

ORIENTALISM,
MODERNISM,
AND THE
AMERICAN
POEM

Robert Kern

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*Orientalism, Modernism, and the
American Poem*

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ROBERT KERN

Boston College



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*To Jean and Ben,
and to the memory of
Anna Marcus (1912–1962)*

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Preface

BEGINNING with a wide-angle lens, in an effort to accommodate so broad a subject as Western fascination with Chinese since the Renaissance, this book ultimately narrows its focus to consider the effects of that fascination on language and style in the work of some twentieth-century American poets. Primarily, I am interested in writers who are drawn to Chinese – or to a mythologized and idealized conception of it – as an embodiment of the equally mythic (and Western) idea of the language of nature, and who thus see in Chinese a model for a purified poetic practice in English, a practice consonant, as I see it, with the aims of poetic modernism generally. One could argue, of course, that such a practice properly originates with Ezra Pound’s *Cathay* (1915) or, a decade or so earlier, with Ernest Fenollosa’s essay *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. Yet the impulses that drove Fenollosa and then Pound to Chinese, it seems clear, have deeper roots, not only in American literary history (particularly the work of Emerson) but in intellectual and linguistic traditions that go back at least as far as the Renaissance, and it is to this prehistory, with its ramifications in the fields of poetics, translation, and cultural exchange, that I also wish to draw attention.

For the purposes of this preface, and as a preliminary example of just some of the ways in which fascination with Chinese can affect twentieth-century American poetry, I want here briefly and selectively to examine “Of Distress Being Humiliated by the Classical Chinese Poets,” a poem published as recently as 1989, in which its author, Hayden Carruth, quite explicitly evokes issues that seem almost part and parcel of the orientalizing poetry with which I shall be concerned. “Masters,” he writes,

Your language has no tenses, which is why your poems can
never be translated whole into English;
Your minds are the minds of men who feel and imagine
without time . . .
When everything happens at once, no conflicts can occur.
Reality is an impasse. Tell me again
How the white heron rises from the reeds and flies forever
across the nacreous river at twilight
Toward the distant islands.¹

In the course of the poem, Carruth moves from his own rather discursive lyric voice to an approximation of Chinese poetry itself – despite the fact that he feels isolated from that poetry, alienated from its wholeness, by what he sees as the inadequacy of English to contain it. Nor does he hesitate to attribute to his Chinese masters, or to their language (which he presumably does not know), capacities unavailable to him or to English. The approximation of Chinese poetry with which he concludes, it should also be said, has little if anything to do with Chinese verse. What makes it “Chinese” for Carruth, and for his readers, no doubt, is its imagism, its focus on natural events and things themselves. In addition, what looks contradictory or paradoxical in Carruth’s English – the manner, for instance, in which the white heron “rises from the reeds and flies forever . . . at twilight” – is absent, we are to understand, in his Chinese source, as if Carruth’s language, at odds with itself, is the best English can do in representing Chinese, a language in which “everything happens at once” and “no conflicts can occur.” Chinese poetry thus becomes for Carruth an imagined site of serene, even sublime, transcendence of time and conflict, an alternative to the “impasse” of reality, as well as to the limitations of English.

Yet the possibility that he might himself achieve such transcendence is less than fully realized in the poem, and Carruth’s transaction with Chinese poetry seems finally to be subsumed by the expression of an escapist longing that constitutes a familiar motif in postromantic Anglo-American lyric. The relation between Keats and his immortal bird in the “Ode to a Nightingale,” one of the chief sources of this motif, lies behind Carruth’s text, as do other, similar relations between poets and their desired objects in many

later poems informed by the Keatsian paradigm. Carruth regards Chinese poetry, that is to say, across a certain distance – the same distance, by and large, that separates Yeats’s speaker in “Sailing to Byzantium,” for example, from Byzantium – or the same distance that separates Yeats’s speaker in “Lapis Lazuli” from his own vision of Chinese sages similarly imagined to be above time and worldly circumstance (although “Lapis Lazuli” is a poem about a transfiguring gaiety, a poem in which the speaker delights in what he imagines more than he laments his alienation from it).

These comparisons with poems by Yeats become most compelling, however, when we see that the image in Carruth’s final lines may be taken to represent his own version of a Yeatsian “artifice of eternity,” not in the sense of Yeats’s Byzantine mosaic or lapis lazuli cameo but to the extent that the poetic lines themselves compose a verbal or textual construct, carefully crafted and arranged as a series of alliterative phrases meant to suggest both stillness and change, time and its suspension, as well as a felt release from the poet’s “impasse.” The image is a permanent, almost talismanic presence or reality for Carruth’s speaker, newly accessible with every reading (“Tell me again”). As much as it reaches out to Chinese poetry, then, Carruth’s address to his Chinese masters and their work turns out, in a way which we shall see variously duplicated in other orientalizing texts, to be mediated or even overridden by the motives and motifs of Western poetic discourse.

I HAVE SOMETIMES been asked whether I myself read or speak Chinese, and the answer is, I do not. My concern in this book, however, is less with Chinese language and literature per se than with their construction and representation in the West, mostly in the work of Anglophone writers whose own knowledge of Chinese is often quite limited. This very limitation, though, as I hope the example of Carruth’s poem suggests, can be imaginatively liberating, stimulating attempts to approximate Chinese in English or to produce English-as-Chinese which go right to the heart of my subject.

With respect to the romanization of Chinese in my text, I have thought it best to follow the usage of the writers I quote and discuss, most of whom employ older systems, such as the Wade-Giles, as opposed to the recent

pinyin system in which Li Po, for example, has become Li Bo and Tu Fu has become Du Fu.

FRIENDS, colleagues, and institutions have provided various kinds of assistance with this project, and it is a pleasure to thank them. Long ago, Donald Wesling cautioned me not to overlook the impact of the Orient on American poetry and later encouraged my first attempts to define what I wanted to do. Closer to home, Henry Blackwell, Rosemarie Bodenheimer, Paul Doherty, Robin Lydenberg, John Mahoney, Jack McCarthy, John Randall, Cecil Tate, and Dennis Taylor listened to an early version of the introductory chapter and were generous with advice and suggestions. For reading and commenting on later portions of the manuscript, I am grateful to Charles Altieri, Ethan Lewis, Robin Lydenberg, and John Mahoney. Special thanks go to Matt Parfitt, who helped me with translations of some thorny nineteenth-century French philological texts. Alan Richardson gave me a helpful tip about my title. I am most indebted, though, to Andrew Von Hendy, who not only read all the chapters almost as soon as they were written but who made himself available to discuss my work and to offer advice and encouragement. I also want to acknowledge, with gratitude, the support of Anne Ferry, to this project and others, over many years.

As a reader for Cambridge University Press, Albert Gelpi evaluated the entire manuscript and proved to be an invaluable source of help in revising it. My thanks go, in addition, to the press's editorial staff and especially to Christie Lerch for her meticulous attention to stylistic and technical matters and for her marginal comments and questions, which often provoked me to rethink my sentences.

To the College of Arts and Sciences at Boston College, I owe a debt of another kind. I was generously provided, first, with a faculty fellowship, which helped get the project off the ground, and later with a year-long sabbatical leave, during which it reached completion. I am grateful also to the staffs of several libraries, including the O'Neill Library and the Baptist Library at Boston College, the Houghton Library and the Widener Library at Harvard University, and the Library of Congress.

It should be clear that I owe a great deal to a legion of writers, critics, and historians in several fields, and my scholarly debts are recorded, less

PREFACE

than adequately, in my footnotes. The experience of writing this book has been a humbling and gratifying lesson in the collective, communal nature of the scholarly enterprise.

Finally, to my parents, Jean and Ben, to my parents in-law, Frieda and Ralph, and to my long-suffering family, Sharon, Rachel, and Josh, I can only say thanks for putting up with me and for keeping me anchored (though I sometimes resisted) to the real world. Although it must often have seemed more a rumor than a reality, here at long last is the book.

Chapter One

Introduction

The European Hallucination

AMONG several possible starting-points for this study, perhaps the most prescient is provided by the publication in Paris in 1811 of a short book entitled *Essai sur la langue et la littérature chinoises*. Its author, Jean Pierre Abel-Rémusat, twenty-three years old and self-taught in Chinese, not only inaugurated modern sinology but in doing so employed a phrase that, with an already long history in Western perceptions of Chinese, was to become one of the principal signifiers of poetic modernism: “things themselves.”

Disavowing some of the earlier European ideas about Chinese – that it was, for instance, the most rational and systematic of languages, and that it was, therefore, the most likely model for a universal language – Abel-Rémusat nevertheless records his admiration for what he regards as the unique qualities of Chinese. Above all he admires its “energy” – a key term in Enlightenment and romantic theories of language – and it is this energy, especially as it is encountered in the most basic of the Chinese written characters, representing the fundamental ideas of humanity, that can be conveyed, he says, by no other language. What he has in mind is primarily a visual or pictorial quality, and those characters which exhibit it, he asserts, in terms that anticipate the whole postromantic quest for pure experience and unmediated vision, “present to the eye not the sterile and conventional signs of pronunciation but things themselves.” This energy, moreover, is an essentializing and synthesizing force, making for such concision that “several phrases are necessary to exhaust the meaning of a single word.”¹

Just over one hundred years later, in London, the twenty-seven-year-old Ezra Pound came into possession of the manuscripts and notebooks of the late Ernest Fenollosa, an American orientalist who had pioneered the

study of Japanese art and undertaken, several years before his death in 1908, a study of classical Chinese poetry. Among these papers Pound discovered an essay – “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry” – in which it is clear that Fenollosa, like Abel-Rémusat, had looked at Chinese characters and also seen “things themselves.” Reading Chinese, for Fenollosa, was a process not of interpreting abstract signs but simply of seeing, of “watching *things* work out their own fate.”²

This conception of linguistic possibility appealed powerfully to Pound, who was in the midst of formulating his own notion of the poetic image as the supreme component, the only aesthetically valid component, of verse. That his efforts were greatly stimulated by Fenollosa’s speculations about Chinese is nearly a commonplace of modern literary history. “The image,” Pound was to write a short time later, quite as though he was regarding it as invested with the same kind of energy that both Abel-Rémusat and Fenollosa had attributed to the Chinese character, “is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language.”³ Pound’s image, that is to say, although it draws upon a variety of sources, is strikingly similar to Abel-Rémusat’s “single word” in Chinese that requires several phrases in another language to release its full concentration of meaning. In 1913, in the first of the imagist manifestos, Pound called for “direct treatment of the ‘thing,’ ” a spare, concise poetry in free verse, and free of conventional verse rhetoric, that would be as immediate to the emotions and intellect as possible.⁴ And by 1915, working closely with Fenollosa’s notes, he had produced such a poetry in *Cathay*, a small collection of his own versions of Chinese poems in which he managed, as it seemed to many of his contemporaries, to reproduce in English not simply the meanings of the original texts but their unusual modes of feeling and perception as well.

Of course, American or British suppositions, circa 1915, about ancient Chinese modes of feeling and perception are less a matter of accurate historical and cultural knowledge than of what George Steiner has called a “general phenomenon of hermeneutic trust.”⁵ Responses to Pound’s translations were and still are governed largely by a conventional idea of China that has evolved over a long history of Western fascination with the Orient – a history, often, of arrogant assumptions and farfetched mistakes. In 1928, T. S. Eliot, looking back at his friend’s achievement in an introduction to

his edition of Pound's *Selected Poems*, observed that "Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time," a remark, often quoted as unqualified praise, that actually seems intended to indicate the limits of what Pound had accomplished.

The passage in which the remark occurs is broadly relevant to my concerns in this study and is worth quoting from at length. "As for *Cathay*," Eliot writes,

it must be pointed out that Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time. I suspect that every age has had, and will have, the same illusion concerning translations, an illusion which is not altogether an illusion either. When a foreign poet is successfully done into the idiom of our own language and our own time, we believe that he has been 'translated'; we believe that through this translation we really at last get the original. The Elizabethans must have thought that they *got* Homer through Chapman, Plutarch through North. Not being Elizabethans, we have not that illusion; we see that Chapman is more Chapman than Homer, and North more North than Plutarch, both localized three hundred years ago. We perceive also that modern scholarly translations, Loeb or other, do not give us what the Tudors gave. If a modern Chapman, or North or Florio appeared, we should believe that he was the real translator; we should, in other words, do him the compliment of believing that his translation was translucence. For contemporaries, no doubt the Tudor translations were translucencies; for us they are 'magnificent specimens of Tudor prose'. The same fate impends upon Pound. His translations seem to be – and that is the test of excellence – translucencies: we *think* we are closer to the Chinese than when we read, for instance, Legge. I doubt this: I predict that in three hundred years Pound's *Cathay* will be a 'Windsor Translation' as Chapman and North are now 'Tudor Translations': it will be called (and justly) a 'magnificent specimen of XXth Century poetry' rather than a 'translation'. Each generation must translate for itself.

This is as much as to say that Chinese poetry, as we know it today, is something invented by Ezra Pound. It is not to say that there is a Chinese poetry-in-itself, waiting for some ideal translator who shall be only translator; but that Pound has enriched modern English poetry as Fitzgerald enriched it. But whereas Fitzgerald produced only the one great poem, Pound's translation is interesting also because it is a phase in the development of Pound's poetry . . . It is probable that the Chinese, as well as the Provençals and the Italians and the Saxons, influenced Pound, for no one can work intelligently with a

foreign matter without being affected by it; on the other hand, it is certain that Pound has influenced the Chinese and the Provençals and the Italians and the Saxons – not the matter *an sich*, which is unknowable, but the matter as we know it.⁶

Eliot addresses himself to several issues here, although the passage as a whole is marked by a deep skepticism about the possibility of definitiveness in translation or cross-cultural and even cross-temporal transmission: “Each generation,” he writes, “must translate for itself.” Nor is he concerned with linguistically accurate translation. Modern scholarly translations, apparently, provide sufficient accuracy, although they “do not give us what the Tudors gave.” Instead, successful translation, or what passes for it, Eliot is suggesting, is always a matter of temporal and linguistic localization, a perception of the foreign limited by an inescapably provincial or ethnocentric perspective. “When a foreign poet is successfully done into the idiom of our own language and our own time,” the effect or illusion of translucence is created, and “we believe that through this translation we really at last get the original.” In fact, however, what we respond to more than anything else in such translation is “the idiom of our own language and our own time,” and it is in this sense that Pound is an inventor rather than, strictly speaking, a translator, bringing across to us “not the matter *an sich*, which is unknowable, but the matter as we know it,” which is to say our own idea of China and Chinese poetry in our own language. The matter as we know it, apparently, is all that we *can* know, and for this reason, “Chinese poetry, as we know it today, is something invented by Ezra Pound.”

Pound’s *Cathay* is thus largely an event within Anglo-American literature rather than an introduction into it of something from outside its boundaries. Like Edward Fitzgerald, “Pound has enriched modern English poetry,” and his work will ultimately be seen as poetry rather than translation. Under the circumstances that Eliot describes, in fact – circumstances characterized by a sort of epistemological inaccessibility to the radically foreign – Pound has no choice but to be an “inventor” of Chinese poetry. Expanding upon Eliot’s point, Hugh Kenner calls his chapter on *Cathay* in *The Pound Era* “The Invention of China,” thus recognizing Pound’s participation in the larger historical process of the reception or construction

of China in the West, a process that had already largely determined the image of China that Pound's poems would convey.

Critics primarily interested in modernism and the Pound era, however, would say at this point (as Kenner does) that the artistic importance of these poems is another matter, and this has less to do with translation, or with what Kenner calls "comparative poetics," or even with what Pound may have gleaned from Fenollosa's sinological speculations, than with his own sense of what was necessary for the renovation of English verse in the early twentieth century. *Cathay's* most decisive context, that is to say, is the collective effort, "then going forward in London," in Kenner's words, "to rethink the nature of an English poem." According to this argument, the facts that *Cathay* also inaugurated the modern art of translating Chinese poetry, and that it aroused greater interest in Chinese poetry than any earlier book or translation had been able to do, are only by-products of its main achievement, which is its substantial contribution to the invention of a modernist style meant to embody "things themselves," a style concerned with presentation rather than interpretation, so that reading might become seeing, or direct encounter, and language might become reality, pure experience.⁸

Such goals are part of what Frank Lentricchia has called "the mainstream of aesthetic modernism" – precisely the idea that language in the aesthetic mode overcomes the arbitrariness of ordinary discourse and achieves access to the being of the world.⁹ What Kenner's argument emphasizes is the importance of *Cathay* in the history of the pursuit of these goals. Thus Pound's translations not only provide the first successful devices for bringing Chinese verse convincingly into English, but also offer a new model for lyric discourse in twentieth-century English poetry – although the first of these achievements is considered subordinate to the second. Yet if Kenner's emphasis is an accurate one, exactly what, it might be asked, is the bearing of Chinese itself upon the accomplishment of these goals? From the standpoint of Eliot's distinction between "Chinese-poetry-in-itself" and Pound's translations, such a bearing would hardly seem to exist. But it is also clear that Pound got something from Fenollosa – even if it was only a shock of recognition, an awareness that they shared an interest in the same qualities or capacities of language – and that Pound's discovery of Chinese constituted a breakthrough in his own work.

As I see it, however, the issue here is not the direct or indirect influence of Chinese on American writing but a romantic or mythologized – and Western – conception of language that is imposed upon Chinese and then appropriated as a model – one that embodies values, authorizes procedures, and represents possibilities seemingly unavailable in Western languages, but one that also suggests ways of manipulating these languages so that they might be restored to some putative original poetic status or capacity. This conception of language is related historically to such earlier European linguistic preoccupations as the quest, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for a perfect universal language and for the origin of language. In its romantic form, it is perhaps the same conception that led Coleridge, in the nineteenth century, to designate German not, as we might expect, as the premier language for philosophy, but as a primally poetic language because of its intact primitive condition, his sense that it had not evolved away – as English and French had, in his view – from its original closeness to nature. For Coleridge, as Gerald Bruns observes, the “word” in German is “not simply a unit of meaning” but “a unity of many meanings,” characterized by the same energy and synthesizing force that Abel-Rémusat saw in Chinese.¹⁰

Pound, then, although Chinese literature and philosophy were to become increasingly important for him, might well have made his way to a modernist style without the help of Fenollosa or of an interest in Chinese. What is most crucial from the viewpoint of Anglo-American literary history, after all, is that style itself, the notion of a new poetic language, and we might recall that T. E. Hulme, Pound’s colleague in the early phases of the imagist movement, was similarly concerned with such a language, although his approach to it was conditioned as much by philosophical as by literary considerations. But the point to make about Chinese is that it seemed to endorse Pound’s own thinking with respect to a language for modern poetry, and thus that it played the same role, as a model, in Pound’s pursuit of such a language as it did, for example, in earlier efforts like Leibniz’s pursuit of the so-called *lingua adamica*, the universal philosophical language, in the seventeenth century.

Here, it would seem, we encounter, in the history of the Western response to Chinese, a recurrent phenomenon – that of a radically foreign language nevertheless stimulating, at various times and places, similar

dreams of linguistic perfection. Or, with Jacques Derrida, we might say that these dreams actually involve an exploitation, an ethnocentric absorption of an exotic script into projects and purposes that disregard the real nature of the script. This is one of the points, in any case, of Derrida's commentary in *Of Grammatology* on the Western understanding of Chinese. According to Derrida, in the seventeenth century the concept of Chinese writing "functioned as a sort of European hallucination," a "prejudice," based less on ignorance than misunderstanding, despite the availability of real, if limited, knowledge. Thus Leibniz is criticized for transforming Chinese into something which it is not – a nonphonetic, arbitrary language independent of history – and this idea of Chinese, both in Leibniz's thinking and in that of his age, remains for Derrida "a domestic representation . . . praised only for the purpose of designating a lack and to define the necessary corrections."

Barely related to the reality of Chinese, Leibniz's idea of it, Derrida suggests, is an invention suitable only for the purposes of his own hopes for a truly philosophical language, one severed from the imprecisions of speech and the excesses of rhetoric, which could thus serve as an instrument of philosophical inquiry and discovery. Somewhat surprisingly, then, especially since he sees the "Chinese prejudice" continuing into the twentieth century, Derrida goes on to exempt Fenollosa and Pound from its effects and to credit what he calls their "irreducibly graphic poetics" with genuine historical significance, as though their encounter with Chinese writing had somehow managed to avoid the fallacious assumptions and idealizing tendencies that characterize most other Western linguistic projects involving Chinese.¹¹

In any case, it is more to the point of my concerns here to emphasize the recurrent nature of the role that Chinese seems to play in Western linguistic projects. For both Leibniz and Pound, Chinese serves as a model in the search for yet more ideal forms of verbal representation, and to the extent that Pound, as an imagist, calls for words stripped of all association, he, like Leibniz, is also asking for a language removed from history.¹² This connection between such disparate figures raises the possibility of further connections, suggesting, for example, that Pound's project is continuous in certain ways with the universal language projects of the seventeenth century; or, to put it more broadly, that the idealization of poetic language in

modernism is in some respects a revival or a new version of an idea about language current in the seventeenth century.

What I have in mind here specifically is the "Adamic" doctrine that language, in poetry and other modes of discourse as well, can achieve a penetration to the truth or essences of things. As Hans Aarsleff outlines it, this doctrine "held that languages even now, in spite of their multiplicity and seeming chaos, contain elements of the original perfect language created by Adam when he named the animals in his prelapsarian state."¹³ Adam's language was perfect because the connections between its words and the things or creatures they signified were natural and necessary rather than arbitrary and conventional. His act of naming, therefore, was equally an act of knowing, and this accounts for Adam's reputation as a philosopher who could write, as one seventeenth-century sermon writer puts it, "the nature of things upon their names," and who could "view essences in themselves" (*From Locke*, 59). To the extent that all languages are descended from Adam's original speech, a further implication of the doctrine is that Adam's original knowledge of the nature of things is also preserved in language.

This knowledge or truth, however, is obscure, hidden, and available only to illuminati like Jacob Boehme, who claimed to know the language of nature. Still, under the right conditions, the truth hidden in language, according to the doctrine, can be recovered, and under such conditions, in the romantic and postromantic versions of this idea, a poet might discover his or her "original relation to the universe" (Emerson), or encounter "not ideas about the thing but the thing itself" (Wallace Stevens), or experience "certain spiritual illuminations, shining with a morality essentialized from experience directly, and not from previous precepts or preconceptions" (Hart Crane).¹⁴ Most importantly, what Fenollosa seems to have conveyed to Pound was the belief that in Chinese such conditions are always in force, so that the truth of things is directly recoverable in language, and that these conditions could be restored or re-created in English.

What should be coming into focus here, in any event, is the mythic notion of a primitive or original language, a form of speech, or, in the case of Chinese characters, a form of writing possessed of a special power, a direct, emblematic relationship with the reality that it signifies. Represent-

ing a major topos in literary and linguistic history, this notion is an important aspect of what I am proposing to examine, namely, the intersection, in the contexts of literary history and poetics, of orientalism, aesthetic modernism, and American poetry. Accordingly, I shall be considering four American writers – Ralph Waldo Emerson and Ernest Fenollosa in the nineteenth century, and Ezra Pound and Gary Snyder in the twentieth – all of whom pursue an ideal poetic language that is first identified, by Emerson, with nature itself, the so-called language of nature, and that is later identified, by the orientalist Fenollosa, with Chinese, specifically the Chinese written character. Continuous with the Renaissance idea of the language of Adam, the language of nature is equally, of course, a mythic conception, a language, as one writer puts it, without a difference between what it *is* and what it *means* – and I argue that the same is largely true of the idea of Chinese into which the language of nature is ultimately absorbed.¹⁵ Thus Chinese writing is often regarded, in the West, as a script which overcomes the mediation of alphabetical writing systems and achieves precisely what poetic modernism in general pursues: greater access to the being of the world. I shall also argue, however, that all of these writers, regardless of their knowledge (or lack of it) of Chinese, are motivated by a concept of linguistic possibility that is entirely Western.

As I have suggested, the publication of *Cathay* in 1915 marks the first emergence of this intersection into historical visibility, and in general it can stand as a starting-point, one of several important founding moments, for poetic modernism, ushering in, in a way almost incidental (but also related) to its stylistic achievement, an unprecedented surge of interest in Chinese poetry in England and America, leading to the work of such poet-translators as Arthur Waley, Amy Lowell, Witter Bynner, Kenneth Rexroth, and Gary Snyder, among others, and culminating in a unique event organized by the Academy of American Poets in 1977 in New York City – a meeting of poets, scholars, and translators brought together to exchange ideas about “Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination.”¹⁶ But this intersection, I am also suggesting, has a less visible prehistory that ultimately takes us back to Emerson and the beginnings of a distinctively American poetry.

As we have been learning in recent years, from such writers as Harold Bloom, Richard Poirier, Hyatt Waggoner, Albert Gelpi, and others, Em-

erson is not only a founder but an unavoidable presence in American poetry and poetics, a figure who touches almost all of our poets either directly or by way of his chief heirs, Whitman and Dickinson.¹⁷ It is hardly new to point out, for instance, that the notion of the poem as a “meter-making argument” is fulfilled first in the imagist and *vers-libre* movements of early modernism and then again in the projective and open-form poetry of the 1960s. Emerson, moreover, like all of the transcendentalists, was interested in the Orient – more in India than in China, to be sure, and more in spiritual and philosophical ideas than in linguistics. But it is significant that he came to maturity during a period when the Hindu scriptures and the Confucian classics were being translated and made available for the first time in modern Western languages.¹⁸

Indeed, if this was a period in which mythic or Adamic notions of language were being revived, it was also a period which witnessed the birth of a new science of language, comparative philology, although the mythic and the scientific were by no means impermeable to each other. One of the first writers to set forth the new method for the historical study of language, for example, was Friedrich Schlegel. Yet in his book *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians* (1808), written in a mood of what Aarsleff calls “nearly mystical idealism,” Schlegel’s enthusiasm for Sanskrit, which he regarded as the original language, as well as the common source of the Indo-European languages, led him to envision the possibility of a new renaissance based on Indian rather than Greco-Roman antiquity; and it may not be too fanciful to suggest that the transcendentalist branch of the American Renaissance was a movement based at least in part on the influx of oriental lore into New England.¹⁹

What most demands Emerson’s presence in the history I am tracing, however, is his particular formulation of ideas about language and poetry in such texts as *Nature* and “The Poet,” a formulation whose several sources include the Adamic doctrine, the related notion of a language of nature, and both Lockean linguistics and a variety of anti-Lockean, romantic ideas about language whose most important locus is probably the work of Coleridge.²⁰ It was this formulation, moreover, that decisively conditioned Fenollosa’s approach to Chinese, preparing his eyes, so to speak, for what he called the “vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature” that emerged for him from rows of Chinese characters (CWC, 8).²¹ Again, for

most of the writers in this history, my point is not so much that they were directly influenced by Chinese as that they were drawn by a romantic conception of a pure, radically poetic language, in which words, as Emerson says, are fastened again to visible things, to search for ways of approximating such speech in the language already available to them.

If Emerson is less bound to Chinese *per se* than Fenollosa, Pound, or Snyder, he is nevertheless the first writer in America to pursue what he calls (in a sense he perhaps did not intend) an “original relation.” But the extent to which a consideration of the work of these writers constitutes a coherent history and exposes a strand of continuity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American poetry is suggested, it seems to me, by the following series of statements, all of which presuppose the primacy of things or experience over words, and which implicitly promote what Emerson’s early mentor, Sampson Reed, referred to as the loss of language in nature.²² The series begins with Emerson’s proposition that “Words are signs of natural facts,” based on his sense of the “immediate dependence of language upon nature” (SW, 197, 199). It continues with Fenollosa’s observation that reading Chinese is like “watching *things* work out their own fate” (CWC, 9); moves on to Pound approvingly quoting Aquinas to the effect that “Names are the consequences of things”; and concludes with Gary Snyder’s recent remark that “There are poets who claim that their poems are made to show the world through the prism of language. Their project is worthy. There is also the work of seeing the world *without* any prism of language, and to bring that seeing *into* language. The latter has been the direction of most Chinese and Japanese poetry.”²³ Despite the closing claim here, in which Snyder implicitly allies his own work with non-Western literatures, the effort to see the world without language may itself be regarded as a thoroughly Western and American enterprise.

By the early decades of the nineteenth century, when Sampson Reed and Emerson first began to think in terms of a language of nature, such conceptions – together with Chinese, with which they were often linked – had become virtually standard features of European linguistic discourse. In the rest of this chapter, I shall examine relevant aspects of this discourse, in part as preparation for a discussion of Emerson and the language of nature in Chapter 2, but also to provide some historical underpinning for my larger concern with orientalism and poetic modernism. The parallel his-

tories that I trace in the book as a whole are those, broadly speaking, of linguistics and poetics, although as I shall point out, they are not always in phase with one another. Beginning in Chapter 6, I shall also introduce the topic of the history of the translation of Chinese into English, and accordingly I shall consider Pound's formulation of what were to become standard conventions for the representation of Chinese poetry in English. Most immediately, I take my cue from Murray Cohen's study of "linguistic practice" in England from 1640 to 1785, where he observes that while linguists in the seventeenth century primarily "sought to establish an isomorphic relationship between language and nature," linguists in the early eighteenth century "assumed that language reflects the structure of the mind."²⁴ My point will be that Emerson inherits and combines both of these ideas about language when he writes in *Nature* not only that "Words are signs of natural facts" but that "the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind" (SW, 201).

CHINESE, of course, has not been the only language to be assigned original status or to function as a model for some ideal mode of speech or writing, although historically it has been among the most prominent candidates for such roles, beginning in the seventeenth century, when the philosophy of language was first "discovered" in modern Europe, and continuing into the twentieth (*Sensible Words*, xxiii). At various times Hebrew, Greek, and Sanskrit, because of their antiquity and cultural or spiritual prestige, have also been regarded as original languages; and as John Irwin has recently shown, Egyptian hieroglyphics, especially in nineteenth-century America, continued to be regarded as a direct survival of a natural, emblematic language even after Champollion, in the early 1820s, demonstrated the extent to which the hieroglyphs were conventional, arbitrary signs for concepts or sounds.²⁵ The reputation of Chinese characters in the West, going back to 1585, when they first appeared in a European book, somewhat paralleled that of Egyptian hieroglyphics, inasmuch as both were regarded and prized as systems of writing which were not only formidably ancient but which seemed to embody an essential connection between signs and things.²⁶

One important difference between them lies in the fact that Egyptian writing early attached to itself a tradition of what Irwin calls "metaphysical"

interpretation, based on the assumption that the hieroglyphs contained esoteric wisdom, whereas Chinese characters seemed to appeal more to such empirically minded thinkers as Francis Bacon and, later, those members of the Royal Society influenced by him who saw in Chinese a possible clue to what a rational, philosophically pure system of writing might look like. Bacon was one of the first Europeans to suggest that a “real character,” that is, a form of writing representing “neither letters nor words . . . but Things and Notions,” might be based on Chinese signs – an idea in which continental thinkers (Descartes and Leibniz among them) also expressed interest.²⁷ Such a language, it was hoped, would have the effect of “repairing the ruins of Babel,” the ultimate goal of all theorizing about language in the seventeenth century, and this meant a language that would not only eliminate ambiguity and imprecision from human discourse by rationalizing the relationships of words and things, but that would reflect the logical order of the world and even make possible the discovery of truth.

Inheriting this goal after the Restoration, the Royal Society was particularly concerned with the possibility of devising a system of signs that would have all the precision and universality of mathematics. Much of the society’s linguistic research is epitomized by John Wilkins’s *Essay towards a Real Character, And a Philosophical Language* (1668), one of the last works of its kind in a century that had witnessed a surprisingly large number of similar attempts.²⁸ In developing his own system of nonverbal signs, Wilkins briefly considered using Chinese characters as the basis for a universal language. But finally, like Leibniz later on, he rejected them on the grounds that they were simply too numerous to learn. Wilkins also found, working with a Chinese version of the Lord’s Prayer, that the connections between the characters and what they signified were far from immediately apparent (*Cycle of Cathay*, 24–5).

In fact, accurate information about Chinese during this period was fairly limited, a point made by Robert Hook in his report on the characters to the Royal Society in 1686 (*Cycle of Cathay*, 32). What knowledge there was came mainly from Jesuit missionaries, one of whom, Matthew Ricci, whose journals were translated into Latin and published in 1615, virtually introduced the subject of Chinese writing to Europe. It was probably Ric-

ci's account of Chinese that most inspired its use as a model in the effort to invent a real or universal character.

Like most later commentators on Chinese, Ricci begins by describing it as a monosyllabic language in which "every word, just as every object, is represented by its own ideograph," and he gives special emphasis throughout his discussion to the differences between the written and spoken forms of the language, observing that many of the characters "have the same sound in pronunciation, though they may differ much in written form and also in their signification. Hence," he continues, "it results that the Chinese is probably the most equivocal of all languages" – by which he means in its spoken form. But it is one of the most accurate, as he implies, in its visual form as a system of writing. Because of this, he points out amusingly, "friends, even when they live close together in the same city, send messages to one another in writing rather than meeting for conversation,"²⁹ a remark whose unintended satire looks forward in some respects to Swift's account, in the third book of *Gulliver's Travels*, of his hero's visit to the grand Academy of Lagado.

Here, at the School of Languages, a method of communication designed to avoid the use of words calls for its adherents to express themselves instead "by *Things*." Accordingly, they carry in large bundles the physical objects to which they would otherwise need words to refer.³⁰ This displacement of speech by a literally visual or physical display of things themselves reduces language to its merely lexical functions, so that it becomes a taxonomy, or what Aarsleff calls a "nomenclature" (*From Locke*, 24), and the academy's method thus represents a sharp break not only with speech but with the whole syntactical dimension of language. What Swift is satirizing is the Royal Society's antagonism toward rhetoric, with its supposed tendency to amplify discourse and to exceed the most essential needs of verbal representation. But he clearly sees in the society's demand for mathematical plainness an antagonism toward language altogether.

Although Ricci is careful to acknowledge the disadvantage of a system of writing that "throws a heavy burden on the memory," just as the method of the Academy of Lagado throws a literally heavy burden on the backs of its users, his account emphasizes the advantages, and it was probably passages like the following that most caught the attention of the universal language theorists among his readers:

Nations which differ widely from one another with respect to their spoken language, but have a written language in common, will eventually come into contact through the exchange of books and letters, which contact could never be made through their spoken vernacular . . . This method of writing by drawing symbols instead of forming letters gives rise to a distinct mode of expression by which one is able, not only with a few phrases but with a few words, to set forth ideas with great clearness, which in our writing would have to be expressed in roundabout circumlocutions and perhaps with far less clarity. (*China in the Sixteenth Century*, 28–9)

Later in the century, in his *History of the Royal Society* (1667), Thomas Sprat would call for a “return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when men deliver’d so many *things* almost in an equal number of *words*.”³¹ This is precisely the sort of proposal, with its nearly physical sense of language as a means of delivering *things*, that provoked Swift’s literalizing satire.

But to the extent that a language characterized by “primitive purity and shortness” represents an ideal language and perhaps even the original language – and to the extent that Chinese writing, as Ricci’s description suggests, embodies such an ideal – one can see why it appealed so strongly to the language theorists of the seventeenth century. This was a period, after all, in which language was regarded primarily from an epistemological perspective, as an instrument of knowledge, and in which the goal of linguistic thought was not so much to illuminate language itself as to show how it might be brought into greater isomorphic harmony with reality, word reflecting thing in a mathematically precise way. As Murray Cohen puts it, “For everyone concerned with language in the middle of the seventeenth century, it seemed possible to organize, recover, or invent a language that represented the order of things in the world,” so that by learning to speak and write one would also learn the nature of things (*Sensible Words*, xxiii). And Chinese, understood as a language in which “every word, just as every object, is represented by its own ideograph,” seemed to correspond more or less exactly to such a hypothetical language. Indeed, the persistence of the Royal Society’s view of language, and the extent to which that view implicates Chinese, are both suggested by David Hartley’s disapproving speculation, in the second edition of his *Observations on Man* (1791), that the language of Adam and Eve “was very narrow, and confined in great measure to visible things,” and was most likely “monosyllabic in great

measure.”³² Swift’s sense of the antagonism toward language implicit in such views would be confirmed, in the early decades of the next century, by the American Swedenborgian writer Sampson Reed, who, in *his* vision of Adam and Eve employing a language of things, was led to wonder why they should have needed a language of words at all.³³

Involved in the hopes for a universal language, then, along with the optimism felt by some theorists regarding the possibility of redeeming the curse of Babel, was a growing critique of language in its present state, a critique that assumed the form of a desire, as in Bishop Sprat, to curb what Dr. Johnson was to call the “exuberance of signification” by cutting back on the sheer number of words in discourse – or a desire, at least, to introduce some principles of order by which this exuberance might be regulated.³⁴ This desire, while leading to the invention of philosophical languages or even to the writing of dictionaries, could also lead, if taken to its ultimate limit, to calls for the abolition of verbal discourse altogether, as Swift realized in his satire against the Royal Society. At the School of Languages in Lagado, Gulliver reports, the first project “was to shorten Discourse by cutting Polysyllables into one, and leaving out Verbs and Participles; because in Reality all things imaginable are but Nouns.” But the other, of course, was the more drastic “Scheme for entirely abolishing all words whatsoever” (158).

There is a sense, then, in which symbolic systems like Wilkins’s Philosophical Language or Sprat’s “primitive purity and shortness” do not constitute languages at all but rather, as Ernst Cassirer remarks of Leibniz’s *lingua adamica*, the dissolution or negation of “the specific character of language as a language of sounds and words.”³⁵ Philosophical or universal languages are thus based on a sharp distinction between writing and speech – the same distinction that Ricci points to in Chinese – and writing is privileged over speech because it seems to be unhampered in its operations by the accidents of time and usage. By being written down, the sign is sealed off from all historical contingency and fixed in its signification. But the condition of this stability and logical accuracy is silence, a final separation of language from the world of sound and the human voice.³⁶

By the middle of the eighteenth century, retreating from this radically reductive attitude toward language, and from the virtual replacement of language by mathematics, linguists in England began to study their subject

in less speculative, more practical ways, focusing increasingly on the mastery of English itself and on the more purely communicative functions of speech. Thus the previous century's interest in Chinese characters and Egyptian hieroglyphics came to be regarded, by such writers as James Beattie and Lord Monboddo, as quaintly amusing but arcane and no longer compatible with the chief purposes of language, which were now defined as communication and social discourse (*Sensible Words*, 98). As ideas about the function of language changed, that is to say, and as interest in the elusive notion of a real character waned, so did interest in Chinese, which, in some instances, was even denied the status of a language. One writer quoted by Cohen, Anselm Bayly, author of *An Introduction to Languages* (1758), dismisses both Egyptian hieroglyphics and Chinese characters as "representative Symbols [rather] than any Species of Writing; because they denote not single Letters and Words, but Things themselves" (97).

The purpose of language, as this complete reversal of attitude suggests, was no longer mathematical or taxonomical precision about things but the arrangement of letters and words in discourse for the communication of ideas and intentions. The difference, as Gerald Bruns puts it, is between a focus upon "discrete, precisely defined lexical units" and "an utterance which describes a mental process" (35). What began to emerge during this period, in other words, was the idea of what Stephen Land calls "a sign system, the realization that a language (whether ordinary, artificial, or mathematical) is not simply a collection of signs (a lexicon) but also a set of rules governing the relation of these signs in such a way as to produce . . . meaning (a syntax)" (*From Signs*, 184).³⁷

What is most remarkable about the waning of interest in Chinese as a model for a universal language, however, is that it coincides, in the later eighteenth century, with the emergence of a more accurate sinology. Less paradoxical than it appears, this development seems to arise and benefit from the more practical turn that language study generally takes in this period, as well as from a new focus in linguistics on the variety and distinctive qualities of particular languages (*Sensible Words*, 127–8). Among other things to which this new focus seems to have led was the eventual institutionalization in Europe of the study of oriental languages, including Sanskrit and Chinese (although this study was also prompted by growing commercial and, later, missionary interests.)³⁸

By 1814, for instance, when Abel-Rémusat was appointed to the first chair of Chinese at the Collège de France, the Asiatic Society of Bengal, founded by Sir William Jones, had been actively studying languages and producing translations for some thirty years. One of its members, Alexander Hamilton, became Schlegel's Sanskrit teacher in 1803 (*Study of Language*, 155). Most notably, sinologists like Abel-Rémusat and his contemporary, the British Protestant missionary Joshua Marshman (who first translated the Bible into Chinese), seem to approach their subject without the idealizing tendencies of seventeenth-century discussions. Their early studies of Chinese, published within two years of each other (in 1809 and 1811), are objective, even critical accounts, and Abel-Rémusat, while asserting the uniqueness of Chinese, is careful to avoid any characterization of it as a perfect language. Broadly speaking, by this time the pursuit of perfection and universalism in language has almost entirely given way to such comparatively worldly linguistic concerns as the practical needs of speakers and the social and historical factors that condition actual linguistic practice (Cohen, *Sensible Words*, 89–95).

Still, what might be called a tempered enthusiasm for Chinese in Abel-Rémusat is nevertheless accompanied by strong admiration for its “energy,” for the way its most primitive ideographs seem to present “things themselves,” while Marshman, referring to the same ideographs, regards them as constituting “a language which speaks to the eye rather than to the ear.”³⁹ The context of admiration here, though, is clearly not that of the seventeenth-century theorists who hoped to establish mathematically precise relations between words or signs and things. Rather, it is a more practical and worldly context, as well as a poetic one, in which the most primitive Chinese characters are experienced in terms of their semantic immediacy, the efficiency of their communicative power, and the purely visual way in which they seem to present what they signify to their observer. Wilkins, by contrast, saw little or nothing when he looked at Chinese writing, and the signs of his own invented language are starkly abstract markings whose appeal is entirely to the intellect.⁴⁰ The difference in outlook is well characterized by a distinction of Rousseau's in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, where he points out that the earliest known languages, which for him are those of the Orient, “are not at all systematic or rational. They are vital and figurative. The language of the first men is represented

to us as the tongues of geometers, but we see that they were the tongues of poets."⁴¹ If Wilkins's ultimate concern is for the reinvention of language along systematic and rational lines, then Abel-Rémusat and Marshman are clearly closer to Rousseau, for whom the earliest language is poetic in its directness and expressive vitality.

The notion of linguistic energy or vitality, we might add, although it is defined in various ways and plays a variety of roles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, almost always occurs in contexts that involve poetry and the imagination. Hans Aarsleff shows, for example, that Condillac's preference for Latin was based largely on his belief that, as an inflected language, it provides greater opportunities (than French) for creative or imaginative departures from conventional or merely logical patterns of syntax. Such departures make for energetic, imaginative speech, and seem to recall the "original language of action." More specifically, they make possible what Condillac calls the "tableau," which is the concentration in a single word of "all the circumstances of an action," an effect not unlike that of the Chinese character in Abel-Rémusat's sense of it. The term "energy," in fact, as Aarsleff points out, was often used, in French aesthetic and linguistic discourse during the latter part of the eighteenth century, to describe such effects, and he defines energy as "a creative means of overcoming the inadequacy of words," an alternative to language, as it were, within language (Humboldt, *On Language*, liv-lv). Chinese, we might say, constitutes a similar alternative to language within language – and it was certainly to become one for Fenollosa, who saw it specifically as a "medium for poetry" – although it was often regarded, in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as something less than a language.

For Gerald Bruns, who pursues the concept of energy over a broader range of writers and historical periods, it ultimately becomes the basis for what he sees as the "romantic idea of language" and for what he also calls the "poetization" of language (*Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, 42–3). Not only does poetry, in this conception, come to be understood as "energetic speech," which is to say, a speech that is "naturally figurative or imaginative" (48), but language itself, or at least certain languages (such as Coleridge's German), come to be regarded as poetic by virtue precisely of their naturalness, their rootedness in the world of their own primitive origins. While all languages, presumably, were originally natural, which is

what Emerson implies when he asserts that “Language is fossil poetry” (SW, 316), it is only primitive languages, or their modern equivalents (like German) that still seem “to incorporate nature as she is in herself, in all her profusion of undifferentiated detail,” or that have preserved “that original unity with the world that distinguishes man’s primitive from his more rational state” (57–8). But the point to emphasize here is that for writers like Coleridge and Emerson it is the language of poetry that aspires to the primitive condition of language in general, that condition, as Bruns puts it, “in which word and world are one” (53), and it is in this respect that the early nineteenth century represents a revival of the seventeenth, with its pursuit of Adamic speech. For poetry, Bruns writes, “seeks to return us to our mythic origins, in which the world is present in the word, not as an idea but as a reality – a reality because the word, being ‘energetic,’ acts upon us as though it were not a word at all but a thing, ‘and a living Thing too’ ” (58).

While neither Abel-Rémusat nor Marshman goes as far as Coleridge (or, later, Fenollosa) toward a poetic language that approximates the original language of nature, both, nevertheless, seem responsive to the energetic or poetic character of Chinese, to the way its primitive ideographs, addressed to the eye, bring their observer closer to the world of elemental things, and do so with an efficiency foreign to alphabetical languages. Otherwise, however, as grammarians and as specialists in Chinese, they tend to reflect some of the more broadly conventional or typical trends in linguistics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In an expanded version (published in 1814) of his 1809 *Dissertation on the Characters and Sounds of the Chinese Language*, for instance, Marshman defends Chinese against the charge of difficulty and aims to correct what he sees as misinformation with respect to the number of its characters, its lack of syntax, and the poverty of its sounds. His humane regard for Chinese, which he sees as different from but not inferior to European languages, is based not only on his sense of its antiquity but on the fact that it serves as a language for nearly a third of the world’s people.⁴² To this extent, Marshman’s attitude in general is consistent with the linguistic outlook that Cohen attributes to the later eighteenth century, an outlook that includes a new tendency to socialize and historicize language, or to see it in relation to the “origin and progress of human societies,” and to emphasize its function

as social communication and shared speech (*Sensible Words*, 79–80). The period as a whole is one in which the ability of people “to understand one another, not the power of language to represent things or ideas, is the gift of language” (120). It is also a period in which linguists “make virtues of what were once the liabilities of any language,” and in which variety, change and “the distinctive qualities . . . of particular languages” become objects of interest rather than condemnation (79).

Thus it is “not the perfection of language but the needs of its users” (89) that now claim the attention of linguists. John Fell, writing in 1784 in his *Essay Towards an English Grammar*, insists that “the business of a grammarian” is “to find out, and not to make, the laws of a language” (95). Marshman adopts a similar stance when he approaches Chinese in a spirit not of judgment but of objective inquiry and accurate description. The irony here, of course, is that although discussions of language during this period often exclude Chinese as too barbaric or primitive for consideration, they nevertheless introduce a new spirit of tolerance for linguistic variety and diversity that ultimately leads to the legitimization of Chinese and its study.

What is most interesting here, however, is the link that seems to emerge between certain theorists in the seventeenth century and linguists and poetic thinkers in the early nineteenth century – a link constituted by the commitment of both groups to the idea of a natural bond between signifier and signified. The crucial figure here is not Wilkins or Locke, both of whom insist upon the arbitrariness of language and define the project of a universal language as one requiring the invention of new symbolic systems meant to eliminate, as far as possible, the ambiguity and distortion of all existing languages. Rather, it is someone like the Polish educator Jan Amos Comenius, with his attraction “to the recovery or reinvention of Adamic speech, in which words contain the essence of the things they name” (*Sensible Words*, 143).⁴³ As we have seen, it is this latter strain of thinking about language, mythic or Adamic in tendency, that is revived to varying degrees in romantic and postromantic poetics. It is a strain in which the perfection of speech is typically located in the past, before the fall of language at Babel, or before the decay of words, into what Emerson calls “rotten diction” (SW, 199) and T. E. Hulme calls “abstract counters,” has taken place.⁴⁴ Indeed, what this process of decay into linguistic rottenness

or abstraction indicates is precisely the sundering of the natural bond between signifier and signified or sign and referent, a point vividly made by Emerson's language about the need to "fasten words again to visible things" (SW, 199). A similar outlook is attributed to Wilhelm von Humboldt by Aarsleff when he remarks that "Since the movement toward prose [in the history of language] is irreversible, the slackness it may cause can now be overcome only by art and energy. Good poetry recaptures the early state of language" (*On Language*, lxv).

Although the Adamic doctrine was effectively displaced by the new linguistic outlook of the later eighteenth century, it never died out completely. Instead, before it returned with renewed force at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it retreated into a sort of subterranean existence in what Cohen describes as some of the "stranger linguistic works of the period," and even these, he points out, despite their peculiarity and, in some cases, self-conscious rebelliousness, still manage to "evoke the distinctive context of later-eighteenth-century linguistics." At the same time, though, they provide a kind of shelter for a way of thinking about language that will come to seem more and more essential to poetry, especially during periods dominated by the idea of the "progress" of language and society.

A good example is a text by John Cleland (author of *Fanny Hill*) called *The Way to Things by Words, and To Words by Things* (1766), in which he pursues what he calls "the universal elementary language of Europe" through the use of etymology. His task, in other words, is to discover "the elementary foundations of our own living language," or, as Cohen puts it, to explore "the history of early England through its language," and it is primarily the historical and national dimension of this project that distinguishes Cleland from his predecessors in seventeenth-century linguistics. What is intriguing here, though, is Cleland's conception of etymology as an approach to language which gives words "a new air and life . . . you find every word strongly stamped with nature; full of energy, meaning, character, painting, and poetry." Etymology, for Cleland, "discovers the 'atoms' of Celtic, the 'primordial language,'" and the recovery of this language reveals not simply the refinement of current speech but the extent to which an original energy and poetry have been obscured by the very process of this refinement.

“Much of this,” Cohen comments, “sounds like the language proposals of a century earlier except that . . . the original language sought has a specific, local history and, moreover, a social history directly relevant to the living language spoken in England” (*Sensible Words*, 134). What is even more striking, however, is the extent to which Cleland’s use of etymology already contains Emerson’s notion of language as fossil poetry, his almost elegiac sense that every word was once a poem.

In some ways, indeed, Cleland’s specific project looks beyond Emerson to the work of Richard Trench in the 1850s, a writer whom Aarsleff describes as a key figure in the linguistic environment from which the *New English Dictionary* was ultimately to emerge. It was Trench, of course, in his book *On the Study of Words* (1851), who expanded Emerson’s fossil poetry into “fossil ethics” and “fossil history” as well, seeing the language as a virtual repository of English national lore, or a record of what Aarsleff calls “the spiritual and moral life of the speakers of English” (*Study of Language*, 238). More than anything else, it is probably this interest in language as a source of historical knowledge that links Trench with a writer like Cleland or with the linguistics of the later eighteenth century in general.

Yet it is also clear that Trench, like Emerson, is an eclectic writer whose thinking is rooted in various linguistic traditions, including Adamic ones. In an 1840 text, for instance, which predates Emerson’s “The Poet” (1844) but which demonstrates Trench’s familiarity with Jacob Boehme and the language of nature, he pays tribute to the latter as a language, “indeed, without which it is inconceivable how that other [Scripture] could be made, for from this it appropriates all its signs of communication.” And Scripture itself, he writes, “with its ever-recurring use of figurative language, is a reawakening of man to the mystery of nature, a giving back to him of the key of knowledge, of the true *signatura rerum*” (*Study of Language*, 232).

Later, after the appearance of “The Poet,” Trench presents an account of language (in *On the Study of Words*) that is not only precisely Emersonian but that requires only slight updating to be immediately pertinent to T. E. Hulme’s theorizing about the visual image in poetry (as well as to Fenollosa’s thinking about the Chinese character):

Many a single word also is itself a concentrated poem, having stores of poetical thought and imagery laid up in it. Examine it, and it will be found to rest on some deep analogy of things natural and things spiritual . . . The image may have grown trite and ordinary now: perhaps through the help of this very word may have become so entirely the heritage of all, as to seem little better than a commonplace; yet not the less he who first discerned the relation, and devised the new word which should express it, or gave to an old, never before but literally used, this new and figurative sense, this man was in his degree a poet – a maker, that is, of things which were not before.⁴⁵

Like Emerson's, Trench's thinking here derives ultimately from the Lockean assumption that words originate largely as signs for common sensible ideas or for what Emerson calls "material appearance." They acquire their more abstract or spiritual significations by metaphorical or analogical extension, a process of linguistic growth and change increasingly regarded in the eighteenth century as part of the progress, or historical development and improvement, of human society. In a 1784 text called *A Rhetorical Grammar of the English Language*, for example, William Kenrick is indifferent to the idea of language as a divine gift and insists instead upon considering it as "an art, which has gradually improved, from the rudest efforts of simple nature, to its present degree of artificial perfection" (quoted in *Sensible Words*, 123–4).

What Trench describes, by contrast, in addition to the power of the poet as Emerson's original namer of things, is the same process of growth and change that Kenrick praises, except that now it leads not to perfection but to the trite, the ordinary, and the commonplace. The result of this process for Emerson in "The Poet" is what he calls the "secondary use" of language, in which words or images "have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin." Thus language is not only "the archives of history" but also "a sort of tomb of the muses" (SW, 316), and from this perspective, the development of language is construed as a history of decline and loss more than one of progress. Indeed, this is precisely the linguistic situation that writers like Hulme and Fenollosa in the early twentieth century will deplore and attempt to reverse. In doing so, they provide us with grounds for seeing the early period of modernism as one characterized by a further or continuing revival of an Adamicist outlook, in which linguistic progress depends not on a movement away from the poetic origins of language but

on a constant effort to invent new imagery and to circumvent what Hulme calls "the inadequacy of the usual" through a return to the primary use or re-poetizing of language (*Speculations*, 167).

This Adamicist outlook, moreover, can be seen to be opposed in many ways to the new linguistics that takes shape at the end of the nineteenth century in the work of such writers as Otto Jespersen and Michel Bréal. Antiromantic and demythologizing in its approach to language, this "re-orientation" in linguistics, as Aarsleff refers to it, develops largely as a rejection of what Jespersen calls "the old school of philology," by which he means the tradition of German comparative philology beginning with Schlegel and extending to the linguistic Darwinism of August Schleicher in the 1860s. What is primarily rejected here is the romantic notion of the decay of language and the organic idea of language as a virtually natural object with a life of its own, independent of its speakers.⁴⁶ In his *Progress in Language* (1894), a work whose title recalls a major theme of eighteenth-century linguistics, Jespersen takes issue with Schleicher's biological model of linguistic development, according to which "Languages are natural organisms which, outside the human will and subject to fixed laws, are born, grow, develop, age and die" (quoted in *From Locke*, 16). Asserting instead that language is an activity of its speakers, as opposed to a self-contained system or structure of external forms, Jespersen redefines linguistics as a human or social science rather than a natural one. Accordingly, he approaches language primarily as *speech*, and argues not only that linguistic change is always determined by the needs of speakers but that speech changes, over time, in a positive or progressive manner, moving always "towards shorter and easier word-forms."⁴⁷

Jespersen's argument becomes most interesting when he turns his attention to Chinese. Indeed, in a major reversal of the prevailing nineteenth-century attitude, he sees Chinese not as an unchanged original language, somehow arrested at a stage of development representing the simplicity and primitivism of the oldest forms of all languages, but as a refined, developed, and even advanced language, insofar as simplicity of structure and ease of use, which Chinese for him exemplifies, are goals of progressive development. Yet if the evidence for progress or change is provided by a study of Chinese, regarded primarily as *speech*, it may well be the case that its primitivism is still preserved in its written characters,

and it is Chinese *writing*, of course, seemingly immune to the social and historical forces which govern speech, that will exercise so much fascination over Fenollosa and Pound. When Fenollosa asserts, in fact, that "All nations have written their strongest and most vivid literature before they invented a grammar," he is referring, in linguistic terms, to the primitive, isolating stage of the evolution of language, precisely the stage in which Chinese was thought to have remained by the philologists of "the old school." Whereas Jespersen argues against the "downhill theory" of linguistic development, however, Fenollosa appears to accept it, although he also trans-values it, so that the earliest stage of language is seen as positively, not pejoratively, nongrammatical. "Nature herself has no grammar," he writes, and "Like nature, the Chinese words are alive and plastic, because *thing* and *action* are not formally separated" (CWC, 16-17). If every word, as Emerson suggests, was once a poem, then it is the systematic application of grammatical rules, in Fenollosa's view, that erodes the poetic vitality of language.

It is perhaps a measure of the distance between early modern poetics and the new linguistics of the 1890s that Fenollosa, in his insistence on the almost absolute value of the concrete qualities of language, was led to the assertion that "Thinking is *thinging*," while Jespersen could write that "The development in language of grammatical forms of a more abstract character constitutes a great advance upon the earlier state when there was little beyond concrete terms."⁴⁸ In fact, Fenollosa is opposed equally to the tradition of nineteenth-century linguistics which held Chinese in contempt as a language that had failed to develop beyond simple primitivism, and to Jespersen's notion of progress in language, which rescues Chinese from its reputation of linguistic or grammatical poverty, but only at the cost of its natural concreteness, its direct involvement with things themselves. At bottom, what seems most to separate the poets from the linguists during this period is not disagreement about the idea of the natural origins of language so much as the question of the value to be placed upon that idea.

As late as 1950, wondering about "natural intelligence" – by which he meant "the kind of intelligence that enables grass seed to grow grass; the cherry-stone to make cherries" – Pound was convinced, according to Hugh Kenner, that such intelligence "bore out the possibility that a language might be a system of natural signs" (PE, 103). For Fenollosa, Chinese

was clearly the language closest to or most directly based upon such a system. What lies behind this thinking, as Kenner also notes, is the seventeenth-century tradition of *signatura rerum*, the idea that every object in nature is its own sign or signature in a vast “text,” the natural world itself, whose meaning, in the original tradition, is contained in God’s other book, the Bible. Interpreted correctly, each book, nature or scripture, is a key to the meaning of the other. For Pound, however, the language of nature, to the extent that it is a language of things themselves, seems to surpass the signifying capacities of verbal languages, so that even Chinese is only an approximation of an authentically natural language. As he suggests in Canto 87, if nature is a language, it is one constituted entirely by particular signs or signatures for which translation into general verbal terms will not suffice:

In nature are signatures
 needing no verbal tradition,
 oak leaf never plane leaf.
 (87/573)⁴⁹

Nature, for Pound, is prior to language, as well as its source – convictions that are maintained throughout his career, from his quotation of Aquinas in *Gaudier-Brzeska* (1915) – “*Nomina sunt consequentia rerum*” – to the beginning of Canto 90 (1955): “‘From the colour the nature / & by the nature the sign!’ ” (90/605).

Nevertheless, the significant corollary to Pound’s thinking, phrased carefully by Kenner as a question, directly raises the possibility of a natural poetics: “Is a natural poetic language conceivable, based on such natural signs?” (PE, 104). For another devotee of natural signatures, the issue is seen in terms that are more epistemological than linguistic or poetic. In his late essay “Poetry and Imagination” (1875), Emerson declares that “Natural objects, if individually described and out of connection, are not yet known, since they are really parts of a symmetrical universe, like words of a sentence; and if their true order is found, the poet can read their divine significance orderly as in a Bible.”⁵⁰ We can pass over what is conventional here – the analogy between words and things and the image of the Book of Nature – in order to observe that Emerson’s chief concern is with the “true order” or syntax of things, which constitutes the intelligibility and unity of the world. The language of nature, that is, seems to depend less

on isolated words which contain the essence of the things they name than on the formal ordering of such words into the sentences of a discourse that corresponds to the structure of the universe. Unlike some of his Adamic predecessors (including himself, in *Nature*), Emerson is concerned here not with the word or sign but with larger forms of utterance, for it is not until the order and interrelationship of objects are found that the poet can read their significance.

