelligenz*), removed of the immediacy (*Unmittelbarkeit*) and individuality (*Einzelheit*) that accompany every perception; the power of the intelligence in freely combining and subsuming the images stored in it as if in a "nightly well" (*der nächtliche Schacht*) is otherwise called fantasy (*Phantasie*), which constitutes the symbolizing, allegorizing and poeticizing imagination, and this fantasy is responsible for creating signs ("Zeichen machende Phantasie").⁷⁷

But the agreement between Hegel and Pound, by way of Plotinus, goes no further than the common belief in the close connections among memory, imagination and the sign (for Pound, the ideogram). For Hegel, the proper contents of the perception and of that by which it is signified have nothing in common.⁷⁸ In other words, the relationship between the signified and its signifier is arbitrary – a very Saussurean view, to speak retrospectively. The sign is, in Hegel's words, "the pyramid into which a *strange* soul [*eine fremde Seele*, namely meaning; italics added] is transferred and preserved."⁷⁹ By removing its immediacy and individuality, the intelligence responsible for creating the sign has sublated (*aufgehoben*) the spatiality (*das Räumliche*) of the original perception that

⁷⁶ Friedhelm Nicolin and Otto Pöggeler, eds., G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (1830 edn.; Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1981), pp. 364–77, sect. 452–64; also cf. Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), pp. 79–127.

⁷⁷ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, p. 368.

⁷⁸ "Das Zeichen ist vom Symbol verschieden, einer Anschauung, deren eigene Bestimmtheit ihrem Wesen und Begriffe nach mehr oder weniger der Inhalt ist, den sie als Symbol ausdrückt; beim Zeichen als solchen hingegen geht der eigene Inhalt der Anschauung und der, dessen Zeichen sie ist, einander nichts an. Als bezeichnend beweist daher die Intelligenz eine freier Willkür und Herrschaft im Gebrauch der Anschauung, denn als symbolisierend" (*ibid.*, p. 369, comments on sect. 458).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 369. In Plato's *Cratylus* (*Opera*, vol. 1), Socrates, by playing with false or dubious etymology, links the sign/tomb (*sēma*) with the body (*sōma*) and suggests by inference that the sign is the tomb of the meaning, which, in turn, is equivalent to the soul as opposed

the sign signifies. The disappearance of the spatiality of the perceived, namely, the “Verschwinden des Daseins,” is compensated by its transformation into time. “A sign,” says Hegel, “is a presence in time.”⁸⁰ And also according to him, the human voice (*Ton*) is the best signifier that functions as time itself. Therefore for Hegel, the ultimate sign is the voice and the more intelligent written language is the alphabetic language, which is made of signs of signs (*Zeichen der Zeichen*).⁸¹

Pound parts with Hegel on the issue of the temporal dimension of signs. The sublation of the spatiality of the presence into time is not what Pound sought in Chinese ideograms. On the contrary, Pound found in ideograms a means to bypass this temporalization of the spatiality of the signified. For Pound, the ideogram externalizes the *phantastikon* without having to transcribe the voice that is the temporalization of imagination. In terms of the history of philosophy, Pound in fact reverted to Leibniz, who had sought a symbolic system that bypasses the expression of the voice and instead consists of “Characters Real.”⁸²

As Hegel becomes embroiled in self-contradiction for reproaching “the Chinese for being too *spoken* when they speak [on account of the tonal nature of their spoken language] and too *written* when they write [on account of the non-alphabetic nature of their written language],”⁸³

to the body (400c). But this may be better applied to the phonetic writing than non-alphabetic writing since the voice, of which the phonetic writing is a transcript, is essentially the soul (*pneuma*), viz. breath, and sign becomes the tomb as soon as the living voice fades after being uttered and being inscribed. Hegel, apparently, had this passage in mind when he used this pyramid metaphor, see also, Derrida, *Marges*, p. 95 and n. 4.

⁸⁰ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, p. 369, sect. 459; Derrida, *Marges*, pp. 102–3.

⁸¹ Hegel, *ibid.*, pp. 371–72. It is worth noting that Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) in his canonical “Rhapsody on Literature” 文賦 conceives voice (Hegel’s “Ton”) through a visual metaphor, 聲音聲之迭代, 若五色之相宣 (“Tones and sounds should be set in alternation / like the five colors, supporting one another”), a virtual reversal of the phonocentric view of signs held by Hegel. For the Chinese text with annotations, see Liu Yunhao 劉運好, ed. and annot., *Lu Shiheng wenji jiaozhu* 陸士衡文集校注 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2007), vol. 1, pp. 26–27; for English translation, see David R. Knechtges, *Wen Xuan or Selections of Refined Literature* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1996) 3, pp. 211–32.

⁸² Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, in James Spedding, Robert Ellis, and Douglas Heath, eds., *The Works of Francis Bacon* (London: Longmans, 1872) 3, pp. 399–400; see also Kenner, *Pound Era*, p. 223, and Saussy, *Great Walls*, pp. 46–47.

⁸³ Derrida, *Marges*, p. 122. Hegel elaborates his criticism of Chinese writing in a long supplemental comment on the merits of alphabetic language and the shortcomings of the *Hieroglyphensprache*, which, according to Hegel, includes Chinese (Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, pp. 370–74, sect. 459). The comment is embarrassingly incoherent and judgmental. It is worth noting that Hegel’s knowledge of the Chinese language and writing largely came from Johann Gottfried Herder, who lashed out against everything Chinese including the language and writing in blatantly racist language. See Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, part 3, book 11, in *idem, Werke in zehn Bänden* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989) 6, pp. 430–42. Herder’s knowledge of the Chinese language and writings seems to have been much indebted to George Anson’s – a contemporary of Wang Youpu – derogatory

Pound's view of the ideograms that opposes Hegel's, whether clearly expressed or inferentially and implicitly indicated, may or may not withstand hard epistemological, linguistic, and semiological examinations. But a firm conclusion from such examinations, whether favorable or unfavorable, concerns us much less than an examination of the ramifications and implications of his view, both in his poetry and beyond.