What the poet reads, moreover, is itself poetic, an aesthetic as well as an organic unity. "Science," he writes, "was false by being unpoetical. It assumed to explain a reptile or mollusk, and isolated it, – which is hunting for life in graveyards. Reptile or mollusk or man or angel only exists in system, in relation" (RWE, 443). To be poetic, then, and truly scientific, is to see things in their contexts, in terms of their place in a larger order or pattern.⁵¹

Emerson's thinking here, to be sure, bears a certain similarity to some of the conventionally romantic gestures that constitute his poem "Each and All" (1839), a lyric that dramatizes the opposition between an analytic approach to experience and an intuitive response to an active natural world that leads the speaker to yield to "the perfect whole" of nature, or the organic "symmetrical universe." The poem presents a series of images that portray the loss of power or beauty suffered by things when they are removed from their contexts:

I thought the sparrow's note from heaven,
 Singing at dawn on the alder bough;
 I brought him home, in his nest, at even;
 He sings the song, but it cheers not now,
 For I did not bring home the river and sky; –
 He sang to my ear, – they sang to my eye.

In effect, it is the speaker who suffers the loss, because he insists upon isolating parts from the whole, natural things from their place in a natural order. When that whole is allowed to stand with all of its parts intact, as the poem's conclusion suggests, the original experience can be recovered, in the terms of the later essay, as a discovery of divine significance which the speaker does not simply "read" but participates in:

As I spoke, beneath my feet
 The ground-pine curled its pretty wreath,
 Running over the club-moss burrs;
 I inhaled the violet's breath;
 Around me stood the oaks and firs;
 Pine-cones and acorns lay on the ground,
 Over me soared the eternal sky,
 Full of light and of deity;
 Again I saw, again I heard,
 The rolling river, the morning bird; –
 Beauty through my senses stole;
 I yielded myself to the perfect whole.

(SW, 441-2)

What the poem most importantly demonstrates, especially in this concluding passage, with its emphasis on particular objects and its location of the self at their center, is the poet's act of "reading" the language of nature, an act in which the mere presence of things-in-relation becomes intelligible. If reading Chinese, for Fenollosa, is an impersonal process of watching things work out their own fate, then here Emerson's speaker, in a more direct encounter with things, watches them work out *his* fate as well, a notion characteristic of a writer for whom knowledge of the self is grounded in a knowledge of nature. As Emerson puts it in another passage in "Poetry and Imagination," "While the student ponders this immense unity, he observes that all things in nature, the animals, the mountain, the river, the seasons, wood, iron, stone, vapor, – have a mysterious relation to his thoughts and his life; their growths, decays, quality, and use so curiously resemble himself, in parts and in wholes, that he is compelled to speak by means of them" (RWE, 442).

Yet the objects in the scene at the end of "Each and All" are not merely present; they are active, and they elicit, by stealing through his senses, the speaker's response of yielding to their collective activity. Emerson's more general point, in the poem and particularly in the earlier passage from "Poetry and Imagination," is that nothing, including the self, can be known until it is perceived as part of a larger order – a conviction that will also find its way, most notably, into the ecological thinking of Gary Snyder.

Fenollosa offers his own version of this idea, in its relation to language, in his attack on the notion of the complete sentence. "But in nature," he writes, "there is *no* completeness . . . All processes in nature are interrelated; and thus there could be no complete sentence . . . save one which it would take all time to pronounce" (CWC, 11) – the point being, perhaps, for both Emerson and Fenollosa, that the truth of things, or the perfect whole of the symmetrical universe, cannot finally be contained or represented in language, since what is required for such representation is a language fully isomorphic with the universe and equal to it in scope – a language, that is, which would not only take all time to pronounce but which would contain all time, as the Bible is traditionally believed to do. If such a language exists at all, it can only be nature or the universe itself.

What appears to be taking place in Emerson here, in any case, is a shift of interest from words as signs of natural facts to sentences, construed as "symmetrical" or systematic wholes analogous to the universe. In terms of the history of linguistics, this shift replicates that in the philosophy of language in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which Murray Cohen and Stephen Land describe as a major change in linguistic thinking, prompted by a new attention to "the syntactical, as opposed to the lexical, functions of language" (*Sensible Words*, 25). The direction of change is from what Cohen calls the "grammar of things" to a "grammar of the mind" and finally a "grammar of sentences," an evolution in which the philosophy of language, in the hands of John Locke, for instance, leaves behind its previous focus on the isomorphism of words and things and turns instead to the correspondence between the structure of language and the operations of the mind.⁵² In Land's terms, linguistic or semantic atomism gives way to formalism, in the sense that greater attention begins to be paid to syntactical structures than to isolated words, and meaning is increasingly seen to reside not in the lexical units of language but in the forms that those units compose (*From Signs*, v). Thus, instead of a pure and direct representation of things, language begins to be understood as a representation of the relations among the signs for things, suggesting a movement toward syntax and logic – a movement, that is, from signs to propositions, or from things themselves to ideas about things.

The significance of this change is that it constitutes a movement away from, as well as a critique of, Adamic assumptions about the connections

between words and things and thus about the epistemological functions of language. Hans Aarsleff argues, for instance, that one of the chief motivations behind the writing of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) was Locke's interest in developing such a critique on behalf of the counter-epistemology of the Royal Society (*From Locke*, 57). For Locke himself, of course, language is no longer a direct avenue to the truth of things but rather to the functions of mind, of which both grammar and logic are reflections. But if an accurate understanding of those functions could be achieved, then so could the perfection of language, and this assumption amounts to what Cohen sees as Locke's redefinition of Adamic naming, a redefinition based upon "a correspondence between the order of ideas . . . and the grammar of language" (*Sensible Words*, 40). Knowledge, understood in these terms, is not a matter of essences but of syntax and logic, and it depends upon utterances which describe mental processes or reveal the patterns of thought.

In this history, broadly speaking, "mind replaced nature as the assumed content of language" (*Sensible Words*, 80). For Emerson, however, "the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind," and *both* mind and nature are the content of language. Insofar as he insists upon a radical connection between language and nature, Emerson, we might say, retains a pre-Lockean Adamicism. Although knowledge for him also comes to be a matter of syntax, or the "true order" of things, his notion of the sentence as a counterpart of the universe constitutes, after all, only a slight variation upon the essential feature of Adamic thinking, namely the correspondence between words and things. At the same time, what is Lockean in Emerson, perhaps, is his adoption of something like a scientific outlook – or, since science is "false by being unpoetical," an outlook in which science is supplemented and redeemed by poetry. In practice this amounts to an aesthetics based primarily on empirical observation, or on an accurate visual encounter with the world – a habit of seeing which takes account not only of what is seen but of the context in which it appears, and we can witness it in operation in the familiar contrast, early in *Nature*, between the reductively utilitarian "stick of timber of the woodcutter" and "the tree of the poet," or between the landscape viewed as a whole and the twenty or thirty farms which compose it, in the same passage (SW, 188). In fact, of course, it is only the eye of the poet that can "compose" the landscape,

or integrate all its parts, and in thus seeing it as it exists “in system, in relation,” he or she gains access to its deeper truth, its “divine significance.”

Emerson’s poetical science is also to be found in Fenollosa, who explicitly aligns science and poetry against logic and grammar in his essay on the Chinese written character. Arguing here that valid science “consists in following as closely as may be the actual and entangled lines of forces as they pulse through things,” he redefines the sentence as based not on the completeness of a thought but on the completeness of an action in nature – the transference of energy from sky to earth in the lightning flash (CWC, 12). Later, in the *ABC of Reading* (1934), Pound will recommend Fenollosa’s essay as the “first definite assertion of the applicability of scientific method to literary criticism” and proclaim that the “ideogrammic method,” which he had derived from Fenollosa, was “the method of science,” involving “the direct examination of phenomena” in their own terms.⁵³ It is precisely this sort of examination, informed by Poundian principles calling for the direct, nondiscursive presentation of things, that often comes together with an ecological regard for Emerson’s “perfect whole” or “symmetrical universe” in the poetry of Gary Snyder. As an example, consider “Burning the Small Dead,” a poem in the volume *The Back Country* (1968):

Burning the small dead
 branches
 broke from beneath
 thick spreading
 whitebark pine.

 a hundred summers
 snowmelt rock and air

hiss in a twisted bough.

 sierra granite;
 mt. Ritter –
 black rock twice as old.

Deneb, Altair

windy fire⁵⁴

What is notable here is the way the poem seems to efface itself, or to subordinate itself to the nonverbal reality it wishes to present. The opening block of five lines and parts of lines is the most fully voiced, the most continuous in its verse movement, in the poem, and even this is slow, hesitant, and grammatically incomplete. Although the next lines, containing the poem's only verb ("hiss"), do form a complete sentence, it is somewhat disguised by Snyder's refusal to capitalize and by his manipulation of the spaces not only between lines but between words, as in

snowmelt rock and air

where three discrete units of speech seem momentarily free of any syntactical pattern and approximate the effect of Chinese characters. These opening sets of lines, in any case, serving to set the scene and to initiate the poem's contemplative movement, speak in the poem's fullest speech style, based on patterns that are grammatical, or nearly so, in structure. In their hesitancy and brokenness, however, the shifting left margin especially effecting a suspension of enjambment, they are still far from actual speech. And as the rest of the poem breaks down into an increasingly atomized syntax, a verbless series of phrases and fragments, we encounter a style that is even less fluent as speech. Yet this becomes the poem's most expressive medium, a scant, elliptical language, nevertheless convincing as a kind of colloquial mental shorthand, whose meaning, like that of most metonymic styles, depends almost entirely on external context.

Beginning, then, with a focus on concrete physical activity, the poem takes an increasingly inward direction as the speaker shifts his attention from what he is doing to what he is thinking, or at least to the impressions borne in upon him by the fire of small dead branches and by the more distant fire of the stars, Deneb and Altair. The grammatical indeterminacy of the last several lines – their syntactical discontinuity and freedom from pattern – becomes a rich way of registering the speaker's open and fluid state of mind, in which various elements and impressions – past and present, rock and fire, the immediately near and the cosmically distant – come together as a unity. Although the cadence of something like the classical cretic foot can be heard throughout the poem, in such phrases as "white-bark pine," "twisted bough," "twice as old," and "windy fire," it is not meter but grammar and syntax that constitute the poet's means of estab-

lishing and varying from pattern. The pattern here is the complete or nearly complete sentence, a form expressing ordinary consciousness and the self's ordinary construction of reality, though the poem barely establishes this form before losing it. As the lines at the end of the poem break up into isolated phrases and fragments that never come together to form grammatical wholes – as those at the beginning of the poem do – they become its intensest signs of inwardness and of awed, silent perception, a subordination of word order to a larger order outside language. We are given not a completed thought, but the fragmented elements, the basic ingredients, of one. Only the syntax is missing, and the poem implies that it is available, in a different form, outside the text, in the actual relations of things.

The poem, finally, is about that syntax, a reading or apperception of that external system of relations and correspondences. Thus “windy fire,” at the end, refers both to what is immediately present to the poet and to the cosmic source of fire beyond Deneb and Altair. In his effort to see the world as much as possible without language, Snyder's self-effacing style is perhaps the most appropriate means of calling attention to what he clearly regards as a “perfect whole” – and his reticence here is his version of yielding himself to it.⁵⁵

It is also a means of approaching, if not quite approximating, the language of nature, based on the assumption in Sampson Reed, for instance, that the speech of things, so to speak, has been drowned out by human speech or conventional language. The less we say, in this conception, the greater our chance becomes of hearing nature's voice. Emerson calls for a similarly ascetic procedure for the renewal of our understanding of the language of nature:

A life in harmony with nature, the love of truth and of virtue, will purge the eyes to understand her text. By degrees we may come to know the primitive sense of the permanent objects of nature, so that the world shall be to us an open book, and every form significant of its hidden life and final cause. (SW, 202)

In the next chapter I shall consider the language of nature as a romantic theory of language, a theory that implicates Chinese to the extent that it suggests, to a writer like Abel-Rémusat, for instance, the possibility of a language utterly transparent to reality, a language in which arbitrary alpha-

betical symbols, signifying sounds rather than things, do not interpose themselves between mind and world. It is not implausible that Emerson, who was familiar with some of the works of Abel-Rémusat and Marshman, may have been guided in his own thinking about language by this understanding of Chinese.⁵⁶ Indeed, it has been suggested that this was the case.⁵⁷ What I want to argue, however, is quite the opposite: that it was precisely the romantic conception of language, with its strong Adamic tendencies, that led to the notion of Chinese as a link with or even a survival of an original language of things themselves.

Chapter Two

Emerson and the Language of Nature

REFERENCES to the “language of nature” or the “rhetoric of things,” or to uses of language in which words aspire to become one with things, occur frequently in Emerson’s essays and journals and may be taken as a sign of what Richard Poirier sees as Emerson’s total obsession with language, an obsession whose consequences for literature far outweigh its significance for linguistics.¹ Emerson’s importance as a theorist of language, in fact, lies not so much in the originality or profundity of his thinking as in the expressive power of some of his formulations of ideas about language. Thus, when he says that language is “fossil poetry,” or when he addresses the corruption of language in terms of a situation in which “a paper currency is employed, when there is no bullion in the vaults,” it is as if he is responding to his own sense that what the health of language requires is literature, which is to say the creation of “new imagery” (SW, 199), or what Pound calls “making it new.” Literature, and language too, we might say, are most threatened by the assumption that they already exist, or by the failure to exercise them creatively, and this is especially the case for a writer who demands, as Emerson does, “a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition” (SW, 186).

A logical starting-point for a discussion of Emerson and language, in any case, is certainly the romantic assumption about the unity of language and the world, even though in his writing this very assumption is often regarded with skepticism. Indeed, Emerson increasingly, and perhaps reluctantly, seems to concern himself with the status of language as discourse, as the expression of its own nature or reality, rather than the expression of nature itself. “The most accurate picture,” he writes as early as 1837, “is only symbols and suggestions of the thing but from the nature of language all

remote,"² whereas in *Nature*, just a year before, words are presented as "signs of natural facts" which point etymologically, their degree of abstraction notwithstanding, back to their original significations in the world of "material appearance" (SW, 197). Or, as Poirier puts it, because he "wanted to believe in the 'immediate dependence of language upon nature,' and that nature in America was as yet relatively unsullied, Emerson admitted only by fits and starts to a nearly contrary view which he felt just as strongly: that language was a cultural inheritance no one could escape, which not even the wilderness could escape" (RL, 30).³

What emerges from these contrary views is a broad question about the nature of language – whether, in fact, its "nature" is intrinsic to itself, so that language is a self-contained system, or whether it is ultimately identical with the world to which, in Adamic and romantic thinking, it more or less immediately corresponds. It is the latter possibility, consonant with the idea of a language of nature, that might be regarded as Emerson's official outlook, the commitment of the utopian or transcendentalist poet who mediates between his human audience and the realities of the universe. Indeed, this position is the one most readily discoverable in such major statements as "The Poet." The former possibility, on the other hand, the idea that language is "all remote" in its nature from things, is directly subversive of the official outlook and, as such, recommends itself to certain recent critics of Emerson, such as Poirier, Barbara Packer, and Julie Ellison, who find evidence throughout his work of a skeptical or ironic outlook, especially toward the romantic idea of unity between word and thing, and wish to use this evidence to discredit earlier views of him as a pure and optimistic transcendentalist who only later in life arrives at a position of doubt.⁴

My concern here, however, will not be with choosing one or the other of these possibilities as more authentically representative of Emersonian thinking. He would be less interesting if he were *not* caught up in the problematics of the relations among consciousness, language, and nature, as Packer's study shows and as Poirier suggests when he asserts that "Emerson is interesting and important not for any solutions proposed by his aphorisms, but for the trouble and contradictions into which his aspirations put him" (RL, 30). My purpose instead is to inquire into some of the sources and implications of Emerson's thinking about language precisely as

it organizes itself around the vexing concept of a language of nature – a concept that Emerson, for all his ambivalence about the capacities of verbal discourse, never seems to abandon. It will be important for this inquiry to keep in mind, as well, the larger history in which Emerson's thinking unfolds – which is not simply that of the various perspectives (theological, philological, poetic) which may bear upon his ideas about language – but the history of the changing status of language itself, which Michel Foucault examines in his monumental *Les Mots et les choses*.

In the "Foreword to the English Edition" of this work, Foucault points out that he is interested not in a conventional history of ideas but in what he calls "a *positive unconscious* of knowledge," or the "epistemological space" in which certain kinds of thinking and discourse become possible.⁵ Accordingly, he calls attention, later in the book, to a new relationship between language and literature that begins to emerge early in the nineteenth century, one in which literature becomes for the first time the domain of language "in an independent form, difficult of access, folded back upon the enigma of its own origin and existing wholly in reference to the pure act of writing." It is in literature that one encounters language, in Foucault's conception, as "the untamed, imperious being of words," and in this form, enclosed within "a radical intransitivity," language ceases to function as a means of signifying the world "outside" it and becomes instead, "in opposition to all other forms of discourse," the affirmation of "its own precipitous existence" (300).

The condition of literature or of literary language that Foucault describes here seems close to what Emerson has in mind when he speaks of the "nature of language" as something from which things are "all remote." While Foucault's distinction between literature and language, or his notion of the "imperious being of words," may be foreign to the style of Emerson's thinking, the idea of language as the embodiment of its own nature was certainly available to him in several traditions of linguistic thought, including some ancient rhetorical ones.⁶ It is not the independent and radically intransitive "nature of language," however, that Emerson is interested in pursuing. His concern as a writer is not with language as a philological object but, in a sense, with transcending language altogether, or at least with approximating what he believes to be the natural expressiveness of things. "Self abandonment to the truth," he declares at one point, "makes

words things" (JMN, IV, 428), and the goal of such abandonment is the language of nature, the possibility of a discourse transparent to the world, based on the notion of the world itself *as* discourse.

Emerson's quest here is grounded in the conviction that the world itself is meaningful and that its meaning constitutes a truth prior to language (what Jacques Derrida critically designates a "transcendental signified") which can nevertheless be represented accurately by language. If there is a transcendental signified, then nature for Emerson is its signifier, and what is at issue is not so much the idea of a language of nature as the extent to which, if at all, this language is continuous with or translatable into the terms of human language. As he puts it in his journal in 1840, "Ah! that I could reach with my words the force of that rhetoric of things in which the Divine Mind is conveyed to me day by day in what I call my life" (JMN, VII, 488).

At the same time, it is equally clear that Emerson is haunted by the idea of language as the embodiment of its own reality and fearful, perhaps, that he becomes the means or agent of this embodiment when he writes. This is to be, in Emerson's own terms, not the transparent eyeball, his metaphor for the privileged state in which continuity between mind and nature is realized, but the "ruin or the blank, that we see when we look at nature, [which] is in our own eye" (SW, 189, 221). It is also to be, in terms of intellectual history, caught between linguistic traditions. Emerson's thinking, like that of Fenollosa and Pound later on, is at odds with the advanced linguistics of his time, and it tends to move, at the prompting of aesthetic and spiritual desire, more in the direction of what Hans Aarsleff, with the Adamic doctrine in mind, calls "linguistic mysticism."⁷

Ultimately I am suggesting that Emerson's thinking constitutes the beginning of a quest in American literature for a new form of poetic speech, a quest continuous in many ways not only with a movement like imagism but with the modernist interest in Chinese as a potential model for such speech. Here I want to look carefully, if not exhaustively, at a variety of Emerson's remarks about language in an attempt to define some of the most important sources, contexts, and implications of his thinking. I shall argue that it is not as a linguistic theorist but as someone engaged in what Foucault calls "the pure act of writing" that Emerson seems both to discover his deepest insights into the nature of language and, perhaps for that

very reason, to experience his greatest longing or nostalgia for the language of nature.

WHAT IS MOST ESSENTIAL to Emerson's thinking about language may already be contained in the three-part formula which he placed at the beginning of the chapter on language in *Nature*:

1. Words are signs of natural facts.
2. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.
3. Nature is the symbol of spirit.

Emerson's point here is that nature is "the vehicle of thought" (SW, 197), which is to say that nature provides us with a medium, not only of words but of things, that gives us access to spirit or truth. The logical structure of the formula, moreover, implies an unbroken movement from words through nature to spirit, although the shift from "signs" in the first proposition to "symbols" in the next two is a noticeable indication of discontinuity and difference. There are, in fact, two languages here rather than one. Nature is itself a language – even, apparently, the original language – and it is one in which "particular natural facts," or things, symbolize an ultimately spiritual reality, so that "Nature is the symbol of spirit." But there is also human language, whose arbitrary and conventional character, in the Lockean view, Emerson acknowledges by speaking of its words as "signs" rather than as "symbols" of the "natural facts" they represent.⁸ This distinction between signs and symbols is Coleridgean, insofar as the symbol, for Coleridge, is always "a part of that which it manifests." What distinguishes the language of Shakespeare, in Coleridge's view, from ordinary speech, for example, is that it is "rather more symbolic than arbitrary – more symbol than sign – and accordingly it works to induce that original, primitive condition of mind in which word and world appear to constitute a luminous and undifferentiated whole" (*Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, 53–4). The question is, to what extent are these human and natural languages compatible with or translatable into each other? Can the force of the rhetoric of things be replicated in a language of words?

In *Nature*, Emerson draws not only on Locke and Coleridge but on the work of two Swedenborgian writers, Sampson Reed and Guillaume Oegger. At the Harvard commencement of 1821, Emerson heard Reed (1800–

80), one of the leading American disciples of Swedenborg, deliver an oration on "Genius" in which the young graduate seems to have been struck not only by Reed's anti-Lockean pronouncements but by his remarks on the progress of poetry.⁹ From its "first rude effusions," says Reed, poetry has now attained to a level of perfection "where words make one with things, and language is lost in nature," a formulation that Emerson was to remember and in part reproduce in his journal some ten years later. The idea in itself, of course, is anti-Lockean in the sense that Reed's argument concerns the divine origins of language (and of human culture in general), and thus the extent to which language expresses the real properties of things, as opposed to the insistence in Locke that it reflects only the processes by which ideas and concepts are built up in the mind. An adequate history of the arts, according to Reed, would show not that they have been invented by humanity but that they "have been taken from nature by human invention" (60).

The same is true of language itself. Although Reed does not specifically address the origins of human or verbal languages here, it seems clear that their sources for him lie in the elements and sounds of the natural world, which constitute a language of things that precedes human language. Thus there is no ultimate opposition between the arts and reality, between culture and nature. If poetry in its highest state of perfection presents the loss of language in nature, this is so because language and nature were originally a unity. In a charming passage near the end of his oration, Reed suggests what this primordial language of nature was like:

Adam and Eve knew no language but their garden. They had nothing to communicate by words; for they had not the power of concealment. The sun of the spiritual world shone bright on their hearts, and their senses were open with delight to natural objects. In the eye were the beauties of paradise; in the ear was the music of birds; in the nose was the fragrance of the freshness of nature; in the taste was the fruit of the garden; in the touch, the seal of their eternal union. What had they to *say*? (63)

In certain of its details, this passage looks forward to the beginning of Emerson's *Divinity School Address*, where a purely sensual response to the natural world is similarly shown to be fully informed by spiritual significance, and where Emerson's summertime landscape is equally governed by

a silence that yields not one word of explanation.¹⁰ What is most important in the passage, though, is Reed's identification of language with the garden itself. Communication by words, as he puts it, has no role to play here, since the garden is a place in which things exist in the fullness of their physical presence, and that presence is immediately intelligible. Saying, as it were, is displaced by being, and there is no need for words, in the sense of signs for things, because all things are in the open, unconcealed, "saying" themselves. Indeed, Reed here anticipates Archibald MacLeish's famous poem "Ars Poetica," in which we are told that a poem should not *mean* but *be*, a "modernist" sentiment which is only a more extreme version of the Poundian dictum "Go in fear of abstractions" and which calls, like Reed's oration, for a "wordless" poetry and for the dissolution of language in things.

Reed's thinking here (and, more obliquely, Emerson's as well) is informed by an interpretation of the story in Genesis of Adam's naming of the animals that diverges from the traditional account. According to the orthodox version, as John Irwin explains, "God gave Adam the power to impose phonetic names on the animals as a mark of the dominion over the earth and its creatures that God had granted to man." In the alternative account, however, "God gave Adam the power to read the ideographic 'names' of the animals in their physical shapes," or to perceive the essence of each creature in its God-given form. In both accounts, as Irwin suggests, the creation of the world may be figured as an act of writing, each created object constituting a "word" in nature's text. Thus the language of things or of nature is the original language and is prior to human language, no matter how the latter is conceived. But it is with respect to human language that these two accounts of Adamic naming differ most significantly. In the orthodox interpretation, speech precedes writing, since the animals remain unnamed until Adam pronounces their names. But in the alternative account Adam reads the names that are already "written," as it were, in the bodies of the animals, so that what Adam pronounces is secondary to, although based upon, the original language or script of things themselves, which is Emerson's language of particular natural facts, or "things which are emblematic" (SW, 197). As Irwin puts it, Adamic naming in this alternative interpretation "is not the archetypal imposition of a spoken word for each object but rather the appropriation of God-given natural forms

into a language of signs, gestures, and pictures – a human language that is continuous with the language of nature because its elements are borrowed from that language” (*American Hieroglyphics*, 33).

Reed’s most substantial work, however – *Observations on the Growth of the Mind* (1826) – seems to insist more on the difference between the language of nature and human language than on their continuity. Here he asserts unequivocally that “There is a language not of words, but of things,” and elaborates upon this idea by presenting his own notion of natural signatures and by exploring some of the consequences of what he sees and deplors as their neglect. “When this language [of things] shall have been made apparent,” he writes,

that which is human shall have answered its end; and being as it were resolved into its original elements, will lose itself in nature. The use of language is the expression of our feelings and desires – the manifestation of the mind. But everything which is, whether animal or vegetable, is full of the expression of that use for which it is designed, as of its own existence. If we did but understand its language, what could our words add to its meaning? (54–5).

Things, according to this passage, are “full of the expression of that use for which [they are] designed, as of [their] own existence.” They both are and mean, so that to exist is also to signify. Thus the mere presence of things, like the garden for Adam and Eve, constitutes a language that renders human speech redundant, superfluous, a pointless doubling of the world – unless, of course, we need words because “we are unwilling to hear” (55) and have lost the ability to read things directly. For Reed, in fact, the need for words is a sign of human corruption, even of the fall, and what he calls our “deafness” to nature has resulted in a situation in which we “find the animal world either in a state of savage wildness, or enslaved submission,” a perversion of Edenic harmony. As he puts it, “man has abused his power, and has become insensible to the real character of the brute creation; still more so to that of inanimate nature, because, in his selfishness, he is disposed to reduce them to slavery” (56). For Emerson the “corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language” (SW, 199), a state of affairs which is figured in *Nature* by an image of economic or fiscal and social disorder. For Reed a similar state of affairs, caused by human “selfishness,” a deliberate alienation from the world, results in “slavery,” by which he

means a distortion of the original relationship between the human and the natural and a breach in the chain of being – although it is hard to imagine that “slavery,” in the minds of both Reed and his readers, would not also have summoned up the human institution and the contemporary debate about it, especially in Boston, with its growing abolitionist agitation against what many saw as the most serious violation of a divinely sanctioned human order.

We can see here, in any case, a crucial difference between Adam and Eve and post-Edenic humanity. What Reed imagines as Adam and Eve’s world of pure intelligibility seems to belong to a time before the invention of human language altogether. In Reed’s conception, Adam and Eve have nothing to say, we may hypothesize, because they have never spoken, and they have never spoken because they live in a world in which all things are immediately present to them – whereas speech, as we might put it, arises only when things are absent, so that the void left by what *was* present is filled by meaning, by the word. Commenting on Hegel’s version of Adam’s invention of language – a version in which, through his imposition of names on the animals, Adam is conceived by Hegel as having “annihilated them in their existence as beings” – Gerald Bruns points out that, by his speech, Adam “annihilated the immediate presence of the world and in its place established a mediating or ideal presence – the word” (*Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, 191).

The invention of human language is thus, again, a kind of fall, introducing absence, or what Reed calls “the power of concealment,” into the garden, and, in doing so, disrupting the harmonious continuity between Adam and Eve and their world. For Reed, in fact, verbal language *is* the power of concealment, not only in the precise sense that it provides Adam and Eve – disastrously, to his mind – with a means of referring to what is not present, but also in the sense that after the fall it is associated with their impulse to cover their newly discovered nakedness. As John Irwin suggests, Adam and Eve’s sudden awareness of their nakedness may be understood as the birth of self-consciousness, or what Reed calls “selfishness” – their sense of their own difference or separateness after they eat the forbidden fruit and become conscious of themselves as beings apart from each other and from their environment – a condition which is paralleled linguistically by the shift from a language of things to one of words or signs for things

(*American Hieroglyphics*, 34). And although, as Bruns notes, the fall represented by the invention of language may be a fortunate one, "in the sense that man is by this means abstracted from the life of the senses and situated in a world of meanings" (*Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, 191), we may suspect that Reed, as a Swedenborgian looking forward to the New Jerusalem and despising philosophy as "an eternal barrier to the truth" (63), would resist such abstraction so that there might be instead a recovery of a world without words, a world in which communication depends more on the immediate presence of things than on the mediation of verbal language.

Reed's thinking, clearly, like that of most theorists of the language of nature, is biased against ordinary language and animated by a desire to return to some mythic condition of "speech" before the fall of the word into its own sphere, its differentiation as a signifier from what it signifies. "It is because we are unwilling to hear," he writes,

that we find it necessary to say so much; and we drown the voice of nature with the discordant jargon of ten thousand dialects. Let a man's language be confined to the expression of that which actually belongs to his own mind; and let him respect the smallest blade which grows, and permit it to speak for itself. Then may there be poetry, which may not be written perhaps, but which may be felt as a part of our being. (55)

Like the language thinkers of the seventeenth century, Reed is also concerned to repair the ruins of Babel, to redeem the curse of "ten thousand dialects." Most radically defined, his conception of such a project seems more apocalyptic than rational, in the sense that it involves not a regularizing or reinvention of language to free it from error – for Reed, after all, verbal language *is* the error – but an ultimate dissolution of language in things themselves, a kind of liberation of the word from its material form as written or even spoken utterance so that it can take on spiritual form as "the voice of nature."

This project requires both Emersonian self-reliance and a Whitman-like regard for "the smallest blade which grows." The result will be a language which Reed calls "poetry," and although he admits, significantly, that it "may not be written," it may still be "felt as a part of our being," and is thus evidence of our own unity with nature. At the same time, Reed

is rational enough to respect the human need for a language of words, so long as it remains within its own sphere and does not distort or interfere with the speech of things themselves. In these terms, language becomes a compromise or interplay between the expression of the mind and a reverent responsiveness to the voice of nature, though it seems clear that the bias in Reed's thinking is against human speech.

It should be just as clear, on the other hand, that this bias is not shared by Emerson, or at least not to the same degree, especially when he inscribes his own version of Reed's idea, in terms that significantly alter it, in his journal in 1831. "In good writing," he says, "words become one with things" (JMN, III, 271). Here, remembering Reed's phrasing in the oration on "Genius," but more concerned with language as a medium of creative expression than with its apocalyptic displacement by nature, Emerson transforms Reed's vision into a stylistic ideal, the pursuit of an effect in discourse, not unlike the eighteenth-century pursuit of linguistic energy, defined by Aarsleff as a "creative means of overcoming the inadequacy of words" (Humboldt, *On Language*, liv-lv), or what I referred to earlier as an alternative to language within language.

Emerson, of course, as Packer argues, struggles with his own "deep skepticism about the capacity of language to embody truth," a skepticism which is reflected in some of the rhetorical strategies of his essays themselves (*Emerson's Fall*, 1). Not only is language remote from truth for Emerson, says Packer, pointing to a passage in *Nature* (SW, 207) – it is hostile to it, since words, in their helplessness to cover its dimensions, can only "break, chop, and impoverish" the truth (quoted in *Emerson's Fall*, 5). Yet it is precisely this situation of remoteness and hostility that calls for rhetorical strategies and linguistic effects designed to circumvent it, and that makes the language of nature so attractive to Emerson, despite his recognition of its mythic or prelapsarian status. At one point in his journal, for instance, he seems to recoil sharply from Reed's notion of unity between word and thing, even as he proposes that "suggestion," as opposed to "telling," is a more likely means of conveying truth in discourse:

The aim of the author is not to tell truth – that he cannot do, but to suggest it. He has only approximated it himself, & hence his cumbrous embarrassed

speech: he uses many words, hoping that one, if not another, will bring you as near to the fact as he is.

For language itself is young & unformed. In heaven it will be, as Sampson Reed said, "one with things." Now, there are many things that refuse to be recorded, – perhaps the larger half. The unsaid part is the best of every discourse. (JMN, V, 51)

Curiously, in his "Song of the Rolling Earth," Walt Whitman seems to echo Emerson when he writes, "I swear I see what is better than to tell the best,/It is always to leave the best untold" – although the context of these lines, in a poem originally titled "Poem of the Sayers of the Words of the Earth" in the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, is one in which Whitman is expressing his own bias against human speech in favor of a language of nature. "I swear I begin to see," he also says, "little or nothing in audible words,/All merges toward the presentation of the unspoken meanings of the earth."¹¹ To say the unsaid, to tell what cannot be told: such is the virtually oxymoronic problem to which the language of nature, or an alternative to language within language, is the equally oxymoronic solution. For how, we might ask, at the risk of overly literalizing the issue, is such a language possible? How can words become one with things and remain functional as words, remain writing?

To ask such questions is to wonder, with Barbara Packer, just what the assertion about words becoming one with things is actually supposed to mean. One answer, of course, as we saw earlier, is the deliberately literal one offered by Swift in his account of the project at the School of Languages at Lagado to replace words with bundles of actual things. Another, which comes perilously close to Swift's, although it is seriously intended, is Ernest Fenollosa's hypothesis that "Thinking is *thinging*." But what the assertion "usually suggests to native speakers of English," Packer points out, approaching it in a more practical way,

is that good writing is writing in which words of Anglo-Saxon derivation are substituted for words derived from French and Latin, and simple nouns are preferred to poetic periphrases. That, at any rate, is what determination to achieve a "natural" or "thinglike" language has meant to every generation of linguistic reformers in English or American literary history from the Puritan opponents of "carnall eloquence" down to Pound and the Imagists.

But it is not simply a matter of reinvigorating language, as Packer puts it, “by returning it to its native roots” (*Emerson’s Fall*, 4). What is called for is something more like a process of reinventing language altogether, of making it new, or of somehow reviving “the remote time when language was framed,” when, in its “infancy,” “it [was] all poetry” (SW, 197, 199), although Emerson’s complicating pun on “infancy” here suggests that this was a time when language could not speak. The important idea, however, as Emerson implies more fully in “The Poet,” involves the restoration of what he imagines as the primary use of language, since “language is made up of images, or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin.” Restored to their primary use, these images will remind us once again of their poetic origin; or, short of that, the poetic origin of *new* words or images, at least, should be readily apparent.

Thus Emerson invokes the figure of the poet as “the Namer, or Language-maker,” an Adamic figure who names things “sometimes after their appearance, sometimes after their essence . . . giving to every one its own name and not another’s.” Always originally poetic, language functions on its highest levels when it is freshly creative and newly created. As Emerson explains, “though the origin of most of our words is forgotten, each word was at first a stroke of genius, and obtained currency, because for the moment it symbolized the world to the first speaker and to the hearer” (SW, 316). What matters here, in “The Poet,” is not only the poetic origin or status of language but the fact that the new word brings both its speaker and hearer into direct and vital relationship with what it signifies, and thus with each other, in a way that, though momentary, powerfully reveals or provides access to “the world,” creating a seemingly indelible impression. Indeed, this is why the word obtains currency, although when it does it falls into a historical process that leads to the loss of its power. Perceiving this, Whitman notes in his *Primer of Words* that “A characteristic word once used in a poem, speech, or what not, is then exhausted.”¹² Yet the process, as Emerson also suggests, is renewable. Language may be “a sort of tomb of the muses” (SW, 316), and “Every word was once a poem.” But we are “far from having exhausted the significance of the few symbols we use,” and “Every new relation is a new word” (SW, 314).

Emerson seems to have been encouraged by the otherwise obscure

figure Guillaume Oegger, French Catholic priest and Swedenborgian philosopher, to assume that original poetic thinking and language could be recovered. Oegger's major work is *Le vrai Messie, ou l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testaments, examinés d'après les principes de la langue de la nature* (1829). This was translated, in part, by Elizabeth Peabody and published in 1842 as *The True Messiah; or, the Old and New Testaments Examined According to the Principles of the Language of Nature*, which Emerson had a chance to see in manuscript as early as 1835. It was Oegger's specific project here not only to offer a correct reading of the Bible but to work his way back to the language of nature in which, he insists, it was written. To understand the language of nature, in fact, is to possess the means of an inevitably correct reading, for it is an ultimately divine language of material objects that are the necessary emblems of what they signify – and what they signify, as Oegger puts it in the passage that Emerson quotes in *Nature*, are “the substantial thoughts of the Creator, which must always preserve an exact relation to their first origin; in other words, visible nature must have a spiritual and moral side” (SW, 202). Thus the universe in its entirety is a text, or an “immense alphabet,” and everything in it is a significant letter or emblem.¹³ Originally, moreover, as Reed also implies, this text, nature itself, was the only language. “Primitively,” says Oegger, “men could not name objects, they must show them” (II, 92). And, he reasons, “the fewer conventional words people had, the more they needed natural emblems; and when they had no conventional terms at all . . . then they had absolutely nothing but emblems in their language.”

Hence, in a manner similar to that described by several earlier theorists of the origins of language, including Locke, Vico, and James Harris, the language of nature lapses (or grows) into the languages of convention as names for ideas displace vivid images or emblems of things themselves – a process of development toward increasing abstraction.¹⁴ Oegger points out, however, that human beings have preserved the emblems of nature “in their speech without knowing that they really belonged to a distinct language” (II, 91). The passage from the original language to all later ones, in fact, was “insensible,” and those who made it, Oegger remarks, “knew not the road they had traveled,” although their distance from their origins, once they became aware of it, appeared striking (II, 92).

But before the process of change completed itself, in Oegger's view, there was an interesting period, essential to his overall idea, in which conventional words and natural emblems coexisted. He describes the entire process in the following terms:

When that primitive faculty of seeing and showing the immediate object of thought, and the natural emblem of sentiment was weakened, then, only, exterior signs came to join it. Thence the language of gestures . . . which at length introduced conventional sounds, and all exterior signs, such as are still found among the deaf and dumb; and, finally, those offered by hieroglyphics and writing the Scripture. At the epoch when the two manners of speaking (that by natural emblems and that by articulate sounds) were mixed, then resulted the language which is now called prophetic or extatic, in which conventional words are used only to recall the more significant emblems of nature. (II, 92)

It is in this double or "mixed" language, as Oegger refers to it, that the Bible is written, so that the Bible becomes not only a bilingual text to be interpreted but the means of interpretation, a hermeneutic guide to or dictionary of the language of nature, to be used in the manner of a Rosetta Stone. The interpreter, that is, relies on a knowledge of conventional language to decipher the natural emblems which occur alongside it. And although languages are now entirely conventional, they themselves, as we have seen, still contain traces of the language of nature, since they are "necessarily derived from it" (II, 87) – a point suggesting that our present languages can also be used as tools for the recovery of original speech through etymological analysis.

It was just this point, in fact, made by Locke, Vico, and eighteenth-century theorists generally, that raised hopes about the use of etymology as a systematic method for undoing the inevitable progress of language toward abstraction and for tracing the origins of language and culture in general. It was also this idea that invited the prodigious efforts of pure speculation (criticized by the philosopher Dugald Stewart as "etymological metaphysics") undertaken by Horne Tooke toward the end of the century.¹⁵ Emerson himself seems to have been attracted by these experiments, and includes some etymologizing of his own in *Nature*.¹⁶

Although Oegger's interests, as Philip Gura observes (*The Wisdom of*

Words, 87), are narrowly theological, more so even than Reed's, he speculates in much greater detail than Reed does about the origins and evolution of language and does so in ways that seem informed by eighteenth-century traditions of linguistic speculation, traditions that begin with Locke and Vico and extend through Condillac and Rousseau. His primary source, to be sure, is Swedenborg,¹⁷ but Oegger mentions Rousseau (II, 84) and otherwise seems to rely in his thinking about language on assumptions (which he adapts to his own purposes) that were in general circulation by the beginning of the nineteenth century. One such assumption is the notion that language was originally poetic, in the sense that it was entirely metaphorical, a form of expression based on the combination of names for common sensible ideas, or what Oegger calls "natural emblems." In this language, as Emerson puts it in *Nature*, "all spiritual facts are represented by natural symbols" (SW, 199), and this is necessarily the case because originally language consists of nothing but such symbols or emblems. The use of metaphorical expression, in other words, is imposed upon primitive speech by the very limitations of its own linguistic resources, a point made by Vico, who is usually associated with another widely accepted idea (which we shall soon encounter in Emerson), that the poetic or figurative quality of primitive speech is the result of strong feeling.¹⁸

In his own account of the historical evolution of language, one which assigns distinct types of linguistic practice to successive periods of social and cultural development, Vico provides the sort of schema that seems to underlie Oegger's, although it is much more detailed. Beginning with "a mute language of signs and physical objects having natural relations to . . . ideas," he proceeds to the speech of the "heroic age," which is all figurative, consisting of "emblems, or similitudes, comparisons, images, metaphors, and natural descriptions," and ends with the arrival of "human language," which uses "words agreed upon by the people." Vico's human language is conventional language, a rationalized social discourse which is "proper to the popular commonwealths and monarchical states." It is a language of abstractions, or names for concepts which were once designated by things themselves used metaphorically. The metaphorical or poetic status of the original designations is now quite hidden, although it is recoverable by means of etymological analysis.

Later in *The New Science*, Vico explains how the figurative speech of the heroic age evolved into human language:

For after the poets had formed poetic speech by associating particular ideas . . . the peoples went on to form prose speech by contracting into a single word, as into a genus, the parts which poetic speech had associated. Take for example the poetic phrase, "the blood boils in my heart," based on a property natural, eternal and common to all mankind. They took the blood, the boiling and the heart, and made of them a single word, as it were a genus, called in Greek *stomachos*, in Latin *ira* and in Italian *collera*.¹⁹

Although there is nothing in Vico's outline that corresponds to what Oegger calls "prophetic or extatic" speech, the latter can be understood, in Vico's terms, as a transitional language, one that emerges before the associated emblems or particular ideas of heroic speech have all been reduced to concepts represented by single words, or even before the full formation of poetic speech, through the association of particular ideas, has been completed. Oegger's "prophetic or extatic" speech is thus a language in which one encounters not only articulate conceptualizing but also, and predominantly, the primitive, unassociated natural emblems which constitute the basic units of poetic speech. One can, indeed, watch this language take shape, although it sometimes seems to express what Oegger finds to be strange and monstrous ideas.

"To understand the Bible, therefore," as Oegger explains,

it is not enough to understand the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin, or any other idiom into which it is translated; but it is necessary also to understand the language of nature; for the sacred writers, primitively, borrowed from the language used in their times, only the words necessary to retrace the natural images which speak of themselves. Hence those strange things found in the prophets, which have so much shocked superficial philosophers; those monstrous images, uniting the discordant members of many different animals; for, in speaking of collective societies, or of different traits of moral character in the same individual, the prophets were forced to amalgamate primitive emblems, and to form of them compounds, such as are remarked, principally, in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Saint John. All that was entirely in the genius of the language of nature, and, consequently, in the essence of things; and to ridicule the animals, the horns, the wheels covered with eyes, of the prophets, the

white horse of the Apocalypse, is like those ignorant beings who laugh when they see Chinese writing or Egyptian hieroglyphics. (II, 92)

Oegger's point here, of course, is that the language of nature is symbolic, a metaphorical system of representation or speaking in images which he links, significantly, to Chinese writing and Egyptian hieroglyphics. To understand it, he assumes, is to have a means of rationalizing the visionary or the outlandish in primitive thought, and of bringing the incomprehensibly other or radically exotic inside the horizon of civilized awareness and knowledge.

Although Oegger exposes Emerson, however obliquely, to the tradition of eighteenth-century European linguistic speculation – or reinforces the exposure to it Emerson seems already to have had in Locke, Hugh Blair, and Horne Tooke – both Oegger and Reed, as Philip Gura suggests, are important to Emerson primarily because they offer him “a compelling alternative to the language of rational discourse” and suggest that “there was more meaning to [words] than was readily apparent” (*The Wisdom of Words*, 88). To read these writers is to experience words or language suddenly undergoing an expansion of meaning, and to realize that we are always saying more than we mean or know or intend to say. This is clear in Emerson's brief exercise, in the chapter on language in *Nature*, of tracing several words, commonly used to express moral or intellectual ideas, back to their sensible or material significations in the “text” of physical nature. It is also clear in his assertion that “good writing and brilliant discourse are perpetual allegories” (SW, 200). Viewed from this perspective, rational discourse can appear to be alienated from the true depths of language. There is, in other words, a language within language, the direct and essential speech of things themselves, which ordinary speech or civilized discourse has obscured and all but repressed. This language within language is what Fenollosa was to see in Chinese writing, and he taught Pound to see it as well, leading him ultimately to introduce ideograms directly into *The Cantos*, where they function as the right names of things.

TO CALL THINGS by their right names, John Irwin observes, “means to call them by their original names” (*American Hieroglyphics*, 29), and to do so is to return to a true and natural state of affairs before language, regarded as

the power of concealment or abstraction, disrupts the direct relationship between the self and the world. Such an assumption operates most elaborately in the linguistics of Horne Tooke (1736–1812), whose etymological investigations, as Robert Essick argues, are motivated by an explicitly political purpose – namely, to wrest control of language away from the educated or ruling classes. Assuming that these classes have gained their intellectual, moral, and political authority partly through a process of attributing abstract meanings to originally natural signs – and that they maintain themselves in power through a sort of discursive control, or sheer linguistic sophistication – Tooke’s aim is to expose and undermine this process by returning language to its origins in “sense experiences available to all social classes” (*William Blake and the Language of Adam*, 63). Insisting that meaning is origin (60), and that all words are rooted in the names of things and events in nature, Tooke’s position is that social divisions based on language differences violate both the universality of experience and the language that originally represents it.

Though not always taken up or acknowledged as explicitly political, in the manner of Tooke, the assumption that meaning, or *true* meaning, is origin is nevertheless shared by all the writers in this study. For Pound, for instance, it is a key element in the literary politics of imagism, clearly visible in his promotion of Ford Madox Ford’s commitment to “an exact rendering of things,” a commitment that led Ford, as Pound puts it, to “strip words of all ‘association’ for the sake of getting a precise meaning.”²⁰ It is equally present in Gary Snyder’s work – not only in his Poundian use of etymologies as part of the substance and texture of his poems but in his promotion, for example, of the term “Turtle Island” as “the old/new name” of the North American continent. The importance of this name, Snyder points out, lies in the way it allows us to “see ourselves more accurately on this continent” with respect to its actual history (predating the arrival of Europeans), its bioregional and geological character, and its cultural composition. The problem with the “‘U.S.A.’ and its states and counties,” on the other hand, is that they are “arbitrary and inaccurate impositions on what is really here.”²¹

Emerson too, of course, especially in the chapter on language in *Nature*, is keenly alert to the “fraud” that language can perpetrate, the perversion

of words "to stand for things which are not," and he calls for a return to the primary use of language, or the fastening of "words again to visible things," since "picturesque language is at once a commanding certificate that he who employs it is a man in alliance with truth and God." Assuming that the power to connect "thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it," depends on the "love of truth" and the "desire to communicate it without loss," Emerson here sees human corruption or failure, as opposed to the possibility that language itself is problematic, as the cause of linguistic breakdown (SW, 199–200).

Thus it is the responsibility of the individual writer or speaker to bring his or her words into close contact with things, whose certainty and stability underwrite the meaning of the signs that represent them. Emerson shows that he is practicing what he preaches here by using the image of "a paper currency . . . when there is no bullion in the vaults" to portray the situation he is describing: the erosion of meaning in words that have lost their "power to stimulate the understanding or the affections."²² What he invokes is a linguistic version of the gold standard, an economy in which the value of currency is fixed and guaranteed by the bullion in the vaults that it stands for. In such an economy currency itself is "a commanding certificate" that it truly signifies what it claims to represent. A corresponding language would be an isomorphic one of the kind described by Thomas Sprat as "the primitive purity and shortness, when men deliver'd so many *things* almost in an equal number of *words*" – and such a language, supposedly, is only a step away from an even more powerfully natural one, the sign languages employed by American Indians, which were often regarded in the nineteenth century, in accord with prevailing assumptions about primitive languages, as grammatically deficient but virtually unmediated as forms of communication.²³

Yet if Emerson finds such semantic stability desirable, it is nevertheless the fixed quality of the sign in relation to the signified in such a language that seems to be at odds with what he goes on to describe – an energetic, spontaneously creative discourse which allows for the invention of new imagery, or new ways of using old words – in short, a primary use of language which offers the possibility of novel and therefore powerfully effective representations of the world. In one of the most characteristic

passages in the chapter on language, Emerson suggests the extent to which the sort of energeic or impassioned speech that he has in mind parallels Oegger's conception of nature as the creative language of God:

The moment our discourse rises above the ground line of familiar facts, and is inflamed with passion or exalted by thought, it clothes itself in images. A man conversing in earnest, if he watch his intellectual processes, will find that a material image, more or less luminous, arises in his mind, contemporaneous with every thought, which furnishes the vestment of the thought. Hence, good writing and brilliant discourse are perpetual allegories. This imagery is spontaneous. It is the blending of experience with the present action of the mind. It is proper creation. It is the working of the Original Cause through the instruments he has already made. (SW, 200)

As in Vico, Hugh Blair, and other writers, passionate speech for Emerson is naturally, even automatically, poetic. A repetition in some ways of the "transparent eyeball" episode earlier in *Nature*, what this passage describes is the transcendence of language, a condition in which expression achieves its own transparency, so that the "action of the mind" can be seen through the "experience" that mediates it. Rising "above the ground line of familiar facts," language here transcends its usual condition as mere words, or language in its secondary use, in order to take on, again, its original unity with things, or material images. This is not a return to primitive speech so much as a recovery of the process by which language was framed, a recapturing of the experience of the first speakers, who had nothing but natural facts from which to derive their words. In an earlier version of the passage, Emerson writes that even "in our artificial state of society the moment our discourse rises above the ordinary tone of facts . . . it immediately clothes itself in images," so that despite social and linguistic progress good writing, we might say, is inevitably "primitive" and always, in effect, a return to origins.²⁴

Elsewhere, however, Emerson acknowledges that such writing occurs only rarely. Several passages in his journals attest to its transcendent nature but also emphasize its uncommonness and even its resistance to verbal embodiment. In an entry of 1835, for example, in which Emerson describes not *language* but *thought* in terms of the unity of word and thing, he nevertheless insists upon the infrequency of such unity. "By & by comes a

word true & closely embracing the thing," he writes. "That is not Latin nor English nor any language, but *thought*" (JMN, V, 51). "Whilst we contemplate," he says in the same journal, "we are infinite; the thought we express is partial & finite" (JMN, V, 30), affording, at best, a reductive or fragmentary glimpse of the truth.²⁵

The best-known passage of this kind is probably the one that appears in "The Poet," where Emerson declares that "poetry was all written before time was, and whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warblings, and attempt to write them down, but we lose ever and anon a word, or a verse, and substitute something of our own, and thus miswrite the poem" (SW, 309). Hence, as we saw earlier, "The aim of the author is not to tell truth – that he cannot do, but to suggest it," and suggestion here constitutes Emerson's concession to the fallen nature of both language and humanity, as well as his only means of approaching, let alone approximating, the language of nature. In such passages, however, he also seems to doubt the possibility of any ultimate rapprochement between that language and human speech.

Suggestion, after all, also calls for a receptive or creative reader who can fill in the gaps in the text for him- or herself, which is what Emerson's style often invites the reader to do. To concede to the fallen nature of language is to acknowledge or accept its power of concealment, which becomes, at the same time, the possibility of meaning. If for Reed's Adam and Eve understanding is a matter of the immediate presence of things, for Emerson it calls for the hermeneutic labor of decipherment and interpretation, or what he calls "creative reading" (SW, 229), a task aided and encouraged by the suggestiveness of the writer's text. Thus, what lies in concealment, the "unsaid part . . . of every discourse," may at least be approached – not as presence but as meaning – through the reader's creative or interpretive response. This response, however, may introduce hazards of its own.

STILL, Emerson never seems to have wavered in his conviction that nature is a language, although it is one which always remains to be learned. For it is not a language of grammatical elements, of nouns and verbs, so much as the expression of the unity of things, the "perfect whole" of "Each and

All," the totality of the world figured as a coherent text. Rightly seen, as Emerson himself puts it, nature "is not merely a language, but the language put together into a most significant and universal book. I wish to learn the language not that I may know a new set of nouns & verbs but that I may read the great book which is written in that tongue" (JMN, IV, 95). In this sense, the language of nature is not available to human speakers for communicative purposes. It is a language to read only, a language to be interpreted or decoded but in which we cannot speak, a unilateral form of discourse that allows for no response. As a text, that is to say, nature is a discourse that imposes itself upon its reader, who can do nothing but passively take it in. Thus Emerson, unlike Reed, seems to imagine it not as an alternative to conventional language but as a repository of the truth which actual speech can never fully embrace. "Ah!" as he exclaims in the journal entry quoted earlier, "that I could reach with my words the force of that rhetoric of things in which the Divine Mind is conveyed to me day by day in what I call my life." By "rhetoric of things," Emerson means the orderly, intelligible world of "material appearance," the physical presence of nature that constitutes the expression of the divine mind. But the force or energy of such rhetoric would seem to be unavailable to words precisely to the extent that words break apart the unity of an originally undifferentiated nature in order to reduce it to the needs of a human discourse of categories and distinctions. Even in *Nature*, as we saw earlier, words for Emerson can "break, chop, and impoverish" the truth.

The return to origins in linguistics is always countered by the progress of language, and the notion that such progress is the result of a continuous process of analysis seems to underlie Emerson's thinking here. To speak of language in terms of categories and distinctions is to evoke, for example, Coleridge's version of this idea, which he calls "desynonymizing," his suggestive term for the historical process by which language (regarded as originally homogeneous, so that all words are equivalent or interconnected) develops into a system of discourse capable of all "the niceties of cause and consequence, division and exception"²⁶ – a language with which to think about and analyze the world rather than one with which to express the force of experience directly. Coleridge conceives of desynonymizing as "the natural progress of language in civilized societies,"²⁷ a movement toward refinement and precision of expression governed by general use and

by the continuous introduction of semantic differences. Implicit in the notion of desynonymizing is the idea of an originally unified utterance, "a single universal Word," as Gerald Bruns puts it, "that subsumes all meanings" and that corresponds to the undifferentiated totality of nature (*Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, 58). A desynonymized language, therefore, is a language of differences, of nouns and verbs, subjects and objects, and other "parts" of speech that cannot help but misrepresent the continuity and wholeness of nature even as it makes possible the analytic thinking of philosophy and civilized discourse.

A roughly similar view of linguistic development is offered by Jeremy Bentham when he writes that the formation of "the words of which language is at present composed has been the work of analysis. The original sentences were, as it were, broken down into words, these words into syllables, and these syllables, by the help of written and visible signs, into letters" (quoted in *From Signs*, 168). Bentham's "original sentences" are conceived, in fact, as single words with the expressive force of whole or complete statements. To this extent, they correspond to Coleridge's idea of an originally homogeneous language.

In romantic thinking, the idea of desynonymizing often seems to serve the purpose not of achieving a more accurate understanding of how language evolves and operates but of establishing the aesthetic, epistemological, and even moral primacy of primitive forms of speech, and in a few instances this purpose has its preromantic adherents as well. "Eighteenth-century speculation," Stephen Land writes, "produced two principles as possible explanations of the formal development of language from a collection of primitive sounds to a highly articulated system: the principle of metaphoric extension first found in Vico, and the notion of progressive analysis performed upon a primal event-name or one-term propositional equivalent" (*From Signs*, 74). It is the latter of these two principles that is relevant here, since desynonymizing may be understood precisely as "progressive analysis," and since those theorists in whose work the principle emerges all seem committed, like Coleridge, to the idea of some sort of primal resemblance between language and nature, or to that of the original dependence of linguistic form upon the structure of the natural world, a dependence that breaks down as language, responding to the needs of more sophisticated thinking, becomes more abstract and more systematic.

Accordingly, such figures as Condillac, Adam Smith, Lord Monboddo, and Herder, despite their differences, all assume that language originates as a virtually nongrammatical, undifferentiated equivalent in sound of direct perception. "The early inventors," Herder remarks, "wanted to say everything at once," and relied upon the "dictionary of nature," as opposed to any grammatically ordered expression, to do so.²⁸ Their words, therefore, tended to be equivalent to whole propositions, each individual utterance encompassing the totality of an event or an entire field of perception, and these propositions, highly complex in themselves, were not only one-term but one-time, since changing circumstances in the world would call for wholly new expressions. As Land puts it, "in the absence of any categorical schema to classify events there would seem to be no reason to suppose that any word would ever occur twice" (*From Signs*, 71).

The notion that such speech is superior to languages of greater formal and syntactical development is based on the idea that the very formality and logical precision of modern languages somehow violate the events or perceptions they are supposed to represent by imposing upon them an artificial structure of grammatical categories and distinctions. Adam Smith, for instance, in his *Considerations concerning the First Formation of Languages* (1767), justifies his preference for a primitive language of propositional terms on grounds that are naturalistic and ultimately aesthetic, reasoning that the most natural expression is that which most directly corresponds to empirical reality and that empirical reality does not present itself to us in categories. Thus, to say "Alexander walks" is to divide a single event "into two parts" and is "altogether artificial," a judgment that seems to be informed by the Royal Society's ideal of "so many *things* almost in an equal number of *words*" and that looks forward to Fenollosa's antipathy toward systematized grammar (*From Signs*, 85-6).

The beauty of language for Smith lies in its conciseness, but what also seems to be anticipated here is the idea, in modern linguistics, of iconicity, or the possibility of resemblance between language and the world, based on C. S. Peirce's definition of the icon as a type of sign which resembles what it represents. Such a conception, of course, exceeds the seventeenth-century ideal of an isomorphic relationship between words and things. While words for Peirce are most often not icons but arbitrary symbols, Roman Jakobson, drawing upon Peirce's definition, has argued that lan-

guage is capable of a kind of iconicity in the sense that plural word forms, for example, are often simply longer than singular ones, the increased length reflecting the greater number of things represented by the plural form.²⁹ This sort of resemblance between language and what it signifies seems close to what a theorist like Smith has in mind, since his thinking seems to be informed not only by objections to prolixity and what he sees as the needless amplification of discourse in modern analytic languages but by a desire for a mimetic balance between events and their expression – a desire that seems to culminate in Peirce's theory of signs and particularly in his notion of the "diagrammatic" nature of the sign, wherein, as Michael Shapiro puts it, "the relations of the parts of a thing are represented by analogous relations in parts of the sign itself."³⁰ To the extent that language is capable of such diagramming or iconicity at all, it would seem to occur most fully in poetry, where several varieties of verbal patterning, as Antony Easthope has shown, can be exploited to create resemblance between expression and the phenomena it represents (*Poetry as Discourse*, 104–6). One may think, in this connection, not only of the many local effects of onomatopoeia or of sound echoing sense in Pope's verse, but of the recent "concrete poetry" movement, in which poems are both texts to be read and arrangements of words in visually significant shapes and patterns on the page.

What is of interest here as well is the extent to which romantic and postromantic poets attempt to revive the language that Smith and Herder imagined primitive humanity to speak. The idea of "one-term propositional equivalents," for example, seems to be reimaged by Hart Crane when he posits a hypothetical poem that would constitute "a single, new *word*, never before spoken and impossible to actually enunciate." This new word, evocative of "certain spiritual illuminations, shining with a morality essentialized from experience directly, and not from previous precepts or preconceptions,"³¹ is not unlike an original relation to the universe. What it bespeaks is a primitivist desire not only to reverse the historical process of linguistic development, but to see poetry itself as the enactment of such a reversal.

GENERALLY SPEAKING, then, the language of nature may be characterized as less a language, less a form of speech, than a kind of *writing*, a pure script, as well as the display, what Emerson calls the "self-registration," of a har-

monious order, and it is “addressed” to us not as conversational or communicative discourse but as a performance, the self-display of the presence of things, which we “read” by seeing. In the essay on Goethe in *Representative Men* (1850), Emerson offers the following description of this natural writing:

Nature will be reported. All things are engaged in writing their history. The planet, the pebble, goes attended by its shadow. The rolling rock leaves its scratches on the mountain; the river its channel in the soil; the animal its bones in the stratum; the fern and leaf its modest epitaph in the coal. The falling drop makes its sculpture in the sand or the stone. Not a foot steps into the snow, or along the ground, but prints in characters more or less lasting a map of its march. Every act of the man inscribes itself in the memories of his fellows, and in his own manners and face. The air is full of sounds, the sky of tokens, the ground is all memoranda and signatures, and every object covered over with hints, which speak to the intelligent.³²

On the showing of this splendid passage, there is little or nothing that is not a text, though the sign-systems in which things are encoded seem as various as the things themselves. As Emerson’s own expanding catalogue of terms for natural signs suggests – “shadow,” “scratches,” “channel,” “bones,” “epitaph,” “sculpture,” and so on – this notion of a universal natural writing demands a wide range of reading abilities and is based on a very broad concept of the sign – one that acutely raises the problem of interpretation.

On close inspection, moreover, the behavior of these natural signs seems to differ little from that of their counterparts in conventional language. Like actual writing, that is, natural writing seems equally an archive or a tomb, in the sense that its signs are almost all literally fossils – bones, epitaphs – tokens less of the presence of things than of their absence or past, *memento mori*. The “sculpture” of nature seems inescapably funerary. And if, like all writing, as Derrida has argued, nature’s “self-registration” is characterized by *différance*, by a gap between communicative or representational intention and the actual capacity of signs to convey what they signify, or equally by a gap between such intention and the understanding of any particular reader, then even though every object may be covered over with

hints "which speak to the intelligent," there is no guarantee that those hints will communicate an absolute or unitary meaning. To speak of signification at all, as Emerson does, is to call attention, Derrida would say, to the difference (as well as *différance*) between signs and things.³³ For Emerson himself, on the other hand, it is precisely the *naturalness* of the natural sign, the fact that the thing that signifies is so close to the thing itself as to be virtually identical with it, that raises it beyond the arbitrariness of ordinary language. Nature's engagement in the writing of its history, so to speak, is exactly the same as nature in the act of being nature, so that saying (or signifying), as in Reed, converges with being. This is why Emerson insists, in "Each and All," on keeping things in their own original contexts. Such anchoring will prevent natural signs from falling prey to the indeterminacy of all conventional sign-systems.

Can the thing that signifies, however, also be the thing itself? This is to raise once again the question of how words can become one with things and remain words. And, as the example of "Each and All" suggests, once removed from its place in the syntax of things, an object will lose much, if not all, of its signifying power. To regard nature as a text to be read, it would seem, is inevitably to remove it from its own meanings, as well as to defer those meanings, to displace them into a future where, it is hoped, they will eventually be revealed, or to see them as past and, if not beyond recovery, then certainly difficult of access.

Emerson's attitude toward the possibility of such ultimate revelation, despite the irony of his remark against Reed that only in heaven will language be one with things, is sometimes optimistic. "Every object," he writes in a journal of 1838, "suggests to me in certain moods a dim anticipation of profound meaning, as if by & by it would appear to me why the apple tree, why the meadow, why the stump, stand there, & what they signify to me" (JMN, VII, 98). On the other hand, he had occasion to experience the blankness of nature, the absence of meaning, without the promise of any ultimate revelation, as though, in its transformation into a text, nature were reduced to a set of empty signs, signifiers cut adrift from what they signify. In a remarkable journal entry of 1840, for instance, Emerson records the experience of going into the woods and finding himself "not wholly present there," which seems a direct contradiction of the

famous account early in *Nature*, where to go into the woods is to encounter one's truest self. In the journal entry, by contrast, even nature is hard to locate:

If I looked at a pine tree or an aster, *that* did not seem to be nature. Nature was still elsewhere: this or this was but outskirts & far off reflection & echo of the triumph that had passed by & was now at its glancing splendor & heyday, – perchance in the neighboring fields, or, if I stood in the field, then in the adjacent woods. Always the present object gave me this sense of the stillness that follows a pageant that has just gone by. It was the same among men & women as among the silent trees. Always it was a referred existence; always an absence; never a presence & satisfaction. (JMN, VII, 392)

This passage reappears, revised and considerably depersonalized, in the essay “Nature” (1844), where Emerson, in an almost teasing way, deliberately raises provocative questions about the elusiveness, seductiveness, and mocking character of nature as “something that leads us on and on, but arrives nowhere, keeps no faith with us.” Like much of experience in general, including language, nature here provides “not satisfactions, but suggestions” (RWE, 244), and its promise never tallies with its performance – an idea that should not, perhaps, be surprising in a book that opens in one mood, with “The Poet,” and continues, in quite another, with “Experience.” Although these attitudes, in the essay, are projected onto the reader rather than specifically acknowledged as the speaker's, in both essay and journal nature fails to embody its own meanings and appears, for once, no more privileged than any other system of signs. Yet Emerson, it seems clear, wants it both ways. He wants nature to be a language, but he also wants it to serve as a solution to the problem of language, or as a model of the ideal language, one in which the continuous falling away from things, from meaning defined as absolute presence, which is characteristic of conventional languages, is reversed.

But if the language of nature is essentially a form of writing that cannot be used directly for human communicative purposes, a more practical question is raised, and that is, what role, if any, can such a language play with respect to conventional discourse? As we have seen, Emerson's interest in nature as a language lies primarily in the extent to which it provides an idea or model of order, a way of figuring the coherence of the world,

rather than a "new set of nouns and verbs." From this point of view, writing in which words become one with things can be understood as the attempt to imitate nature's self-registration not at the lexical level but at the level of overall structure or form. The poet can write like nature, that is to say, insofar as the formal design of his discourse pursues a natural order, nature's own organic harmony, as opposed to more straightforward kinds of logical or literary structuring, and what this involves is not only the idea of the meter-making argument in verse but what Lawrence Buell calls the "buried outline" (among other structuring possibilities) of Emersonian argument in the essays as well, a deliberate avoidance not of unity or wholeness per se but of the more overt and traditional rhetorical strategies for achieving it.

In defending Emerson against the charge of formlessness or lack of control, Buell points out that he derives the structures of his essays from several different models of natural order, and that these provide "intimations" of form rather than the sense of a formula being adhered to or a pattern being applied to material that may well have a pattern of its own.³⁴ Emerson's thinking on this point seems close to the Coleridgean distinction between "form as proceeding" and "shape as superinduced," and it calls for the transposition of the argument about organic form in "The Poet" from verse to prose.³⁵ Indeed, as David Porter remarks of "The Poet," Emerson's defense of his poetry can be regarded as the defense of his prose,³⁶ and if this is true, then we can speak not only of the organic poem but of the organic essay, one animated and shaped by effects analogous to those in the "rhetoric of things" which Emerson "reads" in actual landscapes:

We feel – do we not? – that every one of those remarkable effects in landscape which occasionally catch & delight the eye, as, for example, a long vista in woods, trees on the shore of a lake coming quite down to the water, a long reach in a river, a double or triple row of uplands or mountains seen one over the other, – and whatever of the like has much affected our fancy, must be the rhetoric of some thought not yet detached for the conscious intellect. (JMN, VII, 405)³⁷

Like all organic approaches to writing, Emerson's clearly involves the risk of formlessness, the very failing with which his work has often been charged. But it also reflects a trust in the essential form or shapeliness of

experience itself, so long as it can be accurately reproduced by the writer. It is "Self abandonment to the truth," we should remember, that "makes words things," and in the passage just quoted it is not only the notion of landscape as rhetoric that is important but the implication that it is the destiny of such rhetoric to become intelligible as conscious thought, to assume an order and a meaning, finally, in human understanding. The language of the passage recalls that of other passages, particularly in *Nature* and "The American Scholar," that deal with the theme of the conversion of life into truth, or experience into thought, which Emerson regards as a "strange process," and describes in transcendental and aesthetic terms:

The new deed is yet a part of life, – remains for a time immersed in our unconscious life. In some contemplative hour, it detaches itself from the life like a ripe fruit, to become a thought of the mind. Instantly, it is raised, transfigured; the corruptible has put on incorruption. Henceforth it is an object of beauty, however base its origin and neighborhood. (SW, 230–31)

Like the "new deed," effects in landscape also await translation into significance, which is to say the fulfillment of a virtually linguistic or semiotic process by which an object is revealed to be a sign whose meaning will also be (but "not yet") revealed. As Emerson puts it in the introduction to *Nature*, where he uses an explicitly linguistic figure, "Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put. He acts it as life, before he apprehends it as truth" (SW, 187). For Emerson, again, any object or experience is a potential "word" or "sign," and understanding is reading, recognizing the linguistic or semiotic nature of a thing and turning it into meaning, an object of consciousness. Again, too, the function or condition of a thing *as* a thing can never fully coincide with its function as a sign, so that to turn the world into language is to forfeit the possibility of immediate experience – even though (or because) what Emerson also suggests is that it is our own thought that we encounter in nature – that in looking at a landscape we are looking at the world of our own mind in its own original language, an idea that anticipates Gary Snyder's assertion about the ultimate identity of wilderness and ego, of nature and mind.³⁸

Yet the process of revelation or translation is neither irreversible nor final. For Emerson, as many of his critics have pointed out, all is change,

metamorphosis. "The divine circulations," he tells us, "never rest nor linger," and what has become readable as language will be material form again:

Nature is the incarnation of a thought, and turns to a thought again, as ice becomes water and gas. The world is mind precipitated, and the volatile essence is forever escaping again into the state of free thought. Hence the virtue and pungency of the influence on the mind, of natural objects . . . Every moment instructs, and every object: for wisdom is infused into every form . . . we did not guess its essence, until after a long time. (RWE, 247)

TO WHAT EXTENT, we may ask finally, is the idea of a language of nature, and particularly Emerson's version of it, consistent with or related to an understanding of Chinese? It has been argued that Emerson might have discovered some of his ideas about language in early nineteenth-century orientalism, and I want to consider this possibility early in the next chapter. For the moment, we might just say that despite its suggestiveness, the evidence for any deep or sustained interest in Chinese on Emerson's part is slim, and that my theme here has been precisely the extent to which his thinking is fully accounted for by European linguistic traditions – although, as we have seen, Chinese is already quite fully implicated in these traditions by the time Emerson receives them.

Yet, in the absence of any direct causal relationship between Chinese and Emersonian thinking, what is of interest here is the way in which his linguistic speculations prepare the ground for the discovery, in Fenollosa and Pound later on, of a fertile connection or compatibility between Chinese, regarded as a primitive, natural language, and a revitalized language for Anglo-American poetry in the twentieth century – a discovery which renews and extends a perennial tendency in the West to mythologize Chinese and to see in its written characters a concrete alternative to abstract Western discourse. As we shall also see in the next chapter, however, renewed recognition of Chinese as a model for Western discourse, poetic or otherwise, was largely blocked through much of the nineteenth century by a counter-mythology of language, in the powerful guise of linguistic science, which virtually denied that Chinese was a language at all.

Chapter Three

Character Assassination

Representing Chinese in Nineteenth-Century Linguistics

How then will we revive the dead language of nature? Through pilgrimages to Arabia Felix, through crusades to the Orient and the restoration of its magic.

– J. G. Hamann (1762)¹

DESPITE the intuition, or romantic nostalgia, of a figure like Hamann (for whom the Orient, in any case, was not necessarily China), the path between Emerson's language of nature and the identification of Chinese as a version or revival of it was not a straightforward one. Indeed, through most of the nineteenth century, the notion of Chinese as in any sense an ideal or privileged language is unlikely to be found. But accurate, unprejudiced understanding seems almost equally hard to come by. According to Raymond Schwab, author of the magisterial *La Renaissance orientale*, Western knowledge of China, let alone of Chinese, remained largely superficial even after the establishment by Abel-Rémusat of a legitimate sinology in 1811.² Despite its long history in Europe, says Schwab, China "had been too much represented by folding screens, porcelains, and banalities" (6). Yet the growing sense of connection, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, among notions of human origins, the Orient, and the idea of a natural language often identified with poetry, would ultimately, in the work of Fenollosa, claim Chinese as one of its most powerful expressions. In the romantic period, Schwab points out, "nothing worked more in favor of the rediscovery of the Orient . . . than the clarion calls to the skill of an infallible Nature as against the artifice of the classics" (210). By the time

Fenollosa took up the study of Chinese – the last frontier, so to speak, in the Western appropriation of the Orient – the appeal of “an infallible Nature” was still very great, inasmuch as what Chinese represented to him was a “natural” alternative to all Western logic and abstract systematizing.

It has been suggested, as we have seen, that Emerson himself might have arrived at some of his ideas about language, particularly his notion of it as “fossil poetry,” as a result of seeing Chinese characters and reading about them in contemporary accounts of the language. Aside from essays and reviews in periodicals and the works of Sir William Jones, Donald Murray cites some of the more specialized texts that Emerson is likely to have read, including Joshua Marshman’s translation of Confucius, his dissertation on Chinese grammar, and some of the works of Abel-Rémusat. What is most striking to Murray is the clear parallel that he sees between Emerson’s ideas about language and Western explanations of the structure of written Chinese. As an example, he offers Sir William Jones’s remark that the earliest Chinese characters “were originally . . . PICTURES . . . of visible objects, or figurative signs for simple ideas,” an observation which is in perfect accord, as Murray sees it, with Emerson’s assumption that “As we go back in history, language becomes more picturesque.” “It is not impossible,” says Murray, that Emerson “drew some inspiration” from such statements “when he formulated and reiterated through the years his theory of language.”³

While Fenollosa’s essay on the Chinese written character, however, may certainly be regarded as Emersonian, in the sense that it is an account of the language of nature in which that language is identified with Chinese, it is probably a mistake to read Fenollosa back into Emerson, as Murray seems to do. I would argue not that there might be a cross-cultural influence at work here, reflecting some actual encounter between a Western writer on the one hand and an oriental language on the other, but that Emerson’s entirely Western assumption about the primitive concreteness of language is essentially discovering another version of itself in the equally Western notion or representation of Chinese writing as figurative signs for ideas.⁴ We find ourselves here, most likely, not in a realm of facts, where one can speak confidently about analogies between positive features in different cultures and languages, but in a realm of representations, a realm in which what is “true” or “natural” or “real” (especially with respect to

a radically different culture) is more often than not displaced by an image or concept in the mind of an interested observer.

To argue this way is to adopt the perspective of Edward Said's telling study, *Orientalism*, which is predicated upon the general belief that "what is commonly circulated by [a culture] is not 'truth' but representations."⁵ And nowhere is this more the case, as Said (following Schwab and Foucault) shows, than with regard to Western knowledge of the Orient. Thus I am not so much rejecting as reformulating Murray's argument in accord with Said's account of orientalism as a Western enterprise whose object, a whole range of languages, cultures, and texts belonging to regions "outside" but facing the West, exists more as an idea, a product of orientalism's own discourse, than as a reality in the world. As Said puts it, the Orient became an object of Western study, or was "Orientalized," in part "because it was discovered to be 'Oriental'" (5) – discovered, that is, to be in conformity with images of the Orient already created in (and so native to) the West. In this sense, the "Orient" is largely an invention or fantasy, a concept that derives from a desire – sometimes a virtually paranoid impulse – to mark differences and define boundaries, to create not only the Orient ("them") but the West ("us") as well.

With regard to the possibility that Emerson was inspired by Chinese in his own theorizing about language, I am suggesting that this may have been precisely the case – although it seems necessary to add the qualification that what constituted his inspiration was not Chinese *an sich* (in T. S. Eliot's phrase) but an idea of it that was largely nourished by Western thinking about language, an idea, indeed, that was already his own. Said, commenting on certain orientalizing poets (Byron, Goethe, Hugo) whose techniques of representation created the Orient for their readers, points out that "At most, the 'real' Orient provoked a writer to his vision; it very rarely guided it," and this was true because "Orientalism responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object, which was also produced by the West" (22).⁶

While the evidence for Murray's main supposition, then, is largely circumstantial, and while my own assumption is that Emerson had no need to venture outside Western linguistic traditions to find either support for his ideas or the ideas themselves (although Chinese is already implicated in these traditions from at least the seventeenth century on), what is never-

theless interesting about Murray's argument is that it *becomes* true, so to speak, in the work of Fenollosa, where Emerson's language of nature, or a version of it, is more or less explicitly "discovered" in Chinese writing. Thus Chinese comes to serve not only as an embodiment of the language of nature, transforming it into a usable system of signs, but serves also as a model for the restructuring and revitalization of English, enabling it to recover its own capacities for authentic, poetic speech.

Even as Emerson, however, was supposedly finding validation for his own thinking about language in Chinese characters, Western recognition of Chinese as a natural or transparent sign-system, or indeed as privileged or ideal in any way, was encountering serious obstacles in the form of the new historical or comparative linguistics taking shape, primarily in Germany, in the early nineteenth century. The irony here is that at the very moment of the emergence of linguistics as an autonomous field, and of the pursuit of the ontology of language per se, a new system of linguistic classification arose which granted little if any value to certain languages while vastly privileging others.⁷ My subject in this chapter, therefore, is not the emerging awareness of Chinese as an untainted, naturally poetic language, but rather the misapprehension of Chinese, or more accurately the misfortunes of its misrepresentations, in the developing and increasingly hegemonic tradition of European linguistic thought in the nineteenth century.

Chinese, of course, has always been, for the West, a primary example of linguistic otherness. Since at least the seventeenth century, according to Hans Aarsleff, it has stood as "a sort of linguistic test case" – testing the abilities of its observers to accommodate its otherness and to look beyond their own ethnocentrism, or otherwise functioning as a challenge to Western ideas about language in general (*From Locke*, 322). Robert Morrison, for a negative example, writing in the second decade of the nineteenth century in a tone of distinct skeptical annoyance, points out that the Chinese have no alphabet, a fact which foils efforts to learn the language according to what for him are the perfectly logical methods dictated by alphabetical languages, in which the student may start with letters representing basic sounds and then proceed to syllables and words. By contrast, the Chinese character "presents nothing to the eye by which its pronunciation can be ascertained. It attempts to communicate the meaning re-

ardless of the sound. How far it succeeds, and whether this advantage, if really possessed, equals or overbalances the obvious defect of not conveying the sound, must be determined by those who are masters of Chinese as well as of an alphabetic language, and so able to make a fair comparison.”⁸ Given the alphabetical prejudice which shows through these remarks, it is hard to know what to conclude about their author’s intentions and qualifications. Either he is *not* a master of Chinese, which raises questions about his authority to write a book entitled *View of China for Philological Purposes*, or he is simply exposing his prejudice, his own inability to make a fair comparison.

Still, from the very beginnings of modern awareness of Chinese, in the late sixteenth century, its authority and fascination for the West lay largely in its writing, the apparent closeness of its written signs to empirical reality. And this authority seems to have survived even the new attacks upon Chinese in the nineteenth century as a barrenly mechanical language, one whose arrested development is plainly visible (to an influential group of German philologists, at least) in its monosyllabic, uninflected structure. It is these attacks that are my subject here, especially to the extent that they constitute what are essentially (mis)representations of Chinese formulated for specific, often ideological, purposes.

AS A SUBDIVISION of orientalism (which in Said’s emphasis is a geopolitical as well as a cultural and textual phenomenon), sinology begins to come into its own as an academic discipline in the first half of the nineteenth century, helped, no doubt, by the enormous surge of Western interest in all things oriental that was perceived at the time as a new renaissance. “Suddenly,” Said remarks, “it seemed to a wide variety of thinkers, politicians, and artists that a new awareness of the Orient, which extended from China to the Mediterranean, had arisen.” Included within the scope of this awareness was a newly accelerated interest in a whole range of Eastern languages and a fresh sense of the political relationship between East and West whose most important stimulus was Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 – “an invasion which was in many ways,” Said observes, “the very model of a truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another, apparently stronger one” (42).

Strictly speaking, however, the notion of an oriental renaissance prob-

ably refers most specifically to the discovery and decipherment by Europeans of mainly Sanskrit texts – activities more or less initiated by Sir William Jones and the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784.⁹ To be sure, Jones's announcement two years later that Sanskrit, along with Latin, Greek, and the Germanic languages, constitute a linguistic family, may be taken not only as the founding gesture of modern linguistics but as the inauguration of European Sanskrit studies and what was to be a more broadly conceived oriental philology in the nineteenth century. Before this period, the term "Orient" most often meant the Islamic lands of the Near East, long a region of anxious concern to Christian Europe (*Orientalism*, 74–5). But with the opening of India to scholarly investigation, the Orient began to take on new proportions, expanding eastward and providing the West with a startling new sense of its own cultural and linguistic origins. Friedrich Schlegel's *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*, published in 1808, is a key text in the history of these developments, and one of the first to insist on their status as a renaissance (Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, 13).

In general, interest in Chinese also grew during this period, although it tended to lag behind other branches of oriental studies. "Because of its loftiness, and its sheer size," Schwab remarks, "Chinese thought remained the most difficult peak for Europe to scale," and it "would be the last to be studied" (6). By 1850 all the major European universities had initiated programs in at least one of the orientalist disciplines (usually Islamic or Indo-European, however, rather than Chinese). And although the first academic chair of Chinese in Europe was established as early as 1814 (at the Collège de France, where it was assumed by Abel-Rémusat), Chinese generally had to wait much longer to receive similar recognition elsewhere. Indeed, the fact that it had to wait until 1875 to enter the curriculum at leading universities in England (Oxford) and the United States (Yale) testifies to its somewhat marginal status in the general upsurge of interest in an Orient more often defined as Indian or Arabian through most of the nineteenth century. Organized sooner on the Continent, perhaps because of the large number of Chinese texts that had been collected by Jesuit missionaries and housed at the Bibliothèque du Roi in Paris (which held some five thousand volumes by the 1750s), the study of Chinese seems nevertheless to have been hampered even in France by its fabled difficulty,

a topic addressed by Abel-Rémusat in his inaugural lecture. "China's linguistic instrument," as Schwab puts it, "appeared in a formidable solitude, bewildering the mental habits of the West, rendering the problem of equivalences among languages almost absurd, and refusing to allow its closed system to be drawn into the comparative school" (6).¹⁰

Moreover, the very emergence of an oriental renaissance focused largely on India, and the enthusiasm for Sanskrit that led Schlegel to predict a new revival of learning based on "the language and wisdom of India," may have posed the most serious obstacle of all to the study of Chinese. The enormous prestige of Sanskrit as, if not the original Indo-European language, then the closest to it in structure, seems to have encouraged unfavorable comparisons with other languages, especially Chinese, and the two, in fact, were often played off against each other. Abel-Rémusat took note of this opposition in 1827, pointing out that "two celebrated Asian languages, one remarkable for the perfection of its system, the other for the apparent poverty that characterizes it, have begun to be studied with more care and success."¹¹

Indeed, for Schlegel, who seems to have originated it, as well as for others in the German school of comparative philology, this opposition became both a theme and a strategy for the study of language. As a result, Chinese was assigned a place in the "lowest grade" of languages, below even those whose grammar is formed "not by inflection, but by the addition of particles"; whereas Sanskrit, according to Schlegel, offers "the best example of perfect simplicity, combined with the richest artistic construction."¹² Moreover, to the extent that Chinese is entirely monosyllabic, and the monosyllables are "perfect in themselves, and independent of the root," Schlegel comes close to suggesting that it has no grammar at all, since there is no addition or annexation of particles to the roots themselves (448). Therefore, it may even fall below the languages of the lowest grade. While it serves a useful function, "facilitating the comprehension of other languages" (447), Chinese is thus virtually banished from consideration as a linguistic medium of any real interest or even viability.

Such judgments are based, ultimately, upon the ubiquitous romantic metaphor of organicity. What is organic or "alive" about Sanskrit and other highly inflected languages for Schlegel is precisely the plasticity or variability of their word forms, the ease with which their roots transform themselves

in order to perform different grammatical functions within a sentence or utterance. This quality attests to the "inner life" of a language, its almost biological capacity for growth and change, whereas Chinese appears rigid, lifeless, pejoratively primitive in the unchanging forms of its monosyllabic words, "each having an independent signification" (447).

In a sense, then, Chinese for Schlegel is *the* primitive language, although in this case primitivism is no virtue, revealing here not the strength of ancient origins but the weakness of an infancy that has failed to develop beyond its earliest stages. Yet at the same time, Schlegel does not imply that, given further development, Chinese might have attained to a higher status or a higher level of perfection. Although, as he puts it, the characteristics of the language were fixed "at too early a stage of their development" (by, paradoxically, "the highly artistic system of writing so early introduced"), development alone cannot carry a language to a status beyond that to which it is, apparently, destined in advance.

What determines the status or position of a language, with respect to the binary opposition between the two principal branches of language that Schlegel defines, is the nature of what he calls its "internal structure," and in his scheme of classification, there are only two kinds of language structures: those which are characterized by inflection, and those which are not. A noninflected language like Chinese, moreover, cannot change its character and become inflected. In Schlegel's "organic" linguistics, the character of a language is predetermined and unalterable. Hence, development for Chinese, had there been any, would have resulted not in a superior, which is to say inflected, language, but only in a more efficient version, perhaps, of what it already was, an inherently inferior language. Schlegel makes all this quite clear in a key passage in his chapter on the division of languages:

In the Indian and Greek languages each *root* is actually that which bears the signification, and thus seems like a living and productive germ, every modification of circumstance or degree being produced by internal changes; freer scope is thus given to its development, and its rich productiveness is in truth almost illimitable. Still, all words thus proceeding from the roots bear the stamp of affinity, all being connected in their simultaneous growth and development by community of origin. From this construction a language derives richness and fertility on the one hand, and on the other strength and durability. It may well be said, that highly organised even in its origin, it soon becomes woven

into a fine artistic tissue, which may be unravelled even after the lapse of centuries, and afford a clue by which to trace the connexion of languages dependent on it, and although scattered throughout every part of the world, to follow them back to their simple primitive source. (449)

Judging by this passage, one might say that there are not only two kinds of language but two kinds of linguistic development. In an inflected language like Sanskrit or Greek, the "living and productive" quality of each root enables a development of "freer scope" to take place, to an extent almost without limit. Such a language, Schlegel remarks, is "highly organised even in its origin," already mature, as it were, even in its infancy, so that the process by which it becomes "woven into a fine artistic tissue" is merely a matter of course, virtually self-generated, and not really subject to any external or worldly circumstance. In a word, it is organic. Such a language, in addition, through its almost masculine vigor and "rich productiveness," begets other languages which, "although scattered throughout every part of the world," may still be traced back to their parent through the "stamp of affinity," a kind of birthmark, signifying lineage or legitimacy, borne by their words. It is as if the role of the researcher, in this conception of comparative grammar as romance, is to tell the linguistic princes from the linguistic paupers and thus to preserve the purity and separateness of the language families.

This aim becomes especially clear when Schlegel turns his attention to the noninflected languages in a passage where his thinking takes on both the rhetoric and the moral quality of nineteenth-century racial theory and "Aryan" mythologizing. Unlike Sanskrit or Greek, he says, those languages in which the declensions are formed by supplementary particles, instead of inflections of the root, have no such bond of union: their roots present us with no living productive germ, but seem like an agglomeration of atoms, easily dispersed and scattered by every casual breath. They have no internal connexion beyond the purely mechanical adaptation of particles and affixes. These languages, in their earliest origin, are deficient in that living germ essential to a copious development; their derivations are poor and scanty, and an accumulation of affixes, instead of producing a more highly artistic construction, yields only an unwieldy superabundance of words, inimical to true simple beauty and perspicuity. Its apparent richness is in truth utter poverty, and languages belonging to that branch, whether rude or carefully constructed,

are invariably heavy, perplexed, and often singularly subjective and defective in character. (449–50)

Increasingly in the nineteenth century, as Said points out, language and race seemed inextricably tied (*Orientalism*, 99), and from the derogation of noninflected languages it is only a short step to the derogation of the people who speak them. In the passage just quoted, Schlegel's anthropomorphic terms suggest that these languages suffer from a variety of defects easily transferable to their speakers. They are unhealthy, poorly derived, without beauty, and lacking in productive vigor, despite "an unwieldy superabundance of words" – an apparent contradiction that anticipates later orientalist thinking, especially with respect to oriental sexuality.

Said exposes the mystified logic governing recent Arabist discourse, for instance, when he points to an unacknowledged antithesis in such discourse between the qualities, simultaneously ascribed to the Arabs, of overfertility and passivity, or of sexual aggressiveness and an ineptitude that ultimately renders such aggressiveness harmless. "An Arab Oriental," he writes, "is that impossible creature whose libidinal energy drives him to paroxysms of overstimulation – and yet, he is as a puppet in the eyes of the world, staring vacantly out at a modern landscape he can neither understand nor cope with" (312). On the one hand, according to the orientalist argument that Said deconstructs here, in terms of sheer numbers and generative potency the Arabs represent a potential danger, both sexually and politically. But on the other hand, in terms of concrete political or cultural achievement, they are unproductive and need not be taken seriously.

In a similar way, Schlegel appeals to the organic analogy, to the idea of what he calls "that living germ essential to a copious development," to deny the appearance of such a development in languages that he regards as defective. The "affixing" languages *appear* rich, in the sense of a coherent and organic profuseness; but in reality they are merely mechanical assemblages of particles "easily dispersed and scattered by every casual breath." In both cases, what seems productive and even threateningly powerful is exposed as weak and inconsequential, and the structural similarity of these arguments points to the possibility that there are, as Said suggests throughout his study, certain assumptions and habits of thought that have been part of orientalism from its very beginnings. The operative assumption here,

of course, concerns the inherent superiority of Sanskrit, regarded as the linguistic source of Germanic culture, in opposition to the noninflected languages spoken by inferior cultures. But Schlegel's terms also anticipate a broader orientalist outlook, one in which the East (whatever "East" it may be) is often imagined as backward, unordered, outside of history, and unable to define and pursue its own destiny – a region of ungoverned fertility in need of rational and creative, which is to say masculine and Western, control.

Schlegel's ostensible purpose, however – a purpose made possible by the very discovery of Sanskrit – is to achieve a new, scientifically objective description of language. What distorts that purpose, and produces his ethnocentric, even racist, subtext, is an overly literal approach to the organic conception of language, as well as a metaphorical, anthropomorphic style that converts the discrimination of linguistic features into moral and aesthetic judgments against certain languages and (by implication) their speakers. In any event, it is precisely the misplaced concreteness of this style – what the French linguist Michel Bréal saw as an abuse of metaphor characteristic of the entire German school of comparative philology – that would come under sharp attack during the period of what has been called "reorientation" in linguistics in the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹³ Rejected during this period is not only the doctrine of the autonomous existence of language but the idea of a direct correspondence between the supposed character of a language, in terms of the "richness" or "poverty" of its forms, and the cultural capacities of the people who speak it.

It should be remembered, too, that as "poor" and "defective" as the affixing languages are, Chinese, for Schlegel, can only be that much worse. Although he denies that his aim is "to exalt one chief branch of language exclusively, to the neglect or disparagement of the other," it is hard to feel that he is doing anything else, even when he allows that inflected languages can also suffer debasement as a result of negligence "and the admission of numerous dialects" (451). To acknowledge this point leads only to an even greater exaltation of the original, classical form of the language in question, whether it be German or Sanskrit itself, and it is the whole purpose of comparative philology, as Schlegel conceives it, to arrive at a reconstruction of that original form – not only, as he says, to achieve "an authentic history

... of the origin of language" (464), but to savor aesthetically the formal perfection of the original Indo-European.

As the terms throughout his text suggest, in fact, Schlegel's ultimate criterion for judging and classifying languages is aesthetic, and one consequence of the organic conception of language seems to be that languages themselves become works of art. The organic analogy, as Roger Brown points out, originally appeared in aesthetic theory, where it was used to describe both the nature and the productions of creative activity, and to this extent it is only to be expected that Schlegel, who was one of the first writers to think about language in terms of organic form, should try to account for the origin of language by comparing it to the genesis of poems and paintings. Like a poem or a painting, a language for Schlegel is a *whole*, not the result of a build-up of "atomistic parts," but present in its entirety, as an "ideal conception," from the very beginning.¹⁴ Of course, from Schlegel's perspective, some languages are more organic, more artfully constructed, than others, and his organic thinking seems complicated, or even confused, by his very sense of such differences, since one may argue that organicity is an absolute condition and not a matter of degree.

His thinking is rendered even more problematic by his reference, in passages about the perfection of Sanskrit, for instance, to its having been "woven into a fine artistic tissue," or to its "more highly artistic construction." To speak this way is to undermine, or even deconstruct, the *naturalness* of the organic conception to be conveyed – just as Emerson, in his account of the "metre-making argument" in "The Poet," speaks of "a thought so passionate and alive, that, like the spirit of a plant or an animal, it has an *architecture* of its own" (SW, 310; my emphasis).¹⁵ What starts out in such descriptions as an assimilation of culture to nature – of art and language to the world of living organisms – is returned to culture once again by metaphors that evoke cultural activities like weaving, architecture, and art itself. One may think, in this connection, of Polixenes' speech to Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, in which he asserts, with full consciousness of the paradox, that "the art itself is nature." The idea of language as organic, to this extent, is bound up with the whole vexed notion, in romanticism, of a natural art, or of an expressiveness that is natural in the sense that it is self-determining and unpredictable, so that any attempt at external control

can lead only to devaluation or falsification of its original character. Considered in these terms, language is already an extrahuman object, independent of its speakers.

In defense of the romantic concept of organic form and its use by Schlegel and others in the early nineteenth century (but writing from a perspective very much within the same tradition), Ernst Cassirer remarks that

It would be unjust to suppose that the designation of language as an organism was a mere image or poetic metaphor. Pale and vague as this term may seem to us today, Friedrich Schlegel and his epoch formed a very concrete picture of the position of language within man's spiritual life as a whole. The Romantic concept of the organism did not refer to a single *fact* of nature, a specific, limited group of objective phenomena, with which, it is true, linguistic phenomena can be compared only very indirectly and inaccurately. For them, the "organism" signified not a particular class of phenomena, but a universal speculative principle.

This idea, Cassirer continues, "bridged the chasm that seemed to divide the unconscious growth of nature from the conscious creation of the spirit," and thus assumed a "general systematic significance" in romantic thinking, providing a way of resolving paradox rather than generating it. Later, however, in the work of August Schleicher, organicism ceased to be a speculative concept, or what Cassirer calls "a mediation between opposite extremes, so that it appeared to partake of the nature of both," and became a more purely scientific concept. Along with this change, language itself became the object of scientific or empirical research, an "organism" on the biological model, and linguistics, separate now from philology (defined by Schleicher as the study of spiritual and cultural life *through* language), became, virtually, a natural science.¹⁶

THE ORGANIC NATURE of language, and the notion of it as a work of art, continued, in the meantime, to be important elements in romantic linguistic thinking, especially in the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt, often regarded as one of the most original theorists of language in the nineteenth century. "It may be," says George Steiner, "that Humboldt derived from Schiller his emphasis on language as being itself the most comprehensive work of art."¹⁷ It is equally possible, of course, that he derived this notion

from Schlegel, with whom, and with Franz Bopp, he studied Sanskrit in London in 1816 or 1817 (*Oriental Renaissance*, 179).¹⁸ For Humboldt, however, language is not, in any simple or conventionally romantic sense, a natural or transparent medium, a means through which to view the world regarded as an independent reality, as if language “merely designated the objects perceived in themselves”; and even less is it possible, again in any simple sense, that words are or can become one with things.¹⁹ As an organic work of art, language can be conceived, on the contrary, as a “second world, formed objectively in accordance with man’s impressions of the real one.” Language, that is to say, is precisely a medium or mediating structure, what Humboldt calls an “ambient of sounds” with which we surround ourselves “in order to assimilate and process the world of objects” (LV, 49).

Our knowledge or understanding of the world, moreover, does not precede the emergence or use of language (as it does in Locke): “every external object,” Humboldt points out, “attains complete substantiality only through the medium of a concept,” and “no concept is possible without language.” What this suggests is that language is prior to thought, since nothing exists for us except as a concept, and we cannot think or form concepts without words. In this sense, like Wallace Stevens’s singer at Key West, for whom “there never was a world . . . / Except the one she sang and, singing, made,” the world comes into being for us only after we acquire language, which functions for Humboldt like those Kantian forms or categories that order our perceptions and constitute our experience.²⁰ Thus we know not the thing itself but the word, which “is an offprint not of the object per se, but of the image of the latter produced in the soul,” a sound which “intervenes between object and man.” Whatever knowledge we have comes to us only in and through language, and we establish our knowledge, as opposed to merely expressing it, by speaking.²¹

Each language, in addition, constitutes what Humboldt calls “a unique cosmic viewpoint.” “Each tongue,” he writes, “draws a circle about the people to whom it belongs, and it is possible to leave this circle only by simultaneously entering that of another people” (LV, 39). Yet, although we cannot deal with the world, so to speak, except through the intermediary of a language, language itself does not exist entirely apart from

the world or from nature. To enter into language's "world of sounds," as Humboldt puts it, is not to abandon the world that empirically surrounds us.

Nature unfolds before us a multicolored and, according to all sensual impressions, a multishaped variety, bathed in luminous clarity. Our reflective thinking discovers in it a regulated pattern that is congenial to our intellectual form. Quite apart from the physical existence of objects, an external beauty clings to their outlines as a charm intended for man alone. This is a beauty, moreover, in which this regulated pattern and the sensory material join together in a persistently inexplicable bond because we are gripped and carried away by it. All this we find again in analogous accordances in language, and it is capable of representing it. For, when by its hand we pass over into a world of sounds, we do not abandon that actually surrounding us. The regulated pattern of language in its own structure is related to that of nature; and because it stimulates through this structure the activity of man's highest and most human powers, it brings him closer to an understanding of the formal impression of nature. (LV, 40)

Somewhat like Emerson, Humboldt sees in nature, if not a language in itself, then at least "analogous accordances," a "regulated pattern" which is related to that of language and which language can represent. The pattern of the one is in harmony with that of the other. To this extent, perhaps, language for Humboldt has both a natural and a cultural identity – "the art itself is nature" – although any such claim has to be qualified by Humboldt's view of language's constitutive function. As he puts it, "language enhances the impression of the beauty in nature by transposing it into another area; it operates, however, independent of this impression via the mere melody of speech upon the temper of the intellect" (LV, 40–1). Such an emphasis suggests, in Aarsleff's phrase, a view of language as more "mind-bound" than natural, a view in which words, originally arbitrary or subjective sounds representing mental images, may *become* identified with their objects through sheer social use, the need to communicate and be understood.²² In this instance, however, it may be more accurate to say not that "the art itself is nature" but that the naturalness of language is itself, at first, art.

ORIGINALLY intended to be the introductory first part of a projected three-part study of the Kawi language and published posthumously in 1836, Humboldt's *Linguistic Variability and Intellectual Development* is one of the most ambitious works on language to appear in the nineteenth century, embracing both descriptive linguistics and a boldly speculative treatment of language regarded as the foundation of thought.²³ Although it is both more detailed and more profound than *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*, and far exceeds it in scope, Humboldt's text will nevertheless seem familiar, in some of its gestures and procedures, to a reader of Schlegel. Humboldt's assumption, for instance, that, of all languages, Sanskrit comes closest to "perfect linguistic form" (LV, 194), is virtually canonical in German romantic philology after Schlegel.

He follows Schlegel also in tending to locate Sanskrit and Chinese at opposite ends of the linguistic spectrum – a tendency itself based on Schlegel's broad division of languages into the "higher" inflecting and "lower" affixing types. As we have seen, however, the result of such a classification is that Chinese fails to find a place in Schlegel's typology at all, suffering consignment instead to a sort of linguistic limbo. For his part, Humboldt declares at one point that "No matter how you explain it, apparently there is an imperfection in the linguistic structure of the Chinese language" (LV, 184), and so, like Schlegel again, he also excludes Chinese from the three possible structural types – inflectional, agglutinating, and incorporating – that constitute his own language typology (LV, 195).²⁴ Elsewhere in his discussion, speculating about the possibility of a historical rather than a conceptual or structural type of classification, one involving "stepwise elevations to an ever increasing level of perfection . . . as if in the various epochs of the human race there had been only successive linguistic structures," Humboldt decides that in this case "Chinese would be the oldest language while Sanskrit would be the youngest" (LV, 213). Apparently, for Humboldt, there is no scheme for classifying human languages in which Chinese might appear to be other than extreme and imperfect.

Such an attitude, however, is not merely prejudicial, and Humboldt goes much further with Chinese than Schlegel's outright rejection of it. While Chinese and Sanskrit represent "two extremes," as Humboldt puts it, "unequal to each other in fitness for intellectual development," they are, at

the same time, "equal in inner consistency and thorough application of their system" (LV, 212). Chinese, that is to say, has its own unique expressive and structural properties, and it is admirable for remaining true to itself – for not trying, unlike other noninflected languages, to become something it is not, namely inflected. Assuming that it lacks a grammar, by which he means the verbal or phonetic system with which a language designates formal relationships among its words, Humboldt asserts that Chinese "increases the sharpness of the mind . . . with respect to the formal concatenation of speech" (LV, 211). More than any other language, it "brings out the power of the pure idea and directs the soul toward it more exclusively and precisely because it lops off all small disturbing connecting phonemes" (LV, 196). In doing so, moreover, it achieves a "stirring dignity" and a "simple grandeur" because, again, regardless of its shortcomings, "it seems to take recourse in depicting pure thought via language" (LV, 124).

Such praise, however, is more qualified than it seems, since what Humboldt is suggesting is that by failing to be a complete system of discourse, Chinese has to settle for the pure expression of concepts, as though it were less a language than what Aarsleff calls "a nomenclature that constitutes an inventory" (*From Locke*, 346), similar to the communicative system of Swift's Lagado, a mere sack of objects. To this extent, Humboldt somewhat resembles the early eighteenth-century grammarians who criticized Chinese precisely because they took it to be a representation not of discursive speech but of "things themselves." In any case, despite what he finds to admire about it, Chinese represents for Humboldt a deviation from what he calls "pure principle," or "a fruitful principle of intellectual development," without which a language cannot guide "intellectual activity to the true central point from which poetry, philosophy, scientific research, and eloquent recitation blossom forth" (LV, 196).

Underlying Humboldt's attitude here is a somewhat contradictory (or perhaps dialectical) approach to the nature of language as both the result of a universal human impulse, "a natural development that designates man as such" (LV, 192), and a variable or unequal achievement of different nations or peoples. He addresses himself to *language* as a virtually ideal concept or form, declaring at one point that "Every language remains a likeness of the original predisposition responsible for language" (LV, 197),

and also to *languages*, which are strictly bound to the groups or nations which have produced them. While “the creation of language is an innate necessity of humanity,” and “an indispensable factor for the development of human intellectual powers” (LV, 5), any particular language is also itself a result of those powers, and can be aided or hindered in its own development by the “innate intellectual power” of the people who speak it (LV, 4). Hence, separate languages, representing particular manifestations of the universal power of speech, also reflect the particular, and unequal, intellectual capacities of their speakers. If, on the one hand, language is a tool for intellectual advancement, which should culminate, according to Humboldt, “in the formulation of philosophical doctrine” (LV, 5) – a culmination that language should in fact make possible – on the other, it is a product of the already given intellectual condition of a people, and as such it may impose limits on the very advancement it is supposed to bring about. Such is the case, apparently, with Chinese, which for Humboldt constitutes a linguistic structure that hinders intellectual activity.²⁵

Early in his discussion, Humboldt accounts for the dichotomy here, to some extent, by historicizing it – by imagining a time in the remote past when language and intellectual development are indistinguishable from each other, or when the entire intellectual progress of humanity is completely represented by language itself. At such a time, language is not a “product born of activity . . . but an involuntary emanation of the intellect.” In its material form, it is identical with its spiritual origins. Later, however, “languages must have evolved,” as Humboldt puts it, “along with the flourishing tribes from the respective intellectual peculiarities of the latter, which imposed numerous restrictions on them” (LV, 2). From being itself the spontaneous sign of a universal intellectual power, completely identified with it, language becomes subject to particular manifestations of that power and their limits. Almost insisting on the paradox that will govern so much of his ensuing discussion, Humboldt asserts that “It is no empty play on words to represent *language* as originating spontaneously and divinely free, whereas *languages* are depicted as bound to, and dependent on, the nations to which they pertain, for in such case they have entered into a definitely restricted area” (LV, 2–3).²⁶

If we now ask, more specifically, just why it is that Chinese hinders intellectual activity, we are also asking just what Humboldt means by the

“pure” or “fruitful” principle that informs certain languages more than others. From what has just been said, it would appear that few, if any, languages, particularly in their later stages of development, could avoid the limits or restrictions that constitute the very conditions of their development. And this, in fact, seems to be the case, since, as Humboldt suggests, “perfect linguistic form” is an ideal or purely formal concept which can coincide with an actual language only at its point of origin, at the moment when it first “emanates” from the intellect. At this ideal level, where there is no difference between the universal linguistic impulse and any particular language, “the form of all languages must be fundamentally identical and must always achieve a common objective.” At this level, too, what Humboldt calls the “intimate linguistic sense” – which is both “the entire intellectual capacity” of humanity and the “guiding impulse” behind language, the “pure principle,” more or less, to which he refers – “requires in all tongues a correct and principled structure, which cannot be other than one and the same for all languages.”

In reality, however, as Humboldt remarks, “matters are otherwise” (LV, 192–3). Languages, after all, do differ, and for a variety of reasons, both abstract and concrete, internal and external. For one thing, although the drive of the “intimate linguistic sense” is always toward uniformity among languages, the energy of that drive will vary from one language to another, producing differences in sound and meaning. And, more broadly considered, languages, Humboldt points out, “cannot contain the selfsame factor in themselves because the nations speaking them differ and have an existence that is determined by different situations.” Yet, apparently, despite these “different situations,” supposedly affecting all nations equally, the differences among languages themselves are not in any sense equal.

Languages, in fact, are separate and unequal for Humboldt, since the Sanskritic tongues, as he goes on to say, approach perfection of form “to the highest degree and are also those in which the intellectual progress of the human race has developed through the longest series of progressions and in the most fortunate manner” – which is to say that Sanskrit and its cognate languages have somehow preserved an almost pristine relationship to the intimate linguistic sense, and have thus maintained the “correct and principled structure” which that sense ideally requires. For all practical

purposes, then, there is an ideal language, and for Humboldt it is clearly Sanskrit, the privileged linguistic structure that constitutes “a fixed point of comparison” for all others (LV, 194). The very existence of such a language, moreover, suggests not so much a linguistic relativity principle – which acknowledges that every language is informed by the separate (but equal?) “spirit” of its speakers – as, somewhat paradoxically, the positive inequality of languages.²⁷

As for Chinese, since the character of a language, or the extent of its principled nature, is determined by the energy of the intellectual activity that informs it, it seems to follow that a less perfect language is evidence of “the lesser drive of the nation developing it” (LV, 195) – although this is a point not immediately reconcilable with Humboldt’s assumption that “the natural inclination to language is universal,” and that all languages, at least ideally, must therefore be fundamentally identical (LV, 193). It is one thing to argue that languages differ because of varying external conditions and physical or environmental factors. But it seems to be quite another to insist that the impulse, supposedly universal, that guides them into being is equally variable. We encounter here, perhaps, a version of the same contradiction in Humboldt’s thinking that was discussed earlier. Languages are simultaneously products of intellectual activity and “tools which intellectual activity needs” (LV, 196), and Chinese, considered from either point of view, will suffer. As an imperfect language, it is a poor tool for intellectual advancement; but in its linguistic poverty it also demonstrates the weakness of the intellectual force that lies behind its development. Just as it does for Schlegel, Chinese for Humboldt seems inherently inferior – despite the fact that it must originate, like all languages, in a human linguistic sense that is universal.

To be perfectly fair to Humboldt, however, he does point out that once a language has been ushered into being by the linguistic sense, the procedures of that sense are then modified in turn by the language itself. This is so because “all creation does not proceed in the simple direction of the original power, but its course changes, being affected by what was created earlier” (LV, 193). Thus it is not the linguistic sense, strictly speaking, that is variable, but the particular form that it takes once it emerges as a specific language. Since Humboldt’s account of this point is complicated, it may be best to quote it at length. In language, he begins,

we may distinguish two constitutive principles: the intimate linguistic sense . . . and the phoneme insofar as it depends upon the quality of the organs and upon what has already been handed down. The intimate linguistic sense dominates the language from the interior and outward direction; it is the principle that everywhere supplies the guiding impulse. The phoneme would in itself be equivalent to passive material being molded. However, owing to the penetration of the linguistic sense, it is converted into articulation, thereby encompassing in itself in inseparable unity and constant interaction an intellectual and sensory power; it thus becomes the truly creative principle in the language, and is characterized by its steady and apparently independent symbolizing activity. Inasmuch as it is absolutely a law of the existence of man that he cannot release anything from himself that does not react upon him and determine his further creative effort, the phoneme in turn modifies both the viewpoint and the procedures of the intimate linguistic sense. (LV, 193)²⁸

On the one hand here, it is the linguistic sense that “everywhere supplies the guiding impulse,” dominating the language from the inside out. But on the other, the phoneme, raw sound penetrated by the linguistic sense, “becomes the truly creative principle,” even if its symbolizing activity is only “apparently independent.” To this extent, if we give Humboldt the benefit of the doubt, the universal linguistic impulse is altered by every language that it sets in motion and becomes variable, individualized, influenced by the native qualities of speakers who shape it according to their own needs and capacities. In this sense, the development of a language may be understood precisely as the process of deviation from “correct and principled structure” specific to that language – although in Sanskrit, again, we seem to encounter an exception. Here, “by a happy coincidence of a rich and delicate origin with an animate power of the linguistic sense,” such deviation has been avoided to the greatest degree possible (because the intellectual drive of its speakers is somehow consonant with the linguistic sense itself), with the result that it is “the only principled type” of linguistic form. As Humboldt puts it, in a passage notable for its recourse to a conventional figure for organic life:

A linguistic structure developing under such favorable conditions then appears to have sprung from a correct and energetic intuition of the relationship of speech to thought and of all the components of the language to each other. In fact, a truly principled linguistic structure is possible only where such an

intuition, similar to an animating flame, pervades the structure with its luminous glow. (LV, 214)²⁹

Sanskrit, in short, nearly exempt from the conditions or restrictions governing the development of all other languages, represents an almost untainted image of ideal linguistic form, an almost perfect fulfillment of what the original impulse toward language requires.

It is when he speaks this way, in praise of Sanskrit and, despite his disclaimers, in disparagement of other languages, that Humboldt most resembles Schlegel. The clearest instance of Schlegel's influence in *Linguistic Variability* occurs in a passage where Humboldt takes up what he calls Sanskrit's "stronger and more various self-creative virility factor" (LV, 161). Shortly thereafter, however, with remarkable forthrightness and greater moral awareness than Schlegel, he stops to look back over his work and consider some of the implications, ethical and otherwise, of his positions (which are still those, generally speaking, of early nineteenth-century German linguistics as a whole).³⁰

The crucial position, of course, involves a commitment to the superiority of Sanskrit over all other languages, a superiority based, as in Schlegel, on its creative or productive capacities. This commitment also includes the assumption that Sanskrit is the original or parent language of the Indo-European family. "It is marvelous to see," Humboldt begins, "what a long series of languages of equally fortunate structure and of equally stimulating effect upon the intellect Sanskrit produced." As the "primitive or mother tongue" standing at the apex of this long series, Sanskrit is seen as both the origin and the continuing source of the vitality of Indo-European civilization, a generative force of truly miraculous and life-giving power. Throughout a history marked by linguistic declines and falls, it has preserved "a virile principle in itself by which for three millennia at least the thread of the intellectual development of the human race was capable of spinning itself forth, and which possessed the power of generating new linguistic structure from decayed, deteriorated, and dispersed linguistic material" (LV, 160). Sanskrit here is not only the independent and self-generating medium or transmitter of culture but its organic and unifying productive principle, breathing new life into disorder and fragmentation.

Although he adopts Schlegel's metaphor of procreation in languages and his rhetoric of linguistic "virility," Humboldt goes much further in speculating about what is less than fully explicit in Schlegel, namely the connections between languages and nations or races. At one point, for instance, he states unequivocally that the special aim of his work is to show "that there is an animated and indivisible connection between languages and the intellectual capacity of nations" (LV, 195). On the basis of his sense of the particular virtues of the Sanskritic languages, he poses questions that, as Said has taught us to see, harbor assumptions which are essential to nineteenth-century orientalism (if not racism). What would have happened, he wonders, "had Carthage conquered Rome and dominated Occidental Europe." Or he wants to know "in what condition our present-day culture would be if the Arabs had remained the sole possessors of scientific knowledge . . . and had spread their dominion over the Occident. In both instances," he concludes, "a less favorable measure of success does not seem doubtful to the author," and this is the case because "we became truly receptive to the Greek intellect and language, whereas the Arabs clung for the most part only to the scientific findings of Greek research. Even upon a base of the same antiquity, however, they would have been incapable of erecting the scientific and artistic structures, on which we may justifiably pride ourselves." This receptiveness to the Greek intellect and language, Humboldt points out, working his way back along the series of languages produced by Sanskrit, is due to our inclination toward Roman culture and to "an intimate ethnic relationship" among members of the same language family.

But how, he goes on to ask, is "this precedence of the people belonging to the Sanskrit group" to be explained? The answer, for Humboldt, is purely ethnocentric. Occidental superiority is simply taken for granted. It can be ascribed, he argues, neither to intellectual capacity, nor to language, nor to favorable accidents of history, but to the interaction of all three, since language and intellect cannot really be separated, and since even historical destiny is not really independent of the "innate nature" of a people. Humboldt's aim, however, is not cultural self-glorification. Instead, his assumption is that cultural superiority "must be recognizable in some feature of language," and it is in his pursuit of this point, tortured as his argument

sometimes is, that his honesty and moral awareness most clearly emerge (LV, 160–1).

We need not dwell on the fact that, as George Steiner has pointed out and as we have already seen, Humboldt's thinking is often circular. Throughout his text, a language is sometimes the cause and sometimes the result of a particular civilization. If, on the one hand, the Sanskritic tongues have perpetuated themselves for three millennia, "this is simply an effect of the intensity of the creative linguistic action in the peoples to which they belonged" (LV, 162). But on the other, "a linguistic structure which is lively and fortunately oriented produces by its very nature philosophy and literature" (LV, 181). "The one proposition," as Steiner remarks, "is used to demonstrate the other and vice versa."³¹ More important for our present purpose is Humboldt's commitment to certain ideas or "view-points" established, as he sees it, by his work – viewpoints, like that concerning the general excellence of the "purely principled" languages, from which everything else in his thinking follows. To be sure, it is the clash between this commitment and his nagging sense of its negative implications that generates the occasional defensiveness of tone in the later portions of his discussion.

In his nineteenth chapter, for instance, Humboldt is aware, almost from the start, of "the curious impression," as he calls it, "that is produced by raising a few languages to a position of preeminence, which automatically then marks the others as less perfected," and he attempts, variously, to combat or reduce that impression. Appealing first to his typology of language structures, with its inflectional, agglutinating, and incorporating patterns, and insisting that only the inflected tongues can be considered "correct," he draws a contrast between the purely abstract nature of these structures and the fact that, in his view, noninflected languages are never content to rest in their agglutinating or incorporating status (although Chinese, since it exists outside this system altogether, is evidently an exception). Instead, as he points out, "there is always alive [in noninflected languages] a visible striving toward the correct form," and in this sense negative judgments against them are not entirely relevant, since the correspondence between actual languages and the abstract structural patterns is, at best, only theoretical or provisional.³²

At this point, however, Humboldt moves from languages to their speakers, and as he does so, the "curious impression" that he hoped to reduce becomes an idea which "might seem highly repugnant to many," as he puts it, posing a problem of greater moral intensity. He declares himself opposed, in fact, to the "general feeling" that insofar as languages are found to exist on the same cultural level, "peculiar advantages deservedly accrue to each in question without our being able to assign a decisive advantage to any one over the others." His position, again, is that languages, in terms of their relation to the intellectual capacity of their speakers, are not equal, and therefore, as he surmises, "the same rejective judgment relative to languages appears to apply also to peoples." The further conclusion that "A more imperfect language hence proves immediately the lesser drive of the nation developing it" seems inescapable, except that Humboldt now wants to restrict this judgment to a nation's development of language alone. "I have made," he says, "no other decisions regarding the nation's other intellectual advantages" (LV, 195). Insofar as he is considering the intellectual capacity of a nation *only* as it manifests itself in the structure of its language, however, he appears to undercut his earlier claim that the languages of the Sanskrit group, for instance, reflect its general cultural superiority.

In doing so, in any case, he avoids or at least qualifies the adoption of a viewpoint that might appear "highly repugnant," namely the idea that an inferior language is the sign of an intellectually inferior people. What Humboldt now seems to be saying is that an inferior language proves only, so to speak, the lesser *linguistic* drive of the nation developing it. But this idea clearly goes against the grain of his deepest convictions about language, and he cannot sustain it for very long. Thus, by the end of his discussion here, Humboldt, it seems, has returned to a full identification of the linguistic sense with the human intellectual capacity in its entirety. "Languages," he writes, "are tools which intellectual activity needs, they are the roadways upon which such activity rolls forward. Therefore, they are truly beneficial only when they facilitate this intellectual activity and accompany it inspiringly, placing it in the center so that each of its categories may develop harmoniously" (LV, 196).

Toward the end of this chapter, entitled "A Review of the Present

Investigation,” which turns out to be a review, as well, of its author’s often problematic thinking, Humboldt insists that he “still cannot avoid establishing an absolute antithesis between languages of a purely principled form and those clearly deviating from such a pure principle.” The implication seems to be that this commitment is unavoidable for him, regardless of the consequences. Yet he seems to be unable fully to reconcile himself to those consequences, particularly if they include “rejective judgments” against certain languages and peoples. Thus, he also insists that he is neither mistaking nor derogating “the excellence of digressive languages,” and explains further, “I am denying only their capacity, when compared to principled languages, to affect the intellect with the same universality and harmony. Nobody,” he concludes, “could be farther from condemning any language, even the rudest . . . than the present writer” (LV, 196–7) – a statement, we may feel, which softens without really altering the effect of Humboldt’s “absolute antithesis” between one group of languages and another.

WHAT WOULD BECOME CLEAR to a later generation of linguists – that languages, as Aarsleff puts it, “use different means to achieve similar ends, thus all are equally good” – seems to have been unavailable as a possibility to writers like Schlegel and Humboldt, given their assumption that the Indo-European languages deserve superior status because they are based on a special, irrecoverable insight into “the precise relation between sound and concept” (*From Locke*, 306, 385). From such an assumption comes both Humboldt’s “highly repugnant” idea of inferior languages that imply inferior peoples and hinder cultural development, and the broadly romantic notion, consonant with the organic analogy, that languages decay or decline from some original state of linguistic perfection. In the context of this sort of thinking, of course, the low esteem in which Chinese is held is virtually guaranteed. Not only is it presumed to be deeply flawed structurally, but in its linguistic uniqueness it seems exempt even from the patterns of development that govern most other languages, often appearing “arrested” in some “infantile” stage. Yet what is remarkable is the sheer amount of attention Chinese nevertheless receives, the powerful fascination it clearly exercises over a figure like Humboldt. In great part, this is due, no doubt, to its “special case” status, to its extreme position as a language seemingly

beyond the linguistic pale. And given this position, the study of Chinese for Humboldt, even more than for Schlegel, provides a means of understanding the nature and functioning of language in general.