In any case, important for us now is the close connections among perception, memory, imagination, and the ideogram as the sign for those connections. If *phantastikon* is what makes memory possible in the first place, we may infer for Pound that as a totalitarian rendition of such *phantastikon*, the ideogrammic writing could overcome the opposition between *mnēmē* and *hupomnēsis* posited by Thamus in Plato's *Phaedrus*. For the ideogram as such is externalized memory instead of an external mnemonic device that reminds one of what one has memorized. It is what memory consists of, not something outside and alien to it that stimulates recollection. For if *phantastikon* preserves the image – that is, the *fantasy* of the originally perceived object – of the absent object and if the ideogram is the externalized *phantastikon*, it follows that in ideograms we remember. The only apparent difference between memory consisting of the internal *phantastika* and the ideogram is that the latter is inscribed on some exterior material such as a bamboo slip or a piece of paper whereas the former, to borrow Plato's famous trope,⁸⁴ is in the wax of the soul. But since the ideograms must be memorized, that is, as the Germans say, “internalized” (*erinnert*), unlike the natural signs, such as smoke for fire or footprints in game-hunting, that can be recognized without systematic learning and memorization, they virtually become that which is written in the wax of the soul. In the final analysis this is what makes the ideogram possessive of a substance and distinguishes it from the writing presented by Theuth, which “n'aura jamais de vertu propre et définissable.”

The substance which the ideogram possesses is, in essence, life. For what distinguishes it as externalized memory from prosthetic and mnemonic device is that the former is permeated with life like a living limb, whereas the latter is a dead instrument devised to perform functions proper to a living limb that is missing. Life thus serves as the substratum for the perceived kinetic quality of the ideogram.⁸⁵ Life in

reports about China including that on the language in *A Voyage round the World in the Years MDCCXL, I, II, III, IV* by George Anson (London: Oxford U.P., 1974), pp. 367–68.

⁸⁴ *Theaetetus*, 191c-d, *Opera*, vol. 1.

⁸⁵ Ernest Fenollosa in his famous essay, now discredited by sinologists, argues for the kinetic qualities of the Chinese characters, see Pound, *Instigations* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), p. 363.

the ideogram and the ideogram as live writing motivates Pound to appeal to the “ideogrammic method” to revive poetry. “The ideogrammic [sic] method,” says Pound, “consists of presenting one facet and then another until at some point one gets off the dead and desensitized surface of the reader’s mind, onto a part that will register.”⁸⁶

Saturation with life in the ideogram makes it analogous and akin to an important notion in Pound’s philosophy of culture, *paideuma*.⁸⁷ For Pound, *paideuma* is “the tangle or complex of the inrooted ideas of any period”⁸⁸ and as living embodiment of the cultural heritage of a civilization, it is “immanently bound with human life.”⁸⁹ This is because “[n]ot that the will of men brings forth cultures, but rather culture lives on men.”⁹⁰ The layers of ideas deposited in the present civilization that constitute *paideuma* correspond to the layers of meanings, references, allusions, and associations deposited in each ideogram. *Paideuma* is a macro-ideogram and the ideogram is the micro-*paideuma*. As the tangle or complex of the inrooted ideas, the ideogram qua *paideuma* is no *simplex naturae*; rather, it is any moment of culture or civilization, or culture condensed in miniature. In other words, it is the nodal deposit of cultural memory, whose purpose is to perpetuate.

Self-perpetuation is in fact repetition. The idea of repetition as self-perpetuation of culture underlies l. 44 of c. XCVIII: “thought built on *Sagetrieb*,”⁹¹ that is, the impulse of (passing down) lore and legends. In Canto LXXXIX, where the neologism also appears, Pound in an

⁸⁶ GK, p. 51.

⁸⁷ *Paideuma* is a Greek word Pound borrowed from German anthropologist Leo Frobenius. The Greek word, well attested in classical authors, means “that which is reared up or educated,” or simply nursling or subject of instruction. Pound, however, used it only in the sense he learned from Frobenius. In *Paideuma: Umrisse einer Kultur- und Seelenlehre* (München: C. H. Beck, 1921), Frobenius argues for the existence of some internalized and essentialized cultural and racial identity which he calls *paideuma*. According to Frobenius, *paideuma* is located both in an individual and in a nation. *Paideuma* in an individual comprehends all the major phases of the individual’s development that is analogous to the development of man as a species; see *Paideuma*, pp. 51–89. Frobenius distinguishes two types among nations: on account of their respective geographical and environmental origin, the oriental nations have a cave mentality (*Höhlenvorstellung*) that tends to develop in the direction of soul space (*Seelenraum*); whereas the occidental nations have an expanse mentality (*Weitenvorstellung*) that tends to develop toward widening life space (*Lebensraum*). In both cases *paideuma* transcends individual will and, often, consciousness. That Frobenius’ theory may be very relevant to c. XCVIII may also be indicated in the fact that, as mentioned earlier (see above, note 35), the third line of c. XCVIII refers to Frobenius’ *African Genesis*.