Humboldt's fascination with Chinese is best seen, perhaps, not so much in *Linguistic Variability* as in an earlier work, a letter to Abel-Rémusat, written in French in 1826 and published in Paris the following year. This text, "on the nature of grammatical forms in general and on the spirit of the Chinese language in particular," is a discourse of nearly one hundred pages and is in some ways a trial run for ideas that would reappear in his later work. But it is also Humboldt's most sustained treatment of Chinese, regarded, as Abel-Rémusat points out in his prefatory note, from the perspective of both "general grammar" and "the metaphysics of language."³³ Written in the first flush of his study of Chinese, a study undertaken with the help of Abel-Rémusat's *Grammar* and translations from Confucius, the letter is marked by Humboldt's excitement of discovery and, ultimately, by an ambivalence of attitude toward Chinese even more extreme than that we have already seen in *Linguistic Variability*.

Humboldt's task here is to narrow the gap that he perceives between Chinese and other languages by focusing on what all languages must do if they are to succeed as communicative systems, namely, to indicate the relationships of words to each other in discourse. How, he wants to know, can a language function with little or no grammar, and, more particularly, by what means does Chinese indicate grammatical relationships among its words? To ask such questions is to assume, first, that grammar is essential to language, and, second, that Chinese, all appearances to the contrary, does not really lack a grammar but registers its effects more minimally than any other language. As Humboldt puts it, "the Chinese language seems to me less to neglect than to disdain to show grammatical categories, and places itself, insofar as the nature of language permits, on entirely different ground." By "grammatical categories" he means "the forms assigned to words by grammar" or "the classes of words that carry with them certain grammatical qualifications, recognizable by signs in the words themselves, or by the position the words occupy, or finally by their links with the sentence" (L, 3), and in Chinese it is only by means of the position of words and the contextual sense of the utterance in which they occur that their grammatical value can be ascertained. Otherwise, since grammar "ex-

ists essentially in the mind" (L, 9), Chinese proceeds, for all practical purposes, without any explicit grammar, depending instead on the ability of its speakers and listeners to understand what is manifested in an utterance only "by the cut and turn of sentences" themselves (L, 10). Indeed, this is the "entirely different ground" of Chinese to which Humboldt refers.

For this reason, though, Chinese for Humboldt is a singularly minimal and unimaginative form of speech, one that seemingly keeps itself at a distance from the full range of linguistic possibility. In its formation, he theorizes, it must have followed a route whereby its speakers had fastened "strictly upon the relation of ideas *as* ideas, soberly holding to that which indispensably requires the clear and precise enunciation of those ideas, taking as little as possible of what belongs peculiarly to the nature of language as agency and instrument of thought" (L, 12). The result of such a grimly ascetic approach to speech is a language that almost refuses to be one, a language "as little removed as possible, in the formation of sentences, from the form of mathematical equations" (L, 14), and to this extent, Humboldt is in agreement with Francis Bacon and those members of the Royal Society who also noticed a similarity between Chinese and their dream of a mathematically precise philosophical language.

For Humboldt, however, the possibilities of language far exceed those of mathematics. If all Chinese words, in his view, are "in statu absoluto," "abstracted from all grammatical connection" (L, 16) and to that degree limited in their expressive capacities, his most positive vision of language depends precisely on forms of speech with complete grammatical systems, those which both owe their origin to, and exercise influence upon, what he here calls the imagination – "not the imagination in general, but the particular aspect of this faculty which endows ideas with sounds in order to place them outside of man, make them return to his ear as words . . . and then make them act within him in a new way as ideas fixed by language" (L, 61).

Here, of course, Humboldt is looking forward to conceptions more fully developed in *Linguistic Variability*, where he refers not to the creative imagination but to the "intimate linguistic sense" as the guiding force behind language. What is striking, though, is his vision of linguistic possibility itself, the almost rhapsodic quality of his description of the effects of grammatical forms on thought and speech, and this vision is the direct result of his

comparison of Chinese with such languages as Sanskrit and Greek in particular. "These grammatical forms," he writes,

so insignificant in appearance, in furnishing the means of expanding and of interlacing sentences according to the requirements of the thought, bring the latter to a greater expansion, permit it and solicit it to express the least nuance and the most subtle connections. As ideas form a seamless tissue in the head of each individual, they find in the propitious organization of these languages the same wholeness, the same continuity, the same expression of these almost insensible movements that they encounter in themselves. The grammatical perfection that the classical languages offer is at once a means of giving to thought greater attenuation, greater fineness and color, and a way of rendering it with more exactness and fidelity, by strokes more pronounced and more delicately expressive, adding a symmetry of forms and a harmony of sounds analogous to the articulated ideas and to the movements of the soul which accompany them. (L, 61-2)

What Humboldt admires, clearly, is the way an explicit grammatical structure allows a language to mirror the process of thought itself, almost, indeed, to externalize consciousness – the way Greek, for instance, "in its exact phraseology, rich and beautiful at once . . . suggests every twist of thought and expresses every nuance" (L, 49). Thinking in such a language discovers its precise outward manifestation, not only in substance but in form as well.

At another point in his discussion, Humboldt refers similarly to "languages which regard expression as a picture of the thought in which all is continuous and closely linked together, and where this continuity is imprinted upon the words themselves – languages which impart life to their words in changing their forms according to their functions, and which permit the listener to follow, always with the help of enunciated sounds, the linking of thoughts, without obliging him to interrupt this task to fill in the gaps left by speech" (L, 67). A language endowed in this way seems to Humboldt not only to bring thinking and speaking into the closest correspondence but, finally, to influence thinking itself and thus to bring about the intellectual and cultural development that he prizes, and attributes almost exclusively to the Indo-European nations, in *Linguistic Variability*.

Chinese, on the other hand, "arranges words in the order least restrained

by the determination of the ideas" (L, 48), and "keeps purely and bluntly to the essential substance of thought" (L, 60), placing its terms, by and large, in isolation from each other. Obviously, this is a procedure representing a wholly different relation between thinking and language, and, despite Humboldt's efforts, Chinese seems intent upon preserving its differences. Therefore, even ordinary conversation in Chinese, as Humboldt imagines it, becomes awkward and difficult, since the Chinese "utter each word, so as to deliver it first in isolation to reflection, by continually interrupting their sentences and by connecting words only where the idea absolutely demands it" (L, 21). Similarly, to read this language is to experience not the immediacy and continuity of ongoing *thinking*, a discursive process, but an immediate and forceful contact with discrete, self-enclosed ideas, fully formed and arranged directly beside one another. In these terms, we might say, employing Humboldt's well-known distinction between *ergon* and *energeia* (in which language in general is declared to be an activity rather than a work or a product),³⁴ Chinese, in fact, seems to be less an activity and more a product, a result of an act of arrangement rather than a "living" representation of thought.

We may feel as well, at this point, that the gap between Chinese and other languages is being insisted upon rather than narrowed. As a reader and translator of Chinese, to be sure, Humboldt finds that his habits as a speaker of Indo-European languages intrude upon what he reads and lead him to distort it:

Every time we compare translations of Chinese to the text, we find that we have been careful to link ideas and clauses that Chinese is content to place in isolation. Chinese terms receive precisely a greater weight by this isolation, and one is forced to stop more often to grasp their connections. Chinese leaves it to the reader to supply a great number of intermediary ideas, and imposes in this way a considerable labor on the mind. Each word in a Chinese sentence seems placed there so that one will weigh it and consider it in all its different relations before passing on to the next. As the connection between ideas is born from these relations, this purely meditative work supplies one part of grammar. (L, 44-5)

As this passage suggests, the experience of reading Chinese for Humboldt seems to include a certain degree of resistance on his part. He cannot fully

bring himself, apparently, to step into the circle of its "unique cosmic viewpoint," or to surrender to the demands of its system, which he tries, to some extent, to override. The result is that he feels "forced" to stop more often to grasp connections, and remains sensitive to what he perceives as the imposition of "a considerable labor on the mind." Although this passage, therefore, can easily be construed as a neutrally descriptive one – demonstrating, for instance, that grammar in Chinese is largely implicit or understood – it is just as easy, in the context of Humboldt's discussion to this point, to read it as a complaint against the difficulties or deficiencies of Chinese, especially in comparison with inflected languages whose grammatical structures are highly visible. What is surprising, then, is that the passage leads to a statement, the first of two or three pivotal ones in the letter, that speaks of Chinese in terms of the highest praise.

First Humboldt sets forth a series of points meant to summarize his developing conception of Chinese, and the last of these in particular, in its emphasis on the "poverty" of this language, and in its mode of negative definition, seems entirely of a piece with the impression that has been conveyed thus far. "The Chinese language," he writes, "in its manner of indicating grammatical value, does not adopt the system of grammatical categories, does not specify them in their finest nuances, and does not determine them even insofar as speech renders them absolutely necessary" (L, 47). Aware that this, and much of what he has said besides, must seem biased and negative, Humboldt appears suddenly to shift his ground as he offers to disabuse Abel-Rémusat of any such assumption:

One could, after this description, confuse Chinese with the imperfect languages of nations which have never attained great development of their intellectual faculties, or of nations in which this development has not powerfully acted upon their language; but this would be, in my opinion, an extremely grave error.

Chinese differs from all these imperfect languages by the consistency and the regularity with which it exploits the system that it has adopted, whereas the languages . . . of which I have just spoken either stop halfway along the road or fail to reach the goal that they set for themselves. All these languages are weakened at once by the absence and the useless redundancy of grammatical forms. It is, on the contrary, by the neatness and purity that it employs in the application of its grammatical system that Chinese is placed absolutely

as the equal and in the rank of the classical languages, which is to say among the most perfect of those that we know, albeit with a system not only different but opposed to theirs, as far as the general nature of language permits. (L, 47-8)³⁵

A few pages further on, acknowledging that he has been speaking of Chinese almost exclusively in terms of qualities it lacks, Humboldt continues to describe it from a more positive point of view, so that what appeared to be a deficiency or a loss is now seen as a gain, and the Chinese "disdain" for grammatical categories is explained and justified. This language, he says,

simply by renouncing an advantage common to all the others, by this single loss, gains an advantage that is found in none. By disdaining, as far as the nature of language permits (for I believe I can insist on the accuracy of this phrase), the colors and the nuances that expression adds to thought, it makes the ideas stand forth, and its art consists in arranging them directly beside one another, in such a manner that their similarities and their differences are not only sensed and perceived, as in all other languages, but they strike the mind with a new force, and push it to pursue and to make present their mutual relations. This gives birth to a pleasure evidently independent of the very essence of reasoning, which one can call purely intellectual, since it belongs only to the form and the order of ideas; and if one analyses the causes of this sense, it arises mainly from the isolated and rapid manner in which the words, each expressive of a complete idea, are reconciled to each other, and from the boldness with which everything that serves only as a link has been removed. (L, 57-8)

The "new force" with which ideas in Chinese "strike the mind" may be Humboldt's version of what Abel-Rémusat calls the "energy" with which Chinese characters convey "things themselves." And it may also be that Humboldt's positive statements about Chinese are being made, at least in part, in deference to the sinological commitments of Abel-Rémusat.

As definitive as these statements sound, however, they begin almost immediately to be qualified as Humboldt adopts yet another position, setting Chinese apart from both the imperfect languages and the classical ones. "I distinguish Chinese," he now says, "from the languages vulgarly called imperfect by its consistent spirit and its regularity, and from the classical languages by the opposite nature of its grammatical system" (L, 60). Al-

though one could argue that this differs from the earlier statement more in tone than in substance, it seems to be the case here that the status of Chinese as the equal of the classical languages, and as the rightful occupant of a place among the most perfect languages, is being subtly undermined by Humboldt's need, nevertheless, to distinguish it from other language groups and isolate it in its own category.

Moreover, his loyalties to inflection as a "principle," and to the Indo-European languages, begin to reassert themselves, so that we soon find Humboldt saying, in what appears to be a complete about-face, that Chinese, despite the purity and force with which it presents ideas,

seems to me, without any doubt, quite inferior, as an organ of thought, to the languages which have achieved a certain degree of perfection in a system which is opposed to its own. This results from what has already been indicated. If it is impossible to deny that it is only in speech that thought achieves precision and clarity, one must also admit that this effect is complete only insofar as everything that modifies the idea finds an analogous expression in the spoken language. There we have an evident truth, and a fundamental principle. (L, 65-6)

To the extent that Chinese presents ideas in isolation, and leaves modifications of the ideas largely unexpressed by outward means, it falls short of Humboldt's "fundamental principle" here and stands exposed as a language in which speech bears little resemblance to the thought it is supposed to represent or "picture." Insisting on a virtually isomorphic harmony between, not words and things but speech and thought, Humboldt cannot help but find fault with Chinese precisely because it expresses the ideas of "things themselves," without their connections, and in this sense it ultimately "prevents the free flight of thought in long chains of clauses through which grammatical forms alone can serve as guides" (L, 66-7). For this reason, too, as Humboldt will argue in *Linguistic Variability*, Chinese is an unsuitable language for advanced intellectual activity. If it "impresses us with striking effects, [only] languages with an opposed grammatical system strike us by a perfection which we recognize as being that to which language must truly aspire" (L, 67).

In an effort, perhaps, to avoid offending Abel-Rémusat, and to acknowledge the value of a linguistic system of which he cannot wholly approve,

Humboldt may appear more evasive about Chinese than he really is. In the end he remains committed to what he calls his “deepest convictions” about language, and they are the same whether he is addressing “complete grammatical structures” in the letter to Abel-Rémusat, or “purely principled languages” in *Linguistic Variability*. Insist as he might on his openness to diversity in language and to the infinite human capacity for linguistic creativity, there is, finally, only one system which is valid for him, and it is that of the inflecting languages of the Indo-European family, with their greater ability to reflect, in its minutest organic entirety, not the external world, but the inner world of human meaning.

Chapter Four

Otto Jespersen and Chinese as the Future of Language

IN 1894, the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen published a work entitled *Progress in Language* in which all that is linguistically desirable is judged to be best represented not by ancient Sanskrit but by modern English. The book is a revised version of the doctoral dissertation Jespersen had submitted just three years earlier to the University of Copenhagen, and from its opening pages it is evident that European linguistics, from the time of Schleicher some thirty years before, has undergone a series of what may seem surprising reversals. Jespersen's very title, as Aarsleff notes, is a more or less explicit critique of the romantic view that the history of language exhibits decay rather than progress (*From Locke*, 296).

By the 1890s, in fact, its assumptions having come under greater critical scrutiny, the hegemony of German romantic linguistics seems largely to have broken apart, making way for the emergence of new perspectives in the study of language. Accordingly, in the work of such writers as Jespersen, Michel Bréal, and Ferdinand de Saussure, language ceases to be regarded as a natural or aesthetic object, autonomous in its development and essentially closed to all human influence. Instead, it increasingly takes on the character of a social institution, whose value consists not in the beauty of its intrinsic form or in its power to stimulate intellectual activity or cultural growth, but in its efficiency as a communicative system, an efficiency governed precisely by the changing needs and constant influence of its speakers.

Hence there was a shift from the empirical study of linguistic forms per se, or from the history of language considered apart from history in general, to a more inclusive focus on both the history and the present state of language in terms of what Bréal calls "the form and the function of words," an approach that acknowledges the importance of both synchrony and

diachrony in linguistics and that takes account of meaning as well as morphology (*From Locke*, 305). Starting from the idea that, as Jespersen puts it, "language is nothing but human action and has no material existence," so that it is as valid now as it was at the mythic moment of its origin, such an approach removes language from the sphere of biology and from the governance of natural life cycles and insists upon its human and social dimensions, the extent to which the life and history of language are subsumed by those of society.¹ In Bréal's words, language "always keeps in step, if not with political history, at least with the intellectual and social history of the people."² In this sense, the only real test for determining the value of a language, according to Jespersen, lies in a consideration of how well it answers to "the practical interests of the speaking . . . community" (PL, 11-12). And this means that in any hierarchical classification of languages, the best ones will be those which, in keeping with the criterion of efficiency, go "farthest in the art of accomplishing much with little means" or are "able to express the greatest amount of meaning with the simplest mechanism" (PL, 13).

Bréal's outlook is similar. Language, for him, is humanly produced "with a practical goal in view," and the study of language therefore requires a consideration of its "utility." The goal of language, he declares, "is to be understood," and since this is the case, the "only true causes" of change in language are "human intelligence and will" (as opposed to any forces inherent in language itself), exercised toward the end of furthering such understanding.³

MY CHIEF CONCERN in this chapter will be with the implications of this altered linguistic outlook for Western attitudes toward Chinese. Jespersen in particular offers a powerful argument for revising the idea, almost universal in the nineteenth century, that Chinese is a living example of primeval speech, representing in its structure the condition of all languages at the most primitive stage of development. This argument, though, is but part of a larger one in which Jespersen rejects or reverses some of the most characteristic assumptions of nineteenth-century linguistics as a whole, and it may be helpful to begin by considering at least certain aspects of this larger argument.

Like Bréal, Jespersen chooses Schleicher as the most typical, or perhaps

the most vulnerable, representative of what he calls "the linguistic philosophy of the age that is now going out" (PL, 3), and he identifies him with views that clearly belong to Schlegel and Humboldt as well.⁴ The most obviously important of these is the notion of the superiority of the inflected or "flexional" languages. As Jespersen puts it, in his doubting and often dismissive sketch of Schleicher's ideas, "Beyond the flexional stage no language can attain; the symbolic denotation of relation by flexion is the highest accomplishment of language; speech has here effectually realized its object, which is to give a faithful phonetic image of thought." Except for Schleicher's Hegelian maneuver of giving Humboldt's typology a temporal or historical dimension, so that each language type – isolating, agglutinating, and inflected – represents for him a stage of linguistic development through which all languages must pass if they are to attain to the next highest form, there is nothing in this summary which cannot also be found in *Linguistic Variability*. If Humboldt himself did not go quite as far as Schleicher, there is still present in his thinking the idea that the main thrust in the development of languages is toward inflection, and that even the most deviant languages within the typology are governed by a kind of inward urge to return to principled form.

Schleicher's thinking, to be sure, seems more elaborately speculative, especially in its Hegelian formulation of an opposition between Language and History, an opposition based on the notion that "History cannot begin till the human spirit becomes 'conscious of its own freedom,' and this consciousness is only possible after the complete development of *Language*" (PL, 7). But even this idea, which leads Schleicher to conclude that "Language and History are . . . successive stages of human activity," and that once the stage of history is under way, language becomes "a means, instead of being the aim, of intellectual activity" (PL, 7–8), is adumbrated to some degree in Humboldt. Despite Schleicher's much greater stress on linguistic decay, a doctrine which is perhaps implicit in any organic conception of language, his thinking can still be regarded in large part as a development of certain tendencies in Humboldt's.

From Jespersen's point of view, of course, it is precisely the doctrine of decay which has been called into question by more recent linguistic research, and he sets himself the task of showing the degree to which modern languages have evolved from their ancient and more complex

forms in positive or progressive ways. In such a demonstration, as Humboldt understood, a great deal depends on one's criteria, on the tests one applies in order to arrive at a judgment, and a serious problem with Schleicher, in Jespersen's view, is that he never establishes "a rational basis for determining the relative value or merit of different languages" (PL, 13).

Jespersen's own criteria, as we have seen, include simplicity and efficiency, reflecting a belief in "the universal inclination to save oneself trouble, that is . . . to pronounce as few sounds as is compatible with making oneself understood" (PL, 57). The general shortening of forms in a modern analytic language like English, for instance, "means a diminution of effort and a saving of time in the communication of our thoughts" (PL, 18), and in accordance with such goals, as Jespersen argues, one will prefer the English word "had" to its Gothic equivalent *habaidedeima*. The loss or supersession of *habaidedeima*, nevertheless, was lamented by Schleicher in what Jespersen archly refers to as his "noble simile": "Our words, as contrasted with Gothic words, are like a statue that has been rolling for a long time in the bed of a river till its beautiful limbs have been worn off, so that now scarcely anything remains but a polished stone cylinder with faint indications of what once it was." Despite Jespersen's criticism that Schleicher "does not explain by what test he estimates the comparative merits of languages," this passage suggests what lies behind Schleicher's preference for the old word forms. It seems clear that in comparing them to a statue with beautiful limbs he is responding to what he perceives as their aesthetic appeal; they are for him works of art – whereas the modern forms are but fragments of this lost beauty, mere allusions, like the Venus de Milo, to what were once aesthetic wholes.

To bring such a standard to language, however, will clearly seem less than satisfactory to a positivist like Jespersen, whose position is that the development of language is constituted by a progressive universal movement toward a kind of spoken shorthand. In response to Schleicher's elegiac regard for the old word forms, Jespersen significantly alters the context of his comparison. "Suppose," he suggests,

that it would be quite out of the question to place the statue on a pedestal to be admired; what if, on the one hand, it was not ornamental enough as a

work of art, and if, on the other, human well-being was at stake if it was not serviceable in a rolling-mill: which would then be the better, – a rugged and unwieldy statue, making difficulties at every rotation, or an even, smooth, easy-going and well-oiled roller? (PL, 11)

By redefining the situation as one of human need, Jespersen proposes that the worn-away statue, like the shorter English word forms, may simply be more useful. His point is that the process by which the statue is worn down represents a human gain rather than a loss, aesthetic or otherwise. In showing this, of course, he completely invalidates Schleicher's aesthetic standard, since, in Jespersen's version of the simile, the statue is simply not ornamental enough to be admired as a work of art. The issue, therefore, is not one of aesthetics versus utility, or of beautiful word forms versus merely serviceable ones. Rather, Jespersen's concern is with the kind of tool language is, and the alternatives, as he presents them, are that it is either an unwieldy tool, doubling inappropriately as an aesthetic object, or a smoothly functioning instrument. Even if beauty were an admissible standard, Jespersen implies, the old word form is not beautiful (or not beautiful enough), and its true value will emerge only after its identity as a work of art to be admired in and for itself has been displaced by its role as an efficient communicative device.

The problem, in part, results from conceiving of words as autonomous objects rather than as the audible effects produced by "the combined action of human muscles" (PL, 18) – as concrete ends rather than nonmaterial means. If there is beauty in language, we might say, it is a matter not of form but of use. The English "had," as Jespersen goes on to show, is not only simpler and more efficient than *habaidedeima*; it is also simpler and more efficient than the many variations of *habaidedeima* required by the system of inflected endings in the older "Arian" languages. Jespersen lists some fifteen separate forms "for two or three persons in three numbers in two distinct moods!" (PL, 19), for all of which "had" serves as a fully adequate replacement. Compared to "had," and regarded, from the physical point of view, as a means of accomplishing a task, the older forms represent an unnecessary expense of energy – although to the romantic linguist (who does not have to use them) they may seem intriguingly complex relics of an age of greater spiritual and imaginative plenitude, not

unlike Gothic architecture in comparison with more functional but less interesting modern architectural styles.

IN HIS OVERALL CONCEPTION of the development of language, then, Jespersen discerns two kinds of progressive change. The first is the movement from the impressive though burdensome complexity of the older inflected forms to the relative simplicity and thus greater utility of the modern analytic languages. The second, clearly related to the first, involves a general shift from the concrete to the abstract, by which Jespersen means more than just the Lockean/Emersonian notion that the development of language depends upon the metaphorical use of words which originally stood for things to represent intellectual or spiritual concepts. What he has in mind here, in addition to the growing emergence of abstract or conceptual terms, is the evolution of abstract grammatical forms, the fragmentation or *analysis* of language into the elements of speech characteristic of a tongue like modern English. Thus, as he puts it, the "notion that was formerly expressed by one inseparable word is now often expressed by means of a group of pronouns, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, and other little words, each with a comparatively abstract signification" (PL, 24-5), and he gives, as a simple example, the Latin *cantaveram* in comparison with the English "I had sung." Like Humboldt and Schleicher, Jespersen emphasizes the importance of a direct relation between speech and thought to the adequate functioning of a language. But in his conception, the directness or fidelity of that relation is best realized not by the organic unity of the inseparable inflected word but precisely by the atomized elements of a phrase like "I had sung," which allows the speaker "to express certain minute shades of thought by laying extra stress on some particular element in the speech-group." In "I had sung," for instance, one can easily "accentuate the personal element, the time element, or the action" (PL, 25), an operation which can be performed in *cantaveram* only with much greater difficulty. This comparison leads Jespersen to conclude that "in analytic languages you have the power of kaleidoscopically arranging and re-arranging the elements that in synthetic forms . . . are in rigid connexion" (PL, 26), and suggests further that, in its movement toward a more abstract character, language also moves toward greater freedom and flexibility, which is to say a fuller realization of its functional purpose as a communicative system.

Of particular interest here is Jespersen's notion of the "inseparable" or "indissoluble" nature of inflected forms, along with his conviction that such forms must be located at an early, rather than late or final, stage in language development. Despite the antiromantic and positivist tendencies of his arguments, his thinking about the origins and development of language looks back, in these respects at least, to some decidedly romantic ideas, converging, for instance, with Coleridge's concept of "desynonymizing" (although there is nothing particularly "romantic," to be sure, about Jespersen's use of the idea). "Desynonymizing," we may recall, denotes the process by which Coleridge accounts for the fashioning of a language capable of rigorous philosophical expression, a language in which fine distinctions and shades of meaning may be registered, as opposed to an older, more poetic form of speech closer in structure to undifferentiated nature itself.⁵ Like Jespersen's analytic languages, a desynonymized language is a late development in the history of civilized society, the result of a continuing process of abstraction and fragmentation of what was originally a greater linguistic wholeness or unity. As the term itself suggests, the process involves the breaking up of a primordial sameness, or the progressive establishment of differences, and, in Jespersen's terms, the passage from "flexion" to "analysis" or "isolation" is clearly a part of that process. Later in his discussion Jespersen offers this definition: "Flexion means inseparableness of the word itself . . . and the formal elements" – so that, to use another of his own examples, the Latin *amo* shows inflection, whereas the English "I love" does not (PL, 120).

Arguing against Schleicher and "philologists of the old school," who "were able to see only decay and retrogression" in the history of language (PL, 112), Jespersen is moving here toward a more or less complete repudiation of the idea that inflection represents the final stage in the ancient development of language, as well as "the highest union of content and form" (PL, 118). With certain reservations, unwilling "simply to reverse the order of the three stages of evolution, and say that flexion is the oldest stage, from which language tends through an agglutinative stage towards complete isolation," and knowing, as he does, that the "possibilities of development are . . . manifold, and that there are . . . innumerable ways of arriving at more or less adequate expressions for

human thought" (PL, 126), Jespersen nevertheless offers the following principle, which he sets down, for emphasis, in upper-case letters:

THE EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE SHOWS A PROGRESSIVE TENDENCY FROM INSEPARABLE IRREGULAR CONGLOMERATIONS TO FREELY AND REGULARLY COMBINABLE SHORT ELEMENTS. (PL, 127)

Now what is interesting about the inseparableness of inflected forms is that the most primitive languages, in Jespersen's view, exhibit the same feature. He is even willing to speculate that "the pre-Arian languages spoken in a remote past by our ancestors were still more complicated than the oldest languages we are now acquainted with," and that in these languages the complication took the precise form of "intricate words or word-conglomerations, embodying in one inseparable whole such distinctions as subject, verb, direct and indirect objects, number, tense, mood, etc., and being therefore very clumsy and imperfect instruments for the expression of thought" (PL, 122-3).

In his final chapter, on the origin of language, Jespersen expands and clarifies this point by reiterating his sense that the path of linguistic development in general is towards "flexionless languages . . . with freely combinable elements," and that the starting-point for this development "was flexional languages (such as Latin or Greek)" (PL, 347), which consist largely of what he calls "sentence-words," those relatively complex verbal forms (like *cantaveram* or *cantavisset*) which express in their unity what a modern analytic language would require a whole sentence to convey. The "borderline between word and sentence" in such languages, Jespersen observes, "was not so clearly defined as in more recent times" (PL, 348). But to go back to earlier or more primitive languages is to encounter even greater complexity and lack of definition, not only sentence-words but "sound-conglomerations" almost wholly subject to the particular occasion of their use. Carried to its greatest extreme, moreover, such thinking implies the idea, so to speak, of a *language-word*, a completely unanalyzed, self-synonymous word mass containing within it the possibility of all utterance – a literal language of nature in which whatever is said, to use Wallace Stevens's phrase, is purely "the cry of its occasion."

What is being struck down here, again, is the nineteenth-century view that language originally consisted of discrete, formless roots in isolation

from each other on the model of Chinese, and that only later did it develop toward the complex, inflected systems of such "higher" languages as Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit. Jespersen is proposing, on the contrary, that progress in language means not the building up but the steady breaking down of complexity, and that an ever-increasing refinement in the direction of simplicity and ease of use has in fact taken place, from primitive speech to inflected languages to modern analytic languages. This refinement, moreover, continues right up through the present, suggesting that the "origin" of language is not a fixed point in the past so much as a continuing process. Assuming as he does (in opposition to Schleicher) that language changes constantly, and that patterns of linguistic change are the same in all eras, Jespersen takes the present as his primary source of evidence about the behavior of language in the past, and *Progress in Language* is in fact filled with examples of contemporary usage in modern European languages, primarily English, meant to support his general hypotheses.

What is also suggested here, however, is an even broader commitment on Jespersen's part to a process of desynonymizing, one that involves both the forms and the meanings of words. Hence, in his vision of the development of language, advance is constituted by a movement from the particular and concrete entanglements of words with the reality they name to a greater generality and abstraction, a freeing of words from their subjection to specific things and events so that they become available for general and systematic use in the expression of thought, as opposed to the expression of the world or of things themselves. The development of language, in this sense, is also its liberation, its freedom from nature, and thus its realization of its own identity as a human and cultural instrument.

THE PLACE of Chinese in Jespersen's broad redefinition of linguistic history and priorities should perhaps already be coming into focus at this point. Far from being a prototype of human speech, an intact example of an original, primitive tongue, it stands for Jespersen with modern English as an instance of a language which has undergone extensive change in the direction of "shorter and easier word-forms" (PL, 83). To this extent, and in more than one sense, Chinese is a "modern" language, the result of a long and progressive process of evolution, although this is difficult to see, as Jespersen grants, because of the virtually complete separation in Chinese

between writing and speech, the fact that Chinese writing is not a representation of Chinese sounds. Thus, although a character, standing for a complete word, may remain entirely unchanged, its pronunciation may vary considerably over time. But it is primarily on the basis of such changes in pronunciation that Jespersen begins to mount his argument against the primitiveness of Chinese in general.

Interestingly, Jespersen's description of the features of Chinese differs in no essential way from that of Humboldt, or Schlegel, for that matter. He starts with what are almost obligatory elements in Western accounts of Chinese, mentioning the monosyllabic nature of the language, and the uninflected, invariable forms of its words. These features, in turn, lead him to others that are equally traditional or conventional in Western sinology, including the idea that context is often essential for understanding, and that the "most important part of Chinese grammar" is "that dealing with word-order" (PL, 80). Although he mentions the function of the so-called "empty words" in Chinese, those which indicate grammatical relations more explicitly than word position alone, Jespersen is in general agreement here with Humboldt that the grammatical values of Chinese words are conveyed primarily by their positions with respect to each other, or by what Humboldt calls "the cut and turn of sentences."

The important difference between them, of course, lies in the area of how, or whether, such features of Chinese are to be valued. What for Humboldt, as we have seen, is an alien and ultimately inadequate linguistic system is for Jespersen a perfect instance of a language exhibiting the kinds of changes, the adjustments in the direction of greater freedom and flexibility, that characterize the history of language in general. To this extent, Chinese is allowed back into the fold of valid human languages. Moreover, according to Jespersen's understanding of the history of language, one in which evolution involves a universal movement from complexity to simplicity, and from word- or sound-conglomerations to "freely and regularly combinable short elements," it is precisely the monosyllabic and uninflected nature of Chinese that suggests its modernity or lateness as a language. Rather than the speech of the "world's grey morning" (PL, 82), it is actually, in its present form, the product of advanced evolutionary change, and thus represents not so much the beginnings as the future of language.

Here as elsewhere, then, Jespersen's assumption veers sharply away from

the common nineteenth-century one, which is that Chinese is a language without a history, that it has somehow managed to survive intact from primitive times, frozen in the earliest stages of linguistic growth. Assuming that simplicity of structure is a sign of linguistic development and sophistication rather than of primitiveness, Jespersen suspects that Chinese today is vastly different from what it was like before it acquired its present character of uninflected isolation and almost complete reliance on word order to indicate grammatical significance. He cites, for instance, the researches of the linguist Richard Lepsius, who argued, as early as 1861, that “the monosyllabic character of Chinese is not original, but is a lapse from an earlier polysyllabic structure” (PL, 83). The important point for Jespersen here – and what in fact emerges as one of his central convictions – is that features such as short, invariable word forms and the use of word position for grammatical purposes, regardless of which languages they may appear in, are not and cannot be primitive.

In some respects, to be sure, Jespersen seems less interested in Chinese itself than in the degree to which it seems to lend support to his own sense of linguistic development. Indeed, the idea of progressive change begins to take on more importance for him than the languages whose history supposedly provides the evidence for it. Entitled “The History of Chinese and of Word-Order,” the fourth chapter of *Progress in Language* focuses much more on word order than on Chinese – understandably so, perhaps, since Chinese is but one example in a more inclusive argument that deals not only with linguistic progress but ultimately with *human* progress, with the rational and even inevitable development of humanity, as Jespersen sees it, toward its own fullest possibilities. And the notion of a fixed word order, far from being an insignificant part of that development, is in itself for him “the highest, finest, and accordingly latest developed expedient of speech to which man has attained” (PL, 90). Jespersen, in any case, cannot accept the idea that Chinese or any other language has had a fixed word order from the beginning. To insist upon this idea would be to violate his sense of an orderly or logical evolution. The particular order of subject/verb/object, as he puts it, “is only natural to *developed* human thought” (PL, 91, my emphasis), and any such fixed order, he imagines, “would come quite gradually as a natural consequence of greater mental development and gen-

eral maturity: when the speaker's ideas no longer came into his mind helter-skelter but in orderly sequence" (PL, 97).⁶

But to what extent, we may ask here, is Jespersen's sense of what is "natural" and "orderly" displacing his objectivity? How far is his thinking being shaped by ideological factors or by a cultural bias of his own? Again, his commitment to the idea of progress seems to be overtaking his interest in language itself, and it is hard not to feel that he is finally more concerned with his own notion of orderly development, regarded as a *value*, than with discovering the extent to which the history of language truly exhibits it. It is in this sense, in any case, that *Progress in Language* as a whole may be seen as an optimistic and positivistic account of Western rationality, a late Victorian celebration of such values as progress and civilization (as opposed to the primitive) that constitute for Jespersen an ultimate ground of judgment and an ultimate commitment. How else can we interpret such bravura passages as the following, in which Jespersen considers the logical precision of Chinese word order and what he sees as the unlikelihood that such precision could ever have been available to the primitive mind?

Now, is it probable that primitive man, that unkempt, savage being, still half brute, who did not yet deserve the proud generic name of *homo sapiens*, but would be better termed, if not *homo insipiens*, at best *homo incipiens*, is it probable that this *umensch*, who was little better than an *unmensch*, should have been able at once to arrange his words, or, what amounts here to the same thing, his thoughts, in such a perfect order? I should prefer to suppose that logical, methodical, orderly thinking and speaking have only been attained by mankind after a long and troublesome struggle. And above all an exact order of words as a grammatically significant element of speech is what we should, least of all, look for in the case of primitive man, whose thoughts and words are most likely to have come to him rushing helter-skelter in wild confusion. Nay, "a fixed word-order" is without doubt to be considered the highest, finest, and accordingly latest developed expedient of speech to which man has attained. (PL, 89-90)

What is most striking here, along with the word play and the continual interruption of the proposition in the opening sentence (itself framed as a question), is the hypothetical character of the argument, its prejudicial ap-

peal to self-serving probabilities. Equally telling is the willfulness of Jespersen's "I should prefer to suppose," with its implication that even if the facts should prove otherwise, he would still insist on his own understanding of what makes sense – and what makes sense to him here is precisely his own culture's way of making sense, the modern and Western notion of progress, the idea that such achievements as order and logical thinking can only be located at the end of a developmental process, "a long and troublesome struggle." The argument at this point, however, seems to be based more on such preferences than on empirical facts about the history of language, let alone the primitive.

To his credit, though, Jespersen's sense of humanity is finally broad enough to include what others in his time thought of as "that heathen Chinee." Perhaps he can even be forgiven the ethnocentrism and cultural self-congratulation of his remark that the Chinese use the same word order "as ourselves," a fact that, as he puts it, "shows the phenomenon [of such order] to be founded in the very nature of human thought" (PL, 90-1). One of the most positive results of his wholesale revision of linguistics, certainly, is the rescuing of Chinese from its status as a pejoratively primitive language. By means of this gesture alone he moves far beyond the narrower ethnocentrism of some of his predecessors in linguistics. Yet this gesture, clearly, is made at the expense of the idea of the primitive itself, whose recognition as a part of humanity will have to wait for a still more inclusive outlook. Ironically, for a new generation of modernist poets and writers, it will be precisely its "primitive" aspects that will have to be restored if language is to be renewed or revalidated for the purposes of vital, imaginative expression.

Chapter Five

Language in Its Primary Use Fenollosa and the Chinese Character

Thinking is *thinging*.
— Fenollosa¹

DESPITE his achievements as a collector and historian of Chinese and Japanese art, the American orientalist Ernest Fenollosa is probably best known as the author of the brief and still controversial essay, “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry.” Drafted, in Kenner’s estimation, about 1904 (PE, 291), and intended as a public lecture but unpublished during Fenollosa’s lifetime (he died suddenly in 1908), the essay was largely the outcome of several years of intensive study of classical Chinese poetry, a study which Fenollosa initially undertook in the late 1890s in Japan. Later, after sorting through the materials he had received from Fenollosa’s widow, and concluding that Fenollosa “was a forerunner without knowing it” (CWC, 3), Pound edited the essay and then published it in 1919. Clearly an important stimulus to Pound’s own evolving ideas, not only about the “image” as a form of poetic speech but also about the use of what he was to call the “ideogrammic method” as the foundation for a new kind of poetic structure, Fenollosa’s text has also been regarded as “seriously misleading” in its approach to Chinese poetry and generally as “a small mass of confusion.”²

The argument against Fenollosa primarily involves his apparently less than perfect understanding of the nature of Chinese characters, an understanding that emphasizes the visual qualities of ideograms at the expense of the degree to which, like alphabetical signs, they function as symbols of

sounds. Of course, once Pound began to produce translations from Chinese based on Fenollosa's understanding of ideograms (in spite of Pound's own ignorance of the language), this argument grew to include an attack on an approach to translation that insists on the right to play freely with its source, as opposed to a strict adherence to the letter of the original text. This expanding conflict between the poet on the one hand and the professional sinologist or academic specialist on the other is anticipated, perhaps even instigated, by Fenollosa himself, whose thinking throughout his essay is based on an opposition between science and logic, or poetry and grammar – an opposition in which the first term in either formulation is the privileged one.³ Here I want to consider this conflict as an instance of a larger debate, in the era of early modernism, between poetics and linguistics.

Part of my point, to be sure, is that Fenollosa's discovery of Chinese as a natural or originary language, a linguistic mode that is not "fossil" but *living* poetry, is less a "discovery" than a projection of Emersonian linguistic assumptions upon a highly exotic script, so that Chinese becomes for him an embodiment of the language of nature. As a disciple of Emerson, recruited to teach philosophy in Japan, the Harvard-educated Fenollosa was prepared in advance to be "struck" (to use his biographer's word) by the natural hieroglyphs, the brilliant pictures, that apparently constituted the Chinese written language.⁴ But I also want to situate Fenollosa in the context of his own historical moment, which saw the emergence of modernism, and to relate him to such figures as Jespersen and T. E. Hulme, among others, so as better to see his work not simply as an extension of Emerson's but as part of a developing modernist outlook which increasingly called for a sort of visual thinking, both in philosophy and poetics, during this period. To do this, however, will require postponing consideration of Fenollosa himself and returning briefly to Jespersen.

THE HISTORY of language, in Jespersen's account, is the story of its triumph, its rise, with humanity itself, from nature to culture. If at first it "displayed a luxuriant growth of forms, entangled one with another like the trees in a primeval forest" (PL, 349), from the beginning, nevertheless, "the tendency has been one of progress, slow and fitful progress, but still progress towards greater and greater clearness, regularity, ease and pliancy." From

the miasma of its subjection to the world of particular things and events – a subjection that forced upon it the “intricate, capricious and difficult” form of “half-musical unanalysed expressions” (PL, 365) – language in this story ultimately arrives at the flexibility and abstract generality that make possible its systematic use as an instrument of precise human thought and communication.

Barely acknowledged in this account, however, is the underside or cost of such success, the possibility that from the point of view of the language of nature, which is to say, of poetry, the progress of language, as Jespersen describes it, may well carry with it a loss, a defeat. Indeed, it is hard to avoid the impression that although this loss is registered, however obliquely, in his text, Jespersen does not quite recognize its significance. Given his sense, in fact, that there is “a close relationship between primitive words and poetry,” he seems quite ready to abandon poetry altogether as a primitive property of language which has been superseded by a more accurate civilized speech.

At first, in a familiar contrast, Jespersen admits that while

our words are better adapted to express abstract things and to render concrete things with definite precision, they are comparatively colourless. The old words, on the contrary, spoke more immediately to the senses, they were manifestly more suggestive, more graphic and pictorial; while to express one single thing we are not unfrequently obliged to piece the image together bit by bit, the old concrete words would at once present it to the hearer’s mind as an indissoluble whole; they were, accordingly, better adapted to poetic purposes.

But the problem with the old poetic language, consisting of “nothing but such graphic concrete words,” is that it cannot possibly meet the needs of fully civilized discourse, the needs, that is, of sequential, linear thinking, so that “a wealth in such words,” as Jespersen puts it, “is not incompatible with a certain poverty” (PL, 352). This point, in turn, leads to another familiar argument, one about the growth of language, the overcoming of its primitive poverty, through the metaphorical extension of the meanings of words. What becomes evident here, however, is the extent to which Jespersen is virtually committed to prizing the defeat of poetry by the very logic of his position as a partisan of progress:

That a figurative or metaphorical use of words is a factor of the utmost importance in the life of all languages, is a well-known fact; but I am probably right in thinking it played a more prominent part in old times than now. In course of time a great many metaphors have become stiffened and worn out, so that nobody feels them to be metaphors any longer . . . But the better stocked a language is with those ex-metaphors which have now become regular expressions for definite ideas, the less need is there for going out of your way to find new metaphors. The expression of thought tends therefore to become more and more mechanical and prosaic.

Primitive man, however, on account of the nature of his language, was constantly reduced to using words and phrases figuratively: he was forced to express his thoughts in the language of poetry. (PL, 352-3)

Jespersen's sense of triumph over the primitive here is not without its complications and ironies. While his "primitive man" has no choice but to be poetic in his speech – he is, in fact, "reduced" and "forced" into figurative expression – we, with our full stock of "ex-" or dead metaphors, enjoy the convenience of not having to formulate new ones, with the result that our speech becomes "more and more mechanical and prosaic." Jespersen himself, however, appears quite undismayed by this tangle of losses and gains. He seems to regret neither the loss of language's ancient figurative vitality nor its present condition of stiff, mechanical conventionality. If, on the whole, poetry precedes prose in the march of progress, and we are now beyond poetry, then so be it.

The point, though, as we turn from Jespersen to Fenollosa, and thus from linguistics to poetics, is that for a new generation of writers, emerging within the two decades or so following the appearance of *Progress in Language* in 1894, the progress that Jespersen describes is really a story of a certain decline, of a sort of imaginative or linguistic exhaustion. The freedom from the need to invent new metaphors, the fact that we have already available a language of preformulated definite ideas, was increasingly regarded, by such figures as T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, and certainly Fenollosa himself, not only as the death of art but as the erosion of all perception, and it became the function of poetry, in large measure, to oppose the movement toward abstraction in language, or at least to provide an alternative to it. The idea was not necessarily to deny or overthrow "progress" and to return to the imagined purity of primitive speech, but

to find some way of maintaining the link between language as a product of culture and its natural or poetic origins, its *energeia* as a creative tool.

In Hulme's conception, for instance, poetry is a counterforce to what Jespersen sees as the convenience of the "mechanical and prosaic" quality of modern expression. Hulme does not deny that this "progress" has taken place, or that it has a certain value. But he wants to limit the prosaic to prose itself, regarded as a specific kind or use of language, a kind in which "concrete things are embodied in signs or counters which are moved about according to rules, without being visualised at all in the process."⁵ And poetry, he says in a central passage of "Romanticism and Classicism," "may be considered as an effort to avoid this characteristic of prose."

It is not a counter language, but a visual concrete one. It is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily. It always endeavours to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process. It chooses fresh epithets and fresh metaphors, not so much because they are new, and we are tired of the old, but because the old cease to convey a physical thing and become abstract counters. (S, 134-5)

Poetry for Hulme, in short, corresponds fairly exactly to Jespersen's primitive language of graphic or pictorial words which present things to the hearer's mind as indissoluble wholes. What it lacks in efficiency, preventing, as it does, our "gliding through an abstract process," it makes up for with a certain kind of power, its ability to "arrest" us and to render a more or less direct sensation of the world. If the purpose of prose, as Hulme puts it, is "to hurry you along to a conclusion" (S, 165), then poetry, quite deliberately, is meant to slow us down, forcing us to experience things in terms of their immediate presence rather than abstractly or conceptually.

For Hulme, however, poetry is not primitive; rather, it represents the most advanced state of language precisely because it forgoes the convenience of "abstract counters" and keeps going out of its way to find new metaphors for the sake of a fresh apprehension of experience. Poetry, in this sense, is the renewal of language, a use of it in which it attempts to resist its own fate, which, as Hulme acknowledges, is ultimately to be absorbed by ordinary speech. Without such renewal, he suggests, language can be little more than what Emerson called the "tomb of the muses"⁶ or

what Hulme himself calls "the museum where the dead metaphors of the poets are preserved" (S, 152). The problem with such a language is that to speak it is to be involved in experience in only an approximate way, since what it expresses is "never the exact thing but a compromise – that which is common to you, me and everybody" (S, 132). Whether we like it or not, however, as Hulme also acknowledges, we inhabit this linguistic museum most of the time, and he does not minimize the difficulty of breaking out of it. "It is because language will not carry over the exact thing you want to say," as he puts it, "that you are compelled simply, in order to be accurate, to invent original ways of stating things" (S, 162), although to do so is to enter into "a terrific struggle with language" (S, 132).

In a sense, then, Hulme reverses Jespersen's reversal. The progress of language toward greater generality and abstraction, or toward what Jespersen considered the positive establishment of a stock of "regular expressions for definite ideas," is reinterpreted as a process of decay, a movement toward the breakdown of language's capacity to convey meaning at all. "Most of us," Hulme insists, "never see things as they are, but see only the stock types which are embodied in language" (S, 166). *Real* progress, therefore, depends on the very activities and qualities of language that, in Jespersen's sense of the matter, have been superseded and left behind, in the primitive past. Poetry, as Hulme puts it, is "always the advance guard of language. The progress of language is the absorption of new analogies."

THE QUARREL between Hulme and Jespersen that I have been staging here is best understood as a disagreement about what constitutes linguistic progress or about the value of the results of linguistic change. At bottom, it is a quarrel about the efficacy or efficiency of poetic as opposed to prosaic discourse – which is an opposition between "live" and "dead" metaphor, between a visual, intuitive speech which makes us see, through an overt use of figurative language, what we are talking about, and ordinary, seemingly literal language whose figurative status has been forgotten and whose signs have displaced what they signify. To Hulme, Jespersen, for the sake of verbal mobility, is obliged to live in the museum of dead metaphors and thus to live apart from immediate experience, while to Jespersen, Hulme must take on the difficult task of constantly reinventing experience in language.

More significant than this quarrel, though, is the shared view of language that underlies it, the broad idea that language originates in or develops from metaphor, from poetic acts of perception, and that its progress includes a certain loss of power. Both writers agree, as Hulme puts it, that "Every word in the language originates as a *live* metaphor," and that "Metaphors soon run their course and die" (S, 152; 151).⁸ Such beliefs, to be sure, are virtually standard linguistic doctrine in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with or without explicit reference to the organic analogy. Emerson's version of these ideas, in "The Poet," where language is a conspicuously human construction which nonetheless exhibits "natural" behavior, is perhaps their classic articulation:

The poets made all the words, and therefore language is the archives of history, and, if we must say it, a sort of tomb of the muses. For, though the origin of most of our words is forgotten, each word was at first a stroke of genius, and obtained currency, because for the moment it symbolized the world to the first speaker and to the hearer. The etymologist finds the deadest word to have been once a brilliant picture. Language is fossil poetry. As the limestone of the continent consists of infinite masses of the shells of animalcules, so language is made up of images, or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin. (SW, 316)

In several ways, of course, what this passage describes is a linguistic paradise lost, the fall of man transposed to language. More than just a statement of what would become conventional linguistic doctrine, however, this passage, especially if it is seen in the larger context of the essay in which it appears, is susceptible to more than one reading. It seems calculated, in fact, to demonstrate not only, as Emerson puts it two pages earlier, that "Every word *was* once a poem," but that "Every new relation *is* a new word" (my italics), where the change in tense marks a significant shift in outlook, a suddenly revised notion of the progress of language that anticipates the attitudes of both Jespersen and Hulme. Emerson moves, within the space of two sentences, from a conception of origin as irrecoverable beginning to a conception of it as an always present possibility, and thus from an understanding of language as a finished creation, what Humboldt called an *ergon*, to an understanding of it as an ongoing process or activity, Humboldt's *energeia*, in which the per-

ception of new relations constitutes the renewal or continuing origin of language.

Both of these conceptions are demonstrated in the passage itself. A word obtains currency, according to Emerson, because it achieves a powerful if momentary fidelity to experience, giving its first speaker and hearer a vital access to their world. In obtaining currency, however, the word slowly undergoes a kind of devaluation, losing, through its very use, its ability vividly to signify what it stands for, and becoming, in Hulme's sense, a mere counter, an abstraction. But if the fusion of word and thing is only momentary, and if language is thus inescapably the archives of history – a kind of memorial to its own origins, preserving those insights of tradition whose brilliance has been worn away by time – the continuing possibility, throughout history, of *new* relations and *new* words is not therefore ruled out. In this sense, there is no progress or history of *language*, but there are histories of *words*. Emerson shows as much, assuming the role of poet as well as etymologist, with his own images of “fossil poetry” and “the limestone of the continent,” metaphors which newly relate language and natural science, and which thus constitute a recovery for his own time, a true naming, of the nature of language itself. We are asked, that is, to think of etymology as a kind of natural history, akin to biology or geology, and of words as the traces of once living organisms, the mere shells of once vivid meanings.⁹ At the level of statement, then, the passage as a whole is a lament for the loss of original poetic power from words. But the passage also demonstrates, at the level of its own use of metaphor, that poetry, as Hulme insists, is the advance guard of language, supplying new relations which make possible fresh representations, or coinages, of the world.

THE PROBLEM, at any rate, for Emerson and Hulme, if not for Jespersen, is that language exists at any given time largely in terms of its “secondary use” – as a body, that is, of received poetic figures whose original status or use has been forgotten – or even suppressed, as Nietzsche suggests in what is perhaps the most powerful statement of this idea, his 1873 essay, “Truth and Falsity in an Ultramoral Sense.”¹⁰ This circumstance, as Jespersen might well argue, is perhaps the inescapable condition of successful social discourse and practical civilized existence, and, as such, a kind of

reality principle that we have no choice but to accept. Communication would be cumbersome indeed if we had to remain actively and constantly aware of how we are using language or of how we might most vividly and originally say what we mean. Nietzsche, however, offers his own version of this point, one that goes far beyond the practical considerations involved:

Only by forgetting that primitive world of metaphors, only by the congelation and coagulation of an original mass of similes and percepts pouring forth as a fiery liquid out of the primal faculty of human fancy, only by the invincible faith, that *this sun, this window, this table* is a truth in itself: in short only by the fact that man forgets himself as subject, and what is more as an *artistically creating* subject, only by all this does he live with some repose, safety, and consequence. (PN, 510)

Nietzsche's volcanic metaphor here suggests the infinite, world-forming potential, but also the volatility, the sheer figurational excess, of the imagination. For the sake of stability and of an ordered existence, we must impose limits on our creativity and commit ourselves to some version of the truth, to the illusion of some necessary, final relationship between words and what they signify, cultivating an "invincible faith" that the world as we experience it through the names of things constitutes a fixed reality. But this also means, again, that we are cut off, in certain fundamental ways, from our actual, immediate experience (even if, for Nietzsche himself, such experience is ultimately impossible to encounter).¹¹

In Emerson's case, for instance, the problem of establishing an "original relation to the universe," announced as a goal at the beginning of *Nature*, can be seen to be a problem of language. To live in a world already named by one's fathers or the foregoing generations is to live in a state of less than full access to that world; it is to be clothed out of the "faded wardrobe" of the past. The remedy for this situation would seem to lie in what might be called a *primary* use of language, what Emerson refers to as a "poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition" (SW, 186) – although this is as much the goal itself as it is a means of achieving it, in the sense that a poetry of insight *is* an original relation, a new metaphor. In these terms, a primary use of language would seem to be not simply poetic or aesthetic

but *utopian* – a use of language that might lead to new political and cultural formations, and that would permit the building of our own world, which Emerson, in fact, invites us to undertake at the end of *Nature*.

At the same time, of course, the term “utopian” also suggests the visionary or impractical nature of such a use of language, its virtual unworldliness. For Nietzsche, for example, a primary use of language, or what he calls the “impulse toward the formation of metaphors,” is a fundamentally human capability, and although it is repressed by its own products, the concepts and metaphors which we mistake, or are conditioned to mistake, for the real world, this impulse has open to it other outlets or channels, those of myth and art. Here, by consciously producing “new figures of speech, metaphors, metonymies,” this impulse

constantly shows its passionate longing for shaping the existing world of waking man as motley, irregular, inconsequentially incoherent, attractive, and eternally new as the world of dreams is. For indeed, waking man per se is only clear about his being awake through the rigid and orderly woof of ideas, and it is for this very reason that he sometimes comes to believe that he was dreaming when that woof of ideas has for a moment been torn by Art. (PN, 513)

Art, in other words, is a kind of sublimation that embodies the desire for change, what Wallace Stevens calls “the motive for metaphor”¹² – and Nietzsche suggests that this desire, if it could, would extend beyond art to “the existing world of waking man” in order to dismantle its imprisoning concepts. Short of this, however, we at least have art, in which we can relax our commitment to the concepts that define “reality,” and experience the freedom (disturbing as this may sometimes be) of knowing its arbitrariness and of seeing it invented anew.

IN SOME WAYS, as I shall be arguing, it is precisely to a vision of language in its primary use that the work of Ernest Fenollosa is also addressed, though without Nietzsche’s interest in exposing the metaphoricity of “truth” and the resulting fictionality and instability of our concepts. Fenollosa’s essay on the Chinese written character is, in this sense, an almost explicitly utopian document, part of a project to bring about not only a new understanding between East and West but, as Pound notes in his preface, a new, American renaissance as well. If we must grant, though, as some of Fen-

ollosa's critics insist, that his essay hardly affords an accurate picture of Chinese, it is perhaps part of its utopian character that it risks being, instead, a contribution to the *mythology* of language, a modern version of the quest for a *lingua adamica*, precisely because it is committed to the pursuit of a linguistic method that would be, "whether the Chinese exemplified it or not . . . the ideal language of the world."¹³ This ideal language, moreover, is not only utopian but primitive, based as it is on a recovery of linguistic possibilities that have been obscured rather than improved upon by modern civilized speech.

Fenollosa's concern, that is to say, in direct contrast with Nietzsche's, is to reestablish what he sees as the truth or the natural grounds of language, and thus to repair the ability of our poor abstract speech, through the use of Chinese as a model, to serve as an instrument of genuine knowledge. The special virtue or privilege of Chinese for Fenollosa, after all, to put it in Emersonian terms, is that it is a language made up of images or tropes which have never lapsed into a secondary use and which thus continually remind us of their poetic origin. Clearly, there is more than a hint here of an Adamic impulse at work, an idealistic assumption about the connection between naming and knowing. One is reminded of Sampson Reed's language of things, not to mention various seventeenth-century efforts to restore the mythic condition of unity between language and the world that prevailed before the fall at Babel.

But to what extent, we might also ask, can Chinese legitimately serve as a model for Western linguistic practices? In assuming that it can, and in assuming that ideograms embody the history not only of Chinese but of language in general, Fenollosa, it seems, overlooks an important distinction. Unlike alphabetical writing, which, as Michel Foucault reminds us, represents speech rather than the thing signified, and which provides, so to speak, directions for the phonetic reproduction of words, Chinese writing is a wholly different mode of representation which refers to the signified directly.¹⁴ Given this paramount difference, it is difficult to see how alphabetical or phonetic systems of writing could adapt themselves to "ideogrammic" methods or otherwise do what ideograms do. Pound's habit in the later cantos of incorporating Chinese ideograms directly into his predominantly alphabetical text only seems to stress the difference all the more.

My interest here, however, is not simply in Fenollosa's thinking itself

but in the degree to which that thinking is grounded in a set of persistent Western myths about language, particularly the idea that words, under certain conditions, will efface themselves before the world. Based on Emerson's notion of the "immediate dependence of language upon nature" (SW, 199), Fenollosa's thinking coheres around the assumption that language, in a way still visibly exemplified by Chinese, was originally a direct reflection of the world, so that a primary use of language for him means a return to origins, to a primitive linguistic state before the invention of grammar, a state in which forgotten but valid "mental processes," as he puts it, are still intact (CWC, 21).

Like Hulme, then, but far more radically, Fenollosa can also be seen to be at odds with Jespersen's idea of linguistic progress. For both, such progress implies the increasing blindness or opacity of language, the failure of its capacities to disclose a direct, primarily visual impression of experience. But if for Hulme the visual, concrete language of poetry is, at best, a "*compromise* for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily" (my italics), for Fenollosa, Chinese poetry, inscribed in ideograms which are themselves "based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature," comes much closer to such a language and thus to things themselves. "It speaks," says Fenollosa, "at once with the vividness of painting, and with the mobility of sounds. It is, in some sense, more objective than either, more dramatic. In reading Chinese we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching *things* work out their own fate" (CWC, 8-9). To read Chinese poetry, in these terms, is not only to hear it "speak" but to be presented with "a continuous moving picture." As representations of reality, written Chinese expressions, according to Fenollosa, are virtually events in the world, independent of and detached from their readers, so that *reading* becomes *watching*. They have this capacity because, unlike the conventionalized signs of alphabetical languages, Chinese signs are originally representations not merely of sounds or even of things but of actions or processes, things in motion or in relation. "It might be thought," says Fenollosa, "that a picture is naturally the picture of a *thing*, and that therefore the root ideas of Chinese are what grammar calls nouns." But it is at just this point that Fenollosa can be seen to depart from Emerson, since, as he goes on to say, "a large number of the primitive Chinese characters, even the so-called radicals, are shorthand pictures of

actions or processes” (CWC, 9), as opposed to the things or static “natural facts” to which words, for the Swedenborgian Emerson of *Nature* at least, correspond.

As a simple example, Fenollosa cites the ideogram meaning “to speak,” which “is a mouth with two words and a flame coming out of it” (CWC, 9–10). To respond to such a sign literally, which is what he insists upon, is to see it precisely as a direct image of *speaking*, and not as a sign encoding or representing an infinitive or any fixed part of speech. In this sense, even to say that this sign means “to speak” is to violate its graphic nature and to push it toward the abstract condition of conventionally grammatical discourse – or, as Fenollosa himself remarks, it is to “import into our reading of Chinese all the weakness of our own formalisms” (CWC, 17). In actual use, the meaning of such a sign will vary according to the demands of its context, although its form will remain unchanged. But the important point here is that the nature of the Chinese sign as a representation of an action gives it a freedom of function, what Fenollosa refers to as an “alive and plastic” quality, unknown to “parts of speech” in conventional grammatical systems.

It is this freedom, along with its concrete particularity, that grants the Chinese sign its representational accuracy and vitality. As Fenollosa goes on to argue,

A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature. Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting-points, of actions, cross-sections cut through actions, snap-shots. Neither can a pure verb, an abstract motion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things, and so the Chinese conception tends to represent them. (CWC, 10)

If, as Fenollosa asserts, “Nature herself has no grammar” (CWC, 16), then it makes sense, in terms of his isomorphic conception, that a language geared to the accurate representation of nature should be similarly free of formal, systematizing rules. Almost every written Chinese word, he points out, is an “underlying word,” by which he means that it can serve the function of virtually any part of speech, depending upon the demands of its context. This underlying word “is not exclusive of parts of speech, but comprehensive; not something which is neither a noun, verb, nor adjective,

but something which is all of them at once and at all times" (CWC, 18) – a description which recalls Jespersen's notion of primitive words as un-analyzed expressions.

From Fenollosa's primitivist perspective, of course, it is the classification of words into grammatical categories that obscures their natural, which is to say their poetic, vitality. Such classification represents for him the imposition of a cultural construct or a human invention upon an intrinsically natural language, a sort of domestication that leads inevitably to distortion. "Like nature," as he puts it, "the Chinese words are alive and plastic, because *thing* and *action* are not formally separated. The Chinese language naturally knows no grammar," and so it is flexible, poetically vital, "full of the sap of nature" (CWC, 17).¹⁵

Like Nietzsche, then, although for different reasons, Fenollosa tends to see language (or at least modern and mainly Western languages) largely as a falsification of experience. This is the case for Nietzsche because concepts, or the names of concepts, are fictions, abstractions corresponding to nothing in reality (like the word "leaf"), whereas for Fenollosa it is the organization of language according to grammatical systems, or into "parts of speech," that leads to the misrepresentation of experience. There is nothing wrong with language, apparently, until words are classified into grammatical categories – categories, for instance, that isolate nouns from verbs, and thus agents from actions. To conceive of language in this way, as an arrangement of parts of speech, is not only to remove it from experience but to break experience itself down into parts in a way that violates its natural wholeness or interrelatedness, the very quality that primitive utterances, according to Jespersen, are best designed to express. Thus, "All nations," Fenollosa insists, "have written their strongest and most vivid literature before they invented a grammar" (CWC, 16).

Moreover, when we attain what he calls "the inner heat of thought, a heat which melts down the parts of speech," we realize that they can be recast, or that one part of speech can act for another. And "They *act for* one another," says Fenollosa, "because they were originally one and the same" (CWC, 17). The implied idea here of an originally desynonymized language, a language without differences, strongly recalls Jespersen's conception of primitive "sentence-words" and "sound-conglomerations," and underlines Fenollosa's own primitivism. His attitude, in fact, as we saw in

Chapter 1, places him in opposition both to the tradition of nineteenth-century linguistics, which held Chinese in contempt as a language that had failed to develop beyond its own beginnings, and to Jespersen's notion of progress in language, which rescues Chinese from its reputation of linguistic poverty, but only at the cost of its direct involvement with things themselves.

Other elements in Jespersen's thinking seem equally likely to have aroused Fenollosa's dissent. These include not only the notion that language is more social and historical than natural in character, but the idea that linguistics is most properly pursued as a study of speech or pronunciation, the area that provides the most direct evidence for linguistic change and development. But if Jespersen's linguistics calls primarily for an approach to language as speech, then for Fenollosa the primitivism of Chinese, as we also observed earlier, is still preserved in its written characters, and it is Chinese writing, in its immunity to the social and historical processes that govern speech, that is, of course, Fenollosa's primary concern.¹⁶

That concern becomes even narrower when we consider that Chinese, for Fenollosa, means not simply Chinese writing in general but Chinese writing of a specific kind – that of classical Chinese poetry, a literary language or script employing conventions that distinguish it from other kinds of discourse, both spoken and written.¹⁷ Despite what Jespersen sees as the general progress of language toward increasing systematization and separation from nature, Chinese for Fenollosa remains the primary example of a language that represents the original (and desirable) condition of all languages and that still maintains its original, “natural” character, by which he means its embeddedness in direct action and concrete processes, its embeddedness in nature itself. To this extent, Fenollosa is in agreement with nineteenth-century philology about the primitivism of Chinese, except that he values that primitivism, and he is in agreement with Jespersen himself regarding the progress of language, except that he sees this “progress” as a negative development and, in large part, exempts Chinese from it – justifiably perhaps, because what he means by “Chinese” is not the modern spoken language but the ancient literary one.

ROUGHLY SPEAKING, Fenollosa's essay on the Chinese written character may be divided into two more or less equal parts, the first of which considers

“the Chinese characters and the Chinese sentence chiefly as vivid shorthand pictures of actions and processes in nature” (CWC, 21). The focus here is not only on the concreteness of Chinese but on the essentially verbal nature of all language which Chinese reveals – the idea that all words, regardless of their grammatical function, derive from roots which are primitive verbs and which thus express “characteristic actions of visible nature” (CWC, 19). A great part of the value of Chinese for Fenollosa, in fact, lies in the extent to which its written characters still visibly retain the marks of their origins, suggesting to him that words in all languages were originally verbs and that all the other parts of speech derive from them.

Chinese, then, embodies the original state of language away from which all other languages have evolved, and it is only in Chinese that we can find accurate representations of what the eye truly sees in the world: “things in motion, motion in things.” Thus, our abstract generality “spring” is expressed in Chinese by a character representing the “sun underlying the bursting forth of plants” (CWC, 10). This character “means” spring, but it also links the concept to a particular natural event or action. In this way, reading in Chinese is never merely an abstract process; it is a movement among signs which may be *interpreted* as abstractions but which are visibly composed of more fundamental signs which refer directly to the concrete world of experience. In this way, too, Chinese shows that thinking is *thinging*. Each character, as Fenollosa says, bears its metaphor on its face and embodies its whole history, displaying its “progress” from concrete representation of visible nature to abstraction.

After a brief digression on the process by which the various parts of speech must have grown out of primitive verbal roots, Fenollosa moves on to the second part of the essay, beginning with the observation that the “best poetry deals not only with natural images but with lofty thoughts, spiritual suggestions and obscure relations,” shifting his attention here from the ability of Chinese to represent visible nature to its ability to represent the invisible, that part of “natural truth” which is “hidden in processes too minute for vision” (CWC, 21). In other words, in order to demonstrate the capacity of Chinese not merely to reflect appearances but to operate as an important literary language and to create “a great intellectual fabric,” he turns to a more particular examination of those forgotten but valid mental processes of primitive humanity which Chinese, in his view, also

still embodies – and these turn out to be processes of metaphorical thinking, the very processes responsible for the “progress” of language and thus its arrival at its present condition of self-forgetfulness.

Yet it is these processes which must be recovered if language is to be restored to its state of primary use, and for this task, as Fenollosa argues, Chinese is perfectly equipped to serve as an example, since, unlike Western phonetic scripts, the Chinese written character openly displays its metaphorical origins, as well as “the embryonic stages of its growth.” In Chinese, Fenollosa insists, “etymology is constantly visible” (CWC, 25), so that words can never become dead metaphors but remain living archives which exhibit their own evolving histories, all the “substrata of metaphor” (CWC, 22) upon which language is built.¹⁸ Just as a fresh metaphor, for Hulme, “arrests” us and grants us more direct access to our experience, so reading Chinese, according to Fenollosa, is a constant exercise in renewing our contact with the world, and this is the case because what the visible etymology of Chinese characters reveals is that the roots of all words, even the loftiest abstractions, are “still embedded in direct action” (CWC, 22) – or, to put it another way, that all our concepts and ideas were originally metaphors rooted in the real world.

Thus, in reading Chinese, our attention is focused not only on the “operations of nature,” which it represents more transparently than phonetic writing systems do, but, paradoxically, on the words or characters themselves in terms of the successive stages of their development, their “lines of metaphoric advance” (CWC, 25), which show precisely that a concept like “spring” is built upon the metaphorical extension of the meanings of several more elemental signs (the sun, growing plants) compounded together in a single ideogram. Fenollosa seems to be arguing here that Chinese is simultaneously transparent to its meanings and materially productive of them, giving us access both to “*things* working out their own fate” and to the poetic vitality, the original metaphorical basis, of the Chinese sign – an idea in accord with Emerson’s notion that words in their primary use are “brilliant pictures,” poetic inventions that symbolize the world, which only later become part of the archives of history, their brilliance obscured by time and use.

The difference in Chinese, however, is that the original brilliance of the picture remains. Words do not fall into a secondary use in which they cease

to remind us of their poetic origin – or, if they do, it is not at the cost of their primary use. The special quality of Chinese for Fenollosa is that it is simultaneously brilliant picture and abstract counter or material sign, simultaneously poetry and ordinary speech. In the ideogram we see both word and world, both metaphor and nature, because metaphor is “the revealer of nature” (CWC, 23), which is to say, of truth.¹⁹ The question, again, is how alphabetical languages, in which etymologies are not visible, can be made to function like Chinese, in a way that will nonetheless expose their poetic or metaphorical origins, so that we will be better able to see, just as much as in Chinese, that our words, our abstract concepts, are not themselves real but are derived from or grounded in the physical world, in real things and events in nature.

BUT IN THE FIRST PART of the essay, where he shuttles back and forth between examinations of the sentence and the individual sign, Fenollosa is mainly concerned to demonstrate the poetic vitality of Chinese at both levels, a vitality that depends upon the nature of the sign as a representation of an action, and upon the nature of the sentence as an expression, not of a complete thought, but of a complete natural process, a transference of energy or power, as he sees it, from one place or thing to another. The simple transitive sentence, both in English and in Chinese, “exactly corresponds,” he points out, to the “universal form of action in nature.” Thus, “Farmer pounds rice,” as a sentence, is formally equivalent to a flash of lightning between the clouds and the earth (CWC, 13).

This argument, which concludes with Fenollosa’s insistence that all words derive from primitive verbal roots, so that language was originally an elemental representation of action in nature, is underlain by his all but explicit conviction that language in its natural state, so to speak, is an independent entity, existing outside the human, and to this extent he is in agreement, again, with those nineteenth-century linguists who insist on the natural, as opposed to the social or human, status of language. His conviction, to put this another way, is that there *is* such a thing as a natural state of language, prior to its domestication or appropriation by grammatical systems.

At one point, for example, considering the individual written word in Chinese, he wonders, somewhat archly, how such words are to be classi-

fied. "Are some of them nouns by nature, some verbs and some adjectives? Are there pronouns and prepositions and conjunctions in Chinese as in good Christian languages?" And his answer, or suspicion, at least, derived, as he says, from an analysis of the Aryan languages, is that "such differences are not natural, and that they have been unfortunately invented by grammarians to confuse the simple poetic outlook on life." From this point Fenollosa moves to his argument about the degree to which all words began originally as verbs, supported by his observation that "all Aryan etymology points back to roots which are the equivalents of simple Sanskrit verbs" (CWC, 16), so that the classification of words into "parts of speech" must be seen as a later and largely artificial imposition in the history of a language.

It is because of this conviction, at any rate, that Fenollosa is led to attack the idea of the sentence as a merely grammatical and self-limiting operation – as either the expression of a complete thought or as the union of a subject and a predicate. For one thing, no sentence, as he puts it, can really complete a thought. Assuming that there is an ultimate identity between thought and nature (following Emerson, for whom "the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind"), and arguing that there is no completeness in nature, or that "All processes in nature are interrelated," he goes on to conclude that "there could be no complete sentence . . . save one which it would take all time to pronounce." As for the notion of the sentence as the union of a subject and a predicate, to adopt this idea is to fall back upon "pure subjectivity," to impose upon language a human definition, in willful disregard of its own nature. The result is a distorted view of the sentence as "an accident of man as a conversational animal," in opposition to Fenollosa's preferred view of it as "an attribute of nature."

What is implied here, in the possibility that language is a merely human instrument, is the alarming prospect of its groundlessness, an utter lack of connection between language and the world, and this possibility evokes from Fenollosa a strong cry of protest. If this were really the case, he is led to exclaim, "then there could be no possible test of the truth of a sentence. Falsehood would be as specious as verity. Speech would carry no conviction" (CWC, 11). We would have, in short, a state of affairs corresponding to that implied by Nietzsche's view of language as a set of merely provisional fictions, a "mobile army of metaphors" (PN, 508) with nothing

outside them to guarantee their truth. Nietzsche's view, of course, is a radical one which will not come into its own until the era of poststructuralism. But against this view, against even Jespersen's notion that the fundamental form of the simple transitive sentence, far from being natural or primitive, is only the end result of a long evolutionary process of human development, Fenollosa insists that "The sentence form was forced upon primitive men by nature itself. It was not we who made it; it was a reflection of the temporal order in causation" (CWC, 12).

Although we encounter here what initially looks like a contradiction in Fenollosa's thinking – namely, the apparent opposition between his idea that the sentence form is wholly natural in origin and his assertion, nonetheless, that nature has no grammar – what he seems to intend, instead, is a distinction between a "natural" grammar, "the temporal order in causation," as he puts it, and a human one, in the sense of a system of linguistic or grammatical differences derived from logic alone. Consistently, he tries to demonstrate that language is "scientific" rather than logical, by which he means that it agrees with the structure of nature rather than some set of "arbitrary *subjective* processes" (CWC, 22) or merely human decisions about how it should work. Language without grammar, then, means a language that operates without "benefit" of some abstract organizing system imposed externally upon words, such as a system of inflections to indicate grammatical functions. Fenollosa prefers uninflected languages like English and Chinese, in which "there is nothing but the order of the words to distinguish their functions. And," he emphasizes, "this order would be no sufficient indication, were it not the *natural order* – that is, the order of cause and effect" (CWC, 13).

It is this natural order, or natural grammar, really, that brings language "close to *things*," because there is no interference from some arbitrary system of arrangement between the order of words and the order of things. A similar conception, as we saw earlier, appears in Emerson's late essay "Poetry and Imagination," where he writes, "Natural objects, if individually described and out of connection, are not yet known, since they are really parts of a symmetrical universe, like words of a sentence; and if their true order is found, the poet can read their divine significance orderly as in a Bible."²⁰ The truth of a thing, in other words, can appear, or be read, only if that thing is seen in terms of its place within the total order or

grammar of the symmetrical universe, a point that Fenollosa echoes when he declares that "All processes in nature are interrelated," which implies, in turn, that the truth cannot be spoken unless it is spoken in its totality.

Curiously, Emerson's thinking here is the reverse of Fenollosa's, in the sense that natural order or the truth of nature finds its best model for him in the grammatical sentence or the ordered text, while Fenollosa sees the truth of the sentence or of language as dependent upon its accurate reflection of the order of cause and effect in nature. Yet it should also be clear that both are approaching the same point from opposite directions, a point about the complete correspondence between language and nature. Emerson's "true order" corresponds to Fenollosa's "natural order," inasmuch as both, to the extent that they are reflected in our speech, provide us with accurate, namely "scientific," knowledge. What is most important is that for both writers nature can be figured as a language or in itself constitutes one – a language, moreover, that lies behind or directly informs the roots of our speech, so that ultimately nature and language are in complete isomorphic correspondence with each other. Andrew Welsh articulates what is essential here when he writes that "Language can structure the world as well as it does because the world once structured language."²¹

Language for Fenollosa, in any case, approaches its ideal condition when it is allowed to function unhampered by humanly devised systems of order or arrangement. Only then can it assume its natural state of self-effacing isomorphism with the world. When, on the other hand, the order of words in an utterance derives from the subjectivity of its speaker, or from language itself, as opposed to nature – as he thinks it does, for instance, in intransitive or negative constructions – then the result is "weak and incomplete sentences which suspend the picture and lead us to think of some verbs as denoting states rather than acts. Outside grammar," Fenollosa continues, "the word 'state' would hardly be recognized as scientific" (CWC, 14), for a "state" is precisely a suspension of process and, as such, unreal, a fictive creation of language when its own relations with nature have been disrupted by grammar. The danger or weakness of language, once it has developed away from nature, lies precisely in this capacity to create fictive states, and the "ultimate weakness of language" for Fenollosa lies in the use of the copula – the use of "is" followed by a noun or an adjective," a construction which names "the abstractest state of all, namely bare ex-

istence" (CWC, 15), or which presents a thing completely isolated from its functions and relations.

But in Chinese, just as "we can still watch positive verbal conceptions passing over into *so-called negatives*" (my italics), so we can also see the active, concrete basis of even so abstract a construction as that employing the copula, which in European languages, along with negations and intransitive forms, makes possible artificial statements that correspond to nothing outside of language itself. In Chinese, Fenollosa explains, "the chief verb for 'is' not only means actively 'to have,' but shows by its derivation that it expresses something even more concrete, namely 'to snatch from the moon with the hand.' Here," Fenollosa triumphantly comments, "the baldest symbol of prosaic analysis is transformed by magic into a splendid flash of concrete poetry" (CWC, 15).²² And, conversely, the moment we use the copula, "the moment we express subjective inclusions, poetry evaporates" (CWC, 28).

THE STUDY of Chinese poetry, therefore, is an education in the primary use of language. It demonstrates the power of a mode of expression which is in dynamic and isomorphic harmony with the world, a mode that does not do violence to nature but that has absorbed its poetic substance, Fenollosa says, and "built with it a second work of metaphor" (CWC, 24). (Similarly, the poet's power of naming, Emerson suggests in "The Poet," "is not art, but a second nature, grown out of the first, as a leaf out of a tree" [SW, 316].) It is metaphor, in fact, that emerges in the latter part of Fenollosa's essay as his master concept, largely because he regards metaphor as non- or even anticonceptual. The ultimate opposition organizing his thinking, certainly, can be seen to be that between metaphor and abstraction. As with Emerson, Nietzsche, Hulme, and even Jespersen, metaphor for Fenollosa, defined as "the use of material images to suggest immaterial relations" (CWC, 22), is the central feature in a primary use of language, although it is more for him than just a rhetorical figure or a poetic construct. Instead, it is the chief means of countering the force of abstraction – by the very fact that it is the *basis* of abstraction – a relationship of which the ideogram is the supreme embodiment – and it is also the very substance of both poetry and nature, as well as "the revealer of nature" (CWC, 23).

Fenollosa explains the thinking behind these remarks in one of the most Emersonian passages in the essay:

The whole delicate substance of speech is built upon substrata of metaphor. Abstract terms, pressed by etymology, reveal their ancient roots still embedded in direct action. But the primitive metaphors do not spring from arbitrary *subjective* processes. They are possible only because they follow objective lines of relations in nature herself. Relations are more real and more important than the things which they relate. The forces which produce the branch-angles of an oak lay potent in the acorn. Similar lines of resistance, half-curbing the out-pressing vitalities, govern the branching of rivers and of nations. Thus a nerve, a wire, a roadway, and a clearing-house are only varying channels which communication forces for itself. This is more than analogy, it is identity of structure. Nature furnishes her own clues. Had the world not been full of homologies, sympathies, and identities, thought would have been starved and language chained to the obvious. There would have been no bridge whereby to cross from the minor truth of the seen to the major truth of the unseen. (CWC, 22-3)

Like Emerson, especially the Emerson of *Nature* and "The Poet," Fenollosa is largely concerned here to establish the truth of metaphor, to affirm that the ground of language is reality. The originary metaphors of our speech have not arisen, he asserts, from "arbitrary *subjective* processes. They are possible," or real, "only because they follow objective lines of relations in nature herself," and to this extent language can be understood as a direct mimetic reflection or doubling of the world, a virtual transposition of nature's own structures and processes to speech. It is in this sense that Fenollosa understands the simple transitive sentence to be a natural structure or event. "The type of sentence in nature," he says, "is a flash of lightning" (CWC, 12). And it is also in this sense that words, for both writers, are signs of natural facts – if we can enlarge Emerson's rather static notion of such facts to include Fenollosa's "direct action." At the beginning of the chapter on language in *Nature*, as we saw earlier, Emerson provides a list of examples to show that abstract terms in English are still embedded, etymologically if not visibly, in direct action, or "material appearance." Thus "*Right* means *straight*; *wrong* means *twisted*. *Spirit* primarily means *wind*."

But even more important is the *use* of natural facts, or of “natural history,” as Emerson puts it, which “is to give us aid in supernatural history: the use of the outer creation, to give us language for the beings and changes of the inward creation” (SW, 197). In Fenollosa’s words, “Nature furnishes her own clues” – clues that provide us ultimately with a “bridge whereby to cross from the minor truth of the seen to the major truth of the unseen.” This bridge is language itself, or the world’s own “homologies, sympathies, and identities” transposed to language, and then extended to take on a symbolic or metaphorical function. “Nature,” as Emerson’s well-known formula concludes, “is the symbol of Spirit.” Without these clues, Fenollosa asserts, language would be “chained to the obvious.” We would be unable, that is, to see the subtler, underlying connections, the “identity of structure,” among such disparate objects as “a nerve, a wire, a roadway, and a clearing-house,” or to appreciate the similar “lines of resistance” that produce “the branch-angles of an oak” and “the branching of rivers and of nations.” We would be unable to perform the role attributed to us by Emerson when he declares in *Nature* that “man is an analogist, and studies relations in all objects” (SW, 198).

We would have, at best, only limited access to the “relations” which, for Fenollosa, “are more real and more important than the things which they relate,” and the world, in turn, would be less coherent, on the way to becoming a mere collection of incongruous things or perhaps the “heap of broken images” to which it is reduced in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. Thought would be starved, not only because without nature’s clues we could not see relations among things in the world, but because language would be correspondingly weakened, and so we would lack our primary tool for making connections, except for the most obvious ones, and be unable to articulate them in a humanly meaningful way. Again, this is very much the plight of the characters in *The Waste Land*, one of whom says, “I can connect / Nothing with nothing.” Let us recall, too, that one possible source of salvation in the world of Eliot’s poem is contained in the sound of the thunder, heard as the syllable “Da” by the poem’s speaker and interpreted by him as the primitive Indo-European root for the Sanskrit verbs “Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata” – “Give, Sympathize, Control.” “Our ancestors,” says Fenollosa, “built the accumulations of metaphor into structures of language and into systems of thought” (CWC, 24), and here,

in a primitive verb just passing over from nature to language, from thunder to commandment, Eliot locates the origins of the ethical system enshrined in the Upanishads. It is not the ethical system itself that is saving, however, but the act of recovery, the perception of continuity between past and present and nature and language, a perception which enables the poem's speaker to regain his stability in the welter of the present: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins."²³

It appears, in fact, that both Fenollosa and Eliot practice what might be called a strategy of modernist primitivism, or what Perry Meisel calls "paradoxical atavism – going forward by going backward."²⁴ Both writers return to origins in order to discover a cure for what they perceive to be the alienating emptiness and degeneration of the present, a set of primal values with which to shore up the ruins, the failing structures – linguistic as well as cultural and spiritual – of the modern world. Fenollosa's concern, of course, is primarily linguistic, but he employs terms, especially in the latter part of his essay where he addresses what he calls the "anaemia of modern speech," that seem consonant in several ways with the cultural outlook inscribed in *The Waste Land*. Like Eliot, he seeks out or appeals to a mythic or idealized ancient unity, in his case the primitive wholeness of Chinese writing, which, after thousands of years, "retains the creative impulse and process, visible and at work," and his goal in doing so is to repair or reverse what he sees as a modern condition of growing linguistic depletion and fragmentation. Rather than progress toward formal simplification and efficiency, Fenollosa sees in our speech an "anaemia . . . only too well encouraged by the feeble cohesive force of our phonetic symbols" (CWC, 24–5) – an observation in which he implicitly registers disagreement not only with Jespersen's linguistic positivism but with all those nineteenth-century enthusiasts for Sanskrit (especially Schlegel) who looked at Chinese and saw little more than linguistic poverty and ill health,²⁵ and who all too readily regarded the language as a reflection of the weak spiritual and cultural condition of its speakers.

Though Fenollosa finds virtually nothing to criticize and much, if not everything, to praise in Chinese, and intends to correct a long-standing misperception of it, or of the Chinese people themselves, he is guilty of the same sort of ethnocentric thinking (except that he applies it in reverse) when he writes, "We have been told that these people are cold, practical,

mechanical, literal, and without a trace of imaginative genius. That is nonsense." The proof of Chinese cultural superiority for Fenollosa, in other words, lies precisely in the Chinese language itself, or at least in its ancient system of writing (whereas nineteenth-century orientalists, using the same logic, often arrived at the opposite conclusion – that the primitivism of Chinese was a symptom of cultural and racial inferiority).

But in contrast with Chinese, languages "today," Fenollosa says, "are thin and cold because we think less and less into them. We are forced, for the sake of quickness and sharpness, to file down each word to its narrowest edge of meaning," with the result that, if nature is the source of language, it "would seem to have become less like a paradise and more and more like a factory" (CWC, 24). In the telling terms of his analogy here, we encounter what is perhaps the mythic core of Fenollosa's thinking, his sense of nature not only as the source of language but as a "paradise" which has been debased and from which we are alienated. Like similar ironic juxtapositions and transformations in the poetry of Pound and Eliot – juxtapositions and transformations designed to gauge the distance of the fall from ancient to modern (consider, for instance, Pound's "The pianola 'replaces' / Sappho's barbitos"²⁶) – nature here has become a factory, and instead of the pristine unity of word and thing, or the original continuity between nature and language, we are left with the "logicianised pitfalls" of current speech, all the "modern narrow utilitarian meanings ascribed to the words in commercial dictionaries" (CWC, 28).

To use a dictionary at all, in fact, is to consult a book in which a "late stage of decay is arrested and embalmed." It can give us only "the vulgar misuse of the moment," and to accept this is to submit to the loss of an original plenitude of meaning and to adopt in its place a merely utilitarian, commercial, industrialized speech, a language virtually stripped down and streamlined on an assembly line, cut off, like the "heap of broken images" in *The Waste Land*, from ancient unities and "accumulations of metaphor" (CWC, 24). Ironically, what Jespersen applauds as the "progress" of language is regarded by Fenollosa as its "anaemia," that condition of linguistic "thinness" and "coldness" brought about by the increasing alienation of words from their verbal roots or natural (poetic) origins, a condition produced by a process which he refers to at one point as "nounising," since even in the case of such fundamental nouns as "the sun" or "the moon"

what we have, he points out, is "a thing arbitrarily cut off from its power of action" (CWC, 17) and so not faithful enough to the reality of natural processes to qualify as a primary use of language.

Like other modernists, then, particularly Eliot, with his commitment to what Perry Meisel calls a "modernist myth of a lost . . . origin from which we are estranged," or a myth of historical degeneration in which a lost plenitude is opposed to a present emptiness,²⁷ Fenollosa also historicizes his thinking and assumes that Western thought, at some point in its past (he refers to the "useless logic of the Middle Ages"), had taken a wrong turn in the direction of abstraction, which he defines as a kind of thinking in which concepts are "drawn out of things by a sifting process." The result of this thinking was a "logic of classification," a logic in which concepts are privileged over the things from which they are drawn and kept artificially separated from them. "It was as if Botany," Fenollosa remarks, "should reason from the leaf-patterns woven into our table-cloths" (CWC, 12), or from representations and ideas about things rather than things themselves. The deleterious effects of this logic, moreover, can be felt not only in reasoning but in linguistic practice as well, especially once language is regulated and arranged according to the dictates of grammar.

For all their agreement about historical degeneration, however, and the falling off of the modern world from the values or thought processes of a prior era, there is nevertheless an important difference between Eliot and Fenollosa. The notion corresponding to Fenollosa's "logic of classification" in Eliot's historical myth is, of course, the "dissociation of sensibility," a malady which erupted in the seventeenth century and enforced a separation between thinking and feeling from which, Eliot argues, we have never recovered.²⁸ For Fenollosa, on the other hand, an alternative to the "logic of classification" is available, and it lies both in scientific thought ("Poetry agrees with science," he asserts, "and not with logic" [CWC, 28]) and in Chinese writing, which, as we have seen, embodies a prelogical, pregrammatical, natural order of perception. To this extent, the "logic of classification" can be circumvented, and the lost plenitude of Chinese writing, with its embodiment of forgotten but valid mental processes, can, although not without some difficulty, still be recovered.

It is precisely the pursuit of a cure for linguistic "progress," for the apparently inevitable and self-destructive development of phonetic lan-

guages toward abstraction, that is one of Fenollosa's chief concerns in the second part of his essay, and it involves not only the study of Chinese poetry but the cultivation of what that study teaches and its application to other languages: habits of concrete thinking as *thinging*, and the practice of poets in general, or what might be characterized as the re-poetization of language, which Fenollosa describes as a process of "feeling back along the ancient lines of advance," or feeling "painfully back along the thread of our etymologies" so that we may "piece together our diction . . . from forgotten fragments" (CWC, 23-4). It seems clear, in addition, that Fenollosa is concerned here not just with the adequate translation of Chinese poetry, but with finding, for the purposes of general expression, equivalents in Western languages for the natural energy of classical Chinese writing. His hope, that is to say, is the seventeenth-century one of bringing about a renewal of language altogether.

From one point of view, of course, the process of "feeling back along the ancient lines of advance" will be a reversal, a kind of undoing, of the progress of language – although it will be a depressing process if it results in nothing more than an awareness of our language as a "*fossil* poetry," the poetry in ruins which just happens to constitute the language that we speak. But from another point of view, this process, it should be clear, is not a reversal of the progress of language at all, since its purpose is precisely to uncover that progress and to reveal what Fenollosa calls the "wealth of European speech," a speech which grew "by following slowly the intricate maze of nature's suggestions and affinities," and which built up a structure in which "Metaphor was piled upon metaphor in quasi-geological strata" (CWC, 23). The poet returns to origins not simply to discover the ancient verbal roots of his speech but to unearth, as it were, and render visible, the whole process of its growth in all its stages or "strata." "He must do this," Fenollosa says, "so that he may keep his words enriched by all their subtle undertones of meaning," or by the entire history of their transformations – a difficult process because that history is hidden, obscured by the very passage of time that has created the wealth of our speech.

Nevertheless, some such process is necessary if phonetic languages are to be restored (to the degree that this is possible at all) to the condition of Chinese – which is to say, to the primal energy of their primitive verbal roots. For in Chinese, where each character openly displays its etymology,

what Fenollosa calls "the metaphoric overtones" (CWC 28) are preserved by the very nature of the language: "After thousands of years the lines of metaphoric advance are still shown, and in many cases actually retained in the meaning. Thus a word, instead of growing gradually poorer and poorer as with us, becomes richer and still more rich from age to age, almost consciously luminous" (CWC, 25).

What is perhaps most interesting at the end of the essay, however, is the extent to which Fenollosa is finally aware of the mythic or utopian character of his own thinking – the extent to which he acknowledges that what he has been describing is not Chinese, not an actual language, but the "ideal language of the world," of which even Chinese may represent, at best, only an approximation. Consider this remarkable and rather defensive paragraph:

It is true that the pictorial clue of many Chinese ideographs can not now be traced, and even Chinese lexicographers admit that combinations frequently contribute only a phonetic value. But I find it incredible that any such minute subdivision of the idea could have ever existed alone as abstract sound without the concrete character. It contradicts the law of evolution. Complex ideas arise only gradually, as the power of holding them together arises. The paucity of Chinese sound could not so hold them. Neither is it conceivable that the whole list was made at once, as commercial codes of cipher are compiled. Foreign words sometimes recalled Chinese ideograms associated with vaguely similar sound? Therefore we must believe that the phonetic theory is in large part unsound? The metaphor once existed in many cases where we can not now trace it. Many of our own etymologies have been lost. It is futile to take the ignorance of the Han dynasty for omniscience. It is not true, as Legge said, that the original picture characters could never have gone far in building up abstract thought. This is a vital mistake. We have seen that our own languages have all sprung from a few hundred vivid phonetic verbs by figurative derivation. A fabric more vast could have been built up in Chinese by metaphorical composition. No attenuated idea exists which it might not have reached more vividly and more permanently than we could have been expected to reach with phonetic roots. Such a pictorial method, whether the Chinese exemplified it or not, would be the ideal language of the world. (CWC, 31)

Although it is vague and barely under control in places, this troubled paragraph shows that Fenollosa, at the very least, is not unfamiliar with the

fact that Chinese is both a phonetic and a visual or pictorial language.²⁹ It also seems, however, that he cannot quite bring himself to accept the idea, and he tries, valiantly if somewhat confusingly, to fight it off, almost all the way through to the end. In the very last sentence, though, where we can see Fenollosa transferring his commitment from Chinese itself to some hypothetical "pictorial method" that would be, if it existed, "the ideal language of the world," it is clear that the battle has been lost.

It is hard, in any case, to avoid the conclusion that like Emerson's language of nature, Fenollosa's ideal language is ultimately not one to be used for purposes of speech and communication but a language strictly to be read, or even just contemplatively prized, savored aesthetically for what Fenollosa calls the harmonizing and balancing of its overtones.³⁰ Indeed, in his final paragraphs, it becomes clear that terms like "harmony" and "overtone," as Fenollosa uses them, have little if anything to do with the *sounds* of words or even with any poetic conception of speech as "verbal music." He asks, for instance, "How shall we determine the metaphorical overtones of neighbouring words?" and answers, to be sure, by suggesting the avoidance of "flagrant breaches like mixed metaphor" and by pointing to "Romeo's speech over the dead Juliet" as an example of "harmonising at its intensest." At the same time, though, what he has in mind is nothing actually spoken or heard but, rather, "Chinese ideography," or "composition in characters," which "makes possible a choice of words in which a single dominant overtone colors every plane of meaning." This "coloring," again, has nothing to do with the characters regarded as signs of sounds, as pronounceable or speakable words. "The overtones," Fenollosa says, "vibrate against the *eye*" (my italics), and his notion of harmony here is purely visual, a matter of repetition and variation in the shape or appearance of the characters.

As an example, he offers the sentence "The sun rises in the east," which, in Chinese, consists of three characters, those for "sun," "rises," and "east." The "single dominant overtone" here is the sign for the sun, which appears in all three. To read what Bernhard Karlgren calls the "highly graphic" signs of this sentence,³¹ and to read them not as words but as signs of things themselves, as Fenollosa does, is not to "read" so much, in the sense of extracting meaning from a set of conventional symbols, as to witness the

unfolding of a natural process almost in its own terms, as Fenollosa's account of the sentence makes clear:

日	昇	東
Sun	Rises	(in the) East

The sun, the shining, on one side, on the other the sign of the east, which is the sun entangled in the branches of a tree. And in the middle sign, the verb 'rise,' we have further homology; the sun is above the horizon, but beyond that the single upright line is like the growing trunk-line of the tree sign. This is but a beginning, but it points a way to the method, and to the method of intelligent reading. (CWC, 33)

Although he does not acknowledge that this sort of visual homology hardly represents the norm in Chinese, in this one instance, at least, we can see how meaning and being, sentence and natural process, virtually coincide in the characters, and to this extent the actual language does seem to approximate Fenollosa's ideal language of the world, the Chinese of his imagination, so to speak. And in *that* Chinese, we may conclude, the world itself can fairly be said to constitute its own language.

Interchapter

Pound, Emerson, and the Poetics of Creative Reading

AS A SUBJECT of recent critical investigation, Ezra Pound's attitudes toward philology, historical scholarship, and history in general have been found to be far from simple. From early on in his career as both poet and critic, Pound's work derives much of its energy from an animus against the scholarly methods in which he was trained, while he himself attempts to make those methods new. For the most part, he derides what he calls "the method of multitudinous detail" in favor of his own method of "luminous detail," by which he means the effort to discover the truly telling point, whose impact in scholarly discourse is meant to be similar to that of the *mot juste* in imaginative writing.¹ Indeed, for Pound there is finally no difference between the two, since the *mot juste*, as he insists, is itself "of public utility."² "Any fact is, in a sense, 'significant,'" Pound writes. "Any fact may be 'symptomatic,' but certain facts give one a sudden insight into circumjacent conditions, into their causes, their effects, into sequence, and law" (SP, 21-2). It is the "luminous detail," as opposed to great accumulations of mere data, that can convey not only the essential quality of some past era but even "sudden insight" into the general principles underlying historical change.

This "sudden insight," moreover, may not be unlike the "sense of sudden liberation" that Pound ascribes to the image, and it is, after all, the "artist," he tells us, who "seeks out the luminous detail and presents it. He does not comment. His work remains the permanent basis of psychology and metaphysics" (SP, 23). Like the image, that is to say, which grants us a momentary freedom from time limits and space limits, the luminous detail gives us access to what is "permanent" or independent of time in human experience. Such details, as Hugh Kenner puts it, are images "which trans-

ferred out of their context of origin retain their power to enlighten us” (PE, 153), and in accord with this power, James Longenbach points out, Pound “wanted to forge a criticism that would not divorce poetry – especially the poetry of the past – from the intensity of lived experience.”³ The danger of traditional philology, however, as Pound saw it, was precisely its tendency to effect such a divorce and to put into practice what he would later call a “provincialism of time” (SP, 198), as though the poetry of past ages retained a merely historical or antiquarian interest, without relevance to the present or to the experience of its modern reader.

Thus we find Pound, as James Longenbach and Sanford Schwartz extensively show, conducting a “war against philology,” a war motivated not simply by disagreement about the efficacy of certain scholarly methods but ultimately by Pound’s sense that the nineteenth-century tradition of positivist philology – particularly in Germany but also in the American universities which adopted it – was bound up with the ideological mission of the state and therefore contributed to a larger cultural malaise, even to the conditions responsible for World War I.⁴ In “Provincialism the Enemy” (1917), which, as Longenbach observes, is a harsher restatement of attitudes already expressed in “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris,” Pound attempts to establish a link between “‘philology’ and the Junker,” between the German university system and a culture, or *Kultur*, in which the individual, including the university professor, is subordinate to the state and obliged to promote its nationalist aims. For Pound, as for his friend Ford Madox Ford, who had already arrived at similar conclusions, the danger of such aggressive nationalism is not only “provincialism,” in the sense of a self-imposed isolation from the larger civilized world, but the dehumanization of the individual – a dehumanization directly linked to a positivist scholarship divorced from meaningful human values and needs. Pound writes, “Take a man’s mind off the human value of the poem he is reading (and in this case the human value is the art value), switch it on to some question of grammar and you begin his dehumanisation” (SP, 197). As a former student of comparative literature at the University of Pennsylvania, Pound is writing here, of course, out of personal experience, experience which clearly led him to agitate against a system of scholarly training in which all attention is focused, as he puts it, on “some minute particular problem *unconnected* with life” (SP, 191).

Much the same attitude emerges in Pound's work as early as 1910, in the opening sentences of his first critical book, *The Spirit of Romance*. "This book," he writes,

is not a philological work. Only by courtesy can it be said to be a study in comparative literature . . . I am interested in poetry . . . I have floundered somewhat ineffectually through the slough of philology, but I look forward to the time when it will be possible for the lover of poetry to study poetry – even the poetry of recondite times and places – without burdening himself with the rags of morphology, epigraphy, *privatleben* and the kindred delights of the archaeological or "scholarly" mind.⁵

Here, undistracted by the external pressure of a war, Pound insists on a distinction and declares his true allegiance. His book is, emphatically, "not a philological work," because he is "interested in poetry," and the two, he makes it clear, should not or cannot go together.

On the other hand, it seems equally clear, as Hugh Kenner points out, that for Pound and his generation, growing up in the era of a new historical lexicography and textual scholarship – an era shaped in many respects by the late eighteenth-century discovery of the kinship of the European languages, and then by the formation of new academic disciplines, such as comparative grammar – the literature of Europe, "like its speech, could be conceived as one rich organism, and the study of poetry be seen as inextricable from the study of philology."⁶ In these terms, like it or not, Pound's work is philological through and through, and his inescapable involvement with the "German science" leads ultimately, in *The Cantos*, to what Kenner regards as his major discovery, "the poetry of the footnote," based on "the minute particulars of research" (*Voices & Visions*, 208).

Sometimes, as in Canto 23, Pound introduces such particulars right into his text, which, in this case, moves beyond the poetry of the footnote to become a literal representation of philological reading and speculation. Generally speaking, in the earliest cantos, as Michael Davidson suggests, "lexicology and philology appear via the superposition of texts, one upon the other, to create a seamless, polylinguistic surface," whereas in later cantos, such as number 23, "lexical research comes more and more to the surface" in a directly literal way.⁷ Consider, for instance, the following passage:

With the sun in a golden cup
and going toward the low fords of ocean

ἼΑλιος δ' ἕπεριονίνδας δέπας ἑσκατέβαινε χρύσειον

ἼΟφρα δὶ ὠκεανοῖο περάσας

ima vada noctis obscurae

Seeking doubtless the sex in bread-moulds

ἠήλιος, ἄλιος, ἄλιος = μάταιος

("Derivation uncertain." The idiot

Odysseus furrowed the sand.)

alixantos, aliotrephes, eiskatebaine, down into,

descended, to the end that, beyond ocean,

pass through, traverse

ποτὶ βένθεα

νυκτὸς ἑρεμνᾶς,

ποτὶ ματέρα, κουριδίαν τ' ἄλοχον

παίδας τε φίλοις . . . ἔβα δάφνοισι κατάσκιον

Precisely, the selv' oscura. (23/107-8)

Reproduced here, in any case, in the poet's hermeneutic encounter with an ancient text, is an instance not only of philological speculation but, I would argue, of Emersonian "creative reading." Pound records his literal effort to construe a passage, by the seventh-century B.C. Greek poet Stesichorus, in which Helios, the sun, sets and descends into darkness. The passage, of course, is being incorporated into the canto for thematic and structural reasons, since Pound is ultimately concerned to discover parallels between what it describes and the travails of such figures as Odysseus and Dante, whose significance for the poem as epic voyagers and masters of experience has already been established. Both figures are mentioned or alluded to in the passage, whose climax occurs with Pound's recognition that Stesichorus's "shadowy laurel grove" is, "precisely," Dante's "selv' oscura."

If this identification seems somewhat willful or subjective, such a gesture is still very much in keeping with Emerson's notion of "creative reading." "One must be an inventor to read well," Emerson asserts in "The American Scholar," and continues, "When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of

our author is as broad as the world" (SW, 229). Reading, in these terms, is not a passive or submissive activity but a boldly personal and imaginative one, more an act of construction than of consumption, and virtually an occasion to bring one's own creativity to bear upon a text, to take charge of it and steer it in the direction of one's own interests. As Julie Ellison argues, reading, for Emerson, is an "act of aggression" (*Emerson's Romantic Style*, 104), by means of which he can acquire authority over texts that would otherwise warp him "clean out of [his] own orbit," since "Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over-influence" (SW, 228). Thus books in general, from Emerson's perspective, must be interpreted, in Ellison's words, "as images of our own creativity and freedom" (101), an attitude based largely on Emerson's conviction "that one nature wrote and the same reads" (SW, 228), or that writer and reader are united, even across centuries, by a certain kinship, an identity of minds, which results in their virtual contemporaneity. Similarly, Pound insists that "all ages are contemporaneous" (*Spirit of Romance*, 6), a remark with which we may compare Emerson's assertion, in a journal entry of 1847, that "A good scholar will find Aristophanes & Hafiz & Rabelais full of American history" (JMN, X, 35) – a notion which virtually anticipates Pound's methods in *The Cantos*.⁸

Therefore we may read the work of Chaucer, Marvell, or Dryden, Emerson suggests,

with the most modern joy, – with a pleasure . . . caused by the abstraction of all *time* from their verses. There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise, when this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul, that which I also had wellnigh thought and said. (SW, 229)

Yet, judging by this passage, reading may be defined as more than an aggressively creative or defensive act of self-imposition upon a text. It becomes, as well, a discovery of the self, or a discovery of the self's participation in what Emerson calls, in his essay on "History," "one mind common to all individual men," or a "universal mind" (RWE, 113). This conviction about "one mind," in turn, underlies a sense of history and of one's relation to it that is very close, as we shall see, to Pound's – and we may note here that, without mentioning Emerson, Sanford Schwartz de-

scribes Pound's approach as both translator and critic in terms that strongly evoke Emerson's "creative reading." Pound, he says, "is often less concerned with a text's original meaning than its potential for instigating new thought," and he points out, further, that in Pound's criticism "authorial intention is less important than the reader's imagination, the original meaning subordinate to constructive thought in the present" (*The Matrix of Modernism*, 145). As Emerson puts it, in answer to his own question about the right use of books, "They are for nothing but to inspire," and "We hear, that we may speak," by which he also clearly means, "We read, that we may write" (SW, 228). Emerson's insistence on aggressive and inventive reading, in any case, is certainly relevant to Pound, if only in the sense that so much of Pound's reading is pressed into the service of his writing and of his overall vision in *The Cantos*.

Pound's creativity as a reader in Canto 23 takes several forms. In the passage already quoted, for instance, there are further recognitions of analogies and parallels among texts and characters – which may have the effect of qualifying our impression of Pound's willfulness as an interpreter – and there is also a movement beyond these recognitions toward a more specifically philological kind of reading. Starting with the opening two lines of the Stesichorus text, translated into English, Pound gives next the original Greek, then a line in Latin (from the bilingual [Greek and Latin] edition he is using), followed by more Greek and some parenthetical commentary, the first part of which – "Derivation uncertain" – is quoted from Liddell and Scott's *Abridged Greek-English Lexicon*, while the second, constituting Pound's own philological suggestion about the passage, is intended to fill the vacuum of scholarly uncertainty he has just come up against. This is followed in turn by three words in transliterated Greek, some phrases in English that extend and reinforce Pound's interpretation of the passage, straight Greek again, and finally the climactic moment of Pound's own insight into how the passage enters the orbit, so to speak, of his own interests.⁹

Throughout the passage, he moves slowly, almost gropingly, toward understanding, arriving, at the end, at the idea that what he is reading is the account of an experience not unlike the Odyssean descent to the underworld or Dante's passage through the allegorical "dark forest." The link between Odysseus and Helios becomes especially clear in Guy Davenport's

translation of the Stesichorus fragment, the first line of which reads, "And then Helios, the Sun, son of Hyperion went down," in which there are several reminders of the opening line of Canto 1, "And then went down to the ship," spoken by Odysseus. In its entirety, Davenport's translation reads as follows:

And then Helios, the Sun, son of Hyperion went down
in a golden cup to cross Ocean
and come to the dread depths of dark night,
to mother, wife, and dear children.
And the son of Zeus went on foot
into the shadowy laurel grove.¹⁰

What Pound gives in the canto, however, is not the passage in its entirety. Instead, there are several omissions, the most crucial of which is the reference to the "son of Zeus" in the penultimate line of Davenport's translation. This particular son of Zeus turns out to be Heracles, on his way to perform his tenth labor, the rescuing of Geryon's cattle. He has come into the shadowy grove to borrow the golden cup of Helios so that he might make his own journey across the ocean. In Pound's version, though, it is easy to overlook the fact that the subject of the final lines of the passage is Heracles and to assume that it is Helios himself who goes into the shadowy grove. As the instigator of this assumption, Pound can be seen to be both making and hiding a connection between Helios and Heracles. At the same time, he also reinforces the link between Helios and Odysseus as parallel participants in the motif of the descent to darkness.

Pound's more specifically philological reading begins when he consults Liddell and Scott about the meaning of the word "Helios," the sun. What he learns, according to Davenport, is that the word, in the Doric dialect of Stesichorus, is homonymous with other words which mean "of the sea," "idle, vain, empty," and "fruitless," although the derivation of the latter is the one Liddell and Scott find to be "uncertain." Yet this very uncertainty provides an opening for Pound's creative reading. What captures his interest is the paradoxical nature of a word that can mean both "the sun" and "fruitless," two apparently opposed meanings which nevertheless seem to join together in the third meaning, "of the sea." "The sea grows no wheat," Davenport remarks, "and its sand and salt are sterile" (*Cities on*

Hills, 220). To furrow or plow the sand, as Odysseus does in *The Odyssey* in order to appear insane and unfit for service in the war against Troy, is a “fruitless” activity, and this sense of the word’s meaning not only leads Pound to his ironic epithet for Odysseus as an “idiot” but also constitutes a riposte to the etymologists who could not explain how a word meaning “fruitless” might relate to its homonyms meaning “sun” and “of the sea.”¹¹ Pound’s purpose here may well be to demonstrate that his poetic approach to the ancient text, which is to say his aggressive, creative reading, is not only more in tune with the text itself but finally more productive than the unimaginative, if professionally responsible, approach of Liddell and Scott.

What Pound sees in Stesichorus, then, is a poetic play with language, a kind of punning, as Davenport suggests, based on the ambivalent potential of words that derive from the same root. This is why Pound cites, in transliterated Greek, two other words with the same root that are nonetheless opposite in meaning: *alixantos*, meaning “sea-worm,” suggests destruction, whereas *aliotrephes*, meaning “sea-reared,” bespeaks nurturing. More to the point, perhaps, is the way Pound moves right on to *eiskatebaine*, Stesichorus’s word, denoting the sun’s descent “down into” the sea, which Pound associates with the destructive/creative pattern of Odysseus’s return from Troy to Ithaca. As another commentator on this passage, John Peck, observes, Pound is reading the setting and rising of the sun as itself an archaic “root” or mythic source, a kind of narrative seed, of the Homeric *Odyssey* – a reading that is prompted in large measure by Pound’s philological consideration of the text’s lexical roots. Peck goes on to point out that what he calls “lexical archaeology”

is prominent . . . at every juncture [in *The Cantos*] where Pound’s adaptation of a text and its voice makes translation into recovery. But this archaeology becomes something like mythography whenever the lexical method recovers mythos or rite itself. Canto XXIII shows us something of this; the lexical demonstration, as much as the carefully chosen text, sorts out aspects of the poem’s solar night-sea journey, and further links it with the Odyssean return.¹²

What also seems worthy of emphasis, however, is the extent to which the reader is invited to see Pound himself as a participant, albeit a metaphorical one, in the motif or mythos featured in this canto. Regarded literally as a scene of reading, one in which Pound is primarily involved

with the text of Stesichorus but also with those of Homer, Dante, and Liddell and Scott, the passage becomes an intertextual presentation of the drama or allegory of reading, as well as of philological speculation, which is itself akin to a passage through darkness, the “selv’ oscura” of the text. In other words, we become aware of Pound’s discovery – that the story of Helios is another version of the journeys of Odysseus and Dante – and become aware, in addition, that Pound, as a reader within his own text, is involved in a process representing yet another version, on a different level, of the experiences of voyaging and adventuring in the texts he is reading.

It is passages like this one, in any event, that confirm Margaret Dickie’s suggestion that philology, the “art of slow reading,” must be seen as a model for *The Cantos*, as well as a model for the reader of *The Cantos*. Pound, she says, “wrote as he read, read as he wrote, both transcribing into writing his own responses as a reader and reading in order to write.”¹³ Although this passage may be a fairly intense and unusually foregrounded example of Pound’s approach in *The Cantos*, it reveals the extent to which his activity of intertextual navigation, carried out here in full view of the reader, constitutes one of the fundamental situations of the poem and of his work in general, a situation in which we are invited to imagine the writer as reader surrounded by texts and appropriating them aggressively, creatively, into the orbit of his own interests.

*Modernizing Orientalism/
Orientalizing Modernism*

*Ezra Pound, Chinese Translation, and
English-as-Chinese*

POUND'S subcareer as an orientalist begins, to be sure, with his work on Fenollosa's notebooks, but it could also be said to begin with his association, starting not long after his arrival in London in 1908, with T. E. Hulme, F. S. Flint, and their small circle of aspirants toward a new English poetry. That aspiration, which resulted most significantly in the imagist movement, involved oriental poetry, especially what Pound called "the Japanese *hokku*," right from the start. Indeed, when he received her husband's papers from Fenollosa's widow, Mary, in 1913, Pound's own recent work included what were to become some of his most famous imagist lyrics, such as the haiku-like "In a Station of the Metro" and the deliberately imagist adaptations of several Chinese poems which he had read in translation in Herbert Giles's *History of Chinese Literature* (1901). Pound placed all of these poems together in his 1916 volume, *Lustra*.

Although Pound's reading of Fenollosa intensified his interest in Chinese poetry and the Japanese Noh drama and ultimately led him beyond imagism, orientalism and modernism are closely bound up with one another from the very beginning of his career. Indeed, one way to characterize the relationship of orientalism and modernism in his work is to say not only that Pound modernized orientalism, which is one of the implications of T. S. Eliot's well-known claim that Pound is "the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time," but that he orientalized modernism, in the sense that his versions of Chinese poems became models for modernist poetry in general, both in his own work and in that of other poets as well. As Hugh Kenner suggests, the important thing about Pound's *Cathay*, even beyond its function as the major stimulus to the whole enterprise of translating Chinese poetry into English in the twentieth century, is that in it we

witness the work "of a man who was inventing a new kind of English poem" (PE, 218).

To say this, however, is perhaps also to acknowledge that Pound's involvement with Chinese poetry represents a certain, probably unavoidable, neglect of its full reality as an independent and exotic cultural production. Although it provokes and enables Pound's pursuit of modernism, Chinese poetry itself, to just this extent, is displaced as a literary tradition in its own right. What Pound provides in *Cathay*, as Eliot suggested long before Edward Said formulated his conception of "Orientalism," is not Chinese poetry itself but "the matter as we know it," in "the idiom of our own language and our own time." Thus if Chinese poetry in our time is Pound's invention, and if that invention's most essential concern is, in fact, with "a new kind of English poem," then what we are dealing with as Chinese poetry is something that has been produced in and by the West. This situation, moreover, is not unprecedented in the history of Western interest in Chinese culture, or, indeed, in other non-Western cultures. Except for the fact that, in Pound's hands, the translation of Chinese poetry becomes, perhaps for the first time, an "art," as A. C. Graham suggests,² the relation between this Western translator and his non-Western materials turns out to be a fairly standard one, representing, as we shall see, a virtual norm, or one among several norms, in this field.

At the same time, though, it is important not to overstate this issue and insist too emphatically on the disjunction between Chinese texts and their Western translators, even if one of those translators is Pound, who was obliged to approach his texts in *Cathay* through several filters, including Fenollosa's notes and the instruction of his Japanese teachers and, not least, Pound's own ignorance of Chinese. What is remarkable, after all, is the degree to which *Cathay* provided a genuine opening to Chinese poetry and culture and stimulated further efforts to understand and represent them accurately, as well as to adopt Chinese poems as models for American poetry.

THE HISTORY of the translation of Chinese poetry into English goes back at least to the eighteenth century, although translation itself remains a fairly sparse activity until the twentieth. As Roy Teele shows in *Through a Glass Darkly* (1949), his critical and historical survey of English translations of

Chinese poetry, this history consists of several more or less distinct phases, all of which, arguably, are marked by the phenomenon of Said's "Orientalism." As we saw earlier, this term covers not only the academic study, in the West, of Eastern languages and cultures but also includes, for Said, the style of thought that tends to govern this study – a style of thought informed by an ontological and epistemological distinction, as opposed to a merely geographical one, between East and West. In Said's definition of it, this field of study deals "not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient . . . despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient" (*Orientalism*, 5).

In other words, orientalism is a "discourse" in Michel Foucault's sense, a self-contained discursive system or discipline which does not describe the world so much as impose itself upon it and effectively displace it. As such, orientalism has been the means "by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (3). Arguing that the Orient is less a reality than a textual or rhetorical field constructed by the West, Said himself allows that this view of the matter is a radically skeptical one that may "strike us as too nihilistic" (203). We may feel, in addition, that there are important differences, in terms of sensitivity to Chinese culture, for example, between a poet and translator like Pound and a liberal colonial administrator turned scholar like Herbert Giles. Yet Teele's history reveals the extent to which the relatively small and apparently benign field of the translation of Chinese poetry into English and other languages was also governed by an ethnocentric, orientalist outlook, so that Chinese texts often appear to have been appropriated or even "colonized" by their translators for their own purposes. Indeed, although Teele himself is optimistic about the future of Chinese translation, the title of his book, *Through a Glass Darkly*, is hardly sanguine about the possibility of accurate cultural exchange.

Said's thinking about the Western invention of the Orient, or of the binary opposition between East and West, is not unanticipated by other writers. Raymond Dawson, for example, in his analysis of "European Conceptions of Chinese Civilization," is alert to the constructed nature of the idea of a "natural" antithesis between East and West, and, although he

does not identify a specifically orientalist discourse in the West, he attacks the notion of a monolithic East, perpetuated, as he argues, by orientalists who organize themselves into associations and congresses that tend to promote it.³ For the China scholar Jonathan Spence, on the other hand, Said's emphasis on the "cognitive imperialism" of orientalism is exaggerated and "leaves out too much of the story."⁴ And other recent writers, although generally receptive to Said's account of orientalism and its applicability to cross-cultural discourse in general, share some of Spence's skepticism and are primarily wary of the notion that such discourse is inescapably and completely sealed off from the reality it purports to represent. David Murray, for instance, dealing with Native American materials, points to "the risk, in tending to seal off cultures or historical periods or epistemes from each other, of reinforcing and mystifying that very sense of 'otherness' which we would want to question rather than accept."⁵ And Rolf Goebel proposes a somewhat softened version of orientalism when he acknowledges that "orientalist topoi" originate in "European philosophical and literary traditions" but nevertheless rejects the idea that "orientalist conceptions necessarily miss the reality of the countries they attempt to describe; rather, they are characterized by that peculiar mixture of empirical observation and interpretation, truth and ideological distortion, factual report and fiction which seems to typify all cross-cultural discourse."⁶

In any case, the relevance of Said's notion of orientalism, although it may not apply to every situation equally, becomes almost immediately apparent in Teele's description of the first phase of the history of Chinese translation, the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century period during which the East India Company was actively pursuing the vast commercial potential of new ports and expanded trade in China – and yet, according to John Francis Davis, one of the company's earliest translators, was also neglecting what he saw as its responsibility to further the study of Chinese, both language and literature, in England.⁷ This combination of aggressive commercialism and cultural indifference on the part of the British, along with growing Chinese mistrust of British intentions, led to increasing friction between the two countries, friction that continued, to varying degrees, throughout the nineteenth century.

Viewed from a larger perspective, the period can best be described as a sort of interregnum in the history of Sino-European relations, preceded as

it was by some 150 years of often brilliant Jesuit missionary activity in China – activity which stimulated immense European curiosity and interest – and followed by a new era in which a rather conservative Anglo-American Christian evangelism established its own missions in the Far East and pursued policies and activities of a very different character. In fact, the whole European attitude toward China was undergoing a change, moving away, perhaps inevitably, from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century adulation – from a time when Leibniz could seriously suggest that the Chinese should send missionaries of their own to Europe⁸ – and arriving increasingly at more negative – some would say imperialist and racist – assessments. Spence has recently argued that European enthusiasm about China began to fade much earlier, almost from the beginning of the eighteenth century, when, along with political and cultural reservations about the Chinese, new scientific theories emerged, suggesting that human origins are “polygenic” rather than “monogenic,” and that peoples like the Chinese, the American Indians, and others are the consequence of separate creations and that members of these groups thus constitute an essentially different, and inferior, kind of human being (*Chinese Roundabout*, 80–3).

During the earlier period, by contrast, European interest in China was both more positive and quite differently focused, although no less determined, perhaps, by ideas of China more reflective of European needs and desires than of Chinese realities. Europeans took notice primarily, and even enviously, of what was widely regarded as China’s rational and stable form of government and of the appealing humanism and worldly practicality of Confucian political and ethical thought. For the Jesuits, the teachings of Confucius were, in fact, “a wonderful preparation for the Gospel” (*The Chinese Chameleon*, 139), whereas the nineteenth-century missionaries would see the Sage’s teachings largely as an obstacle to the ultimate triumph of Christianity. The emergence of Confucius as a virtual cult figure in the West, from the latter half of the seventeenth century on, was also the work of the Jesuits, who sent back idealized accounts of many aspects of Chinese culture and society, along with translations from the classic Confucian texts. Colin Mackerras, who points out that the reputation of China in Europe during this period was higher than at any other time before or since, is also alert to the irony of the Jesuits’ success in constructing a seductively utopian image of China when they were supposed to be converting the Chinese.