⁸⁸ GK, p. 57.

⁸⁹ *Paideuma*, p. 94.

⁹⁰ *Paideuma*, p. 4.

⁹¹ Also see c. LXXXV, 46 where the word appears for the first time in the Cantos, and c. LXXXIX, 52. The term *Sagetrieb* is made up of two German words, *Sage*, saga and legends, and *Trieb*, impulse or drive. The term is most likely modeled after the tripartite terminology Friedrich Schiller invented, *Stofftrieb*, *Formtrieb* and *Spieltrieb*; see Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung in einer Reihe von Briefen*, in *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1955) 8, pp.

appositional phrase qualifies it as “the oral tradition,” presumably on account of the etymology of the word *Sage*, *sagen*, to say or to speak. But this oral aspect of *Sagetrieb* does not alter the fact that it is derivative rather than original. The *Sage* in tradition is not the original *logos* uttered by Ammon, rather, it is the repetition of the original *logos* and is therefore a mediation of the origin. As mediation of the origin, *Sage* in *Sagetrieb* is the same as writing, which is also the repetition of the original voice, albeit in a different medium. Indeed, it is *Sage-Schreibtrieb* that propels the series of figures in Canto XCVIII – which start with Thoth and end with Wang Youpu – to undertake their respective functions as scribe, narrator, and imperial herald in order to mediate, to repeat and to pass down the origin.

VOLGAR' ELOQUIO OR BAIHUA 白話

Sagetrieb, or the impulse of tradition, is the impulse of repetition. The repetition is that of the ἀρχή, or the beginning.⁹² Canto XCVIII features three figures of *Sagetrieb* arranged in a descending order that ends with Wang Youpu: first comes Thoth, the titular god of the *Sagetrieb*, to whom inferential allusions are made early in the canto; second, there is Nestor, a hero in the *Odyssey* – as well as in the *Iliad* – who, as Plato says, “superior to all mankind for the vigor of his speech,”⁹³ narrated the saga of the Trojan War and told no lies and was therefore the wisest:

ψευδός δ' οὐκ ἐρέει
... γάρ πεπνύμενος⁹⁴

433–50, letters 14–16. The idea that poetry is built on *Sagetrieb* therefore is directly opposed to, say, Shelley's assertion that it is “an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study,” Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Defence of Poetry,” in Donald H. Reiman, ed., *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 504; also see M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1953), p. 192.

⁹² c. XCVIII, 47.

⁹³ *Leges* IV, 711e, *Opera*, vol. 5. Nestor features even more prominently in the *Iliad*, in which he also appears as a wise elder (1. 250), a lucid speaker (1. 248), and a prophetic narrator (an analogy between him and the prophet Kalkhas is drawn early in the *Iliad*, 1.68–100). For a study of the figure Nestor as a narrator, see Keith Dickson, *Nestor: Poetic Memory in Greek Epic* (New York: Garland, 1995), esp. chaps. 2 and 3, pp. 47–156. It should be pointed out, however, that strictly speaking, Odysseus himself is also a prototypical narrator like Nestor (see Hermann Fränkel, *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums*, 4th edn. (München: Beck, 1993), p. 11.

⁹⁴ l. 45. This Greek passage is culled from a narrative in the *Odyssey* in which Athena thus tells Telemachus on his voyage to Pylos seeking tidings of his father Odysseus from Nestor. In the *Odyssey*, the narration of Nestor that occurs shortly after the passage, and consequently the *Odyssey* as a whole, are “built on *Sagetrieb*,” a repetition of the ἀρχή, the beginning or origin.

Nestor is wise (“πεπνύμενος”) and “knows judgment and wisdom” (“ἐπεὶ περίοιδε δίκας ἠδὲ φρόνιν ἄλλων”⁹⁵), because he carries out and is qualified to carry out such repetition of the ἀρχή. The repetition is in the form of narrating the events he experienced. But for Pound as well as for us, the wisdom (φρόνις) or the sense (πεπνύμενος) of such repetition lies not so much in *le répété* as in *le répétant*. The narrative art of Nestor therefore must be considered analogous, too, to the central trope of the sunlight as the emanation of the origin.⁹⁶ Just as in the sun imagery central to the imagination of paradise light is conceived as sieved “by the silk cords” 顯 and yet “non si disuna,” so is narration as the repetition of and differentiation from the origin also an instance of mediation, and as such it is always more privileged. Again, this prioritization of repetition as representation over the represented but absent origin stands in contrast to Plato. In *Phaedrus*, where a distinction is made between *mnēmē* or the live memory and *hupomnēsis* that is writing, as Derrida has expounded it, “the true is repeated; it is what is repeated (*le répété*) in the repetition, what is represented (*le représenté*) and present in the representation. It is not the repeater (*le répétant*) in the repetition, nor the signifier in the signification”;⁹⁷ whereas for Pound, Nestor the repeater or narrator is wise not so much because the content of his narration, *le représenté*, was true *per se* as because his “thought [was] built on *Sagetrieb*,” namely because he stood in the concatenation of tradition. The *Sagetrieb* is *le répétant* of ἀρχή/awareness, namely it is the mediated presence or representation of the origin, and it is not *le répété* or the unmediated presence of the *eidōs*, which would be the ἀρχή in its plenitude without any mediation and differentiation.