Clearly, for many of its Western observers, China served chiefly as a model or mythic image against which to measure the West and by means of which to criticize European social and political institutions.⁹

In any event, in the increasingly unpromising political circumstances of the later eighteenth century, when British mercantile energies were being thwarted by what Robert Douglas, writing in 1875, would see as China's perverse rejection of the "fellowship of western nations,"¹⁰ the history of the English translation of Chinese literature had its feeble beginnings, largely among a group of men who were associated with the East India Company, or who went to the Orient as missionaries, or who were attached to the British consular service in the Far East. It was only later in the nineteenth century that Chinese language and literature became broadly established as a subject of academic study, although when it did, significantly, it was taught and pursued by these same men, usually former missionaries such as James Legge and former diplomats such as Herbert Giles.

Opinion was somewhat divided, but by the middle of the nineteenth century it was widely felt that the Chinese, despite their thousands of years of civilization, had produced little of literary interest, and this judgment was sometimes extended even to the Confucian classics, which the Jesuits had eagerly translated and which seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europeans, by and large, had found both appealing and encouraging to their own hopes regarding human progress and enlightenment.¹¹ John Francis Davis himself (1795–1890), who became governor of Hong Kong and chief superintendent of British trade in China – his youthful criticism of the East India Company and promotion of the translation of Chinese literature notwithstanding – finally acceded to the conventional view that this literature was childish, a mere reflection of "the general condition of society and intellect in which it originates."¹² Indeed, this attitude, which echoed everywhere in nineteenth-century Europe, had been anticipated by no less a figure than Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), who reasoned, on the basis of a consideration of their language, that the Chinese were a people "stuck in childhood." The "eighty thousand composite characters" of Chinese kept them in "childish captivity" and forced upon them "an artificial manner of thinking."¹³ This philological argument, of course, in which an indictment of a language on linguistic or even aesthetic grounds becomes almost irresistibly an indictment of the people who speak it, would be

repeated and developed by Schlegel, Humboldt, and others, and the attitude in general would be nailed down by the historian Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), who referred famously to the Chinese as the people of “eternal standstill” (quoted in *The Chinese Chameleon*, 65).

Nevertheless, translation did begin, and Davis, along with the great orientalist Sir William Jones, was among the earliest English translators of Chinese poetry; both produced versions of texts from the *Shih Ching*, the Confucian *Book of Odes*. In addition, Davis was one of the first English writers to try his hand at translating poetry of the T'ang dynasty and was the author as well of *Poeseos Sinensis Commentarii, or the Poetry of the Chinese*, the first reasonably accurate English account of Chinese poetry, which he read to the Royal Asiatic Society in 1829. Other translators active during this early period include Robert Morrison, the Protestant missionary who produced the first Chinese-English, English-Chinese dictionary (1815), and Stephen Weston, who was the first translator, according to Teele, to bring Chinese poetry directly into English. In 1809 he published *Ly Tang, An Imperial Poem*, by the reigning Chinese emperor Chien Lung (*Through a Glass Darkly*, 46). Teele does not mention Jones, whose translations from the *Shih Ching*, if indeed they were direct, would have preceded the work of Weston.¹⁴ The qualification “direct” is necessary here in any case, because, as we shall see, the term “Chinese translation” by no means represents a uniform concept and must cover a fairly broad range of approaches to translation, a range that persists throughout this history and that includes translations of translations and translations of translations of translations, as well as adaptations and collaborations. Davis, Morrison, and Weston are certifiably direct translators, but their work is preceded in England by at least two instances of indirect translation of poetry. These are significant because they anticipate the various kinds of indirect translation, including Pound's, which will later enter into this history.

The first Chinese work to appear in English, then, was a translation of a translation. This was the play *Orphan of the Zhao Family*, which was first translated into French, by the Jesuit Joseph Premaré, and then included in the multivolume work *Description . . . de l'empire de la Chine*, by another French Jesuit, Jean Baptiste du Halde, in 1735. An English version of the play appeared in 1736 in the complete English translation of du Halde's influential work, although it remained for Voltaire, some twenty years later,

to produce his own version of this play, *Orphelin de la Chine*, which is the most famous piece of theatrical *chinoiserie* of the eighteenth century.¹⁵

The second Chinese work to appear in English was, likewise, a translation of a translation, although of a more complicated kind. This work, a novel called *Hau Kiou Chooan, or The Pleasing History*, was published in London in 1761 and is described on its title page as *A Translation from the Chinese Language*. In fact it is an English version, by Bishop Thomas Percy, of a translation from Chinese partly into English and partly into Portuguese, so that Percy's only task, as Teele puts it, "was to polish the English and translate the Portuguese" (*Through a Glass Darkly*, 44). Teele also tells us, however, that Percy included "voluminous notes from his wide reading in English and European books on China" (45), so that *The Pleasing History* is not without a serious sinological purpose, as well as a critical one. Along with du Halde's *Description*, it served as an important source of information about China in eighteenth-century England, despite its hostile attitude toward much of what it describes.

Given his wide reading in sinology, it may well be that Bishop Percy was better prepared for his task of translating a translation from Chinese than Pound was when he undertook to produce his English versions of Chinese poems based on Fenollosa's notes, which were based in turn on the "decipherings" of Fenollosa's Japanese instructors, Kainen Mori and Nagao Ariga.¹⁶ What Percy and Pound have in common, nevertheless, is that they both produce works which, originally Chinese, have become English, but only after undergoing a circuitous passage through other languages, subject all the while to the various pressures and influences, linguistic and otherwise, in the cultural and historical environments of their translators. This sort of process, it seems, is par for the course in the history of Chinese translation, a history in which texts are almost routinely subject to treatment which quite exceeds that accorded to texts in other, less exotic languages. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Percy was prevailed upon by his publisher to Anglicize his novel's heroine and, in general, to "Westernize" *The Pleasing History*,¹⁷ and it is this sort of pressure, exerted from without or self-imposed by the translator, that seems to be a part of the special fate of Chinese texts when they are brought into the West.

The early English translators of poetry, moreover, whether they were

aware of it or not, tended to turn their Chinese texts into verse that is essentially and thoroughly British. In order to do so, of course, they were forced to make what Wai-lim Yip calls “unimaginable deviations from the original,”¹⁸ and they are often joined in this approach by more recent translators as well. These deviations are not only linguistic but also formal and even cultural, so that the end-product is more often a domestication or familiarization of the text, in the sense of an appropriation of it in terms of the translator’s own culture, rather than a translation properly speaking, which is to say, the result of an attempt to find English equivalents for Chinese words – although there are good reasons why translation from Chinese in general is often obliged to go beyond so minimal a definition of translation.¹⁹

Confronted by the following quatrains from Davis’s *Poetry of the Chinese*, for example, it is impossible to tell that we are reading a translation and not a home-grown British poem, as though the aim of translation were in fact to contravene or conceal the foreign origins of the text:

See how the gently falling rain
 Its vernal influence sweetly showers,
 As through the calm and tepid eve
 It silently bedews the flowers:

Cloudy and dark th’horizon spreads,
 – Save where some boat its light is burning:
 But soon the landscape’s tints shall glow
 All radiant, with morn returning.²⁰

Judging by this text, it seems clear that all of the effort in Chinese verse translation during the early nineteenth century – formal, prosodic, syntactical, linguistic – is expended in order to convert the original text from whatever it was and to confer a new identity upon it. This conversion is not unlike the change of Caliban at the end of *The Tempest*, where he ceases to be an unrepentant savage and presents himself instead as ready for redemption and a civilized life – which means that he is willing to adopt the language as well as the laws of Prospero, thus leaving behind not only his own earlier version of Prospero’s language, from which he learned, as he says, only how to curse, but also his own language, which is represented in the play as richly and directly responsive to all the primitive allure of

the island – and yet, apparently, quite beyond Prospero’s ability to appreciate. In this sense, few if any traces of what is *Chinese* about Chinese poetry are discernible in the translations dating from this period, as though translation meant reclamation, the presentation of Chinese texts in ways calculated to make them meaningful, as well as inoffensive, both linguistically and culturally, to English readers.

In comparing the translation of Chinese poems with the conversion of Caliban, I take my cue in part from Eric Cheyfitz’s *The Poetics of Imperialism*, a study in which he uses the relationship of Prospero and Caliban as a paradigm of that between the imperialist master and the colonial slave, and especially between the imperialist’s language and the slave’s language, a relationship in which the slave’s language is “mastered by translation.”²²¹ What I am also insinuating here, of course, is a connection between texts and persons, as well as one between translation and conversion – and thus between the religious or at least the behavioral conversion of a person and the linguistic translation of a text – and it should not be surprising that both these activities coexisted as goals for the British Protestant missionaries who first became active during this period. In other words, I am suggesting that what the early British translators did to Chinese texts is not very different from what the missionaries hoped to do to Chinese people, and for the missionaries translation became, in fact, an important means toward the goal of conversion.

It should also be emphasized that the missionaries not only became notable translators but were often involved with language even more intensely than those translators whose interests were more properly or narrowly literary. Robert Morrison, for example, the first of the British Protestant missionaries to arrive in China (1807), conceived of his missionary task quite explicitly in linguistic terms. The way to convert the Chinese, it was clear to Morrison, was first to gain control of the language for himself and then to bring the Chinese within the fold of Christianity through both translation, primarily of the Bible, and the teaching of English. To these ends he established a school and produced not only his dictionary and a Chinese version of the New Testament but a variety of works about Chinese, including a grammar, and other translations both from and into Chinese, all the while making “few Chinese friends and hardly any converts,”²²²

and complaining about what he saw as the linguistic inadequacies of Chinese, as well as the difficulty of learning it.

Nevertheless, his aim was to establish as much ease of movement – from English to Chinese and Chinese to English – as possible, and other British missionaries shared his conception of their task and threw themselves into similar, sometimes monumental linguistic projects, with the goal not only of converting the Chinese but of explicating Chinese culture and values in general for the British, especially future missionaries. Hence, there were other attempts besides Morrison's to translate the Bible into Chinese (by Joshua Marshman, for example, who also wrote about Chinese grammar and prosody), while James Legge undertook the most epic task of all: the first complete translation of the Confucian classics into English.²³ In an account of the motives underlying Legge's vast project, one of his biographers writes that the "key to China" for him

was a knowledge of the Chinese Classics which were responsible for the whole of the behaviour pattern of the Chinese – their thinking, their beliefs and their way of life as well as their form of Government. Morrison had opened the door to their language; Legge felt he must go further along the corridor of learning, which led to the Chinese Classics, and there to open the door of Chinese moral philosophy to the western missionaries and to the western world.²⁴

The key to this passage is clearly the metaphor of the "key" itself, the idea that one could "open the door" of Chinese language and philosophy and thereby open the door of China (another potent metaphor in the history of political relations between China and the West), revealing its people, their thinking and their beliefs, to the rest of the world. What is important is not Chinese language and philosophy in themselves but the access to China that knowledge of them will provide, enhancing the possibility of greater Western penetration of what was viewed as a perennially closed and secretive culture. Unlike the Jesuits, who saw much to admire in Confucian philosophy, who sent translations of it back to Europe in the spirit of this admiration, and who regarded Christianity as the potential fulfillment of tendencies which they saw as already latent in Confucian ethics, Morrison and his followers, it seems clear, were animated by a

narrower sense of opposition between Christianity and native Chinese moral, cultural, and religious traditions. Their goal was essentially imperialist, the expansion of the empire of Christianity, which called for the conquest, not the appreciation, of cultural difference, and for the establishment of spiritual unity. This attitude, to be sure, went hand in hand with the increasingly imperialistic outlook which England shared with other Western countries, including the United States (from which missionaries were also attracted to China), in the nineteenth century.²⁵

In his study of European and Anglo-American imperialism in the New World, an enterprise in which, he argues, translation is the central act, Eric Cheyfitz calls attention to what he sees as a primal scene from classical rhetoric which can serve as an emblem for the imperial or colonial project: "the scene in which an orator through the power of eloquence 'civilizes' 'savage' humanity" (*The Poetics of Imperialism*, xx). Translation, which Cheyfitz relates to the medieval theory of the *translatio imperii et studii*, or the transference of the empire and of learning, "is inseparably connected," he tells us, "with a 'civilizing' mission, the bearing of Christianity and of Western letters to the barbarians . . . those who do not speak the language of the empire." Thus, from its beginnings, he explains, "the imperialist mission is . . . one of translation: the translation of the 'other' into the terms of the empire" (112). And this view, in fact, is in essential accord with ideas of translation current during the time of the Roman Empire and the early Christian period. Saint Jerome's Latin version of the Greek Bible, for example, is based on a rigorously Roman conception of the translator's relationship to the source language. "The translator," he writes, "considers thought content a prisoner which he transplants into his own language with the prerogative of a conqueror."²⁶

It is tempting, in the light of these accounts and of Said's *Orientalism*, to cast the British missionaries to China and the early translators of Chinese in the role of Cheyfitz's eloquent orator, who brings language and religion to the barbarians and who translates their culture, whatever culture it may be, into the terms of his own so that it may be better understood by, and made more accessible to, *his* culture. To regard a figure like Legge in this way would be unfair, however, since in the course of his long career he struggled with his ethnocentrism and grew increasingly sensitive to the humanity of the people whose culture he tried to interpret, even if his

ultimate aim was to transform that culture by bringing it within the spiritual empire of Christianity.²⁷ For many of the translators, both early and later, on the other hand, Cheyfitz's eloquent orator is a fairly accurate characterization, to the extent that what they do, more often than not, is precisely to translate the other into the terms of their own culture – and with respect to poetry, this means, quite literally, that they turn Chinese poems into English ones.

EUROPEAN conceptions of China, Raymond Dawson argues, have depended historically on two sources. The first, of course, has been objective information about China, when that was available. But the second has been precisely the tendency to imagine or formulate conceptions of China, in the absence or even presence of more factual information, driven by European need or desire. As Spence suggests, Westerners continually “seek to find themselves through China” (*Chinese Roundabout*, 90), and the value of China for the West, it seems, has depended more often on a Western determination of what is valuable than on any sense of what may be intrinsically valuable about China and its civilization. Thus, in an era of European instability and conflict, China is seen as a utopia and as a source of potential solutions to European problems; and in an era of European progress and expansiveness, China is seen as static and inferior, in need of European guidance and moral direction. Views of China, then, are not unlike the differing and contradictory European views of Caliban's island in *The Tempest*. What remains fairly constant in the history of Sino-Western contact is that the importance of China is defined almost solely in terms of its relationship to the West – or its importance, to put it another way, is its *importance for the West* – and this is equally true in the area of culture and its importation. Thus, the different phases of the history of translation that Teele describes can be seen to be determined largely by changing trends in the interests of translators, which, in turn, correspond to, or are dictated by, changes in European literary sensibility and intellectual outlook.

To do justice to his subject, of course, Teele is forced to consider more than just the translation of Chinese poetry, as well as more than just translation into English. But this expanded focus only provides more examples of the West's orientalist or Eurocentric approach to Chinese culture, and

reveals more fully the extent to which the history of the translation of Chinese can be read as another aspect of Western literary and intellectual history, as opposed to a story of disinterested encounter between different cultures.

Approaching it from this broader perspective, however, we can see that the translation of Chinese texts, first into Latin and then into the European vernaculars, became an increasingly organized and purposeful activity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Jesuit translators turned their attention to the Confucian canon. A selection of Confucian texts was first published in Paris in 1687. Another Confucian classic, the *Book of Odes*, bits and pieces of which had also been introduced to the West by the Jesuits, was not translated in its entirety into any Western language until Legge brought out his English prose and verse versions, in 1871 and 1876 respectively. But it was already important as a source of material for poetic translation almost from the beginning of the nineteenth century. In fact, as Teele shows, by the time Legge's complete versions appeared, the interests of translators were already shifting from the practical social morality and didacticism of Confucius to the more romantic mysticism of Lao Tzu, author of the *Tao Teh Ching*. Later, after the turn of the century, translators looked more and more frequently to the work of T'ang dynasty poets, including Tu Fu, Li Po, Po Chu-i, and others, for their material.

With his arrival at this new era, of course, Teele turns to Pound and to a fuller consideration of translation in the twentieth century – although his history at this point may require some revision from a historical perspective broader than his own.²⁸ Writing long before Hugh Kenner's invention of the "Pound Era," or the emergence of a broad critical consensus regarding Pound's central position in the field of modern translation in general, Teele offers a somewhat limited account of Pound, as well as an overly qualified judgment of *Cathay*. Taking his cue from T. S. Eliot, he is not insensitive to the purely poetic value of Pound's achievement. "Plainly poetry," he remarks about one of the texts he quotes, "this is not exact as a translation." And he goes on to conclude, with some regret, that "when Pound had studied other languages, he knew how to carry over into English certain of their general effects. Not knowing Chinese, he made Chinese translations which except for a few exotic names and notions are thoroughly English" (*Through a Glass Darkly*, 108).

While this judgment is not entirely invalid, it will require, before it can achieve greater accuracy, some more attention to the whole problematic of Chinese translation, precisely as Pound's work has alerted us to it. Exactness of translation, for instance, may turn out to be of quite limited value in producing an English version of a Chinese text, let alone a viable poem in English – while even a thorough knowledge of Chinese will not necessarily prevent a translation from being “thoroughly English.” Indeed, it seems doubtful that any translation into English can avoid being “thoroughly English” in some sense, which is surely what Eliot had in mind when he referred to *Cathay* in terms of its quality of “translucency,” the illusion of which, after all, is exactly what Pound had to invent. For now, though, we may amend Teele's history by observing that after 1915, the effort to bring Chinese poetry into English not only received fresh impetus from *Cathay*, in a way that Teele does not fully register, but that its publication ushered in a whole new era of Anglo-American regard for Chinese poetry, along with a new era of translation, which does not become fully visible until after the publication of Teele's book in 1949. Indeed, *Through a Glass Darkly* may be regarded as itself a part of this later history of interest in Chinese poetry, although the true flowering of this interest did not occur until the 1950s and 1960s, with the work of such poets, scholars, and translators as Kenneth Rexroth, A. C. Graham, Wai-lim Yip, Gary Snyder, David Lattimore, Jonathan Chaves, James Wright, and W. S. Merwin, many of whom attended the conference on “Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination” in New York in 1977.

To see that *Cathay*, in fact, constitutes a watershed in the history of Chinese translation, we may consider the attitudes of translators active during the period just prior to its publication, a period extending roughly from the 1880s to 1915 (although there are also continuities, for some of which Pound himself is responsible, across the divide that *Cathay* establishes). This is, of course, the period of high imperialism, and it is also marked, appropriately, we may feel, by a sort of laissez-faire approach to translation, particularly if the texts to be translated happen to be Chinese. English translators of this era, on the whole, tend variously to appropriate, domesticate, or otherwise impose themselves and their culture upon Chinese texts, and there seem to be few if any explicit rules or conventions to guide the practice of translation. The writers surveyed by Teele, for the most

part, introduce their work by expressing dissatisfaction with existing translations and calling for some new approach, one which will not necessarily constitute a closer approximation of the Chinese, however, but which will correct what they feel to be the excesses of previous translators, especially Legge. Frequently they articulate their dissatisfactions in terms of a postromantic distinction between the scholarly and the literary or the poetic, where the former represents an uninviting literalism or a pedantic adherence to the text, thought to impede a freer, more imaginative interpretation of the material. Pound himself, to be sure, who would later assume his own antischolarly or antiliteral stance and insist on *not* translating the words (PE, 150), was often the target of criticism directed at what was seen to be his own unseemly or ignorant deviations from the text. But if Pound appears to take the side of the poets against the scholars in this debate, a further distinction must be made between his understanding of poetic translation and that of many of his predecessors and contemporaries.²⁹

In the case of Clement Allen, for example, writing in 1884, and offering new versions of texts from the *Book of Odes*, the excesses to be avoided are the literalism and simplicity that he finds in Legge, and he calls instead for the use of "modern language" and "clear expressions in honest flowing metre, omitting Chinese names which are so repellent to the English reader." His method consists, as he puts it, of "taking a whole poem, and turning it into English with an utter disregard of the order of the lines, or even of the stanzas" (*Through a Glass Darkly*, 79). Teele quotes these remarks without comment, no doubt feeling that Allen's irresponsibility as a translator is self-evident. After considering a few examples of his work, Teele concludes that they "are not translations, but verse compositions in a Victorian vein on themes suggested by the *Shih Ching*" (80). As readers schooled in Said's orientalism, we should be surprised neither by Allen's approach to translation nor by his distaste for Chinese names. We may even feel that, given such attitudes, producing "verse compositions in a Victorian vein on themes suggested by the *Shih Ching*" is as close as Allen can come to translation, and as close, perhaps, as he wants to come, since what is important to him, clearly, is not what is really in the text but what can be made out of it.

Also on display here, however, is what Said refers to as the "internal consistency" of orientalism, in the sense that as a writer Allen is most

immediately involved not with the Chinese texts he is supposedly translating but with the work of Legge, upon which he aims to improve, and with his own writing, which he apparently wants to divorce as much as possible from its Chinese sources. In other words, Allen closes his work off almost completely from Chinese and situates it instead within an entirely Western textual field. In terms of the history of Chinese translation, this behavior is offensive, not so much because it radically departs from what we might think of as the translator's fundamental obligations, but because it does so in a way that seems so casually indifferent to what, in fact, is being translated.

While Allen's work may be one of the most egregious examples of such tendencies, it is not the only one. The sinologist Joseph Edkins, whose scholarship Teele judges to be original and intelligent, is nevertheless the author of translations that are "so free" and so full of "gratuitous additions" that "they are no longer translations." In Edkins's hands, Teele shows, a Chinese quatrain can easily expand to become a fourteen-line English verse paragraph (81), and this sort of expansion is not an uncommon experience for English translators. Teele also draws our attention to the work of George Gardiner Alexander, translator in 1895 of the *Tao Teh Ching* and another writer who seeks to bypass the "strained literal accuracy" of his more scholarly predecessors. He was interested, we are told, "not so much in finding out the exact meaning of Lao Tzu's words as in finding out just what Lao Tzu had in mind when writing them" – a distinction which Teele finds to be "subtle," but overly and ironically so. Yet it turns out to be a fairly close anticipation of a Poundian distinction as well, inasmuch as Pound somewhat dauntingly advised his own German translator, "Don't translate what I wrote, translate what I MEANT to write" (PE, 150). Alexander's aim, as Teele interprets it, is to "fit the Chinese text into his own conception of its meaning" (*Through a Glass Darkly*, 83) – which is yet another instance, we may feel, of irresponsible translating, and, precisely, of colonizing, or even cannibalizing, a text.

Pound's wish not to translate the "words," on the other hand, reflects his conviction that, as Kenner puts it, the poem "is not its language" (PE, 150), whereas to suppose that it *is* its language is also to assume that "the importance of a moment of thought or feeling lies in the notation somebody else found for it."³⁰ Moreover, Pound's distaste for literal trans-

lation only makes him more responsive and responsible to other aspects of the poem, including its sequence of images, its rhythms, and its tone. It is in this sense that Pound satisfies his obligations to the original text and in this sense also that his translations become acts of homage to the poets he translates. In Kenner's words, his translations can be seen as "interchanges of voice and personality with the dead" (*Translations*, 14) – encounters on common imaginative ground between one poet and another – in contrast, say, with Clement Allen's contradictory struggle against his Chinese sources, and his use of them, nevertheless, as springboards into compositions that are virtually his own.

One of the most important figures during this era, for Teele, is Herbert Giles, who, a few years after his retirement from the British consular service in China, was appointed to the chair of Chinese at Cambridge (1897) and went on to produce not only the first history of Chinese literature to appear either in China or the West but a body of translations that was apparently the first to satisfy sinological standards of accuracy and to appeal to a wide reading public. As Teele shows, however, the achievement is a vulnerable one, largely because of Giles's willingness to comply with Victorian expectations regarding diction, rhythm, and a sort of Tennysonian atmosphere in his verse that must have made his readers feel right at home but that essentially misrepresents the Chinese. To this extent, Giles does not colonize his texts so much as domesticate them in the manner of his predecessors Jones and Davis, as we shall see when we look closely at one of his translations. For Teele, this problem is partly one of mistranslation, but more importantly it is a problem of diction and tone, and it can have the effect of suddenly transforming a poem from lyric to "society verse," indicating not only a misapprehension of the Chinese but a failure of emotional response on Giles's part. Teele reads this lapse into society verse as an admission of a lack of sympathy with the Chinese, informed by a preference for the polished, witty verse that Giles learned to admire as a student of the classics. But it can also be seen as a refusal or inability to take Chinese poetry seriously as a reflection of non-Western modes of experience. From an orientalist perspective, certainly, it is these modes of experience that are either filtered out of Giles's translations or transformed by his use of a Victorian or Tennysonian idiom, and it is this idiom, in turn, which will make his work a perfect target for Pound's imagist reforms later on. In this

way, Giles's work can also be seen to operate largely within a Western field of poetic discourse and, to this extent, remain outside, if not entirely closed off from, Chinese.

Just after the turn of the century, Lancelot Cranmer-Byng presents the intriguing case of another writer who participates in the literary debate between the scholarly and the poetic and who anticipates Pound quite directly by bringing out a book, not of "translations of Chinese poetry," as Teele at first describes it, but of translations of translations from the Chinese by Giles. Pound, of course, a decade or so later, would not produce a whole volume of such work but merely borrow four of Giles's translations and recast them in an imagist mode. Cranmer-Byng, on the other hand, seems to have had larger ambitions for this approach to poetic composition and went on to produce other volumes of translations of translations, including a version of the *Book of Odes* (1920) based on Legge's edition. In this book he explains that he has undertaken this task in order to reclaim the "great literatures of the world" from "the hands of mere scholars, to whom the letter has been all important and the spirit nothing" (*Through a Glass Darkly*, 99) – assuming, apparently, that as a "literary man" he has greater access than scholars do to the spirit of great literature, even if it is written in a language that he cannot read, and even though he is totally dependent, therefore, on the mere scholars whom he otherwise disparages as virtually dispensable.

Cranmer-Byng's situation as a writer, to this extent, is another version of Clement Allen's, especially with respect to his contradictory relationship with his sources. That situation reveals the self-defeating nature of a literary culture characterized by an opposition between the scholarly and the poetic. As much as Cranmer-Byng is committed to outdoing Giles, who is both his source and his rival, his work is essentially a replay of Giles's, insofar as the Pre-Raphaelite style which Cranmer-Byng adopts for his compositions plays the same domesticating role in his work that the Tennysonian style plays in Giles's. Both styles, as Teele points out, are inappropriate for representing Chinese (*Through a Glass Darkly*, 99), and both have the effect of obscuring the Chinese origins of the work being presented, as well as of misleadingly familiarizing it. Cranmer-Byng is worth considering, however, since his work is a fair indication of the nature of the literary/political context in which Pound himself would attempt to

produce versions of Chinese poems, first as a translator of other translations and then as a quasi collaborator with Fenollosa. When Pound chose to rewrite some of Giles's translations, and when he undertook to complete the work of Fenollosa, he was venturing into a field whose assumptions and procedures were already well established.³¹

The collaborative approach to translation, according to Teele, was still, in fact, quite new when Pound began his work with Fenollosa's notebooks. It was first introduced in 1910, when a poet named Clifford Bax and a Japanese Buddhist monk, Tsutomi Inouye, together brought out a volume called *Twenty Chinese Poems*, and it would soon be responsible for such famous volumes as *Fir-Flower Tablets* (1921) by Amy Lowell and Florence Ayscough and *The Jade Mountain* (1929) by Witter Bynner and Kiang Kang-hu. It is hard not to feel, however, that collaboration is implicit in nearly all the modes of indirect translation, going back as far as Bishop Percy's *Pleasant History* of 1761. With respect to the immediate situation of British literary culture in the early twentieth century, it appears initially to be a way of resolving the dichotomy between the scholarly and the poetic, or even of exposing the falseness of their opposition. But its use is hardly a guarantee of success in translation, as Teele shows in a number of instances. Given his recognition of Pound's achievement in *Cathay*, coupled with his regret that Pound did not know Chinese and his praise for Arthur Waley's "combination of fine scholarship and unusual poetic gifts," Teele's own belief, clearly, is that there is no real substitute for an outlook that attends both to scholarly accuracy and artistic technique, regardless of the methodological form such an outlook might take. He especially admires Waley's adoption, for example, of "a flexible line that is free enough to permit accuracy in translation yet regular enough to suggest the formal nature of Chinese poetry" (109). For Teele, in other words, progress is possible and has been made, and toward the end of his study, he sees signs of "increasing maturity in the western approach to Chinese literature," along with a new "breadth of view which could at last conceive the whole of Chinese poetry," which in itself is a change that promises "improved translations" (133).

In the light of the intrusive force of Western orientalism, however, it is hard not to feel that Teele's positivist hopes for "improved translations" and his faith in progress through better scholarship and an expansion of the

field are a little beside the point. What orientalism, most radically defined, suggests, after all, is that the problem of Chinese translation has less to do with the effort to find accurate or even adequate representations of Chinese poetry than with the problem of representation itself, which is to say the West's problem of acknowledging and confronting its own conceptions of what is "other" to it before contact with that other is even attempted. Indeed, such contact in some instances may never be made. Instead, as in the case even of a skilled and sinologically informed translator like Giles, it is refused or falsified right from the start, so that what is supposed to be a window looking onto another culture, or even a darkening glass, in Teele's metaphor, turns out to be something more like a mirror giving us back ourselves.

We have been dealing, then, with the problem of what might be called "the Chinese poem in a state of Western captivity," and with the extent to which the practice of translation itself is commandeered and guided by priorities that tend to disrupt and redirect the process by which Chinese poetry is supposedly made available to Western readers. I want to consider just one more example of such captivity, a complicated but instructive one, I think, which involves two books, Judith Gautier's *Le Livre de Jade*, published in Paris in 1867, and *Pastels in Prose*, by the American poet Stuart Merrill, which appeared in New York in 1890. These books are linked by the fact that Merrill's, an anthology of translations of French prose poems, includes some of Gautier's work, which, in turn, consists of versions of T'ang dynasty Chinese poems. Teele includes both volumes in his survey, to demonstrate that the turn of the century marks another large-scale shift in the interests of translators of Chinese poetry, whom he sees moving away from the *Book of Odes*, for example, and beginning to focus much more exclusively on the work of T'ang dynasty writers. Thus, both Gautier and another French translator of T'ang dynasty poems, the Marquis d'Hervey Saint-Denys, are not only ahead of their time, for Teele, but become important resources for later translators, while Merrill, in making Gautier's work available in English, promotes the general shift toward the T'ang dynasty.

Pastels in Prose (with its title evocative of *fin de siècle* aestheticism) is a volume of English translations not from Chinese but from French. Besides the translations of Gautier's prose versions of Chinese poems, Merrill's book

includes translations of French prose poems by Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Huysmans, and others, which have nothing to do with Chinese. As Teele sees it, in fact, the book's immediate purpose was to introduce recent French writers to American readers. If in translating Gautier Merrill also contributes to a major "change in the kind of Chinese poetry used by translators after the turn of the century" (87), this can only be regarded as a welcome bonus.

What Teele does not mention, however, is that the book is primarily and quite explicitly presented, by William Dean Howells in his preface to it, as an introduction to the recently invented form of the French prose poem. One wonders, then, if the more significant point here might be that American readers of Merrill's book were obliged to encounter T'ang dynasty poetry, perhaps for the first time, not only in the context of modern French poetry in the symbolist tradition but in that of modern French formal innovation as well, so that a certain kind of ancient Chinese verse makes one of its earliest appearances in the West in the guise, so to speak, of modern and formally innovative French prose.

A similar point might be made about the translations of Chinese poems by Pound and Arthur Waley, which would appear in 1915 and 1916 respectively; and, indeed, Kenneth Rexroth does make it when he observes, of the effect of Pound's and Waley's translations, that "Chinese poetry has come to influence the West as a *special form of free verse*" (my italics), one to which, he also points out, Chinese poetry bears no resemblance.³² I need hardly add that Chinese poetry bears even less resemblance to the French prose poem, although, significantly, Howells discusses this new form in the very same terms that would soon be applied to free verse translations of Chinese poetry and to imagist lyrics as well. He takes particular notice, for example, of the "beautiful reticence" of the prose poem, of its "brevity" and "simplicity," and of its lack of any explicit moral. What Howells describes here, in fact, may well constitute a sort of precognition of the imagist lyric, with its laconic style, its speaker who presents the image without commenting upon it, and its whole conception of itself as a rapt yet disciplined act of attention, an art, essentially, of omission or condensation meant to foreground things themselves. In offering these observations, Howells points out how "very uncommon in English verse" this approach is, reminding us that Pound's formulation of imagist doctrine is

still twenty-two years away – although once formulated, this doctrine, ironically, would be read back into Chinese poetry.³³

All of these examples, in any case, demonstrate the operation of an orientalist dynamic. In them we can see the extent to which Chinese poetry, at almost every stage in the history of its translation, has been variously and almost invariably pressed into the service of the needs or purposes of its translators – or even, as we have just seen, appropriated into the developing history of modern Anglo-American and French literature, and of the relations between them. The reality of the Chinese text, in effect, has been displaced by what could be done with it or made out of it in Western contexts and formats, and this is not less but perhaps even more the case when Pound inscribes himself into this history and the translation of Chinese poetry becomes an “art,” as well as a site for the further development of the modern American poem.

LOOKING BACK over his own version of the history of Sino-Western cultural relations and dismissing all attempts at translation prior to those of Pound and Waley as inadequate, David Lattimore has asserted that “Chinese poetry could not be translated into English until the writers of English were willing to give some ground in changing their own idiom into something that could catch the Chinese as it came” (“Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination,” 38). Similarly, Wai-lim Yip has called attention to the failure of translators, both prior to Pound and after, “to see the special mode of representation of reality constituted or made possible by the peculiarity of the Chinese language itself,” by which he seems to mean the literalness of the Chinese poetic line and its capacity to present “objects in their purest form uncontaminated by intellect or subjectivity” (*Ezra Pound’s Cathay*, 12, 25). Such features, while not impossible to reproduce in English, can still call for modifications that would tend to disrupt the possibility of direct transfer from one language to the other. Thus the ideal of a perfectly literal translation, as A. C. Graham points out, “is soon betrayed by concessions to idiomatic smoothness, rhythm, and immediate intelligibility” (*Poems of the Late T’ang*, 15), not to mention concessions of a more ideological kind, as I hope we have seen in our consideration of Teele’s history.

In any event, what both Lattimore and Yip seem ultimately to have in

mind here is the tendency (primarily but not exclusively of pre-twentieth-century translators) to bring Chinese poems so fully and thoroughly into English – which is to say, into English words and into conventions of English poetic diction and verse form as well – that a reader loses all sense of the otherness, of the original identity, of the text as a Chinese poem, all sense that what is being rendered is an experience of the world whose cultural and linguistic difference may not be immediately or adequately representable in English at all. The problem here derives from an insistence upon an English, as Lattimore puts it, unwilling “to give some ground” and change its own idiom, so that what is foreign to it can nonetheless gain entry into it. “The essence of translation,” a recent theorist asserts, “is to be an opening, a dialogue, a cross-breeding, a decentering. Translation is ‘a putting in touch with,’ or it is *nothing*.”³⁴ And translation from Chinese, we may add – given, from the viewpoint of European languages, its radical linguistic difference – becomes a test case for all translation.

In his essay “The Task of the Translator” (1923), Walter Benjamin addresses these very issues, although without particular reference to Chinese, when he quotes (and strongly endorses) the thinking of the theorist Rudolf Pannwitz. Speaking of translations into German, Pannwitz remarks that

Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works . . . The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue . . . He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language.³⁵

Benjamin introduces Pannwitz’s observations by declaring that they “rank with Goethe’s Notes to the *Westöstlicher Divan* as the best comment on the theory of translation that has been published in Germany,” and he places them near the end of his essay, where they may best serve the purpose of clarifying his own argument about translation as a means toward the ultimate realization of what he calls “pure language.” “It is the task of the translator,” he writes, “to release in his own language that pure language

which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work. For the sake of pure language he breaks through decayed barriers of his own language" (80).

In other words, when a translator attempts to re-create in his own language a text from another, and sufficiently allows his language to be "powerfully affected" by the other, the result will be not simply a translation, or even, as for Pannwitz, an expansion and re-creation of the translator's own language, but (theoretically, ideally) the expression or revelation of "the central reciprocal relationship between languages" (72), a glimpse, that is, of what might be called a state of interlinguicity, of the pure, universal language that underlies and informs all actual languages and that can be released or liberated only by their totalization or unification. Translation thus holds for Benjamin the possibility of reversing the catastrophe at Babel, the catastrophe that gave rise to the need for translation to begin with. Yet such a possibility exists, if at all, only *between* languages, in an *interlinguistic* space, in the moment *after* a language ceases to be itself and *before* it becomes another.

This notion of "pure language," interestingly, is not unlike the conception of the European languages, if not *all* languages, as "one rich organism" which Hugh Kenner attributes to Pound and which he sees as the chief legacy of nineteenth-century philology to literary modernism (*Voices & Visions*, 215). But what is of most immediate importance here is the insistence that the translator, in the act of translation, should pursue not the ease and perfection of his own tongue but its destabilization and defamiliarization by the other as he attempts to accommodate the alien spirit of the other. That Pound is guided by such an insistence is suggested by Donald Davie when he writes that "Pound is a translator . . . for whom the archaic and exotic character of what he is translating is something not to be overcome in translation, but on the contrary reproduced there. If he wants to familiarize and make accessible, he will not do so without making his reader aware of the gulf which reader and poet together are trying to span."³⁶

As an example of what all these writers are objecting to in conventional translation, consider the following quatrain, cited by Lattimore, from a translation by Sir William Jones of one of the Confucian odes:

Gay child of Spring, the garden's queen,
 Yon peach-tree charms the roving sight:
 Its fragrant leaves how richly green!
 Its blossoms how divinely bright!

What Lattimore is particularly concerned to point out here is the disparity, the lack of correspondence, between the format and length of Jones's text, a quatrain containing twenty-five words, and the brevity of the Chinese original, which, he shows, consists of just two lines of four syllables each:

<i>T'ao</i>	<i>chih</i>	<i>yao</i>	<i>yao</i>
peach	's	grace	grace
<i>cho</i>	<i>cho</i>	<i>ch'i</i>	<i>hua</i>
blaze	blaze	its	flowers

("Discovering Cathay," 11)

Thus the translation not only exceeds its source in length but also misrepresents it in terms of its visual appearance on the page – another kind of equivalence which translation sometimes also attempts to take into account. But as A. C. Graham remarks, the "gift of terseness is the least dispensable literary qualification of a translator from Chinese" (*Poems of the Late T'ang*, 19), and it is in fact Lattimore's larger point that the Anglo-American discovery of Chinese poetry in the twentieth century is crucially related to what he calls "the rediscovery of concision in English poetry" ("Discovering Cathay," 11), a rediscovery, of course, for which Pound and the imagist movement were largely responsible.

If it is true, in addition, that the examples of Chinese and Japanese poetry were instrumental to the early development of imagism, it is also the case that imagism itself, once it was established as a program for the stylistic reformation of English verse, made possible a clearer apprehension and appreciation of oriental poetry and even created an audience for it. For this very reason, what may seem even more striking to us about Jones's text, regardless of the way it expands beyond the limits of its source, is its unrecognizability as a translation from Chinese. With its *abab* rhyme scheme and its neat, unhurried iambic tetrameter lines, it lacks any resemblance to what twentieth-century readers have learned to expect from Chinese translations – and this is surely the result of the success of Pound and his fol-

lowers in establishing the Chinese translation as a virtual subgenre of the modern Anglo-American lyric, with its own special conventions, including unrhymed free verse, emotional reticence, and a concrete, imagistic style. To the extent that any translation deviates from these conventions, it runs the risk of violating our sense of what Chinese poetry has in fact come to be.

More broadly speaking, though, what is at stake here is not the failure of Jones's quatrain to conform to a model of translation that he could not possibly know, but the general adequacy of his text as translation. To judge from the standard provided by Pannwitz and Benjamin, Jones, it appears, has found no way to acknowledge or register in his own language the fact that he is rendering a Chinese poem. There is no perceptible interaction between his English and the Chinese of his source, and barely any correspondence between them (with the slight exception, Lattimore shows, of the emphatic tone of lines 3 and 4, which echoes the effect of the original's second line). Instead, conventions of English poetic diction, syntax, and form have been allowed to displace whatever in the original text might make it identifiable as Chinese, so that an English reader might well assume that there is no difference between these languages other than the words themselves. The important point, though, is that Jones's text is indistinguishable from an eighteenth-century English poem, with the result that the Chinese poem behind it is almost completely hidden from view. As with the quatrains by Davis considered earlier, translation for Jones here is conceived, in effect, as conversion and reclamation. The Chinese text, as it were, is rendered presentable for its English readers, at the cost of the negation of a good deal of its own reality.

In defense of Jones, however, we might say (in Pannwitz's terms) that his reverence for the usage of his own language and poetic conventions justifiably exceeds his reverence for the spirit of the Chinese poem because, in all likelihood, he was ignorant of that spirit and, in any case, had no model available to him for conveying it. He was ignorant of that spirit, that is to say, because no one had yet discovered or invented it, and certainly not in terms that would convince or make sense to twentieth-century readers. Jones, along with his contemporaries, could not, as Lattimore puts it, see the poetry in Chinese poetry, with the result, perhaps, that we cannot see the Chinese poetry in Jones's translation – and this is so, again, precisely

because Pound, in Eliot's shrewd observation, is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time. To say this, however, is perhaps to admit that both Pound and Jones can offer only representations of the Chinese poem in terms of their own respective cultures, and that we have learned to recognize one of these as "Chinese." Our question thus becomes: to what extent does Pound's invention or representation of the Chinese poem go beyond being a mere projection and respond, as well as correspond, to what is really there in Chinese texts?

With respect first to what is really there in Chinese texts, the point to underline is that Chinese poetry, especially the classical variety that Fenollosa studied and that Pound brought into English in *Cathay*, is a highly formal poetry, governed by rules and conventions that, as James Liu shows, can be fairly complicated and elaborate.³⁷ Generally speaking, almost all Chinese poetry rhymes, and much of it follows prescribed forms calling for an equal number of characters or syllables per line, usually five or seven in the so-called Ancient Style, while the earliest Chinese verse, such as that in the *Book of Odes*, calls for mostly four-character lines in brief but fixed stanza forms. And this suggests, of course, as we have already seen, that in at least one major way twentieth-century translations of Chinese poetry into free verse are *misrepresentations*, and that the kind of verse we have learned to identify with Chinese poetry in fact bears little resemblance to it. Pound, in this sense, is as far from the reality of the Chinese poem as Jones is.

Yet, as Kenneth Rexroth has remarked, "Learned and industrious people have tried to reproduce in English the original rhythms of Chinese poetry, but have managed to produce only absurdities" ("Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination," 11), while, as we have seen in the cases of Davis and Jones, the use of English verse conventions as a sort of equivalent for those in Chinese (although this is probably not what they intended) leads to distortions of another kind. A. C. Graham puts the matter best (and provides a strong justification for Pound's approach) when he observes that the element in poetry which is easiest to convey in translation is concrete imagery, and that fidelity to such imagery is impossible without a fairly complete disregard of verse form (*Poems of the Late T'ang*, 15).

Pound himself argues similarly in "How to Read" (1928), where he comments on the relative translatability of three kinds of literary language,

including *phanopoeia* (visual imagery), which can be “translated almost, or wholly, intact”; *melopoeia*, or the musical property of language, which can be reproduced, if at all, only “by divine accident”; and *logopoeia*, the play of language itself or “the dance of the intellect among words,” which “does not translate; though the attitude of mind may pass through a paraphrase” (*Literary Essays*, 25). If one believes, moreover, as Pound did, that the essence of poetry is the image, and that the exact presentation of the image, as A. C. Graham remarks, “imposes an absolute rhythm out of accord with regular verse forms,” then the “sacrifice of strict form for the sake of content,” or of the image, becomes not only possible but essential, a virtual imperative for the translator (*Poems of the Late T'ang*, 15). In this sense, Pound's decision to render Chinese texts in an imagist mode seems almost inevitable, a decision that suggests, as well, the close compatibility of imagism and the Chinese poem (in spite of its formalism).

What is also really there in Chinese texts, after all, is the great concreteness and conciseness of the language, along with a syntax that, in verse especially, makes sparing use of grammatical particles and connectives, so that a line of verse is often little more than a list of nouns, things themselves, as Fenollosa saw it, working out their own fate.³⁸ “Thinking,” he also said, with the Chinese character in mind, “is *thinging*,” a word that turns a noun, “thing,” into a present participle which rhymes with what it means, so that “thinking” becomes a physical activity, a process of things in motion. Here, indeed, is the “peculiarity” of Chinese that Wai-lim Yip identifies as the source of its “special mode of representation of reality,” and that James Liu describes in terms of freedom from “grammatical restrictions,” a freedom that allows for a treatment of the thing whose directness approaches an absolute.

What this freedom consists of, in large measure, is the fact that the indication of number or tense or even the subject of a verb is often omitted from the language of Chinese poetry, and that omission, Liu tells us, creates a sense of timelessness, impersonality, and universality, “compared with which much Western poetry appears egocentric and earth-bound”: “Where Wordsworth wrote ‘I wandered lonely as a cloud’, a Chinese poet would probably have written simply ‘Wander as cloud’. The former records a personal experience bound in space and time; the latter presents a state of being with universal applications” (*The Art of Chinese Poetry*, 41). For

Yip, this freedom from grammatical restriction makes possible a similar state of being, one in which "all the objects exist simultaneously in multiple relationships, multiple viewpoints. They come to you directly, and it is this multi-dimensionality that we want to see what we can do about in English" ("Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination," 39). Clearly, we are not very far here from Pound's own "freedom from time limits and space limits," the "sudden liberation" brought about by an encounter with an authentic image. Nor are we very far from Fenollosa's response to the Chinese poetic line as a visual experience, in which the eye encounters a row of characters, each one representing a thing whose relation to the other things in the row, not immediately determined by grammar, is not unlike the relation among things in the world – various, open-ended, in process. Thus, whether he was aware of it or not, Pound's work as an imagist seems to have been in harmony in significant ways with classical Chinese poetry, moving toward a sort of rapprochement between English and Chinese.

To this we may add that after his reading of Fenollosa in late 1913, Pound apparently came to feel that imagism is not merely a modernist style but a category or genre of poetry with a lineage as ancient as that of the lyric itself. Thus, in his 1914 article on "Vorticism," in which he redefines the image to bring it into greater accord with the dynamism that Fenollosa attributes to the Chinese character, Pound distinguishes between two kinds of poetry, imagism and lyricism, and writes that the former "is as old as the lyric and as honourable, but, until recently, no one had named it." And he concludes, "Ibycus and Liu Ch'e presented the 'Image.'" In this way, by identifying it with two ancient poets, Pound extravagantly historicizes imagism, lifting it out of the fray of competing contemporary avant-garde movements and granting it all the authority of tradition and even antiquity, both Eastern and Western. Based on principles, in fact, that are universal and permanent, imagism is seen here as a virtually timeless condition of language, a stylistic ideal that transcends history. Its presence in Dante's work, for example, makes him a great poet for Pound, while its absence in Milton's makes him, in Pound's term, a "wind-bag."³⁹

We may continue to answer our question, then – about the adequacy or validity of imagism as a means of representing the Chinese poem – by considering another example of what might well seem, in terms of the criteria set forth by Lattimore, Yip, Pannwitz, and Benjamin, to be flawed

or inadequate translation. Here is Herbert Giles's version of a poem by Liu Ch'e which he published in his *History of Chinese Literature*, one of the poems which Pound later reworked in a decidedly imagist format:

The sound of rustling silk is stilled,
 With dust the marble courtyard filled;
 No footfalls echo on the floor,
 Fallen leaves in heaps block up the door . . .
 For she, my pride, my lovely one, is lost,
 And I am left, in hopeless anguish tossed.⁴⁰

As Hugh Witemeyer has observed, the difference between Giles's translation and the poem Pound fashioned out of it, called "Liu Ch'e" after its author, constitutes a brief demonstration of imagism's critique of late Victorian English verse.⁴¹ In several respects, Pound not only revises Giles's moribund poetic style but modernizes his orientalism in the process. Apart from the reference to "rustling silk" in the first line, there is little in Giles's text to suggest that it was originally Chinese. Unlike Jones, however, Giles does manage to adhere to the format of the text he is translating, which also consists of six lines.⁴² Yet as a translator of Chinese, Giles does not seem to have advanced very far beyond Jones, and his poem, with its rhyming couplets and strongly marked iambic rhythm, seems to be another instance of translation so complete that the reality, which is to say the otherness, of the foreign text has been quite subordinated to the reality of the translator's own language and verse conventions.

What we encounter here may well be an instance of what Eric Cheyfitz calls "the ideology of translation in the West," which he defines as linguistic imperialism, a "drive to master the foreign" (*The Poetics of Imperialism*, 135). It seems more likely, though, that this poem represents a more benign form of that ideology, and thus a drive not so much to master as to familiarize, and so to elide the cultural differences that separate Giles's English readers from the experience and its expression in the original text. Giles, to be sure, is nothing if not liberal and partisan in his attitudes toward China.⁴³ Yet translation, for him, is clearly an act of cultural domestication, informed by a linguistic and poetic ethnocentrism, and Giles makes little if any concession to the possibility that what he is translating may not be well served by iambic tetrameter and pentameter couplets and by syntactical

and rhetorical structures that have nothing to do with Chinese poetry but everything to do with traditional English verse and its manner of representing emotional experience.

Since one object of translation, as Donald Davie suggests, "is to bring over into English modes of feeling not already extant" within it (*Poet as Sculptor*, 12), the language of Giles's final couplet seems to be a glaring instance not only of vague expression (from the point of view of imagism) but of speech that asks the reader to accept the idiom of Victorian English melodrama as an adequate substitute for ancient Chinese grief. This is to make the alien familiar and accessible, but only at the cost of disguising it as something else and of ignoring the cultural distance between the reader and the original text. Like Jones, then, although perhaps with less excuse, Giles fails to locate, where it is most needed, some point of real interaction between the language of his poem and the Chinese of the text he is translating. The result is what Antoine Berman calls "bad" – by which he means "ethnocentric" – translation, or translation which, "under the guise of transmissibility, carries out a systematic negation of the strangeness of the foreign work" (*The Experience of the Foreign*, 5).

Pound, on the other hand, invents Chinese for his English reader, in part, by defamiliarizing his English – which means not that he translates *from Chinese into English*, or from a foreign idiom into a familiar one, but that he allows his English to be reordered or even *disordered*, for expressive purposes, by his sense of the cultural and linguistic otherness of the experience to be conveyed. Thus, in *Cathay* we encounter such oddities of English speech as "At fourteen I married My Lord you," which corresponds to little we can imagine actually being said in English, although it strikingly expresses the austere formality of relations between men and women in eighth-century China and constitutes one of the best examples of Pound's ability occasionally to cross over from textual to cultural translation.⁴⁴ Such speech also demonstrates what it means to allow one's own language to be affected – to the point of being deflected from its syntactical and idiomatic norms – by the difference of another language, so that one's own language, as Cheyfitz puts it, becomes alienated from itself (*The Poetics of Imperialism*, 135). This kind of alienation or defamiliarization, of course, becomes more prominent in Pound's work

with Chinese texts after his reading of Fenollosa, which is to say, after he comes into contact with Chinese in a way more direct than that afforded by Giles. But it is already present even in his versions of some of Giles's translations, where the free verse line and the imagist idiom itself, with its insistence on clarity of presentation, evoke a sense of difference or otherness in the experience conveyed almost regardless of its cultural or historical origins. This otherness can be felt in "Liu Ch'e" in particular, not only because its experience is allowed to preserve a certain quality of mystery or ambiguity,⁴⁵ but because of its use of a phrase such as "she the rejoicer of the heart," which sounds like an idiom translated from a foreign language, an idiom for which there is no direct equivalent in English.

Such language, in any case – and this is true of imagism in general – is calculated to take us out of our own time limits and space limits and into the presence of a rendering of things that has transcended ordinary speech, that has become a sort of "transcendental signified," or even Benjamin's "pure language." As Pound himself puts it, one attempts to arrive at such a language through a process of "strip[ping] words of all 'association,'" and thus of separating them from their accumulated cultural and historical meanings, precisely in the hope of achieving an absolute purity of expression and an account of experience untainted by any condition whatsoever. The danger of stripping a word of all its associations, on the other hand, even if it were possible, is that to do so may be to remove the word from human time and meaning altogether and thus to reduce it to nothing at all (as Wallace Stevens discovers about the cry of the leaves in his poem "The Course of a Particular"). "Pure language" in this case means things themselves, and translation becomes unnecessary, because there are no longer any meanings apart from those things.

But now let us look at Pound's "Liu Ch'e" in its entirety:

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

A wet leaf that clings to the threshold.⁴⁶

In revising Giles's text in accordance with imagist principles, Pound discards Giles's iambic rhythms, his rhyming, and, most importantly, his final couplet, which, in its banality, must have struck Pound as a particularly egregious example of rhetorical "slither." But precisely because it is *not* a translation, Pound's "Liu Ch'e" is free to be an almost total reimagining of Giles's text, especially at its conclusion. The result, we may feel, is a fairly dramatic example of Pound's creative reading, as well as a vision cognate with those of other imagist poems by Pound which present similar transformations, including the "Petals on a wet, black bough" of "In a Station of the Metro" and the ocher that clings to the stone in another adaptation of one of Giles's translations, "Ts'ai Chi'h." It is not only structure and technique that tie these poems together but their common image of a personified "clinging," which suggests an experience of loss and a reluctance to let go of what is lost and thus available only as an "apparition."⁴⁷ If "Liu Ch'e" is not a translation from the Chinese, it is nevertheless a "translation" from one poetic mode or style into another, radically different one, which, ironically, may come closer to the spirit of the Chinese than Giles's supposedly more linguistically accurate text. At the very least, it achieves its effect by creating a world that is convincing and yet unfamiliar, that is clear and yet less than fully intelligible.

Pound's most drastic revision is the depersonalization of the poem, the removal of the speaker from an all but implicit involvement in the scene that he describes. Giles's "my pride, my lovely one" is replaced by the greater detachment of Pound's "she the rejoicer of the heart," which has the quality, as we have noted, almost of a formulaic epithet, and which allows the reader to participate in the speaker's sense of loss. There is no subjective "I" here, an absence also common in Chinese poetry,⁴⁸ and the speaker is presented instead as a virtually anonymous onlooker, almost a stand-in for the reader, to whom the scene finally yields its meaning in terms that make it more publicly available.

What replaces the "I," of course, along with Giles's conventional sentimentality, is the image — "A wet leaf that clings to the threshold" — and the image, as Pound tells us, "is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language."⁴⁹ The image of the wet leaf, in this sense, is the essence of the experience or the discovery toward which the poem

has been building. It is itself a translation, or transformation, of all that precedes it – and this is strikingly indicated by the spacing, which separates the image from the rest of the poem. What the image conveys, particularly in the context of all the earlier descriptive detail, is a sense of loss that belongs more to the scene itself than to the speaker, and to this extent it becomes available to the reader as well.⁵⁰ Thus the use of the image enables Pound to maintain not only the concrete texture of the poem but also its (oriental) qualities of reticence and impersonality, and these, in turn, convey James Liu's "state of being with universal applications."

At the same time, of course, it must be acknowledged that it is not Liu Ch'e, in this case, who presents the image, but Pound himself – a fact made quite clear by A. C. Graham's literal translation of the final two lines of Liu Ch'e's text, which contain nothing like Pound's clinging wet leaf and turn out to be closer in some respects to Giles than to Pound: "Peer-after that beautiful woman ah!, where find?/Feel my heart not-yet at-ease." Arthur Waley's version of the poem, which "departs considerably," Graham points out, "from the sense of the concluding line," nevertheless clarifies its meaning, which Waley renders as "Longing for that lovely lady/How can I bring my aching heart to rest?" (*Poems of the Late T'ang*, 34). But the telling point here is that Pound, in a double act of creative reading, is orientalizing not only Giles but the Chinese text itself. Certainly he brings Giles's poem into accord with his own sense of what is "oriental," which is to say imagistic, and, in doing so, also brings it into accord with his own sense of what it requires as a poem. What is most significant, though, is not simply that Pound's revision of Giles's text may correspond to the reality or spirit of Chinese poetry, but that he pursues his own (Western or orientalist) vision of Chinese poetry, with the paradoxical result that he both displaces the reality of the original poem (by Liu Ch'e) and yet also manages to recover the reality (ignored by Giles) of Chinese poetry in general. Thus an expert sinologist and translator such as Graham gives Pound credit not only for producing "a fully achieved poem" but for writing a new conclusion to it that is "Far Eastern in manner and feeling" – as opposed, of course, to *accurate*. Yet of the four versions of the poem that Graham compares – by Giles, Lowell, Waley, and Pound – only Pound's "emerges triumphantly" for him, and it does so not because it is

a successful translation of the original but because it “transforms,” or, as we might also put it, orientalizes, the original (*Poems of the Late T'ang*, 33-6).

WHAT I DESCRIBE as Pound's double act of creative reading in “Liu Ch'e,” his complex transformation not only of Giles's poem but of the poem Giles translated, can also be seen to characterize his work in *Cathay*. On the one hand, Pound orientalizes or displaces the poems he translates, and to this extent we may feel that the book is aptly titled, since “Cathay” is Marco Polo's name for the country whose fabulous image he largely created in the narrative of his travels.⁵¹ But on the other, as Wai-lim Yip attests, Pound can sometimes be positively clairvoyant in his ability to break through “verbal barriers into the core of the poem” and bring back something of its reality (*Ezra Pound's Cathay*, 101). The verbal barriers here, one should say, are not only those of Chinese but also, or primarily, those of Fenollosa's notes, which are sometimes quite fragmentary and all but incomprehensible. *Cathay* is thus very much a production of creative reading, where “creative” means not only inventive or fictionalizing but insightful and penetrating, both psychologically and philologically. Given only the barest details, as Yip puts it (88), Pound is nonetheless able to recover the movement of consciousness in his texts, even to the point of occasionally capturing elusive realities of voice and tone, an achievement which virtually demands that he go beyond strict dictionary meanings (90-1). Therefore, if he is also guilty of errors because of his ignorance of Chinese, or because he is misled by the uncertainties of Fenollosa's notes, sometimes his inaccuracies are conscious and deliberate, committed for the sake of greater artistic intensity and even on behalf of what Yip calls “his own obsessions as a practicing poet” (101).

The significant point here is that the poems in *Cathay* are not only sometimes acutely “accurate,” despite their deviations from dictionary sense, but are continuous, thematically and in other respects, with the rest of Pound's work. Indeed, what needs to be stressed is the extent to which he has deliberately pursued this continuity, and it is under the category of his “obsessions as a practicing poet,” in fact, that Pound's acts of orientalizing or creative reading should be placed. Like other texts in the history of Chinese translation, after all, *Cathay* appropriates Chinese poetry for

purposes other than those of Chinese poetry itself, and here those purposes include, among others – such as Kenner’s brilliant suggestion that *Cathay* is largely an oblique response to World War I – the pursuit of poetic modernism and the advancement of Pound’s own work (though these are largely synonymous).

But if Pound is using the Chinese texts of *Cathay* as a drawing board for the creation of a modernist style or technique, he is also already practicing it, in the sense that modernism in general may be defined as an activity of appropriation, a series of strategies, such as allusion, collage, and what Pound would later call “the ideogrammic method,” for incorporating other texts, other voices, other perspectives within one’s own, and for shoring up, in this way, the ruins of the modern world, amassing the cultural valuables of the past and increasingly of other, non-Western cultures in order to restore coherence and stability to modern experience, or to create them anew. While it seems unlikely that anyone could confuse *Cathay* with *The Cantos*, it also seems fairly clear that with his small collection of Chinese translations in *Cathay* Pound is moving in the direction of the later, larger project.

At the same time, he seems to be moving beyond imagism, and in many of the *Cathay* poems, which reflect Pound’s reading of Fenollosa’s essay, we find less of an emphasis on the image as “itself the speech,” less reliance on the technique of superpositioning as a structural resource, and less of an appeal in general to strict imagist orthodoxy as a means of producing the Chinese poem. What we do find is what Kenner calls “the *vers-libre* principle” of the single line as the unit of composition (PE, 199) and, often, an identification of the line with the sentence – a compositional or structural procedure that seems to derive from Fenollosa’s regard for the simple, declarative sentence, with its transitive energy, its drive from subject through verb to object, as a reflection of natural process.⁵² This sentence, moreover, approximates the line of verse in Chinese, with its series of characters manifesting the same energy, the movement toward fulfillment of a natural event.

What comes into view here, I want to suggest, is not only a modernist style, in the sense of writing that attempts to adhere closely to the contours of experience and consciousness, but an approach to what A. C. Graham calls “a kind of Sino-English,” or even an approximation of a “system of

logographic writing for English" (*Poems of the Late T'ang*, 24, 18) – Fenollosa's dream of the basic transitive English sentence reflecting, kinesthetically if not visually, the structure and energy of events in the world. What also comes into view here, of course, is the possibility of longer and more substantial poems than orthodox imagism, with its strict focus on the luminous detail, has thus far managed to produce. Yet *Cathay* is not an abandonment of imagism; instead, it incorporates imagism's repertoire of procedures into its larger designs.

Earlier I remarked that Pound invents Chinese for his English reader by defamiliarizing his English. This process takes several forms in *Cathay*, one of the most important of which is both Fenollosan and imagist. A good example is the line "At morning there are flowers to cut the heart," from "Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin," which Kenner singles out for comment. In this line, he says, "Pound kept the necessary texture of linguistic strangeness, yet he was transcribing almost literally a philological note of Fenollosa's." And he continues, "On reflecting how nearly his line reproduces the etymology of 'poignant,' a word he might have used but didn't, we may wonder if we've glimpsed some universal principle of thought" (*Voices & Visions*, 215). What Kenner appears to have in mind here is a principle that links Chinese and English, at least on the level of the progress of language. His reflection, that is, suggests the fairly commonplace assumption in linguistic theory, going back to the eighteenth century and earlier, that language, universally, develops through an evolution from concrete image, via metaphor, to abstraction. This is the assumption, for instance, behind Emerson's notion that language is "fossil poetry," or that the deadest word was once a brilliant picture. Pound's line and Kenner's reflection upon it are both in the spirit of Fenollosa's thinking, since "to cut the heart" is precisely the sort of concrete image or metaphor that a Chinese written character (according to Fenollosa) would pictorialize and that would still remain visible in it long after its concreteness would have been displaced for a native reader by an abstraction like "poignant."

The "universal principle of thought" that we may glimpse in Pound's line, then – the extent to which its phrasing appears to embody a recovery of an earlier stage in the progress of language – is the result of his adoption of Fenollosa's imperative for poets – that they must regard language archaeologically and feel their way back to linguistic origins along a word's

ancient lines of advance. Thus, assuming that Pound's starting-point was the abstract adjective "poignant," it is perfectly consistent with Fenollosa's thinking (and Emerson's) that what he should discover, at the site of the word's origins, so to speak, is the phrase "to cut the heart," consisting of the infinitive form of a transitive verb and a direct object, and constituting precisely a "brilliant picture," the primitive metaphor that represents the etymological root of "poignant" "embedded in direct action" (CWC, 12).

It is also consistent with Pound's thinking as an imagist, to be sure, that "the word he might have used but didn't" is a (dreaded) adjective – dreaded because it represents verbal excess – while the words he does use are "straight as the Greek" – concrete, monosyllabic, direct. As we have seen, writing, for Pound, during this period is a process of stripping words of their associations in order to arrive at their exact meanings (which is Pound's own version of Fenollosa's archaeological imperative), and this process is itself a form of defamiliarization, of discovering and presenting arrangements of language that emphasize their own strangeness with respect to more conventional, or historically and culturally conditioned, modes of expression. On this point Pound's imagism, Fenollosa's Emersonian theorizing, and Chinese itself (at least in Fenollosa's understanding of it) all seem to converge.

It is not only in their treatment of language, however, that the poems in *Cathay* foreground their foreignness. The book's opening poem, "Song of the Bowmen of Shu" (Number 167 in the *Book of Odes*), is also apparently the oldest poem in Pound's collection. On the authority of Fenollosa's notes, Pound attributes it to Bunno, an ancient general, and dates it 1100 B.C. Here the single line is the unit of composition, although it may contain more than one clause, and almost every line is heavily end-stopped, creating the poem's monotony and sense of changelessness, despite a progressive awareness of seasonal change in the landscape:

Here we are, picking the first fern-shoots
And saying: When shall we get back to our country?
Here we are because we have the Ken-nin for our foemen,
We have no comfort because of these Mongols.
We grub the soft fern-shoots,
When anyone says 'Return', the others are full of sorrow.

Sorrowful minds, sorrow is strong, we are hungry and thirsty.
Our defence is not yet made sure, no one can let his friend return.
We grub the old fern-stalks.
(*Translations*, 189)

This monotonous, plodding movement, with its repetitions of phrasing and syntactical pattern, and with language that one critic describes as “prosaic,”⁵³ gives the poem its archaic quality (as does a term like “foemen”), distinguishing it from the more sophisticated formalities of poetic lyricism that readers in 1915 would most likely have expected to find, especially in a poem identified in its title as a “song.” And Pound, in preserving or even insisting upon this movement, runs the risk of producing a text verging on the unattractive, if not quite the unintelligible – always a potential problem for the translator like Pound who orients himself more toward the original text and its author (or, in this case, his *sense* of them) than toward his readers and his own language. Such rhythm or movement, however, seems appropriate both to the psychological experience of the poem’s collective speaker and to the poem’s original date, which calls for something “primitive.”

To begin *Cathay* with this poem, at any rate, is to return to the primitive, to poetic origins, and the “Song of the Bowmen of Shu,” in this way, performs a function similar to that of Canto 1 at the beginning of *The Cantos*. Both texts open their respective works by taking us back to beginnings, although Canto 1, with its elaborate allusions to the origins of Western and English literature, and its awareness, inspired by Sir James Frazer, of the origins of culture in myth and archaic ritual, does so with much greater deliberateness. Lacking this breadth of awareness and allusiveness, the “Song” is still a deliberate re-creation of a primitive text, and Pound, as Wai-lim Yip suggests, has clearly chosen to emphasize those aspects of the version in Fenollosa’s notes that he worked with, especially its rhythm, which promote this impression.

The poem anticipates the first canto in other ways as well, given the extent to which its exiled bowmen, lamenting their situation and seeing no relief for it, can do little more than express their sorrow and wonder “who will know of our grief?” This sense of futility and changelessness becomes even more resonant if we follow Kenner’s suggestion and link

these bowmen with their World War I counterparts, something which contemporary readers may have needed little prompting to do. As Kenner points out, Pound's friend, the sculptor Gaudier-Brzeska, wrote back from the front to say of himself and his fellow soldiers that the *Cathay* poems "depict our situation in a wonderful way." What the poem says, then, as Kenner suggests, is that "all this has happened before and continually happens" (PE, 202), so that the poem shows us not only the ancient Chinese situation but the contemporary European one as well, bearing witness to a larger reality which extends beyond the boundaries of the poem regarded strictly as a translation. In effect, translation itself here becomes a modernist device, one which alters the reader's relation to the text, and Pound, we might say, has made it possible for his readers to see in this ancient Chinese poem an allusion to their own historical circumstances.

Readers of Canto 1 are placed in a similar, if even more complex, position. Faced with a translation of Andreas Divus's Latin translation of Book XI of *The Odyssey* (1538), we are invited at the beginning of another poem, *The Cantos*, to consider how we or our experience might be implicated in what the translation contains. Odysseus arrives in the underworld to meet with Tiresias and to find out how to return to Ithaca. As we read, the hosts of the dead converge upon him, begging for the sacrificial blood, as well as for redemption from their suffering and the anonymity of their fate. Not unlike the bowmen of Shu, they are caught impotently in a pitiable situation, victims of history, wondering in their own way, "who will know of our grief?" At one point, Odysseus recognizes his friend Elpenor, who implores him, "But thou, O King, I bid remember me, unwept, unburied." All human suffering and the brutality of history seem to be represented in this canto, and it is hard not to see these figures in the underworld as the dead of Troy and of World War I simultaneously – just as the voice of Odysseus merges later in the text with that of Pound himself as the translator, insisting further upon the extent to which we, as readers of *The Cantos*, become witnesses of what "continually happens" in history, seeing events in their several versions or incarnations at once.

In several respects, then, Canto 1 may be linked with the "Song of the Bowmen of Shu." It is interesting to note, in addition, that Pound not only worked hard to unify *Cathay* thematically but that he was quite alert

to its thematic connections with some of his other poems and even thought seriously about printing it with his translation of Book XI of *The Odyssey*, along with other translations, such as "The Seafarer" (which he did include in the original 1915 edition of *Cathay*).⁵⁴ This fact in itself suggests the degree to which Pound regarded *Cathay* as an extension of, a part of, his own oeuvre, and not simply as a collection of Chinese translations. If nothing else, it shows how little difference there is, for Pound, between translation and supposedly "original" composition. The opportunity to "complete" Fenollosa's work clearly became for him a means of extending himself as a poet and of opening himself to new creative possibilities for his own writing. Indeed, as much as *Cathay* is a volume of translations, it seems fairly clear that it also aspires to be a self-sufficient book of poems by Ezra Pound – poems which reflect his own interests as a poet. Thus we may feel that Pound, for all his superiority as a writer to those whose work with Chinese preceded his – including Clement Allen, Lancelot Cranmer-Byng, and Herbert Giles – could hardly separate himself from the ideological presuppositions, both literary and orientalist, that governed the period of English cultural history in which he worked.

The thematic unity of *Cathay* has been pointed out by several critics, and I need not dwell on it at length here. Both Michael Alexander and Ronald Bush, for example, call attention to a consistency of tone and emotional outlook in the volume that emerges strongly at the end of "Song of the Bowmen of Shu" ("Our mind is full of sorrow, who will know of our grief?"), and then again in "Exile's Letter" ("What is the use of talking, and there is no end of talking,/There is no end of things in the heart"), and then finally at the end of the last poem, "To Em-Mei's 'The Un-moving Cloud,'" where the speaker imagines the birds to be saying, "But however we long to speak/He cannot know of our sorrow." Bush makes a particularly strong case for a view of the book as a meditation on human isolation and on the inefficacy of language to relieve it, suggesting as well that these concerns are a constant in Pound's own earlier work. Poem after poem deals with war, separation, departure, and exile, presenting what Bush calls "a series of impeded journeys and blocked reunions."⁵⁵ One notes in particular that two of the poems are letters, which is to say, merely potential speech or communication, and this raises the question of whether

they ever reach their intended recipients, a question which becomes part of the overall effect of these poems.

To all of this I would add only that, largely because most of the Chinese originals of the poems in *Cathay* are by Li Po (Pound's "Rihaku"), a reader encounters recurrent place-names (such as "Ten-Shin" and "Choan") along with other kinds of echoes, both verbal and imagistic ("the river of swirling eddies," "the back-swirling eddies," "the turning and twisting waters"), as well as situations that resemble each other, all of which create an effect almost of cross-referencing, giving the book a unified or systematic quality, a modernist sense of self-sufficiency and autotelic wholeness. Still, what may remain the most crucial factor in our sense of the book as an orientalizing project, or as an invention of Chinese poetry, is Pound's tendency to take over its poems and push them, though without the heavy-handedness of a Giles or an Allen, in directions of his own.

That this is the case, that Pound is in some sense in competition with his sources, and that the poems in *Cathay* often become occasions for creative reading, can be seen quite clearly, I think, in what is probably the volume's most famous poem, "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter." Widely admired for its delicacy and restrained feeling, its combination of humility and nearly repressed passion, this poem is also generally regarded as one of Pound's best translations. For Kenneth Rexroth, who by his own admission is no great devotee of Pound's, it is nevertheless "one of the dozen or so major poems to be written by an American in the twentieth century, and still the best single translation from the Chinese,"⁵⁶ while for Wai-lim Yip it demonstrates that even a fine translator like Arthur Waley, who set out "to show Pound a few things" by offering his own version of the poem, cannot quite match Pound's "sense of rightness" or "intuitive apprehension" of the text, despite his sinological accuracy (*Ezra Pound's Cathay*, 88-92). "The River-Merchant's Wife" may well be the quintessential Chinese poem in English, the single poem that comes closest to evoking and confirming the Western sense of China as a world, to borrow Rexroth's terms, of exquisite sensibility, elaborate courtesy, and self-sacrificing love.⁵⁷

What I would also argue, however, is that, like "Liu Ch'e," "The River-Merchant's Wife" offers another instance of translation as transfor-

mation – although in this case the transformation falls short of complete displacement. Pound can nonetheless be seen, especially if his version is compared with other translations and with Fenollosa's notes, to be revising Li Po's poem, which is essentially its speaker's account of her awakening to her love for her husband, and her longing for his return. What I want to suggest is that in addition to being a profession of love, a narrative that testifies to the birth of love in the river-merchant's wife, and that concludes not only with her longing for her husband's return but with a statement of her selfless willingness to undergo some of the risks of his journey by venturing out to meet him, the poem is also a complaint, an expression of disappointment and even of a sense of betrayal. Like the former courtesan in "The Beautiful Toilet," the wife here has been left "too much alone," and like the speaker in "The Jewel Stairs' Grievance," yet another victim of betrayal in *Cathay*, she "utters no direct reproach."⁵⁸ Yet she does express herself with what Bush calls "suppressed ambivalence" (*Ezra Pound among the Poets*, 41), and there are, in effect, two wives inhabiting Pound's text. The first is the wife of Li Po's original poem, whom Pound encountered in Fenollosa's notes, while the second is Pound's subtle revision of this figure. Both manage to coexist in the poem, although most readers seem to respond primarily or even exclusively to Li Po's wife, with her charming evocation of her own innocence as a child, her complete devotion to her husband, and her restrained assertion of feeling, and it is clearly this figure who is more in keeping with orientalist notions of the Chinese Wife, as opposed to what Pound seems to be suggesting about his speaker's deeper feelings.

Another translator of the poem, Arthur Cooper, has pointed out that the River Merchant is Li Po himself and that the poem "is a love-poem to his wife but written as if from her to him, which was a common Chinese practice at the time," raising the possibility, perhaps, that the poem is prescriptive as well as descriptive, a presentation of ideal wifely behavior.⁵⁹ But Pound allows Li Po's wife to stand in his text even as he exposes and expands upon elements in her situation that are less pronounced or more easily overcome in Li Po, especially the husband's long absence and the emotional difficulties it occasions for the wife. In Cooper's translation, for instance, the wife's sadness is due entirely to her husband's being away, a problem that will be fully resolved, however, by his return:

September now: yellow butterflies
 Flying in pairs in the west garden;
 And what I feel hurts me in my heart,
 Sadness to make a pretty face old . . .

Late or early coming from San-pa,
 Before you come, write me a letter:
 To welcome you, don't talk of distance,
 I'll go as far as the Long Wind Sands!

(*Li Po and Tu Fu*, 125-6)

Interrupting and setting aside her own expression of her pain, the wife here, at the end of the poem, announces her eagerness to go out and meet her husband even before his return journey is completed. Both here and in Fenollosa's notes, she is undeterred by the distance she may have to travel in order to do this.

In Pound's version, on the other hand, although the wife's love for her husband is still clear, its expression has become more guarded and distant, and her love itself seems qualified by the reality of her isolation:

The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
 Over the grass in the West garden;
 They hurt me. I grow older.
 If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,
 Please let me know beforehand,
 And I will come out to meet you
 As far as Cho-fu Sa.

Seeing the very opposite of her own situation in the "paired butterflies," having desired her dust to be mingled with her husband's "Forever and forever and forever," the wife expresses her sense of hurt here with great bluntness. Her two terse statements in one suddenly contracted line, "They hurt me. I grow older," contrast sharply with the poem's general mode of indirection and strongly suggest that what she feels is irreparable. Their curttness carries over into the last three lines of the poem, where we hear a reserve and a coolness of tone that are clearly related to the disappointment and anxiety of her continuing separation from her husband. Her offer to come out to meet him is courteous, but hardly eager.

The beginning of the poem, moreover, is not inconsistent with this

conclusion. For the first three or four stanzas, the wife firmly separates herself from the times she recalls and from the person she was during those times:

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
 I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.
 You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
 You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.
 And we went on living in the village of Chokan:
 Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.
 I never laughed, being bashful.
 Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
 Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,
 I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
 Forever and forever and forever.
 Why should I climb the look out?

(*Translations*, 192)

As Bush observes, the wife is clearly no longer “without dislike or suspicion” (*Ezra Pound among the Poets*, 41), and the whole first part of the poem conveys her sense of being removed from feelings and expectations that have not been sustained by her subsequent experience. If in Li Po and Fenollosa there is an almost seamless continuity between her original realization of her love for her husband and her joyful anticipation of his return, in Pound that realization is a memory and seems to belong more to the fifteen-year-old girl who experienced it than to the speaker who now remembers it. What comes between the feelings she recalls and the possibility of their renewal with her husband’s return is precisely the reality of his continuing absence, a reality, as we have seen, that is heavily stressed in the poem’s final section and that creates its tone of reserve and ambivalent regard.

It would appear, then, that in translating Li Po’s poem, Pound has also succeeded in remaking it, deliberately revising what he found in Fenollosa’s notes and thus altering the figure of the wife in Li Po’s text. Pound allows her to keep her self-effacing, “oriental” manner but creates an undercurrent

of critical feeling in his version that is apparently foreign to the original. In exposing and emphasizing her suffering, he also brings the river-merchant's wife into greater accord with the other female figures in *Cathay*. Clearly, more is involved here than the kind of orientalizing we have seen in the work of other writers. While Pound has gone beyond the call of duty as a translator, he has done so not in order to domesticate the poem but to complicate it, and he is certainly not insensitive to its foreignness or conspicuously unfaithful to the text, so that even Arthur Waley's version, undertaken to correct Pound's, cannot help being influenced by it (*Ezra Pound's Cathay*, 89). Thus the poem suggests something about the nature of the interests that motivate Pound as a translator – even if they take him beyond translation strictly defined – and, like *Cathay* as a whole, it offers a clear demonstration of Pound's ability to reconcile his own interests as a poet with the requirements of the text to be translated.

But what we can also see in "The River-Merchant's Wife," especially if we approach it from the perspective of Pound's other work, is that it constitutes what might be regarded as an exemplary Poundian text, one that is in full accord both with his poetics of creative reading, which is to say, his will to invent, and with his sense of poetic composition as an inevitable transaction with literary history, which tends to constrain invention. Like some of the earlier orientalizing translators, Pound may value the poetic over the scholarly, the spirit over the letter of the text, but this, again, does not free him from certain basic obligations to the text. Thus, using Fenollosa as a bridge to Li Po, he enters into a sort of dialectical interchange with Li Po's poem, in order not only to bring us to the world of the poem but, depending upon his abilities as a creative reader, to bring that world to us by "making it new," by reimagining and reconstructing its situation without, at the same time, altering it beyond recognition. Pound does not, after all, change the poem to any significant degree. Instead, he keeps its essential situation intact and finds ways of reinterpreting it within its own terms. To do this, of course, is still to orientalize, but to do so with greater regard for the original text than other translators had managed to achieve.

Cathay as a whole, moreover, also demonstrates Pound's notion of the translator's positive relation to history, a relation which makes translation and literary understanding possible despite the vast gulf of historical and

cultural difference that stands between, in this case, ancient Chinese literature and a twentieth-century American poet. Sanford Schwartz makes a useful general point about Pound's historical orientation by comparing him to Wilhelm Dilthey, the nineteenth-century philosopher of history, referring particularly to Dilthey's belief that interpretation across time and cultures "would be impossible if [different] expressions of life were utterly alien," and it would be 'unnecessary if there were nothing alien in them.'"⁶⁰

A similar point could be made by comparing Pound to Emerson, since both, like Dilthey, are committed to the idea of a common human understanding that transcends temporal and cultural divisions. Pound's version of this idea is developed in his early serial essay, "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris," where he writes that "the soul of each man is compounded of all the elements of the cosmos of souls" (SP, 28), while Emerson, in "The American Scholar," remarks that certain books make him feel that "one nature wrote and the same reads," an experience that suggests "the identity of all minds" (SW, 228-9). Similarly, in his essay "History," he writes, "Of the universal mind each individual man is one more incarnation" (RWE, 114). Such beliefs square with what Dilthey calls "the intimate kinship of all human psychic life" (*The Matrix of Modernism*, 139). More importantly, they support projects like *Cathay*, which for Pound depend not only on a responsiveness to "the cosmos of souls," or to what is shareable across cultures, but on an acknowledgment of individual talent, or *virtu*, as he calls it (SP, 28), the alien element of individual difference that both invites and defies translation, and that provides an opening for the translator's own *virtu* or unique creativity. It is, in fact, the interplay between these, between what is universal in humanity and what is distinctive in the individual, as Schwartz points out, that lies behind all of Pound's work (*The Matrix of Modernism*, 140). That interplay most emphatically informs *Cathay* and makes it both a recovery of ancient China (albeit an orientalized one) and a remaking or reconstruction of it. To say this, however, is to say, again, that *Cathay* constitutes a doubly orientalized text.

AFTER *Cathay* and World War I, Pound's work with Chinese seems to trail off, or at least to become less visible and, at best, intermittent, surfacing most notably with the dramatization of Confucius in action in Canto 13 (composed in 1923) and then in the "Seven Lakes" canto (Number 49) in

The Fifth Decad of Cantos (1937). Shortly thereafter, of course, Chinese virtually explodes into visibility in *The Cantos* with Pound's foray into Chinese dynastic history and with the large-scale entry into the poem of Chinese characters. Pound's interest in Chinese history was essentially an interest in Confucian ethics and government, and his focus upon them, together with his concentration on the characters, became the central pursuit in his subsequent work with Chinese. He had, in fact, begun to read Confucius as early as 1914 (in M. G. Pauthier's 1841 French translation), while he was at work on *Cathay*, and published his own translation (based on Pauthier's) of the *Ta Hio*, or "Great Digest," in 1928. By 1936, Kenner tells us (PE, 447), Pound was studying Chinese characters.

In the late 1930s, as another war approached, Pound even appears to have conceived the hope that Confucianism might be restored to its original imperial status – not, that is, as simply a Chinese national religion but as "a world-view which was intended to have world-wide application and validity."⁶¹ As Kenner points out, what Pound saw in Confucius, as well as in the Confucian history of China that served as his main source for the Chinese cantos, was "Enlightenment rationalism," paradigms of principled action and government, for which, he felt, there was a pressing need in contemporary Europe (PE, 434).⁶² Here, clearly, is another example of the West attempting to locate and stabilize itself through China, as well as another instance of Pound acting against the provincialism of time and on behalf of his belief in a universal human understanding transcending time. "It is of the permanence of nature," he writes in 1938, "that honest men, even if endowed with no special brilliance, with no talents above those of straightness and honesty, come repeatedly to the same answers in ethics, without need of borrowing each other's ideas . . . The 'Christian virtues' are there in the [Chinese] emperors who had responsibility in their hearts and willed the good of the people" (SP, 89–90; quoted in PE, 449).

In addition to this commitment to Confucianism, regarded as a universal body of ethics, Pound's interest in Chinese after *Cathay* takes the form as well of an increasingly intense focus on Chinese characters, also understood as universal, which is to say, natural. They constitute a permanently available system of signs, and not so much a language as an authorizing source of language, more immediate to nature or things themselves than any alphabetical writing could be, and therefore less arbitrary than alphabetical

scripts. Chinese characters, in this sense, are an intermediary for Pound between ordinary or alphabetical scripts and the world, and he tends to use them in this way, as a means of anchoring his discourse to what it represents, appealing to the characters as a kind of evidence, an authoritative and nearly absolute representation of what they refer to. As Jerome McGann suggests in *The Textual Condition*, in which he considers Pound in the context of a materialist approach to textuality, in *The Cantos* Pound makes Chinese characters “function as *figurae* of stability in relation to the sequential and temporalized orders of Western language syntaxes.”⁶³ It is not for nothing, perhaps, that the first characters to appear in the poem are Ching Ming, which stand for “correct name” or “accurate definition,” and the function of the characters in *The Cantos* is largely to provide the correct names of things, or simply to recall the reader to the reality outside the text, a reality to which the characters, as natural signs, are more or less directly linked.

Thus McGann is right to point out that those pages of *The Cantos* in which Chinese characters appear are not only “texts to be read” but “visual constructions of printed characters,” so that in responding to them properly a reader will find that “Looking and reading converge as reciprocal functions” (*The Textual Condition*, 145). Indeed, in regarding characters as *visual* signs, and in demanding that the reader *look* at them, Pound seems ultimately to abandon the *invention* of Chinese by means of a defamiliarized English and to force his English reader to confront it directly, which is to say that he radically defamiliarizes our experience of reading itself.⁶⁴ For a reader like McGann, such a move serves as a reminder of “the kind of attention all scripted forms demand, even – and perhaps most crucially – those forms which are most familiar to us, such as the forms of our own languages” (146). Pound, in short, is trying to make us better readers. But McGann is also reminded, contra Pound himself, that “‘reading’ is not a natural but an acquired skill,” and that “there is no such thing as a ‘natural language.’ All language,” McGann insists, “is a constructive acquisition, and to the degree that we treat it as a ‘natural’ phenomenon, to that degree we have abandoned the possibility of exercising control over it” (118–19).

Yet for Pound, as Michael Bernstein observes, the ideogram, while a human or social construct, “is also based directly upon natural forces.” It is “a tangible sign of order in the cosmos,” and to this extent Pound is less

interested in exercising control over it than in acknowledging its authority and urging the reader to do so as well.⁶⁵ In fact, the pursuit of authority, even irrefutability, in discourse is a more or less permanent feature of Pound's work, and here he seems to find in the ideogram what he once found in the image: an "absolute denotative language which stands in an authoritarian relationship to its readers. It demands reception, it does not invite or necessitate interpretation."⁶⁶ This latter point, of course, pertains more to the image than to the ideogram, although ideally, in Pound's understanding, Chinese characters too should require no interpretation, and "honest men far apart in space and time may therefore read them alike" (PE, 449).

At the same time, Pound never abandons his own *virtu* or creativity as a reader, regardless of whether that which is to be read is a whole text or a single ideogram. His aim, as we have seen, is to make it new, and making it new for him means both to preserve and to reconstruct, or to preserve by reconstructing. Indeed, in presenting Chinese characters directly, Pound could hardly go further toward preserving the reality of Chinese in its difference or otherness, at least from the point of view of English or Western readers. Yet in regarding the characters as universal signs, and in tending to read them creatively, to suit his own purposes (although sometimes, without other resources to fall back upon, he has no choice), Pound can be seen in his own way to be downplaying the difference of Chinese. "Serious approach to Chinese doctrines," he writes in his essay "Mang Tsze (The Ethics of Mencius)," "must start with wiping off any idea that they are all merely chinese" (SP, 83), which is to say, merely national or ethnic in origin and therefore without broader human validity. Thus he introduces Chinese characters into the text of *The Cantos* as one more element in the poem's polymorphous linguistic display comprising the homogeneous totality or the "one rich organism" of language itself, writing in a manner that seems simultaneously to foreground and to ignore the division of languages, as if, in fact, he were challenging Humboldt's conception of languages as separate and mutually exclusive linguistic environments.

One of the most telling examples of Pound's creative approach to ideograms occurs in his reading of character Number 381 in Mathews' *Chinese-English Dictionary*, 誠, which means "sincerity" and consists of the

characters for “a word,” on the left, and “to perfect” on the right. The sign for “to perfect” is itself a compound, made up of the characters for “spear,” “cutting edge,” and “man,” which together signify “a man old enough to bear arms,” or “a mature [perfected] man.” Taken as a whole, then, the character means “a word perfected,” or “sincerity.” In Pound’s more imaginative account, however, the character’s ultimate meaning is arrived at by a different route: “‘Sincerity.’ The precise definition of the word, pictorially the sun’s lance coming to rest on the precise spot verbally. The righthand half of this compound means: to perfect, bring to focus.” He sees the sign for “word” clearly enough, but then “spear” becomes “the sun’s lance,” and “to perfect” is rendered more specifically as “bring to focus.” These are “luminous intrusions,” Kenner comments, punning on his own understanding of what is taking place here as Pound reads the character in terms of his own interest in the medieval “light-philosophy” of such figures as Scotus Erigena and Bishop Grosseteste. As for “bring to focus,” Pound, Kenner continues, “saw in the convergent gestures to the right of the character rays entering a focus, and did not care that such an etymology was impossible, before there were lenses.” The result, for Kenner, is what he sees as Pound’s “forte, the magnificent misreading” (PE, 452, 459), although we may also see it as another instance of Emersonian creative reading, Pound’s appropriation of the Chinese character into his own orbit of interests.

JUST PRIOR to the introduction of ideograms directly into the text of *The Cantos*, Pound offers what might be regarded as his culminating attempt to invent Chinese for his English reader in Canto 49 – an attempt that builds upon and surpasses the achievement of *Cathay*. Like *Cathay*, in fact, this canto comprises another small anthology of Chinese texts, most of them taken from a seventeenth-century Japanese manuscript book which Pound had acquired in the late 1920s. For two additional poems in the canto, one translated into English and the other presented as a transliteration of the Japanese pronunciation of its classical Chinese, Pound returned to Fenollosa’s notebooks. But his main source is the Japanese manuscript book, consisting of sixteen poems, eight in Chinese and eight in Japanese, plus a series of eight black-ink drawings of landscapes associated with the scenic region in central China where the Hsiao-Hsiang River flows into Lake

Tung-Ting.⁶⁷ As Sanehide Kodama explains, this is the region of the Seven Lakes, one of Pound's versions of paradise and the site of eight traditional scenes in both Chinese and Japanese poetry and painting.⁶⁸ Each of the Chinese and Japanese poems and each of the drawings in Pound's manuscript book refers to one of the traditional scenes, although Pound's approach to this material in the canto, as we might expect, is highly selective and avoids the traditional ordering of the manuscript book itself.

What is chiefly interesting here, of course, is the evidence provided by the canto of Pound's continuing development as a writer of English-as-Chinese, his further movement toward a Sino-English style (which is consonant for him with a modernist style of pure registration of phenomena) some twenty years after *Cathay*. Equally interesting, in the canto's presentation of what Kenner calls the "paradigms of natural tranquility" (PE, 432), is the extent to which Pound reverts here to one of the major topoi of Western orientalism, the notion of China as the site of "eternal standstill." For Pound, though, this mythologized sense of China is hardly pejorative, and it plays an important ideological role in *The Cantos* as a whole. It is produced largely as an effect of the canto's imagery, which initially presents a world almost devoid of human activity, a world on the point of fading into or being absorbed by its several gradations and qualities of light – evening's "curtain of cloud," the "blurr above ripples," and the silver blaze of the sun on the river. But it is also an effect of Pound's language and style, which feature heavily stressed, often monosyllabic nouns, things themselves, presented in an indeterminate space in which time seems all but suspended. This is what Lancelot Cranmer-Byng, following Herder, Hegel, and other fashioners of Europe's orientalized view of China, saw as the East's "old world of Thought" in contrast to the West's "new world of Action," and *The Cantos* at this point, we might feel, almost cease to be a "poem including history." In addition, Pound's frequent omission of the definite article enhances the canto's sense of immediacy, giving an elemental character to what it describes. Largely visual and sensory in its appeal, Pound's language here seems situated at the furthest limit of what is possible in English before it slips over into ideograms themselves.

Autumn moon; hills rise about lakes
against sunset

Evening is like a curtain of cloud,
 a blurr above ripples; and through it
 sharp long spikes of the cinnamon,
 a cold tune amid reeds.
 Behind hill the monk's bell
 borne on the wind.
 Sail passed here in April; may return in October
 Boat fades in silver; slowly;
 Sun blaze alone on the river.

(49/244)

As in *Cathay*, the line here is still the unit of composition, although Pound is composing more in paratactic phrases than in sentences, with greater discontinuity from line to line and even phrase to phrase. Occasionally, the structure of a line quite fully approximates that of the line in Chinese, with its indeterminate relationships among its elements and its lack of connectives, as in "Rain; empty river; a voyage,/Fire from frozen cloud, heavy rain in the twilight," and "Broad water; geese line out with the autumn" – lines which read like literal, unreconstructed translations, each word or phrase representing a character. A phrase like "Fire from frozen cloud," moreover, in its primitivism, recalls Pound's use of "flowers to cut the heart" in *Cathay*, where the concrete locution "to cut the heart" seems to stand in for the abstract "poignant," which has evolved from it. The primitivism here, however, is even more deliberate, since, in standing in for "lightning," presumably, "Fire from frozen cloud" replaces not an abstraction but another "concrete" term. That the phrase, to be sure, is Pound's primitivist invention, a "translation" of a merely putative ideogram, is suggested by the fact that "fire," as Kodama points out, does not occur in the original text, which speaks only of "frozen cloud" ("The Eight Scenes," 139).

As we shall see, there is much in Pound's style here that Gary Snyder will inherit, a style that is simultaneously responsive to particular sense impressions and alert to their broader, more abstract resonances, and in the canto as a whole, it seems clear, Pound is ideogramatically constructing what he names at its conclusion, "the dimension of stillness." This concept, that is to say, is evoked or generated by the mingling of the several serene landscapes that make up the poem. And "stillness" is not simply an anti-

quoted style of civilization – in contrast with the Western action that has displaced it – but an alternative and an antidote to Western disorder, which the poem up to this point has been documenting.⁶⁹ Pound, in other words, is using oriental stillness as part of *The Cantos*' anti-usury ideology – using stillness, that is, in an active way, incorporating it into his argument against certain aspects of Western culture – and this tactic becomes quite explicit toward the end of the canto, where he briefly drops his oriental sources and their mode of imagistic indirection and puts his case plainly: “State by creating riches shd. thereby get into debt?/This is infamy; this is Geryon” (49/245).

The canto, in this sense, is a Western critique, by *means* of the East, of the West, both in itself and in the context of *The Cantos* as a whole. Pound looks to China and Chinese in the same way that T. S. Eliot, for instance, at the end of *The Waste Land*, looks to India and Sanskrit, as a means of achieving a new perspective on his own situation, and Canto 49 may be regarded in some sense as Pound's version of Eliot's “Shantih shantih shantih.” But if Eliot's invocation of what he translates as “the peace which passeth understanding” is in part an acknowledgment of the limits of understanding, and the limits of human power to rectify the human situation, Pound sees “stillness,” more positively, as a solution, a release from the destructive values of the West and from the chaotic cycles of European history. And yet it is very much in keeping with European perspectives on the Orient and with the historical construction and interpretation of China in the West that it should be the site of this “stillness” and be seen as an alternative to European disorder.⁷⁰ China here, that is to say, far from being an escape from Europe, is still playing the role – even if it does so in a positive sense – ascribed to it in European orientalist discourse.

Several writers have pointed out that with his opening line, “For the seven lakes, and by no man these verses,” Pound not only refers to the anonymous nature of his sources but identifies himself, once again, with Odysseus (who tells the Cyclops that his name is “no man”), thereby creating a sort of alliance in the canto between Greece and China (perhaps like his earlier pairing of Ibycus and Liu Che as proto-imagists). Thus the “voyage” to which the canto refers in the next line (although “voyage” is not authorized by the original text),⁷¹ becomes a Chinese version of Odyssean wandering.⁷² What the canto chiefly dramatizes, however, is the speak-

er's acutely sensitive response to the landscape, and behind that, Pound's own creative or reconstructive response to the poems and drawings of his manuscript book, which he shapes and revises to suit the interests of Canto 49 and *The Cantos* in general.

Most central to the poem is the speaker's experience and style, his achievement of a perspective, a breadth and inclusiveness of vision, that grants him not only natural or aesthetic insights but cultural and economic ones as well, and what he sees in the landscape, ultimately, is a self-sufficient interplay between the human and the natural, indeed a culture (in the folk poem at the end) which barely distinguishes between them. Rather than Odysseus, he may be more comparable at this point to another "no man" – to Emerson, in fact, in his primal scene on the bare common in *Nature*. Becoming "a transparent eyeball" here, Emerson tells us that "all mean egotism vanishes" for him, suggesting perhaps that a more refined egotism remains. "I am nothing," he continues, "I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me" (SW, 189), and it seems clear that he is more interested in the nature of his condition as "nothing," qualified as it is, than in developing a concrete sense of what he may actually be seeing.

Pound's speaker, on the other hand, also seeing all, and articulating it in detail, scarcely exists in his text as a subjective presence. He comes closest to such presence when he situates himself in time ("Sail passed here in April; may return in October") or when he indicates that his experiences are occurring to him sequentially and he perceives them in nearly judgmental terms ("Comes then snow scur on the river/And a world is covered with jade"). Otherwise, he maintains his anonymity, absorbed in what he sees. If anything, in fact, it is Pound, in this canto, who literally and directly enacts the experience that Emerson, in *Nature*, merely describes in terms of the transformation of his own subjectivity – and Emerson does so, moreover, in a rhetoric which Pound, as an imagist, learned to avoid. Pound also, of course, avoids Emerson's transcendentalism and its metaphysical claims, in part, no doubt, because his perspective is Confucian, but also because he adheres strictly to his imagistic, nearly ideogrammatic, mode, evoking a stillness that is very much of this world.

Near the end of the canto, where Pound sums up what his speaker has seen in the form of an ancient Chinese folk poem rendered in a radically

simple, defamiliarized English verse, both his orientalizing vision and style reach a point of maximum intensity:

Sun up; work
 sundown; to rest
 dig well and drink of the water
 dig field; eat of the grain
 Imperial power is? and to us what is it?
 (49/245)

In Fenollosa's notes, this poem is referred to as an "earth beating song, because old folks beat the ground . . . in singing" it, and Kodama points out that it has long been interpreted as a eulogy for "an ideal state of society where the people are content with their life and feel no coercion from the emperor" ("The Eight Scenes of Sho-Sho," 144). Certainly it is that, and yet one might also hear in Pound's last line (rendered in Fenollosa's notes as "Emperor's might for we what is?"⁷³) a questioning of the reality of imperial power, implying not only the collective speaker's humble sense of his own insignificance, his sheer distance from that power, but also his grateful and even boastful sense of having managed to avoid it. As a celebration of an idealized peasant life organically related to and governed by the rhythms, one might say the politics, of nature itself, the poem is something of a pastoral fantasy. Yet in Pound's version its collective persona seems acquainted with imperial power enough to know that contact with it is to be avoided, if possible.⁷⁴

If the canto as a whole, then, presents "paradigms of natural tranquility," this sturdy, compact, sharply accentual text suggests a rather different paradigm for the Chinese poem, one that is more physical and bodily than visionary, and one that Gary Snyder will take up both in his own Chinese translations and in his original writing – particularly in those poems of his that are conditioned, as he explains, by the rhythms of physical labor and by five- and seven-character-line Chinese poems, "which work," as he puts it, "like sharp blows on the mind."⁷⁵

How, I want to ask finally in this chapter, is Pound's own or original writing – as opposed to his translations and his work with obviously Chi-

nese materials – affected by his orientalism? To what extent does the effort to write English-as-Chinese enter into Pound's work, especially *The Cantos*, as a sort of compositional norm? This is, of course, a large question, and to raise it at all is perhaps to make too much of a distinction between translation and supposedly "original composition," particularly in the work of a writer for whom allusion and translation constitute pervasive textual strategies, and whose use of "a global tradition," as Mutlu Konuk Blasing puts it, "is meant to show that . . . different languages, literatures, and ages variously name the same breath animating all life."⁷⁶ Indeed, part of the effect, if not the intent, of Pound's work may be precisely to call into question, or deconstruct, the difference between translation and original writing. For Pound, we might say, to write is almost inevitably to translate, so that his texts are almost always *intertexts*, sites in which various traditions and texts are brought together in a variety of ways (including translation, allusion, and the ideogrammatic method) for a variety of purposes.⁷⁷ Insofar as this is the case, the distinction between poetic invention and translation in Pound's work virtually disappears.

Nevertheless, as a way of testing my argument that poetic modernism and orientalism tend to converge in Pound's writing in general, and not simply in texts that overtly employ Chinese materials, it will be worthwhile to consider one or more passages from *The Cantos* that are neither obviously "oriental" nor translations from the Chinese and that thus represent what might be regarded as a more standard or typical form of Poundian discourse. At the same time, doing so should also suggest the degree to which Pound's habit of breaching the traditional boundary between translation and original composition is, in fact, a constituting element of that discourse, since the texts I want to examine make substantial use of Homeric and Ovidian materials, among others (including, it turns out, just a bit of Chinese).

As an example of a so-called standard Poundian discourse, then, consider the following passage from the end of Canto 2, where the writing (despite or perhaps because of its concern with Ovidian and other kinds of metamorphosis) is deeply informed both by imagist principles and by Pound's recent reading of Fenollosa. If Canto 2, in fact, represents one of Pound's earliest efforts to employ the ideogrammatic method or structure that he found adumbrated in Fenollosa's essay, and that he adopted in order to

produce a “canto” (regarded as a long “imagiste” poem),⁷⁸ it also represents, I am suggesting, a continuing effort on Pound’s part to develop and refine the ideogrammatic writing, or English-as-Chinese, with which he first began to experiment in *Cathay*:

And So-shu churned in the sea, So-shu also,
 using the long moon for a churn-stick . . .
 Lithe turning of water,
 sinews of Poseidon,
 Black azure and hyaline,
 glass wave over Tyro,
 Close cover, unstillness,
 bright welter of wave-cords,
 Then quiet water,
 quiet in the buff sands,
 Sea-fowl stretching wing-joints,
 splashing in rock-hollows and sand-hollows
 In the wave-runs by the half-dune;
 Glass-glint of wave in the tide-rips against sunlight,
 pallor of Hesperus,
 Grey peak of the wave,
 wave, colour of grape’s pulp,

 Olive grey in the near,
 far, smoke-grey of the rock-slide,
 Salmon-pink wings of the fish-hawk
 cast grey shadows in water,
 The tower like a one-eyed great goose
 cranes up out of the olive-grove,

 And we have heard the fauns chiding Proteus
 in the smell of hay under the olive-trees,
 And the frogs singing against the fauns
 in the half-light.
 And . . .

(2/9-10)

Both thematically and on the level of form or verse structure, Pound’s ideogrammatic presentation here (and in the canto as a whole) is clearly designed to signify the idea of change, process, metamorphosis in action –

the world-in-flux as the only permanence, the unstillness of stillness. Narrative is almost completely eclipsed by a sort of imagistic montage, so that the passage creates the effect of a sequence in which one image is displaced by another. And in the canto's long middle section, where narrative is more visible but still subordinated to image, the focus is largely on the miraculous details of the "god-sleight" wrought by the boy-god Dionysus, who transforms his kidnappers' ship into a jungle-like environment and the kidnappers themselves into forms of sea-life.

But what Dionysus enacts on the ship through his transformative powers also takes place, the canto's last section shows, in the natural world (including its supernatural or mythological elements), as well as in the language which represents that world – "a protean language that is isomorphic with the natural matrix of transformation."⁷⁹ Pound's ideogrammatic style, that is to say, tallies with or reproduces in the text the kaleidoscopic reality of the scene which it describes. In ending with "And," moreover, Pound suggests that there can be no closure, perhaps recalling Fenollosa's remark that "All processes in nature are interrelated; and thus there could be no complete sentence . . . save one which it would take all time to pronounce" (CWC, 11). Hence we have a further instance here of the way in which the passage seems meant to be a textual version or verbal manifestation of what it pictures. If we say that the passage, in addition, is Emersonian, we may do so not only because it shows "the flowing or metamorphosis," which is one of Emerson's requirements for the poet, but because it employs a speech that "flows with the flowing of nature" (SW, 315–16), or a language that participates in the very processes it represents and is itself an example of them.

Generally speaking, what we encounter at the end of Canto 2 is a series of things in the act of becoming themselves or moving toward some new form or identity – a world, as Wallace Stevens puts it in "The Motive for Metaphor," of "things that would never be quite expressed."⁸⁰ The many imagistic compounds in the passage, including such phrases as "Sea-fowl," "wave-cords," "half-dune," "Salmon-pink wings," "fish-hawk," and "tide-rips," attest not only to the shifting nature of the poet's imaginative perception but to the restlessness and instability of a world that is concretely natural ("the smell of hay under the olive-trees"), classically mythological ("the fauns chiding Proteus"), and, most importantly, governed by sheer

metamorphic energy – a world, in short, in a permanent state of transition. As the language which mimics it shows, this is a reality in which identities are quite unfixed and in which all things interpenetrate with or participate in each other. Pound here, as Blasing points out, is presenting “a primal energy that patterns itself variously and steals into many forms, disguising and revealing itself over and over” (146). And Albert Gelpi makes a similar point by way of remarking upon the connection, in this canto, between Pound and Emerson, insofar as Emerson too addresses “the endless passing of one element into new forms, the incessant metamorphosis.”⁸¹

In “The Poet,” after all, Emerson also writes that “The quality of the imagination is to flow, and not to freeze,” and further endorses the transitive and transformative thrust of Pound’s style by pointing out that “all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good . . . for conveyance” (SW, 322). Such convictions are closely related to Fenollosa’s notion that grammar, as we have seen, is not a human or artificial construction but originally a natural process or a reality of nature – implicit, for instance, in the transference of energy from sky to earth via lightning, an event, he insists, which is the natural source of the fundamental grammatical paradigm, subject/verb/object. Remarkably, however, there are hardly any verbs in Pound’s passage. Instead, it consists largely of nouns, things themselves, accompanied by various modifiers, and it owes its pace or speed to its paratactic arrangement and to the process of displacement that governs its movement. One image – and the norm here is one to a line⁸² – is displaced by another, so that there is little build-up of meaning in the passage, little if any incorporation of the line into a larger grammatical and syntactical whole, or a larger rhythmic unit. Each line, instead, maintains its unity and independence within the movement of lines that both contains it and dismisses it as nothing more than a momentary registration of a changing or evolving scene in the world. What the passage seems designed to represent, then, is precisely what Fenollosa calls “things in motion, motion in things” (CWC, 10).

Yet Pound is also moving beyond Fenollosa here. If, as Donald Davie points out, the convention established by Pound for the *Cathay* poems is, frequently, one sentence per line, so that grammar replaces meter, in Canto 2 Pound’s principle has become one *image* per line, so that the line is almost purely imagistic (or ideogrammatic). The difference effected by this change,

we might say, lies in the greater focus in the canto on things themselves as they seemingly work out their own fate, largely undetermined by any grammar except that implicit in the natural processes that are being observed. This procedure also makes for an even closer approximation of the poetic line in Chinese, where grammar can sometimes be barely distinguishable from natural order itself, or from the sheer registration of things in the world presented almost without predication at all.⁸³

What I want to suggest, then, is that Canto 2, and particularly the passage from it quoted here, are based not only on Fenollosa's understanding of the structure of the Chinese written character but on his conception of natural grammar as well – although Pound has clearly discovered means other than the simple transitive sentence to represent the events and operations of nature, or what Fenollosa calls “the actual and entangled lines of forces as they pulse through things” (CWC, 12). In other words, there is a distinction to be made between the “ideogrammic method” as it applies to considerations of overall structure in cantos and in long poems that are collections of cantos – which critics, in the search for unity in Pound's poem, have tended to focus on almost exclusively – and ideogrammic writing, which can be regarded as “the paratactic and metonymic accretion of ideogrammic elements”⁸⁴ that exists at the more fundamental levels of a text – such as those of the line and of the movement from line to line in the final section of Canto 2. Ideogrammic writing, then, involves verse structure and grammar in the line and the passage, and insofar as it incorporates the conciseness and concreteness of imagism and adheres to the transitive force or dynamics of a style reflecting natural process, such writing constitutes English-as-Chinese in a form that may be found throughout *The Cantos*.

Ultimately, ideogrammic writing as I am describing it here may be regarded as a possibility inherent in all verse – a sort of deep structure or primitive substratum of poetic utterance that is prelogical, pregrammatical, and prior to what Fenollosa would see as the dubious refinements of civilized, rational discourse. In an interesting experiment, Guy Davenport discovers such a verse or style of utterance buried, as it were, in Keats's *Endymion*. By means of a process of stripping away, not the associations of words (Pound's procedure as an imagist), but what Davenport calls the “ordinary binding structure” of syntax and narrative rhetoric, he exposes

in Keats's poem a sort of imagistic ur-verse, composed of a "cluster of images," or a series of "sharp configurations," that have the capacity, he argues, to communicate as Pound's images do, "wholly independently" of their narrative context. In order to illuminate Pound's approach, Davenport reduces nearly one hundred lines of *Endymion* (670–761) to their imagistic "gists" and, arranging them ideographically, comes up with the following passage:

Melodies without echo, music of silence
 coronal of tender scions,
 dov'd Ida, divine,
 bower of jasmine, floor of golden moss,
 with Hesperean tread,
 to scare Aurora's train
 like a wild bird scudding
 and took her in fresh leaves

We are to understand that Pound's ideographic writing is the result of a similar process of reduction, and *The Cantos*, for Davenport, are thus "a poem from which the ordinary binding structure has been removed, leaving image after image suspended."⁸⁵

Certainly, Davenport's account of what I am calling ideographic writing has the virtue of being consistent with some of Pound's most characteristic impulses and convictions as a modernist – one who returns to origins, and does so in order to move forward, or make it new. Most importantly, it also suggests the extent to which *The Cantos* may be said to be dominated by English-as-Chinese, or by linguistic and stylistic possibilities rooted, in significant ways, in Emersonian poetics and linked to Chinese and further refined by Fenollosa and by Pound himself.

To take just one further example, a more instructive one, perhaps, with respect to Pound's procedures than Davenport's Poundian reconstruction of Keats, we might look at the opening twelve lines of Canto 4, a passage, Davenport tells us (*Cities on Hills*, 130), which constitutes a single ideogram:

Palace in smoky light,
 Troy but a heap of smouldering boundary stones,
 ANAXIFORMINGES! Aurunculeia!
 Hear me. Cadmus of Golden Prows!

The silver mirrors catch the bright stones and flare,
 Dawn, to our waking, drifts in the green cool light;
 Dew-haze blurs, in the grass, pale ankles moving.
 Beat, beat, whirr, thud, in the soft turf
 under the apple trees,
 Choros nympharum, goat-foot, with the pale foot alternate;
 Crescent of blue-shot waters, green-gold in the shallows,
 A black cock crows in the sea-foam.

(4/13)

Here, in a passage that exemplifies Pound's ideogrammatic method at the level both of overall structural organization and of the unitary, imagistic line, the reader senses a simultaneous continuity and discontinuity. The passage, to be sure, may be read as a discursive and lyrical whole, unified by the presence of its speaker ("Hear me"), who invokes and juxtaposes the disparate textual or cultural materials of the opening four lines, evokes the mythic landscape of the last eight, and places them all on the same temporal plane, as if a consistent image or vision were unfolding before him (one similar to the natural/mythological landscape of Canto 2). Indeed, as an ideogram, the passage asks to be apprehended as a whole, as a complex signifier, whose constituting elements, through their juxtaposition, point toward an overall meaning or idea.

Even the first four lines of the passage, taken by themselves, can be regarded as almost a textbook example of the "ideogrammatic method" as Pound defines it in his *ABC of Reading* and *Guide to Kulchur*. Here, instead of rose, cherry, iron rust, and flamingo brought together to signify red, we have references to the destruction of Troy and to Cadmus's founding of Thebes, presented along with allusions to one of Pindar's Olympian odes (celebrating an athletic victory of a descendant of Cadmus) and to a marriage hymn by Catullus. Each of these textual or imagistic fragments is a piece in a larger pattern, one that comprehends the evolution of cities or civilizations, their creation and destruction, as well as the institutions and ceremonies (athletic competition as an alternative to war, and marriage as an alternative to unrestrained passion) that govern their existence.⁸⁶

But if the passage in its entirety can be read as a continuous whole, it is still one, as Laszlo Géfin puts it, in which "the individual components

retain their uniqueness” – even as they compose “a larger conceptual unit.”⁸⁷ As my own commentary suggests, it is impossible to describe the passage without acknowledging what might be called its centrifugal tendencies, the discontinuity that results not only from the separate identities of the elements that make it up but from the unitary and paratactic nature of Pound’s characteristic verse line. That line begins to call particular attention to itself and really to dominate the passage in its second and longer part, where the speaker moves away from the smoky ruins of Troy to the “green cool light” of an apparently more immediate landscape. Here Pound’s ideogrammatic writing clearly looks back to that in Canto 2, where the poet’s eye similarly records, in a way that is meant to adhere to their own order, the flow of imagistic events (“Crescent of blue-shot waters, green-gold in the shallows”). But at the same time the writing also recalls the style of *Cathay*, where each line is end-stopped, and each, for the most part, coincides with a complete sentence (“The silver mirrors catch the bright stones and flare,/Dawn, to our waking, drifts in the green cool light”). The lines here are longer, and somewhat slower, and statelier, than those in Canto 2 – but appropriately so, we may feel, given what they depict: a dance of nymphs and satyrs in the sacred wood, or a grove sacred to Aphrodite, who was born in the sea foam where a black cock crows.

Admittedly, it is difficult for the reader at this point in the unfolding of the canto to see exactly how this scene relates ideogrammatically to the other elements in the opening passage. At the very least, though, the format of the passage itself encourages us to sense a connection, and there appears to be one in the presentation of this landscape as a scene of the origins in myth of the passions or instincts from which both the creation and destruction of cities like Troy and Thebes can issue. Pound’s structuring technique here, in its derivation from Fenollosa and in its deviation from traditional linear narrative, is clearly an important result of the process by which his work was shaped by his orientalism.⁸⁸ What I want to insist upon, however, is the varied and pervasive role his invention of English-as-Chinese plays in his writing as a medium for apprehending and expressing the world directly, as things themselves. Aside from being an attempt to recover what Fenollosa calls “our forgotten mental processes” and to trace the “lines of

forces as they pulse through things" (CWC, 21, 12), Pound's approximation of Chinese is also, finally, an effort to fashion a modernist style, one informed by primitive modes of speech still linked, for him, to the reality they represent.

Chapter Seven

Seeing the World without Language *Gary Snyder and Chinese as American Speech*

I grew up with the poetry of twentieth-century coolness, its hard edges and resilient elitism. Ezra Pound introduced me to Chinese poetry, and I began to study classical Chinese. When it came to writing out of my own experience, most of modernism didn't fit, except for the steer toward Chinese and Japanese.¹

IN A BRIEF TEXT directly reminiscent of the earth-beating song in Canto 49, Gary Snyder brings together several characteristic features of his work – directness, economy, clarity of expression – which he shares particularly with the Pound of the imagist manifesto and *Cathay*:

When creeks are full
The poems flow
When creeks are down
We heap stones.²

What most carries over from Pound's earth-beating song here, of course, is the short, sharply accentual line and the elemental quality of the language, which is closely related to the connection in the poem between natural events and human acts. Like the speaker of Pound's poem, the speaker here is the spokesperson for a community and a way of life that are highly naturalized, governed by natural events. In "The Etiquette of Freedom," an essay which can be read in part as a revisionary updating of Emerson's *Nature*, and which aims to dismantle the civilized definition of nature as the opposite of culture, Snyder characterizes such a community as a "pri-

mary culture,” a society “whose economic system is in a close and sustainable relation to the local ecosystem,” and he gives a distinctly Fenollosan cast to his description of all “social organization” and “order in government” as “a set of forms that have been appropriated by the calculating mind from the operating principles in nature.”³ Poetry itself, Snyder suggests here, is virtually “natural,” its production contingent upon forces beyond human control, and, like those forces, the poems also “flow.” Culture in general, in fact, is ultimately dependent upon nature as well; it is part of an economy – what Snyder has called “earth house hold” – that ebbs and flows with the rhythms of natural processes.

Owing something, no doubt, to the slogans generated by the Cultural Revolution in China during the late 1960s, the poem is the concluding section of a short, three-part sequence called “Civilization” which appears at the end of *Regarding Wave* (1970), a volume that celebrates the subsumption of the human within the larger natural order and that caustically regards postindustrial civilization as a threat to that fragile arrangement. As such, the poem is also a deliberate expression of “primitive” values, and of an outlook that ultimately sees nature itself *as* culture. In the immediately preceding section of the sequence, Snyder looks on with delight as a cricket on a page of typescript

grooms himself
in time with *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.
I quit typing and watch him thru a glass.
How well articulated! How neat!
(NN, 201)

And this, in turn, squares with the perception, in one of Snyder’s most recent poems, that nature is “not a book, but a *performance*, a/high old culture” (NN, 381).

Looking beyond ideology, however, we may note the poem’s oriental-ized quality, the extent to which, with nothing overtly oriental about it, it nevertheless seems intended to strike the reader as “Chinese” or “haiku-like” – and it does so with special force for anyone already familiar with Pound’s work in this mode.⁴ Indeed, the features of the poem that most contribute to our sense of its oriental character – its impersonality, its concise, monosyllabic diction, its short, end-stopped, accentual line, and its

tightness of structure – are, broadly speaking, Poundian, part of Pound’s invention not only “of Chinese poetry for our time” but of an imagistic or ideogrammatic modernist style, and they can be found, although not always in so pronounced a form, in Snyder’s poetry as a whole. Snyder’s work, in other words, is arguably the premier example in post-Poundian American poetry of an orientalized verse in the modernist tradition and of English-as-Chinese. Moreover, despite the fact that Snyder is a trained orientalist, fluent in Japanese and capable of reading classical Chinese, he seems quite deliberately to have adopted Pound’s invention of Chinese in English as one of his chief models – not simply for purposes of translation but as a way of proceeding, stylistically and epistemologically, in his writing in general. That he has done so, of course, may be taken as an endorsement of Pound’s orientalist instincts. But it is also clear that Pound’s Chinese and imagist modes are in accord with Snyder’s own poetic interests, informed as they are by Buddhist spirituality and discipline and by his attraction to what he calls the “non-linguistic, pre-linguistic, pre-verbally visualized or deeply felt areas” of experience.⁵

These interests are tellingly articulated in Snyder’s “Afterword” to the 1990 reissue of *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems*, where he writes, “There are poets who claim that their poems are made to show the world through the prism of language. Their project is worthy. There is also the work of seeing the world *without* any prism of language, and to bring that seeing *into* language. The latter has been the direction of most Chinese and Japanese poetry” (RCM, 67). As we saw in Chapter 1, Snyder identifies himself here with what he regards as the aims of Chinese and Japanese poetry, in opposition to other, presumably Western, poetic values and procedures. To see the world without language is to see it purely, as things themselves, prior to their passage through the filters of words, and Chinese and Japanese poetry are important to Snyder because of what he assumes to be their paradoxical capacity to find words for the experience of seeing the world without them.⁶ Pound’s importance to Snyder, moreover, is also understandable in these terms. As the innovator who first brought Chinese into English in a manner that preserves its own character as a language, Pound greatly enhanced the possibility of representing the experience of seeing the world without language in English, or in an English that veers toward the condition of Chinese. In pursuing that condition in his own writing,

Snyder has had models other than Pound's available to him – most notably in the work of his early mentor Kenneth Rexroth. Yet Snyder remains decisively Poundian, as if, again, to confirm Pound's preeminence in the project not only of bringing Chinese into English but of orientalizing American poetry – a project to which Snyder has responded more fully and consistently than any other poet of his generation.⁷

“THE OLD DUTCH WOMAN,” a key poem in Snyder's 1967 collection *The Back Country*, is the opening poem of the book's final section, entitled “Back.” Organized chronologically and autobiographically, the book as a whole traces Snyder's experience as a trail crew worker in California and the Pacific Northwest, a seaman on an oil tanker, a student of Zen Buddhism during an extended residence in Japan, and a pilgrim in India. “Back” deals with his return to the United States and is intended largely as a distillation, as well as a critical assessment, of all the earlier experience; and “The Old Dutch Woman,” which, taken by itself, is a fairly representative text, exhibits some of Snyder's characteristic procedures as a poet and reveals more of his various connections with Pound:

The old Dutch woman would spend half a day
Pacing the backyard where I lived
 in a fixed-up shed,
What did she see.
Wet leaves, the rotten tilted-over
 over-heavy heads
Of domesticated flowers.
 I knew Indian Paintbrush
Thought nature meant mountains,
Snowfields, glaciers and cliffs,
White granite waves under foot.