Though Pound agrees with Plato insofar as both conceive the sun or *helios* as the most primordial emblem of the origin, unlike Plato, Pound never entertains the idea of an unmediated *helios qua eidōs*. The narrative act of Nestor as mediation and repetition therefore is illustrated by the imagery of the sun going into shadow that follows the passage quoted above:

suns rise, the sun goes into shadow

Hsuan, in the first tone 示 proclaim [c. XCVIII, 53-54]

⁹⁵ *Od.* 3.244.

⁹⁶ For Nestor as a mediator in the civic and political sense and its relation to his rhetorical power, see Dickson, *Nestor*, chap. 3, “Nestor as Intercessor: Figures of Mediation” (pp. 101-56).

⁹⁷ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 127.

The character in the passage is part of a word puzzle to which the intended answer, the character 宣, or *xuan* (“Hsuan”), is meant to illustrate “the sun goes into shadow.” Pound was misled by the modern morphology of the character as to believe that 宣 is made up of a canopy 宀 shadowing the rising sun 旦.⁹⁸ But though the philology is shaky, the “ideoplasty” of the character 宣 is nonetheless effective. For together with the character 示, or *shi*, which Pound placed in that line, the hinted character is meant to form a phrase that means “to ‘proclaim.’” This hinted phrase in characters reminds us that the real hero of the canto is not Nestor. The allusion to Nestor and the episode in the *Odyssey* only serves to introduce, indeed to herald, the third and the main figure of *Sagetrieb* in the canto, Wang Youpu. Wang is a figure of the *Sagetrieb* because he composed an exposition of his monarch’s *Sacred Edict* in, as Pound calls it, *volgar’ eloquio* and the purpose of Wang’s exposition was to proclaim, 宣 or 宣示 (*xuanshi*), the imperial edict to the masses in a language they could understand. The character 宣 befits the role of Wang especially because toward the end of the canto, Pound uses a quotation from the *Book of Documents* 尚書 contained in Yongzheng Emperor’s preface to his *Amplified Instruction of the Sacred Edict*:

“Each year in the Elder Spring, that is the first month of it,
The herald shall invite your compliance.”⁹⁹

The original word for “herald” in the *Book of Documents* is 適人 (*qiuren*),¹⁰⁰ an archaic word which the well-known early exegete Kong Anguo 孔安國 (2d century BC) glossed as 宣令之官, that is, officer who proclaims 宣 imperial decrees.¹⁰¹ Wang, therefore, was such a 宣令之官 in a more recent time. Indeed, Wang styled himself as such in the preface to his rendition of the *Sacred Edict* in *volgar’ eloquio* or, as it is properly called, *baihua*.¹⁰² In the canto, when viewed in the immedi-

⁹⁸ Pound’s etymology of the ideogram is not supported by *Shuowen*. According to Xu Shen, the seal script of the ideogram is 宣, and the root meaning of the character is the antechamber of the royal palace where the monarch issued proclamations and edicts. The lower part of the ideogram is not the morning sun 旦, but 回 “to turn round.” (Duan, *Shuowen zhu*, p. 338).

⁹⁹ l. 141–2.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. James Legge’s translation, *The Shoo king or the Book of Historical Documents, The Chinese Classics*, trans. with critical and exegetical notes, prolegomena and indexes (Oxford U.P.; rpt., Taipei: SMC, 2000) 2, p. 164.

¹⁰¹ *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義, in Ruan Yuan 阮元, ed., *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Shanghai: Shijie shuju, revised facs. edn.; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1979), vol. 1, p. 157.

¹⁰² “臣王又樸 [... ..] 謹就方言里語, 推衍成篇, 或約略以會意, 或闡發以盡辭, 總不敢於聖訓之外妄有增益, 惟竊效周禮適人以木鐸徇于道路之義, 俾未嘗從事學問者, 亦得識聖意所存, 或稍有當於化民成俗之盛心云爾。” The preface is found in his collected works, *Shili tang quanji* 詩禮堂全集 (ca. 1751) and reprinted in *Zhou, Fijie yu yanjiu* (p. 560), but is not included in Baller’s bilingual edition.

ate context in which he was introduced, it becomes clear that Pound makes Wang the last figure of the *Sagetrieb* to fulfill three functions at once: first, within the Chinese tradition he was a latter-day 遯人 or imperial herald; second, in the Sino-Hellenic context he stood in parallel to Nestor the tale-teller; third, in final analysis he belonged to the race whose titular god was Thoth/Hermes. While Nestor and the heralds of Chinese antiquity must be reckoned as among the earliest saga narrators, Wang may be regarded as a latter-day practitioner of the art in the chain of *Sagetrieb*:

But the salt works...

ψεῦδος δ' οὐκ ἔρρει

... γὰρ πεπνύμενος

Patience, ich bin am Zuge...

ἀρχή

an awareness

Until in Shensi, Ouang, the Commissioner Iu-p'uh

volgar' eloquio 又 樸

The King's job, vast as the swan-flight:

thought built on *Sagetrieb*:¹⁰³

“The King's job” puns on Wang's surname 王, a character which otherwise means king. But rather than a king himself, Wang was a herald of a king and as such he bodied forth Thoth or Hermes, herald of king of gods especially Ra or Zeus. Like Thoth/Hermes, Wang's job was to disseminate, to 宣 (*xuan*), the sovereign's *logos* among hoi polloi, since the sun, which is equivalent to the sovereign, is, as mentioned above, mouth. Indeed, Wang's metaphysical position as the mediator of the sovereign's word is fully warranted in the fact that his *Literal Paraphrase* became the most widely adopted text for the promulgation of the official ideology during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

But if Thoth was primarily a scribe and inventor of writing, it should be pointed out that Wang's position as the monarch's herald, like Nestor's, was predicated as much on his using writing to disseminate the monarch's edict as on his facilitating its oral dissemination. Indeed, writing and oral dissemination in this regard are one and the same thing. The word *Sagetrieb*, which Wang embodies, must be taken literally, and Wang's self-assigned role as the herald of the imperial edict has necessarily an oral aspect that cannot be ignored. Indeed, Wang's

¹⁰³ l. 44-52.

vernacular exposition of the *Sacred Edict*, his *Literal Paraphrase of the Amplified Instructions of the Sacred Edict*, was actually proclaimed in public spaces all over China every fortnight during much of the eighteenth century and beyond.¹⁰⁴ And in order to facilitate the dissemination of the imperial edict he composed its exposition not in the more arcane and more respected language of classical Chinese modeled after the Confucian classics but in the contemporary vernacular tongue. Thus, by featuring Wang and his vernacular proclamation of the *Sacred Edict* as the subject of Cantos XCVIII and XCIX, Pound in fact has finally come to acknowledge the phonetic aspect of the Chinese language, albeit in a rather recondite fashion. Indeed, as indicated in the reference to Nestor and in the puzzle on the character “宣,” this oral aspect is an indispensable one in Pound’s overall conception of the *Sagetrieb*. How, then, does Pound reconcile the prominent vocal aspect of Wang’s text in this case with his otherwise exclusive interest in the ideograms as written signs? What place is given to the vocal, vernacular aspect of the Chinese language in Pound’s vision of language, (ideogrammic) writing, and paradise?

To answer these questions we must begin by parsing the term Pound chose for vernacular Chinese, *volgar’ eloquio*. This particular choice in lieu of the more commonly known transliterations at the time, such as *baihua* or *guanhua* 官話, in effect equates or at least makes analogous the relationship between literary Chinese, *wenyan*, which Pound called *uen-li*,¹⁰⁵ and vernacular Chinese, on one hand, with that between Latin and modern Romance languages, on the other. This is because the phrase *volgar’ eloquio* is the Italian translation of the Latin title of Dante’s unfinished treatise on literary theory, *De vulgari eloquentia*, which discusses the relationship between Latin and modern Italian and argues for the literary merit of the latter.¹⁰⁶ It should be noted that for Chinese literary historians and linguists, the analogy drawn between Latin–Romance and *wenyan–baihua* is not without problems.¹⁰⁷ But for

¹⁰⁴ See Mair, “Language and Ideology,” pp. 340 and 349–55; Zhou, *Fijie yu yanjiu*, pp. 326–34.

¹⁰⁵ I. 128.

¹⁰⁶ This treatise was one of the major classics in literary criticism in Pound’s critical repertoire. In his discursive writings, Pound treasured the work mainly for two reasons, one is that it demonstrates how Dante “was positivist on his craft, in this he was a *fabbro*, and one respecting the craft and the worker” (*LE*, p. 181); the other is that it provides technical analysis of the poetic art of Dante’s predecessors and contemporaries.

¹⁰⁷ Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1981), pp. 3–4. Instead of being analogous to Medieval Latin, Hanan sees the situation of classical Chinese in late-imperial ages more akin to those of classical Arabic, classical Greek, Sanskrit and Old Church Slavonic as regards their relationships to their respective modern descendants

Pound, the equation provides a perspective from which to comprehend the historical position and significance of the language Wang used in relation to the much more archaic language in Confucian classics, which always occupies Pound elsewhere, and to acknowledge, if rather belatedly, the diglossal nature of the Chinese language that consists of a stable and transregional standard written language and an ever changing and varying major vernacular.¹⁰⁸

In *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante sought to create among various vernacular tongues spoken in the Romance area – a *confusio linguarum* viewed as the consequence of the disaster at Babel – a *vulgare* that might be more *illustre*, more *cardinale*, more *regale* and more *curiale* than any actually spoken anywhere.¹⁰⁹ It would “belong to every Italian city yet seem to belong to none, and against which the vernaculars of all the cities of the Italians can be measured, weighed, and compared.”¹¹⁰ The eventual goal of Dante, as Umberto Eco has pointed out, was to undo the damage caused by the disaster of Babel and to restore “the natural and universal *forma locutionis* of Eden,” yet not so much in the manner proposed by some in the Renaissance who wished to restore the Hebrew language to its original magic and divinatory power as through a modern invention, namely, an *illustre vulgare*, or illustrious vernacular.¹¹¹

In Wang’s enterprise of rendering the *Sacred Edict* in *baihua*, Pound recognizes a similarity between the linguistic, literary, and historical situations of late-medieval Italy and late-imperial China. To Pound,

(p. 5). Victor Mair, “Buddhism and the Rise of the Written Vernacular in East Asia: The Making of National Languages,” *JAS* 53.3 (1994), pp. 707–51, sees the relationship between *wenyan* and *baihua* to be even more distant than what Hanan believes, Mair regards “that unadulterated *wen-yen* and pure *pai-hua* are actually far more dissimilar than are Latin and Italian or Sanskrit and Hindi” and “that *wen-yen* and *pai-hua* belong to wholly different categories of language, the former being a sort of demicryptography largely divorced from speech and the latter sharing a close correspondence with spoken forms of living Sinitic” (pp. 707–8).

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed definition of the notion of diglossia, see Charles A. Fergusson, “Diglossia,” in Dell Hymes, ed., *Language in Culture and Society: A Reader in Linguistics and Anthropology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 429–39; for the application of the concept in Chinese, see Thomas Zimmer, *Baihua. Zum Problem der Verschriftung gesprochener Sprache im Chinesischen, dargestellt anhand morphologischer Merkmale in den bianwen aus Dunhuang* (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 1999), pp. 11–16. Zimmer also compares the relationship between literary Chinese (*wenyan*) and *baihua* to that between Latin and modern vernaculars in Europe (p. 18).

¹⁰⁹ See Steven Botterill’s introduction to the text, in idem, ed. and trans., *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1996), pp. xiii–xiv. Dante’s treatise was written presumably between 1303–05, a few years before the *Divina Commedia* was begun.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I.xvi.6.

¹¹¹ Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, trans. James Fentress (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 45.

Wang's use of the *volgar' eloquio* is analogous to Dante's effort at creating an *illustre vulgare* because both Italy and China had long been dominated by a once illustrious but now dead *locutio secundaria*, namely, Latin in Italy and *wenli* (*uen-li* in the canto) in China, and both Dante and Wang aimed at renovations by renewing a dynamic relationship to the origin. "A return to origins invigorates," says Pound in an article on the value of tradition.¹¹² In the case of Dante, a dynamic relationship to origins means a modern invention aiming at the return to the prelapsarian and universal linguistic condition of Eden; in the case of Wang, it was about the dissemination of the monarch's *logos* in order to restore, eventually, the moral and political order of antiquity.

In a secular and literary sense, too, *volgar' eloquio* means renovation. According to Pound, it is from the constant movement from the present to the origin and the recourse to the *volgar' eloquio* proper to each age that language of poetry derives its strength:

Dante for a reason wrote *De Vulgari Eloquio* [sic] – On the Common Tongue – and in each age there is need to write *De Vulgari Eloquio*, that is, to insist on seeing the words daily in use and to know the *why* of their usage.¹¹³

Thus in both theologico-mythical and secular-poetic senses, *volgar' eloquio* for Pound was an essential part of the constant task of "making it new."¹¹⁴ Thanks to thus "seeing the words daily in use" and knowing "why of their usage," *Sagetrieb* can "get off the dead and desensitized surface of the reader's mind, onto a part that will register."

Wang Youpu, however, would share Pound's literary agenda of "making it new" only to a very limited extent. Surely his rendition in *volgar' eloquio* of the *Sacred Edict* is a work of mediation and renovation, but blinded by the inveterate prejudice that held *wenyan* (*uen-li*) to be the only worthy language for high literature, he seems not to have recognized or adequately appreciated the literary value of his work in *baihua*. In any case, whatever – if any – literary value he might have attached to his work in *baihua* was nowhere nearly comparable with that which Dante attached to his own works in *volgar' eloquio*. To Pound, "this Wang was a stylist";¹¹⁵ but to "this Wang" himself, the literary

¹¹² *LE*, p. 92.

¹¹³ "Immediate Need of Confucius," *SP*, p. 75. It is worth pointing out that Dante allows the poetic use of the *vulgare* only with many provisos such as genre restrictions and insists that a good poetic *vulgare* should be regulated after the fashion of poetic Latin. See Curtius, *Europäische Literatur*, pp. 357–59.

¹¹⁴ c. XCVIII, 4.

¹¹⁵ c. XCVIII, 127.

achievements on which he could pride himself was not such composition in *volgar' eloquio*.¹¹⁶

Historically, Wang was a minor figure in the literary group known as the Tongcheng School 桐城派 that dominated prose composition during the Qing since the late-seventeenth century, and the school advocated an archaic and austere style modeled after prose compositions before the third century BC, with the Confucian classics as the core texts, as well as after their emulators in the Tang and Song dynasties.¹¹⁷ The school may be said to have honored *Sagetrieb* in such a rigid and anachronistic manner that their writings risked being criticized as ossified and lacking in ingenuity. Colloquialism was considered by the school to be a grave stylistic defect along with ornateness of language although, quite ironically, several figures of the school such as Wang himself and the much later, famous translator Lin Shu 林紓 (1852–1924) were one way or another closely associated with either vernacular writings or fictional writings in *wenyan* that had almost the same popularity as their vernacular counterparts.¹¹⁸ The literary *dignitas* and *nobilitas* of *volgar' eloquio*, naturally, could not or could not openly have been appreciated by the school or by Wang in particular. Indeed, the urgency of crafting a *volgar' eloquio* as a worthy literary language was not fully and generally recognized in China until nearly two centuries after Wang's time, and when this was finally recognized, the project of "making it new" undertaken by Chinese literary critics and poets in many ways would actually contradict the values assigned to ideogrammic writing by Pound. While Pound looked to China's ideogrammic writing to invigorate the English language and poetry, some of the leading Chinese

¹¹⁶ Wang considers his vernacular exposition of the *Sacred Edict* important enough as a piece of writing to include in his collected works, *Shili tang quanji*. But that he granted it little *literary* value may be indicated in the fact that he did not mention this work in his autobiography. Mair finds Wang's silence over his best known work "odd" and thinks "that he simply did not wish to be remembered for this work of *basse vulgarisation*." He also notices that "[n]or did his [i.e. Wang's] biographers in the *Gazetteer of Tientsin Prefecture* and the *Ch'ing History* think the paraphrase worthy of mention"; "Language and Ideology," p. 337. The low esteem Wang apparently had of this work is also duly noticed by Zhou, *Fijie yu yanjiu*, p. 606.

¹¹⁷ For an account of the historical development of the school, see Liu Shengmu's 劉聲木 *Tongcheng wenxue yuanyuan zhuan shu kao* 桐城文學源撰述考 (Hefei, Anhui: Huangshan shushe, 1989).

¹¹⁸ Fang Bao 方苞 (1668–1749), a leading author of the Tongcheng School, considers colloquialism or *li* 俚 detrimental to the desired succinct style modeled after literatures of antiquity, see his "Shu Gui Zhenchuan wenji hou" 書歸震川文集後, in Jia Wenzhao 賈文昭, ed. with introd. and annot., *Tongcheng pai wenlun xuan* 桐城派文論選 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2008), pp. 42–43. Lin Shu was deemed an influential figure of the Tongcheng School in the late Qing, see Wu Mengfu 吳孟復, *Tongcheng wenpai lunshu* 桐城文派述論 (Hefei, Anhui: Anshui jiaoyu 2001), pp. 188–90. Yan Fu's 嚴復 Tongcheng affiliation is another example of the close connection between the school and modern ideas.

critics and poets in the early-twentieth century deemed their own written language moribund and wanted either to reform or even to discard it in order to approximate the logocentric alphabetic languages in the West which they considered to be concomitant with modernity.¹¹⁹ Indeed, what took place as regards writing and speech in China in the early twentieth century – contemporaneous with Pound’s embrace of the ideogrammic method – not only puts his poetics in a translingual and cross-cultural perspective, but may test its ultimate validity.

Historians of modern Chinese literature and intellectual history have shown that social and national exigencies accounted a good deal for the radical agendas on writing in the late-1910s and 1920s, often conveniently designated as the May Fourth Movement.¹²⁰ But there are also intrinsic reasons to be found in the nature of ideogrammic writing itself – reasons that were not always articulated with clarity and coherence at the time – that propelled the advocates of radical reforms on Chinese writing during that period of time to deprecate the Chinese writing system. The perceived spatiality and opacity of ideogrammic writing made up of the nodal complexes of semantic, aesthetic, and intellectual connotations can be taken as strength as well as impediment. Unlike alphabetic writings whose virtue is that it “n’aura jamais de vertu propre et définissable,” ideogrammic writing substitutes the

¹¹⁹ The most important documents criticizing Chinese writing and advocating replacing it with an alphabetic writing can be found in the theory construction volume of *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* 中國新文學大系 (Shanghai: Liangyou, 1935), i.e., vol. 1, *Jianshe lilun ji* 建設理論集. They include major documents by Hu Shi 胡適 that launched the so-called “Literary Revolution:” “Ji Chen Duxiu” 寄陳獨秀, pp. 31–33, “Wenxue gailiang chuyi” 文學改良芻議, pp. 34–43, “Da Qian Xuantong” 答錢玄同, “Guoyu yu guoyu wenfa” 國語與國語文法 (1921), pp. 228–32; contributions by Liu Bannong 劉半農, “Wo zhi wenxue gailiang guan” 我之文學改良觀, pp. 63–73; and by Fu Sinian 傅斯年, “Wen yan heyi caoyi” 文言合一草議, pp. 121–26; documents that advocated reforming the Chinese writing into an alphabetic one include Qian Xuantong, “Zhongguo jinhou zhi wenzi wenti” 中國今後之文字問題, pp. 141–46, and Fu Sinian, “Hanyu gaiyong pinyin dao Guoyu Luomazi” 漢語改用拼音文字初步談, pp. 147–64. There was also a highly visible Esperanto movement in China in the first half of the 20th c. that extended into the second and was sanctioned by the government of the People’s Republic. Historically, the movement was one of several programs at that time for turning Chinese writing alphabetic; ideologically, it was an offspring of the May Fourth Movement. For the proposal of adopting Esperanto to replace Chinese language and writing during the May Fourth era, see Qian’s article mentioned above; for a concise history of the movement in China, see Hou Ziping, *Konciza historio de la Cina Esperanto-movado* (Beijing: Nova Stelo, 2004) and Liu Jincan 劉進才, “Cong Esperanto dao Guoyu Luomazi” 從 Esperanto 到國語羅馬字, in *idem*, *Yuyan yundong yu Zhongguo xiandai wenxue* 語言運動與中國文學 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2007), pp. 59–66. For a general account of the language reform movement in China since the late Qing, Liu Jincan’s *Yuyan yundong* is invaluable.

¹²⁰ See Michèle Loi, *Roseaux sur le mur, les poètes occidentalistes chinois 1919–1949* (Paris: Galilimard, 1970), pp. 17–55; and Liu, *Yuyan yundong*, pp. 13–37 and *passim*. For a comprehensive study of the May Fourth Movement, see Chou Ts’e-tsung [Chow Tse-tsung], *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1960).

original presence not simply with an unsubstantive, transparent or self-effacing sign that unfolds itself in time, but also with a spatial object that always thrusts itself forward to the extent that it obscures the fact that it also has a phonetic value and is meant to be a proxy of the original presence. While the voice is most fragile and its vibration (*Erzittern*) is easily lost in time and history, the radiant nodes or clusters have stayed and sedimented in each character. They becloud and thicken it until it reifies and becomes an aesthetic and intellectual object in its own right. As such, rather than revelatory of the objects they signify, they are obscure; rather than rendering a totalitarian view of the objects they denote, they will dispense with the objects and usurp their place in the spectrum of our aesthetic and intellectual attention. Instead of always referring to the original presence they are supposed to denote in a self-effacing manner as if they were transparent, they constantly draw attention to themselves and deflect that attention from reaching the objects they are supposed to signify.

This opacity of the characters on account of the heavy historical, cultural and literary charges they carry could potentially turn them into the opposite of what made them desirable to Pound in the first place. Instead of directness and immediacy, they could screen and obfuscate; rather than a “radiant node or cluster,” they could become ossified and desensitized. Hence instead of a means for representation, the ideogrammic method will result in calligraphy.¹²¹ Indeed, the characters used in the *Cantos* are calligraphic in addition to being semantic and “ideogrammic,” and their calligraphic efficacy impends over their semantic and referential functions and threatens to arrogate them. In essence, it was against the perceived calligraphication of what was supposed to be either a representative or expressive art that the Chinese writing reform advocates of the early-twentieth century waged their battle. For they considered this calligraphication to be ossification and tantamount to, to quote Derrida when he speaks of the use of *pharmakon* as perfume and pigment, ornamenting the corpse with cosmetics (*pharmaka*).¹²²

What to Pound was a remedy (φάρμακον ἐσθλόν) was therefore to the advocates for radical writing reforms during and after the May Fourth era a poison (κακὰ φάρμακα), or worse, a cosmetic. Thus the movement of Pound’s arguments for the poetic merits of the ideograms ends, as it seems, where the arguments begin: Pound’s call for “making it new,”

¹²¹ Henri Michaux observes that “Chinese: a language perfectly suited for calligraphy. One that induces, provokes the inspired brushwork,” *Ideograms*, p. 19.

¹²² Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 163.

an injunction that presupposes temporality, led him to resort to a writing deemed as timeless, and the timeless ideogrammic writing had itself, according to Chinese critics, already succumbed to almost all the defects and decays, only more serious in degree, arguably, than Pound found in Occidental languages, which had compelled Pound in the first place to search for a cure (*pharmakon*). In canto XCVIII in particular, the ideogrammic writing of Kangxi, as timeless as Confucian classics, must needs gain temporality through Wang's vernacularization. The uttered Word must be retained in writing and the most stable form of writing must subsequently become spoken words again.

What can we make of all these conflicting aspects and facets? Do these conflicts and contradictions suggest that Pound's ideogrammic poetics is inchoate and self-contradictory?

Canto XCVIII, as mentioned above, ends with an indirect quotation from the *Book of Documents*, a Confucian classic whose language is notoriously archaic and recondite. The scene depicted near the end of the canto through quotations from Dante's *Paradiso* side by side with the Chinese quotations indicates that not only the Dantean passages but the Chinese passages, too, contribute to the paradise toward which the argument of Canto XCVIII moves steadily. If we were to conduct an anagrammatic operation on the canto by translating it into Chinese, compelled to restore the original of all the cited Chinese passages in the canto,¹²³ we would unveil a linguistic infrastructure hidden from English readers: the canto is by and large written in *volgar' eloquio* à la Wang Youpu until the very end when the language is shifted to the archaic *wenyan* out of the *Classic of Documents*. The implication of this language shift should be obvious: namely, in paradise, the language in use is the timeless *wenyan* (*uen-li*), not *volgar' eloquio*. *Volgar' eloquio* is, we recall Dante in *De vulgari eloquentia*, the language for humans. It is needed for mediating the arcane and plenitudinous language of heaven. As a mode of communicating *logos* from the divine realm to humans, it has Thoth/Hermes as its titular god. It is the language Thoth/Hermes spoke to humans, whereas the angels, says Dante,

possess, in order to communicate their own glorious conceptions, a ready and ineffable sufficiency of intellect through which either they make themselves, in themselves, completely known to each other, or, at least, through that most refulgent mirror in which all of beauty and ardour is reflected (*per illud fulgentissimum*

¹²³ For such a translation with annotations, see Liu Haoming 劉皓明 trans., "Dijiushiba yongzhang" 第九十八詠章, in *Xinshi pinglun* 新詩評論 4 (2006), pp. 148-57.

Speculum in quo cuncti representantur pulcerrimi atque avidissimi speculantur).¹²⁴

We will not misunderstand Pound by inferring that for Pound *wenyan* (*uen-li*) written in ideograms has given us the closest notion of what *illud fulgentissimum Speculum* would be like. The angels dispense with the voice and use the most substantiated spatial representations for communication. Not the human world, but paradise is the only proper demesne for timeless *wenyan* (*uen-li*) and for timeless ideogrammic writing. By constantly resorting to the paradisiacal ideogrammic writing and to the arcane language known as *uen-li* it inscribes, Pound indicates that to make it new and timely in *our* world one must constantly see the origin in its emanation. Between making it new and the timeless primordial ideogrammic writing there is a constant movement, whose result is most productive and edifying. The May Fourth advocates for Chinese writing reform in their critique of the literary Chinese, like Hegel before them, may be said to have dwelled only on one moment of this movement, namely the “too written” writing. They did not realize or refused to recognize that this necessarily partial moment could be sublated (*aufgehoben*) through a constant recourse to the “too spoken” speech while itself contributing to thought and language built on *Sage-trieb*. In contrast to these critics, Pound has provided us with a more comprehensive view of the dynamic that propels the incessant movement between ideogrammic writing and *volgar’ eloquio*.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>GK</i>	Pound, <i>Guide to Kulchur</i>
<i>LE</i>	Pound, <i>Literary Essays of Ezra Pound</i>
<i>PL</i>	Paul Migne, ed., <i>Patrologiae cursus series Latina</i>
<i>SP</i>	Pound, <i>Selected Prose: 1909–1965</i>

¹²⁴ *Eloquentia*, I.ii.3.