Heian ladies
Trained to the world of the garden,
 poetry,
 lovers slipped in with at night –

My Grandmother standing wordless
 fifteen minutes

Between rows of loganberries,
 clippers poised in her hand.

New leaves on the climbing rose
 Planted last fall.
 – tiny bugs eating the green –

Like once watching
 mountaingoats:
 Far over a valley
 Half into the
 shade of the headwall,
 Pick their way over the snow.
 (NN, 149)

Almost devoid of any commentary by the poet, the poem essentially presents a series of images. We move from the old Dutch woman pacing the back yard to Heian ladies and their “world of the garden” to the speaker’s grandmother “standing wordless . . . Between rows of loganberries” to “tiny bugs eating the green” of new leaves, an image which evokes, at the end, the speaker’s memory of once watching mountain goats, far off across a valley, “Pick their way over the snow.” But images here are themselves the speech, and the poem as a whole is an ideogrammatic construction, one that articulates, by means of the images and their juxtaposition (almost as if they were a vertical column of Chinese characters), the speaker’s new understanding of nature.⁸ If that understanding is feminine, and therefore initially different from the speaker’s customary understanding – bringing the domestic “world of the garden” up against the rugged, more massive world of “Snowfields, glaciers and cliffs” – it is shown at the end to differ from his masculine understanding in ways that turn out to be quite negligible. Thus he closes the poem with a deliberate comparison between the tiny bugs on the leaves of the climbing rose and the mountain goats in the snow across a valley, reconciling the near and the distant, the massive and the nearly microscopic, the wild and the domestic, and the conventionally masculine and feminine, assimilating the feminine into, and in this way broadening and enriching, his experience of the world.

The poem is Poundian, in addition, not only in its juxtapositional or-

ganization but in its prosodic structure, although the cadences of Snyder's lines are very much his own. But the similarities lie most crucially in the extent to which the line, for Snyder, is the structural unit of composition, just as it is for Pound in *Cathay*. As Donald Davie has shown, once the single line is recognized as the structural unit of verse, several other compositional procedures may come into play, one of which is the replacement of meter by grammar or the use of grammar as a metrical device. Thus, as we have already seen in *Cathay*, Pound often contrives to produce a verse in which the line and the sentence (or the clause) more or less coincide, and the reader is conditioned to expect that the grammatically complete or the syntactically self-sufficient utterance will constitute the measure of the line. The general result of such a procedure will be fairly consistent end-stopping and a slower verse movement. But what is most important about this approach is the way it opens the line to a more minute analytic scrutiny, exposing the extent to which it consists of even more fundamental units. "It was only when the line was considered as the unit of composition," Davie writes, "that there emerged the possibility of 'breaking' the line, of disrupting it from within, by throwing weight upon smaller units within the line" (*Poet as Sculptor*, 45).

It is precisely these "smaller units within the line," phrases and pieces of dismembered larger lines, that frequently constitute the compositional units of Snyder's verse, which thus becomes a structure not of lines, strictly speaking, but of phrases, not of sentences or complete syntactical units but of an atomized syntax, one which allows for a more precise registration of the movements of both voice and mind. Snyder himself sees poetic composition, in this latter sense, as a kind of "scoring," a manipulation not only of words and groupings of words, but of the spaces between them and surrounding them on the page, which serves the purpose of conveying to the reader the oral energy and performative potential of the text:

The placement of the line on the page, the horizontal white spaces and the vertical white spaces are all scoring for how it is to be read and how it is to be timed. Space means time. The marginal indentations are more an indication of voice emphasis, breath emphasis – and, as Pound might have called it, *logopoeia*, some of the dances of the ideas that are working within your syntactic structures.⁹

If Pound's tendency in *Cathay* is to disrupt the line from within while maintaining the line itself as a basic structural unit, Snyder's verse displays the literal results of this disruption in its very appearance on the page, where we see a visual and spatial dismemberment of the line into smaller units. In the opening stanza of "The Old Dutch Woman," for example, the phrase "in a fixed-up shed" has split off from the line of which it was a member, with the result that the verse is greatly slowed down. This deceleration reproduces the old woman's pacing in the circumscribed space of the back yard, but it also throws greater emphasis on the speaker's meditative effort to visualize the back yard from her perspective, to enter her world and to see what she saw. Much the same is true for the next set of lines:

Wet leaves, the rotten tilted-over
 over-heavy heads
 Of domesticated flowers.

Here the separation of "over-heavy heads" from "the rotten tilted-over" suggests not only the detail but the incremental nature of the speaker's developing memory, and he seems to realize now what he had not realized before. The heads of the flowers were tilted over *because* they were "over-heavy."

Prosody aside, though, what is perhaps most significant about "The Old Dutch Woman" is the way it enacts or dramatizes what might be called a "translative" activity, not unlike Pound's dialectical approach to translation in *Cathay*, where, as we saw earlier, Pound participates in an interchange with Li Po which allows him both to keep Li Po's text essentially unchanged and to reinterpret it within its own terms. Similarly, "The Old Dutch Woman" presents a process – of memory and the juxtaposition of images – by means of which the speaker not only learns about but assimilates what is other to him – in this case a feminine conception of nature – so that it becomes a part of his own view of the world. "Translation" here means not appropriation or domestication – neither imposition of the self upon the other, nor, for that matter, surrender of the self to the other – but an acknowledgment of difference as well as a mutual interplay between self and other, between what the speaker thought nature meant and

what the old Dutch woman saw. Neither view of nature in the poem loses its identity. Instead both are brought together to create a new, more inclusive awareness of experience.

In his essay "The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West," Zhang Longxi, primarily interested not in denying but in demythologizing the notion of China as the West's principal other, offers a philosophical account of the process of doing so, a process which strongly resembles Pound's and Snyder's translative activity. Ironically, his account derives its terms from the philosophical tradition that begins more or less with Hegel (who dismissed Chinese as a weak instrument of thought) and reaches to the work of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer in the twentieth century. "To demythologize the Other," Zhang writes, "is surely not to deny its distance, its alien nature, or the possibility of its poetic charms, but to recuperate real rather than imaginary differences." In addition, it "is not to become self-alienated in adopting alien values, but eventually to come back to the self with rewarding experiences." The process involves Hegel's concept of theoretical *Bildung*, of "learning and self-cultivation," and it begins, according to Gadamer, precisely with self-alienation, a movement beyond what the self knows toward "universal viewpoints from which one can grasp the thing, 'the objective thing in its freedom,' without selfish interest" (*Truth and Method*, 14).

But then there is a return to the self, which for Hegel constitutes the essence of *Bildung*, and the process is completed with the self's achievement of the universal, "the perfection of the absolute knowledge of philosophy." For Gadamer, on the other hand, as Zhang points out, what is important is the open-endedness of the process, the need "to keep oneself open to what is other" and to "the viewpoints of possible others," as opposed to "a fixed applicable yardstick" or some final absolute (*Truth and Method*, 17–18). In other words, to know the other is a process which produces

a moment when Self and Other meet and join together, in which both are changed and enriched in what Gadamer calls "the fusion of horizons" (TM, 273). That moment of fusion would eliminate the isolated horizon of either the Self or the Other, the East or the West, and bring their positive dynamic relationship into prominence. For in the fusion of horizons we are able to transcend the boundaries of language and culture so that there is no longer the isolation of East or West, no longer the exotic, mystifying, inexplicable Other,

but something to be learned and assimilated until it becomes part of our knowledge and experience of the world.¹⁰

SNYDER's use of ideogrammatic structure, as "The Old Dutch Woman" suggests, does not necessarily involve Chinese or oriental materials, and it can take a variety of forms in his work, including attempts to approximate ideogrammatic writing. Its varied use, in fact, by a whole range of post-Poundian American writers, as Laszlo Géfin and, more recently, Christopher Beach have shown, constitutes something of a tradition in American poetry since World War II – a tradition which has tended to further the influence of Pound's orientalizing gesture in verse, although the "Orient" may play little if any role in the work that results.¹¹ Snyder's "August on Sourdough, a Visit from Dick Brewer," for instance, another poem from *The Back Country*, employs the Chinese theme of departure, but does so within an entirely American context:

You hitched a thousand miles
 north from San Francisco
 Hiked up the mountainside a mile in the air
 The little cabin – one room –
 walled in glass
 Meadows and snowfields, hundreds of peaks.
 We lay in our sleeping bags
 talking half the night;
 Wind in the guy cables summer mountain rain.
 Next morning I went with you
 as far as the cliffs,
 Loaned you my poncho – the rain across the shale –
 You down the snowfield
 flapping in the wind
 Waving a last good bye half hidden in the clouds
 To go on hitching
 clear to New York;
 Me back to my mountain and far, far, west.
 (NN, 98)

Despite its Pacific Northwest setting, the poem seems to be alluding to Chinese poetry – and painting too, perhaps – not only thematically but

through its imagery of mountain landscapes and vast distances. Snyder presents himself and his friend, in the manner of Chinese landscape painting, as tiny figures in the midst of immense spaces. What is most striking here, though, is the poem's structure of dismembered lines and disrupted syntax, the effect of which is intensified further by an accentual, almost Anglo-Saxon rhythm, with emphatic caesuras, indicated by lengthened spaces, between the clauses and phrases that make up the lines. Snyder employs conventional punctuation – commas, dashes, semicolons, and periods – yet occasionally the poem's phrases break free from the sentences which appear to include them and take on an independence, an autonomy, not unlike that of characters in Chinese syntax. By the time we reach line 6, for instance – “Meadows and snowfields, hundreds of peaks” – the syntactical structure of the poem's opening sentence has all but dissolved, and these two phrases are left standing by themselves. We encounter much the same effect in the last half of the next sentence: “Wind in the guy-cables summer mountain rain,” and again three lines later with the phrase “the rain across the shale.” Except for the opening line of each of the poem's three sentences, each of which could qualify as a complete sentence in itself, the poem is composed in phrases, some more ideogrammatic than others, but suggesting, nonetheless, a clear attempt to write English-as-Chinese.¹²

Another poem featuring ideogrammatic writing, and also set at Sourdough Mountain, is the well-known “Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout,” the opening poem of *Riprap* (1959):

Down valley a smoke haze
 Three days heat, after five days rain
 Pitch glows on the fir-cones
 Across rocks and meadows
 Swarms of new flies.

I cannot remember things I once read
 A few friends, but they are in cities.
 Drinking cold snow-water from a tin cup
 Looking down for miles
 Through high still air.

(NN, 4)

If Snyder's early poetry, as he has suggested, is based on the rhythms of the physical labor he happened to be doing and the life he was leading at the time of its composition, then this poem, clearly, is the result of a transpersonal, Emersonian experience of seeing all and being, almost, nothing. Like Pound's speaker in Canto 49, Snyder's speaker here is focused almost entirely on what Emerson calls the "not me," by which Emerson means, in addition to nature, even his own body, and here a similar sense of distance between the speaker and his own physical acts of "drinking" and "looking" is powerfully conveyed by these unqualified participles.

Snyder's poem may also be read as a version of the scene at the end of Emerson's "Each and All," where the speaker declares, "I yielded myself to the perfect whole," and where his final phrase refers to the surrounding landscape in terms of the organic, aestheticized interrelationships of its constituting parts – in terms, that is, of a sort of romantic ecology:

As I spoke, beneath my feet
The ground-pine curled its pretty wreath,
Running over the club-moss burrs;
I inhaled the violet's breath;
Around me stood the oaks and firs;
Pine-cones and acorns lay on the ground;
Over me soared the eternal sky,
Full of light and of deity;
Again I saw, again I heard,
The rolling river, the morning bird; –
Beauty through my senses stole;
I yielded myself to the perfect whole.

(SW, 442)

But if Emerson's "yielded" suggests the overcoming of a resistance, of an initial reluctance to surrender the self to its larger context, Snyder seems to move easily between the me and the not me, self and other, without anxiety about any loss. Nor does he exhibit any self-consciousness about the nature of his experience. There is no equivalent in Snyder's poem for the abstract, conceptual language of Emerson's concluding line. Certainly, the ideogrammatic style, with its emphasis on things themselves, is essential to the effect of Snyder's poem, and it is especially on display in the poem's

opening lines, which, with their terseness, detachment, and imagistic independence, read like literal reconstructions of Chinese characters.

Referring generally to the poems of *Riprap*, Snyder remarks that they were the result of “a curious mind of renunciation and long day’s hard work with shovel, pick, dynamite, and boulder,” a state of mind in which “my language relaxed into itself.” “There is no doubt,” he continues, “that my readings of Chinese poems, with their monosyllabic step-by-step placement, their crispness – and the clatter of mule hooves – all fed this style” (RCM, 65–6).

CLOSELY RELATED to his work in *Riprap* are the *Cold Mountain Poems*, Snyder’s translations from the elusive T’ang dynasty poet Han-shan, which were first published in the *Evergreen Review* in 1958 and then reprinted together with *Riprap* in 1965. This small collection of twenty-four brief poems shows Snyder employing the Han-shan persona in ways that recall Pound’s use of Li Po in “Exile’s Letter.” Like Pound, Snyder attempts to bring his own interests into focus and to reflect upon his own situation. To an even greater degree than Pound, in fact, Snyder here seems to prefigure some of the chief concerns, as well as the manner, of his own later work. He was clearly drawn to Han-shan not only as a Buddhist, a colloquial stylist, and a poet responsive to mountain wilderness and natural solitude, but as a writer whose attitude toward his audience ranges all the way from utter detachment to critical, didactic, and even prophetic regard (a range that creates, in Snyder’s more recent poetry, what Charles Altieri sees as “the problem of reconciling the roles of seer and prophet” and what Charles Molesworth defines in terms of an ambiguity that embraces meditative and transformative, or passive and activist, stances in Snyder’s writing).¹³

In a sense, Han-shan was Snyder’s invention. At the New York conference on “Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination” in 1977, Snyder explained that the idea of translating this poet of the late eighth and early ninth centuries was suggested to him by one of his teachers, Chen Shih-hsiang, at Berkeley, where he was a graduate student in oriental languages in the mid-1950s. Asked what he would like to do – in a seminar in Chinese in which there was just one other student – Snyder replied that he wanted to work on Buddhist poetry in a vernacular style. If not quite

the only Chinese poet whose work could satisfy such specifications (in fact, there are not many), Han-shan, according to Burton Watson, is certainly the most important.¹⁴ When Snyder began his work, however, he discovered that there were hardly any translations of Han-shan available in English, although Arthur Waley published "27 Poems by Han-shan" in *Encounter* in 1954, just in time for Snyder to consult as he worked on his own project, and just in time as well to set up what would be, in some respects, a replay of Waley's debate with Pound, some forty years earlier, about the translations in *Cathay*.

In this replay, Snyder initially seems to take Waley's role, inasmuch as he uses his own translations to register dissatisfaction with an earlier translator's versions of Chinese texts. But finally he plays Pound's role, since his translations clearly adhere to Poundian principles of concision and defamiliarization in their departure from traditional English verse. This new version of an old debate, in fact, can also be seen as a modest reenactment of Pound's effort to reform English poetry through imagism and free verse.

Although Waley is often regarded, with Pound, as a pioneer in the use of free verse in Chinese translation, the following text, presented as Number XVII in his Han-shan series, suggests that he never strays too far from the mainstay of conventional English poetry, the iambic pentameter line:¹⁵

Ever since the time when I hid in the Cold Mountain
I have kept alive by eating the mountain fruits.
From day to day what is there to trouble me?
This my life follows a destined course.
The days and months flow ceaseless as a stream;
Our time is brief as a flash struck on a stone.
If Heaven and Earth shift, then let them shift;
I shall still be sitting happy among the rocks.¹⁶

In addition to the full-blown blank verse that emerges in the middle lines of this text and an English syntax that barely attempts to approximate the Chinese, what is most disconcerting here perhaps is Waley's tired and generalizing diction, particularly his use of such phrases as "mountain fruits," "This my life," "destined course," "ceaseless as a stream," and "Our time is brief." These are the clichés, the trite, literary counters, of a standardized, almost ready-made English verse, lacking in both specificity and conviction.

Snyder's version of this poem, by contrast, reveals a translator much more committed to the quirky, colloquial style of his source:

If I hide out at Cold Mountain
Living off mountain plants and berries –
All my lifetime, why worry?
One follows his karma through.
Days and months slip by like water,
Time is like sparks knocked off flint.
Go ahead and let the world change –
I'm happy to sit among these cliffs.
(RCM, 55)

Although both poems reproduce Han-shan's eight-line format and adhere to the principle of the end-stopped line, Snyder's version moves closer to the Chinese in its attempt to approximate Han-shan's short, five-character line – sometimes even managing five words per line – without distorting the English. Generally speaking, what is immediately noticeable about Snyder's version is its greater compactness and concreteness, the directness, for instance, of "If I hide out at Cold Mountain," as opposed to Waley's labored "Ever since the time when I hid in the Cold Mountain" (where the use of the definite article seems especially out of character for a translation from Chinese). Waley's version no doubt is linguistically accurate, and he has, if anything, focused more on meaning than on image or experience, as in the line "Our time is brief as the flash struck on a stone," which in some ways is clearer than Snyder's "Time is the sparks knocked off flint." Yet Snyder's line, with its direct treatment of the thing, carries greater impact than Waley's conventional simile and seems truer, as well, to the style of a poet who, Watson tells us, is "often colloquial or even slangy (the slang of a thousand years ago, all but unintelligible today)" in his use of language (*Cold Mountain*, 11).¹⁷

At the same time, however, there is also a sense here in which Snyder, like the Pound of *Cathay* and other translators, is appropriating his Chinese texts for purposes other than those of the texts themselves. For one thing, the twenty-four poems in his selection present, perhaps unavoidably (given Han-shan's more than three hundred poems), a somewhat partial view of Han-shan, one which foregrounds his commitment to his spiritual quest

and his indifference toward and sometimes scorn for the ordinary world, at the expense of the more ordinary or worldly aspects of his own character (although these are not entirely overlooked). The dominant impression is of a disheveled, slightly comic figure ("His shack's got no pots or oven,/ He goes for a walk with his shirt and pants askew") who always, nevertheless, "carries the sword of wisdom" and "means to cut down senseless craving" (RCM, 53), which, on the showing of Snyder's selection, he has largely succeeded in doing.

This success authorizes his occasional outbursts against the world he has left behind – "Go tell families with silverware and cars/'What's the use of all that noise and money?' " (RCM, 40) – and allows him to issue challenges to others to try and match his spiritual and physical achievement – "Who can leap the world's ties/And sit with me among the white clouds?" (RCM, 46). The final poem of the series suggests, in terms that recall Whitman at the end of "Song of Myself" ("You will hardly know who I am or what I mean"), just how far beyond us in values and insight Han-shan has gone – so far, indeed, that he seems to be moving, again like Whitman, into untranslatability. Communication, Han-shan attests, has become increasingly difficult, and in an attempt to reach us he can offer only a radically reductive version of his thinking:

When men see Han-shan
They all say he's crazy
And not much to look at
Dressed in rags and hides.
They don't get what I say
& I don't talk their language.
All I can say to those I meet:
"Try and make it to Cold Mountain."
(RCM, 62)

Waley's Han-shan, on the other hand, while ultimately a Buddhist mystic and an ancient sage, is also presented in poems in which he appears as an ordinary human being with a wife and children and family problems, and as a poor, wandering scholar in search of patronage. But Snyder, leaving out these domestic and mundane dimensions of Han-shan's character, and taking his cue from later Zen painters, who often picture Han-shan

and his friend Shih-te in mischievous poses, is more interested in his antinomian spirituality and his eccentricity and irreverence, seeing him primarily as “a mountain madman in an old Chinese line of ragged hermits” and a poet whose work is “rough and fresh.” With just a few exceptions, Snyder’s Han-shan is presented throughout the series as spiritually secure and independent, confirmed in his decision to leave the world for Cold Mountain, and slightly superhuman in his ability to make one serve as a substitute for the other. “How did I make it?” he asks at one point, and answers, “My heart’s not the same as yours./If your heart was like mine/ You’d get it and be right here” (RCM, 44). The seventh poem of the series provides a good summary of its entire, somewhat Thoreauvian, outlook:

I settled at Cold Mountain long ago,
 Already it seems like years and years.
 Freely drifting, I prowl the woods and streams
 And linger watching things themselves.
 Men don’t get this far into the mountains,
 White clouds gather and billow.
 Thin grass does for a mattress,
 The blue sky makes a good quilt.
 Happy with a stone underhead
 Let heaven and earth go about their changes.

(RCM, 45)

In his introductory note to his translation, moreover, Snyder not only mythologizes Han-shan and Shih-te; he also reimagines them in an American setting and invites the reader to see them, in terms of contemporary American society, as marginalized figures, members of a sub- or counter-culture and representatives of an oppositional politics. “They became Immortals,” he writes, “and you sometimes run onto them today in the skidrows, orchards, hobo jungles, and logging camps of America” (RCM, 35). In this way, *Cold Mountain Poems* becomes a more universal text, or, at least – and quite literally – a cross-cultural one, as Snyder introduces his T’ang dynasty poet into a contemporary American context in the interest of bringing about a fusion and thus an expansion of horizons for his reader. What is at work here is a principle similar to Pound’s Emersonian faith in

the universality of mind, a principle that still, nevertheless, preserves a sense of difference. Ancient Chinese spirituality thus becomes, in effect, a contemporary American possibility, while Snyder's American speech is shown to be a vehicle fully adequate to the transmission of Han-shan's attitudes and experience.

In the process, the book also becomes an expression of the ethos of the Beat Generation and of the San Francisco Renaissance, drawing upon the West Coast radical and activist traditions that precede and inform these movements in their search for what Michael Davidson calls alternative modes "of communal organization within American mass society."¹⁸ And it is interesting to note, in this connection, that Snyder read some of his Han-shan translations publicly at the Six Gallery in San Francisco on October 13, 1955, sharing the stage with Allen Ginsberg (who read *Howl*), Philip Whalen, Michael McClure, Philip Lamantia, and Kenneth Rexroth, who served as moderator. This poetry reading, of course, is often cited as the inaugural event of the San Francisco Renaissance, a much publicized and mythologized manifestation of a new cultural, aesthetic, and political formation in the midst of the Cold War era. In this context, Snyder's Han-shan, T'ang dynasty Chinese poet and "mountain madman," becomes a Beat hero and countercultural role model, as well as, to borrow Davidson's phrase, an "oppositional sign" (27), while *Cold Mountain Poems* itself, like *Cathay* in Kenner's view of it as a war book, becomes a Cold War book.¹⁹

Snyder is orientalizing here, of course, insofar as his response to Chinese poetry is largely conditioned by his own experience. His tendency to mythologize Han-shan and to present him as a role model for the American poet is consistent with what he described at the conference on "Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination" as his initial attitude toward Chinese poetry, which was influenced by what he calls "the idea of the Chinese poet, the image that the Chinese poet as a poet, as role-model, presented to us" (12) – an idea, moreover, that he sees as nearly equal in importance to the impact of Chinese poetry on American poetics. That idea, as Snyder explains, was originally bound up with his interest in nature and his experience in wilderness environments:

I first responded, in 1949, living in Oregon, to my contact with Chinese poetry on the level of nature; that was what I was interested in . . . As a mountaineer

and backpacker, when I read Chinese poetry, I was struck in some of the translations by qualities hard to describe . . . clarity, limpidity, space, and at the same time, a fine, specialized and precise attention and observation of natural detail . . . I looked initially only to the hermit poet/nature poet for inspiration and for a while took that to be what Chinese poetry really was.

Later, of course, Snyder came to understand that a writer like Pound could find in Chinese poetry "something else entirely." Pound, as he puts it, "was delighted with the possibility of poets having political power in a strong bureaucracy" ("Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination," 13).

Snyder also came to appreciate what he interestingly describes as Chinese poetry's "strategies of apparent simplicity and understatement." "That this actually elaborate and complex poetic tradition," he asserts, "should have entered into Occidental modernism is amazing," and he explains their convergence in terms of a "modern thirst for natural, secular clarity" and a weariness with "heroics and theologies" on the part of Western poets who responded strongly, as he puts it, to the "plain tone and direct statement of English language translations" – primarily, one assumes, those of Pound, although Snyder also mentions, in this context, the work of Waley and Witter Bynner ("Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination," 20).

As a translator from Chinese himself, Snyder has more in common with Pound than just the application of imagist concision and concreteness to Chinese texts. Snyder's approach chiefly involves what he has described on various occasions as a process of "visualizing," by which he means an effort to reproduce the experience in a poem in his mind's eye, as opposed merely to reading the poem and seeking English equivalents for its Chinese words. In this sense, the problem of translation, as he puts it in his most succinct account of the process, "is not one of 'writing' but one of 'visualizing'":

I get the verbal meaning into mind as clearly as I can, but then make an enormous effort of visualization, to "see" what the poem says, nonlinguistically, like a movie in my mind, and to feel it. If I can do this (and much of the time the poem eludes this effort) then I write the scene down in English. It is not a translation of the words, it is the same poem in a different language,

allowing for the peculiar distortions of my own vision – but keeping it straight as possible. If I can do this to a poem the translation is uniformly successful, and is generally well received by scholars and critics. If I can't do this, I can still translate the words, and it may be well received, but it doesn't feel like it should. (*The Real Work*, 178)

Snyder has also pointed out that he originally discovered this visualizing process in his work on the Han-shan poems, and that it simply “happened” to him, without deliberation or premeditation on his part. “I found myself forgetting the Chinese and going into a deep interior visualization of what the poem was about.” When he began to translate Han-shan's texts, he explains, he had just returned from a four-month stint of work in the wilderness, so that forgetting the Chinese and allowing Han-shan's signifiers to be displaced by what he had just seen at first hand provided him with a spontaneous alternative to the more bookish approach to translation (“Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination,” 41). Thus Snyder was able to bypass the mediation of language altogether and appeal directly to experience – or, as we might put it, having seen the world without language, he was then faced with the task of bringing that seeing into language. The result of the process, as he says, “is not a translation of the words, it is the same poem in a different language.”

That this is also in many respects a Poundian process is strongly suggested by Hugh Kenner's account of Pound's approach not only to translation but to poetic composition in general as “the rendering, without deformation, of something, within him or without, which he has clearly apprehended and seized in his mind.” Just as the poet, in Pound's conception, begins by seeing, Kenner explains, so the translator begins by reading – “but his reading must be a kind of seeing.” And this seeing, for both Pound and Snyder, calls for something other than the translation of words. In Pound's case, whether he is constructing a persona, which is to say an adaptation or imitation of the work of another poet, or producing a translation proper, the task involves the “same clairvoyant absorption of another world,” or the absorption of “the ambience of the text,” before he can genuinely reproduce that ambience in his own language. But it is that ambience or that other world which he wants to render, and not merely English equivalents of the words which represent it. Thus, once this absorption has taken place, the poet will write “a poem of his own following the contours of

the poem before him. He does not translate words. The words have led him into the thing he expresses" (*Translations*, 10-11). But, again, it is this thing, as opposed to a word-for-word account of the original text, that he aims in his own words to reproduce.

Both Pound and Snyder, in this sense, are translators of experience rather than of the language that articulates it, and both presuppose a difference between language and experience, or language and what it conveys. Kenner points to this difference, and justifies the Poundian approach, when he defines "pedantry" as the opposite of Pound's tendency to avoid translating words: "Pedantry consists in supposing that the importance of a moment of thought or feeling lies in the notation somebody else found for it" (*Translations*, 12). It might be argued, of course, that to depart from the precise words that express a thing or an experience is to depart from the thing or experience as well. To alter the language is to alter the thing. But this is an argument that would seem to render translation virtually impossible, since a translation which does not depart from the precise words of the original text is not a translation.

There is also a sense, moreover, in which Snyder's effort to bypass language is a way of avoiding the problem of verbal precision or accuracy altogether, as well as a strategy to achieve a different kind of accuracy, subject, as he grants, only to the distortions of his own vision: the visual accuracy of things themselves. To paraphrase Snyder on this point, you know the words in Chinese, you know the words in the original text, so drop them and remember what the experience or thing they refer to looks like. "And it certainly helps," he adds, "if you've had some sensory experiences in your life, to have that deep storehouse to pull it out of and re-experience it from" ("Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination," 41).

Thus Snyder's visualizing process relies upon memory and particularly upon a memory of sensory experience, and to this extent it differs sharply from the act of "clairvoyant absorption" that Kenner attributes to Pound. But Snyder's procedure might also be regarded as a refinement or revision of Pound's in an empirical, less purely imaginative direction, and it should be pointed out that for this very reason, while it might be more accurate, it is also more limited, in the sense that it is applicable only to poetry about experience one might actually have had oneself and that one might be able,

therefore, to remember. What Pound tries to express, on the other hand – Kenner’s brief catalogue includes “desolate seafaring, or the cult of the plum-blossoms, or the structure of sensibility that attended the Tuscan anatomy of love” (*Translations*, 11) – clearly goes beyond the capacities of a personal memory of physical experience in a natural environment and seems to require a more extravagant and riskily imaginative creativity, as well as reliance on a more than personal historical or cultural memory.

Certainly, Snyder’s concern for the visual or experiential accuracy of things themselves, and his insistence upon his visualizing process, have all but guaranteed a relatively minor role for translation in his work. Indeed, under most circumstances, his approach will be difficult to put into practice – calling, as it does, for a poem susceptible to visualization (constituted by Pound’s *phanopoeia*) and requiring more time and effort than ordinary translation. It is not surprising, then, that, other than his *Cold Mountain Poems*, he has produced only a brief selection of the verse of the modern Japanese poet Miyazawa Kenji.²⁰

AS NOTED EARLIER, an alternative model of translation, and of lyric style generally, was available to Snyder in the work of Kenneth Rexroth, a poet with whom, in fact, he shares a great deal, and Rexroth’s model is worth considering, if only to confirm our sense of the overall Poundian direction of Snyder’s decisions and impulses as a writer. Author of many translations and imitations of Chinese and Japanese poetry, Rexroth is also an important participant in the post-Poundian surge of American interest in oriental literature and a poet who pursues and demonstrates in his own work the fertile compatibility of modernist writing and an orientalized aesthetic.

What initially attracted Snyder to Rexroth’s work was its use of wilderness and natural landscape, a feature which he also admired in Chinese poetry and which seemed to sanction, closer to home, the poetic value of his own experience and interests. Later, while studying Chinese and Japanese at Berkeley in 1953, Snyder met Rexroth and established a relationship with him that brought them into each other’s company “regularly, nearly every weekend,” until Snyder’s departure for Japan in 1956. As Rexroth’s biographer Linda Hamalian points out, Snyder appreciated not only Rexroth’s learning, in such fields as anthropology, American Indian languages and cultures, and orientalism, but also his political outlook, “an-

archo-pacifism," which was close to Snyder's own thinking. Rexroth encouraged Snyder's work in all these areas and influenced his verse with what Snyder calls his "dry, somewhat choppy line," although he also made sure to point out to Hamalian, in an interview about his relationship with Rexroth, that Rexroth's influence on his work was not nearly as great as Pound's.²¹

Rexroth himself often expressed what Hamalian calls an "overall antipathy to Pound" that was informed by both literary and political considerations (*A Life of Kenneth Rexroth*, 285).²² Yet, during the period of his involvement with Louis Zukofsky and the Objectivist movement in the early 1930s, this antipathy did not prevent Rexroth from corresponding cordially with Pound and enlisting his support for a publishing project of his own in which Pound agreed to participate (75). Later, after World War II, he visited Pound at St. Elizabeth's Hospital (finding him, however, "nutty as fruitcake") (175-6), and singled out for particular praise such works of Pound's as *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, the translations of Japanese Noh plays, and *Cathay*, which he calls "a classic in English" and rates as "Pound's best verse."²³

Despite this somewhat ambivalent attitude, Rexroth's own work exhibits a range of interests that could fairly be described as Poundian in its own right, and this range includes experimental modernism, poetic translation, anthropology, economics and politics, and the Far East, to name a few. At the same time, he seems to have gone out of his way to avoid or circumvent Pound's influence, working in similar areas, such as oriental poetry, but gravitating toward different poets (Tu Fu as opposed to Pound's Li Po) and devising a verse style and format for his translations noticeably different from Pound's (although no closer, by his own admission, to the Chinese). As an orientalist, he was perhaps even more makeshift than Pound, working with "self-designed flash cards" (*A Life of Kenneth Rexroth*, 375) to help with characters and often relying on other translations (in French, German, and English) and Chinese-speaking friends, "none of them specialists," for help with the original texts.

More than anything else, however, Rexroth seems to have relied on his own instincts and interests as a poet, and his translations, as he remarks about his versions of Tu Fu, are in some cases "very free, in others as exact

as possible, depending on how I felt in relation to the particular poem at the time." "I hope in all cases," he continues in his Introduction to *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese* (1956), that the translations "are true to the spirit of the originals, and valid English poems." And he concludes, "I make no claim for the book as a piece of Oriental scholarship. Just some poems" (xi-xii).

In this and other ways, Rexroth recalls some of the Victorian sinologists and translators who approached Chinese literature more as poets than as scholars, in pursuit of the spirit rather than the letter of their texts, and who could be rather cavalier, if not completely irresponsible, in their resulting treatment of them. In his notes on Tu Fu, for instance, Rexroth explains,

I have chosen only those poems whose appeal is simple and direct, with a minimum of allusion to past literature or contemporary politics, in other words, poems that speak to me of situations in life like my own. I have thought of my translations as, finally, expressions of myself. (*One Hundred Poems*, 136)

If Pound's tendency, as Kenner remarks, is to lend his voice to the writer he translates, that writer having stirred him into speech to begin with (*Translations*, 14), Rexroth's tendency here is to borrow Tu Fu's poems for purposes of self-expression and as extensions of his own work, not lending his voice to the other so much as allowing the other to speak for him. In order to do so, of course, he must apply a rather strict standard of selection.

As a precocious high school student in Chicago in the early 1920s, Rexroth came across Pound's *Cathay*, and it provided him, "as it has for so many others," with his first introduction to Chinese literature (AAN, 122). Even more important, though, was his meeting with Witter Bynner on a trip to New Mexico in 1924. Bynner had just begun to work with his collaborator, Kiang Kang-hu, on the material that would constitute *The Jade Mountain*, and he seems to have served for Rexroth as a foil to Pound. He introduced Rexroth to "the major Sinologists in French and English," and he encouraged him to shift his focus from Li Po to Tu Fu, who would become, as Rexroth attests, the major influence on his own poetry (AAN, 318-19). Bynner himself seems to have been something of an influence on Rexroth's writing, particularly on his approach to Chinese translation, in-

asmuch as he too, as Roy Teele points out, tends to omit literary and historical allusions, in his case for the sake of “readability” (*Through a Glass Darkly*, 123).

A related feature of Bynner’s translations, which also seems to have had an effect on Rexroth’s, is the extent to which they retain the greater definiteness and syntactical particularity of English, at the expense of what Wai-lim Yip calls “the original mode of apprehension or representation” of the Chinese (*Ezra Pound’s Cathay*, 20). Bynner’s often limpid free verse, in other words, can be an alien imposition upon the original structure of the Chinese text, displacing its “drama of things” themselves with a “process of analysis” (16, 19), or with a luxuriant flow of speech that owes more to English lyric traditions than to Chinese poetry. We can see the extent to which such displacement occurs in the following poem from *The Jade Mountain*, “A Night-Mooring near Maple Bridge” by Chang Chi:

While I watch the moon go down, a crow caws through the frost;
Under the shadows of maple trees a fisherman moves with his torch;
And I hear, from beyond Su-chou, from the temple on Cold Mountain,
Ringing for me, here in my boat, the midnight bell.²⁴

What is striking in this poem is not only the speaker’s arresting and almost fastidious location of himself in the scene and as the destination, so to speak, of the sound of the midnight bell, but the long and elaborate delay in the grammatical completion of the poem’s concluding clause, a delay that seems quite foreign to the syntactical norms of Chinese verse. The poem’s use of what Yip calls “intellectual, directional devices” (*Ezra Pound’s Cathay*, 16) – words such as “while,” “under,” “from,” and “here,” which are rarely directly represented in Chinese – seems especially crucial to its effect.

Rexroth’s line is customarily shorter than Bynner’s here, often just seven syllables, and this is true of his own writing as well as of his translations. But, like Bynner, he tends to make few concessions to the bareness and autonomy of Chinese characters, preferring instead a rather straightforward, if more austere and less elaborate, English syntax, as in this version of a poem by Tu Fu called “New Moon”:

The bright, thin, new moon appears,
Tipped askew in the heavens.

It no sooner shines over
The ruined fortress than the
Evening clouds overwhelm it.
The Milky Way shines unchanging
Over the freezing mountains
Of the border. White frost covers
The garden. The chrysanthemums
Clot and freeze in the night.

(*One Hundred Poems*, 17)

With its impersonal directness of statement, concrete imagery, and absence of overt commentary, the poem carries all the essential earmarks of modernist lyric. The unobtrusive hint of allegorical tension between the unchanging heavens and the all too mutable sublunary world, with its “ruined fortress,” “freezing mountains,” and frost-covered garden, is also an important element, although it may be more characteristic of Rexroth’s own work than of Chinese poetry per se. Still, on the whole, the same features that make the poem “modern” also make it “Chinese” – with one prominent exception, and that is Rexroth’s use of enjambment. Indeed, his nearly systematic violation of the principle of the end-stopped line – what Kenner calls “the *vers-libre* principle, that the single line is the unit of composition” (PE, 199) – goes against the grain not only of most post-Poundian English translations of Chinese poetry but of Chinese poetry itself, where enjambment is exceedingly rare and every line “almost always” corresponds to a complete unit of thought (*Ezra Pound’s Cathay*, 13). This violation, to be sure, is one way of circumventing Pound’s influence, although it can lead to renderings of Chinese poems that can sometimes seem willfully personal or idiosyncratic. And yet, despite the enjambment, and despite even the “no sooner . . . than” structure of the poem’s second sentence, Rexroth still manages to approximate the Chinese – or, more accurately, the orientalized style of modern Chinese translation – with his starkly declarative sentences, which dominate the poem and which adhere to the deep structure that Fenollosa identified in Chinese verse, the fundamental, “natural” pattern of subject/verb/object.

Much the same is true of a version of another poem by Tu Fu, “Sunset,” which evidently features what Snyder regards as Rexroth’s “dry, somewhat choppy line”:

Sunset glitters on the beads
 Of the curtains. Spring flowers
 Bloom in the valley. The gardens
 Along the river are filled
 With perfume. Smoke of cooking
 Fires drifts over the slow barges.
 Sparrows hop and tumble in
 The branches. Whirling insects
 Swarm in the air. Who discovered
 That one cup of thick wine
 Will dispel a thousand cares?

(*One Hundred Poems*, 21)

The enjambment here persists throughout the poem, which shifts at the end from what might be regarded as Rexroth's discursive version of ideogrammatic writing to a sudden, closing question, a different kind of speech which brings the poet himself into the poem and which stops the flow of images. Of course, the proof that the poet has successfully dispelled his "thousand cares" lies precisely in his attentiveness to everything else in his surrounding world.

In a version of another Tu Fu text, "Loneliness," the allegorical element is explicit, much more so than in "New Moon," and we are thus brought closer to Rexroth's own practice as a poet, a practice characterized by what Michael Davidson sees as a "tendency to read the landscape allegorically" (*The San Francisco Renaissance*, 43). Given this tendency, we can also see how a translation of a poem by Tu Fu can be an expression of Rexroth himself, and we can see, in addition, why Snyder should ultimately want to distance his work from Rexroth's.

A hawk hovers in air.
 Two white gulls float on the stream.
 Soaring with the wind, it is easy
 To drop and seize
 Birds who foolishly drift with the current.
 Where the dew sparkles in the grass,
 The spider's web waits for its prey.

The processes of nature resemble the business of men.

I stand alone with ten thousand sorrows.

(*One Hundred Poems*, 16)

Interestingly, in contrast with both of the preceding poems, the dominant pattern here is one of end-stopped lines, broken only to accommodate the dramatic moment of the hawk's attack. Although the abstract statement of the penultimate line is precisely what is absent from "New Moon," these poems present an essentially similar situation, one in which the speaker is reading the natural landscape in human terms, and in both the scenic or natural details double as metaphors or as images invested with human meaning. Soaring with the wind and drifting with the current, for example, are particular natural descriptions that are also meant to be interpreted as more broadly universal forms of behavior. To the extent that nature in general for Rexroth is "a theater against which human dramas may be measured" (*The San Francisco Renaissance*, 48), both translations also serve Rexroth's own interests and reflect his own practice as a poet.

More fully developed in his own work, these interests most often take the form of the poet's meditation on historical or political reality, or even his personal situation, within a natural or wilderness setting. Rexroth's most common persona, in fact, as Davidson suggests, "is that of a wandering Chinese philosopher for whom the natural world – a mountain peak, a waterfall, a trail – is an inverse reflection of the human condition," and his task is to measure contemporary reality against the continuity and permanence of the natural order, "a task that seldom yields positive results" as far as the human world is concerned (*The San Francisco Renaissance*, 41–2). If this is the case, though, then "Loneliness" represents a departure from Rexroth's norm, since here "The processes of nature *resemble* the business of men," an observation which leaves the speaker feeling alienated from both worlds.

What I most want to call attention to here, however, is the difference between Rexroth and Snyder suggested not only by Rexroth's poetic interests themselves but by the role that those interests assign to nature in his work. To the degree that the natural world in Rexroth is a backdrop for critical reflection upon the human condition, or an Emersonian "language" with which to articulate concerns that are ultimately human, its appearance

in his work represents a *use* of nature that Snyder in his own writing tries to counter, insisting instead not only on the equality, indeed the identity, of the natural and the human but on a relationship between them that is in every sense direct. Thus the relevant distinction for Snyder is not between the natural and the human but between the wild and the civilized. New York City and Tokyo, he argues in “The Etiquette of Freedom,” “are ‘natural’ but not ‘wild’ ”:

They do not deviate from the laws of nature, but they are habitats so exclusive in the matter of who and what they give shelter to, and so intolerant of other creatures, as to be truly odd. Wilderness is a *place* where the wild potential is fully expressed, a diversity of living and nonliving beings flourishing according to their own sorts of order. In ecology we speak of “wild systems.” When an ecosystem is fully functioning, all the members are present at the assembly. To speak of wilderness is to speak of wholeness. Human beings came out of that wholeness, and to consider the possibility of reactivating membership in the Assembly of All Beings is in no way regressive. (PW, 11–12)

Han-shan, of course, in his permanent residence at Cold Mountain, is one of Snyder’s earliest figures of dedication to wilderness as wholeness, a human being deeply immersed in the natural world who recognizes it not only as a refuge and a home but as an origin to which he has returned:

In my first thirty years of life
 I roamed hundreds and thousands of miles.
 Walked by rivers through deep green grass
 Entered cities of boiling red dust.
 Tried drugs, but couldn’t make Immortal;
 Read books and wrote poems on history.
 Today I’m back at Cold Mountain:
 I’ll sleep by the creek and purify my ears.
 (RCM, 50)

Like the other poems quoted earlier from Snyder’s Han-shan sequence, but unlike many of Rexroth’s Tu Fu translations, this poem also exhibits consistent end-stopping, along with the directness and concision of the Chinese line mediated by an idiomatic American speech. As a translator of Chinese poetry, that is, Snyder is responsive both to his own visualization of the text and to the text’s own original language and verse conventions – or,

at least, to those aspects of Chinese verse for which Pound invented oriental-ized equivalents or substitutes in English, substitutes which Snyder seems largely to accept.

Since Pound's equivalents, moreover, tend to converge with the conventions of imagistic modernism, not even Rexroth, for all his occasional resistance, can entirely avoid them. Indeed, in a lyric from his 1949 collection, *The Signature of All Things*, Rexroth allows himself to invoke the language of nature, or what he calls "the simple diction of stone," in terms that not only inescapably allude to Pound but that also bring him close to Snyder's own insistence on the common ground of the natural and the human:

As you kneel above me I see
 Tiny red marks on your flanks
 Like bites, where the redwood cones
 Have pressed into your flesh.
 You can find just the same marks
 In the lignite in the cliff
 Over our heads . . .
 And what might have been,
 And what might be, fall equally
 Away with what is, and leave
 Only these ideograms
 Printed on the immortal
 Hydrocarbons of flesh and stone.²⁵

AT ANOTHER LEVEL of his work, what might be called Snyder's "discursive pluralism," his habit of opening his poetic texts not only to an eclectic variety of sources but to discourse sometimes regarded as inappropriate or even alien to poetry, constitutes another mode of writing which he shares with Pound. As Marjorie Perloff has suggested in an essay dealing with the pervasiveness and scope of Pound's influence during the latter half of the twentieth century, the "deeper, more lasting" aspect of that influence lies in "the example of the *Cantos* as 'a poem including history,' the new conception of the poem as 'the tale of the tribe' that no longer privileges lyric over narrative (or even drama), that can incorporate the contemporary and the archaic, economics and myth, the everyday and the elevated."²⁶

Snyder responds to this aspect of Pound's work most prominently in one of his earliest projects, *Myths & Texts* (published in 1960, but composed between 1952 and 1956). Here we find a canto-like, ideogrammatic mingling of diverse sources and discourses, including the history of the logging industry in the Pacific Northwest, Snyder's personal experience as a worker in that industry, Native American myth, anthropology, classical Western myth and literature, the Bible, and Eastern, mostly Buddhist, thought. The poem is critical not only of the exploitation of nature and of the loggers who cut down the woods but of the spiritual blindness of a civilization and an ethos which sanction such destruction.

If Pound's effort in *The Cantos*, in part, is to locate historical figures and social and economic arrangements that represent alternatives to those responsible, in his view, for World War I, Snyder's effort in *Myths & Texts* is to understand his own experience, especially what he witnessed as a child in the Pacific Northwest – "the hills being bulldozed down for roads, and the forests . . . magically float[ing] away on logging trucks" (*The Old Ways*, 15) – in larger cultural and historical terms. Both poets, in effect, pursue solutions to rather large-scale social, economic, and cultural problems, Pound seeking a world (to put it, perhaps, too glibly) safe for art and governed by an economics based on real value, and Snyder seeking a world safe for nature, or the wild, and human communities genuinely "at home" in and with their diverse environments. Such programs, in addition, call for a poetry with a certain didactic force, a poetry, that is, no longer entirely content with a "silent" registration of things themselves.

The opening poem of the "Logging" section of *Myths & Texts* provides a clear-cut example of the collage-like structure of all the poems in the collection:

The morning star is not a star
 Two seedling fir, one died
 Io, Io,
 Girdled in wistaria
 Wound with ivy
 "The May Queen
 Is the survival of
 A pre-human
 Rutting season"

The year spins
 Pleiades sing to their rest
 at San Francisco
 dream
 dream
 Green comes out of the ground
 Birds squabble
 Young girls run mad with the pine bough,
 Io²⁷

In an apparently fragmentary way, recalling *The Waste Land* and Eliot's "mythical method" as much as *The Cantos*, the poem juxtaposes an allusion to Thoreau's *Walden* ("The sun is but a morning star"), the speaker's own observations and lyrical language, Greek mythology in the form of the reference to Io – mother of Dionysus and associated here with his rites – and anthropological discourse. Yet there is also an underlying continuity or relationship among the mythic, discursive, and experiential components of the text. Like Pound ideogramatically defining the color red by juxtaposing rose, cherry, iron rust, and flamingo, Snyder brings together, from different areas of experience, elements that evoke the natural, cyclical renewal of the earth. The dominant figure in the poem is Io, and she, like the characters in *The Waste Land* who "melt into" each other, suddenly becomes "the May Queen," slipping out of one context, the speaker's visionary description, into another, the more abstract, anthropological account of her origins. She also presides over all the manifestations of natural energy in the poem, extending from the "pre-human" to the present moment.

Io's appearance at the outset of the sequence seems to be Snyder's immediate response to the disparagement of the goddess Diana in the volume's epigraph (from the Book of Acts): "the temple of the great/Goddess Diana should be despised,/and her magnificence should be destroyed,/whom all Asia and the world worshippeth." From his critical or subversive perspective, Snyder sees Io behind various signs of natural or seasonal process – the emergence of green from the ground, squabbling birds, young girls in dionysian frenzy – and to this extent he reinstates nature as an object of veneration. In any case, he implicitly calls here, as well as in the sequence as a whole, for a reversal of values

and a turn away from what he sees as the Judeo-Christian bias against nature.

In the elegiac fourteenth poem of "Logging," for another example, we have a text which not only demonstrates the ideogrammatic complexity of Snyder's writing in the sequence but which also captures some of the vituperative energy of Pound's style in *The Cantos*:

The groves are down
 cut down
 Groves of Ahab, of Cybele
 Pine trees, knobbed twigs
 thick cone and seed
 Cybele's tree this, sacred in groves
 Pine of Seami, cedar of Haida
 Cut down by the prophets of Israel
 the fairies of Athens
 the thugs of Rome
 both ancient and modern;
 Cut down to make room for the suburbs
 Bulldozed by Luther and Weyerhaeuser
 Crosscut and chainsaw
 squareheads and finns
 high-lead and cat-skidding
 Trees down
 Creeks choked, trout killed, roads.

 Sawmill temples of Jehovah.
 Squat black burners 100 feet high
 Sending the smoke of our burnt
 Live sap and leaf
 To his eager nose.
 (MT, 14)

The poem begins with a litany of acts of destruction against trees, traced across history and cultures. Recalling here another biblical text (from Exodus) referred to earlier in the sequence – "But ye shall destroy their altars, / break their images, and cut down their groves" – Snyder regards the trees downed by the logging industry in an intimately detailed way, considering their "knobbed twigs/thick cone and seed," and seeing in them at the

same time the sacred groves of the ancient world and of primitive cultures, so that logging, functioning for Snyder like a Poundian palimpsest, becomes continuous with historical acts of cultural violence. What may have begun in ancient times, moreover, as tribal or cultural conflict, a war against alien gods and groves, has escalated into a war of civilization against nature. For Snyder, though, there is little difference between the prophets of Israel and the more recent and more sophisticated civilized conspiracy between "Luther and Weyerhaeuser," or Protestantism and corporate capitalism, a linkage that is repeated and reinforced in the poem's final stanza with the image of the "Sawmill temples of Jehovah," which contains and recapitulates the several parallel histories traced in the text. What we find in the poem, in any event, is Snyder's version of a Poundian canto, incorporating "the contemporary and the archaic, economics and myth, the everyday and the elevated."

But Snyder's writing in this mode takes more than one form, and elsewhere in his work, particularly since the publication of *Turtle Island* (1974), we find an interesting extension of it involving a more straightforward use of material that can often seem nonpoetic by definition, such as the virtually unadorned ethnographic description of a poem like "Anasazi":

Anasazi,
Anasazi,

tucked up in clefts in the cliffs
growing strict fields of corn and beans
sinking deeper and deeper in earth
up to your hips in Gods
 your head all turned to eagle-down
 & lightning for knees and elbows
your eyes full of pollen

 the smell of bats.
 the flavor of sandstone
 grit on the tongue.

 women
 birthing
at the foot of ladders in the dark.

trickling streams in hidden canyons
under the cold rolling desert

corn-basket wide-eyed
red baby
rock lip home,

Anasazi

(NN, 206)

In what amounts to a documentary collage, an objective, discontinuous, ideogrammatic gathering of impressions, scenes, artifacts, and details, Snyder evokes the tribal life of an ancient Southwestern people, the Anasazi, who are presented as virtually indistinguishable from their environment, their “rock lip home.” Indeed, “tucked up in clefts in the cliffs” and “sinking deeper and deeper in earth,” with “the flavor of sandstone” and “grit on the tongue” referred to as characteristic features of their life, they provide an example of inhabitation, of being quite literally at home in the landscape, that has clearly motivated the poem. Snyder’s mode here, moreover, is not only ideogrammatic but Fenollosan, in the sense that the Anasazi are defined in terms of all, or at least much, that they do, recalling Fenollosa’s idea that “the cherry tree is all that it does” (CWC, 28), a principle of definition based on an account of the thing not as an isolated or static noun but as a dynamic object in action. Indeed, it is this principle, as Laszlo Géfin points out, that Pound seems to adopt in his montage-like portrait of Confucius in Canto 13 (*Ideogram*, 40). Snyder’s mode in the poem is also celebratory, as well as obliquely didactic, insofar as the Anasazi are not only at home in but “at one” with their physical environment.

Another kind of poem on this order is the text that features a purely informational sort of discourse about the condition of a particular natural place. In “Among,” for instance, one of Snyder’s several tributes to the Douglas fir, we have, as opposed to the romantic nature lyric, something more like an ecological lyric focusing on the state of the landscape rather than the experience or sensibility of the poet. Like “Anasazi,” “Among” is a highly impersonal poem, except to the extent that it projects its speaker’s intimate involvement with his natural locality. The specific concern here is whether Douglas fir trees will take root and thrive in a particular area of Snyder’s home region that seems to resist them:

history, geography, botany, and the entire physical and biological basis of cultural life. In their departure from some of the chief norms of postromantic lyricism, they begin to suggest, as Molesworth points out, a new kind of poem and “a future model of the lyric . . . as more committed to enhancing an awareness of cosmic scale and cosmic forces and the need of the community to heighten and preserve such awareness” (*Gary Snyder’s Vision*, 93) – although Snyder’s addendum to “Among” attests to an awareness that is not cosmic so much as local or regional. But the poem as a whole provides information and constitutes the record of a sort of ongoing environmental research or awareness, as well as an enactment of stewardship, addressed to the rest of the community.

Molesworth takes his cue about a new kind of lyric from Snyder himself, who concludes his 1975 talk on “The Politics of Ethnopoetics” with a grandly visionary proposal about the function of poetry in a future, more ecologically aware society:

We’re just starting, in the last ten years here, to begin to make songs that will speak for plants, mountains, animals and children. When you see your first deer of the day you sing your salute to the deer, or your first red-wing blackbird – I saw one this morning! Such poetries will be created by us as we reinhabit this land with people who know they belong to it; for whom “primitive” is not a word that means past, but *primary*, and *future*. They will be created as we learn to see, region by region, how we live specifically (plant life!) in each place. (*The Old Ways*, 42)

Such a passage suggests the extent to which poetry, for Snyder, is or should be embedded in the larger cultural life of the community, both reflecting and encouraging greater awareness of the community’s own embeddedness in the natural environment. It also suggests Snyder’s understanding of the primitive as a human norm that persists through and outside of history, in both the East and the West. The primitive is “primary” and “future,” what he sees as “old ways” that represent not only a legacy from the archaic past but an essential human knowledge, as well as the possibility of an authentic human and “posthumanist” renewal – posthumanist because, as he puts it, the “dialogue to open next would be among all beings, toward a rhetoric of ecological relationships” (PW, 68).

Underlying Snyder’s outlook is his sense that technological civilization

has brought about our alienation from the earth as a physical place which supports human life and culture. "In the old ways," he writes,

the flora and fauna and landforms are *part of the culture*. The world of culture and nature, which is actual, is almost a shadow world now, and the insubstantial world of political jurisdictions and rarefied economies is what passes for reality. We live in a backwards time. We can regain some small sense of that old membership by discovering the original lineaments of our land and steering – at least in the home territory and in the mind – by those rather than the borders of arbitrary nations, states, and counties. (PW, 37)

In his more recent writing, particularly the essays collected in *The Practice of the Wild* (1990), Snyder proposes, in effect, that we have arrived at a new stage in the evolution of consciousness, and that the humanist tradition, which he sees as "a story of writers and scholars who were deeply moved and transformed by their immersion in earlier histories and literatures," has itself been transformed by a growing appreciation of the primitive and of the extent to which "Wild nature is inextricably in the weave of self and culture." Such awareness, to be sure, brings with it a new responsibility, demanding that we pursue our humanity "with no sense of special privilege" (PW, 68) and as part of a community larger than the human and increasingly open to the "classes" "now entering history" but "which have so far been overlooked – the animals, rivers, rocks, and grasses" (PW, 41).

In response to this demand, the poet, in particular, must take on a new role. Without necessarily abandoning the conventionally romantic or nostalgic approach to nature as sublimity or scenic beauty, the poet must also view it, as Snyder's language suggests, in political and cultural terms, answering its need for representation. Indeed, to the extent that nature itself is a "culture" (NN, 381), often regarded as the opposite of civilization and, from a civilized perspective, "other-than-human" (PW, 9), traditional nature poetry must become a cross-cultural poetry, and the poet must be a translator, a mediator of nature's otherness. As Snyder puts it in *Turtle Island*, "I wish to bring a voice from the wilderness, my constituency,"²⁹ and, as he suggests in "The Politics of Ethnopoetics," this new role of the poet is in fact one of the "old ways," precisely one of the "primitive" functions of the poet or shaman that he would restore:

I like to think that the concern with the planet, with the integrity of the biosphere, is a long and deeply-rooted concern of the poet for this reason: the role of the singer was to sing the voice of corn, the voice of the Pleiades, the voice of bison, the voice of antelope. To contact in a very special way an "other" that was not within the human sphere; something that could not be learned by continually consulting other human teachers, but could only be learned by venturing outside the borders and going into your own mind-wilderness, unconscious wilderness. (*The Old Ways*, 36-7)

Snyder's notion here of "mind-wilderness" or "unconscious wilderness" recalls earlier moments in his work, such as the line "The mountains are your mind" in *Myths & Texts* (48), and the well-known passage in *Earth House Hold* in which he declares, "To transcend the ego is to go beyond society as well. 'Beyond' there lies, inwardly, the unconscious. Outwardly, the equivalent of the unconscious is the wilderness: both of these terms meet, one step even farther on, as *one*."³⁰ This identity of mind and wilderness, in turn, recalls a passage in "The American Scholar" in which Emerson records the scholar's experience of sudden accession to power through insight into the order of nature, the perception "that these [natural] objects are not chaotic, and are not foreign, but have a law which is also a law of the human mind":

He shall see that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal, and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," become at last one maxim. (SW, 226)

For Snyder too, "Nature is orderly. That which appears to be chaotic in nature is only a more complex kind of order" (PW, 93). Yet the mind is not automatically "a mirror of the wild and of nature . . . for civilization itself is ego gone to seed and institutionalized in the form of the State," with its tendency to impose its own order on things. For this very reason, a sense of the identity of mind and nature, of the extremes of inwardness and outwardness, or self and other, requires more than just a knowledge of the self for its attainment. What is also required is what Snyder calls a

“venturing outside the borders,” both inner and outer, or a transcendence of the socialized ego and of society as well, since it is precisely the “self-seeking human ego” (PW, 92), in all its forms, that clouds perception both of nature itself and of our relation to it.

In *The Practice of the Wild*, Snyder extends some of this thinking further, in a way that implicates language, as part of his general argument that culture is permeated by wild nature. Accordingly, in the essay “Tawny Grammar,” he recounts his conversation with the linguist Ron Scollon about the possibility that “language belongs to our biological nature and writing is just moose-tracks in the snow” (PW, 69). What follows is something of a linguistic tour de force, a playful set of variations on the theme of language considered from biological, evolutionary, and ecological perspectives, in which Scollon at least partially endorses Snyder’s view. Scollon begins by declaring that all languages “belong to the same species and can interbreed” – an idea which rules out Humboldt’s notion of linguistic “speciation” – and he goes on to say that “There is no sort of evolutionary improvement to be inferred from language history,” which rejects the idea of Darwinian competition among languages. Nevertheless, Scollon also points out that “changes in language, vowel shifts, consonant shifts, tendencies toward simpler or more complex grammars, do not seem to be in response to any practical needs,” implying, contra Jespersen, that languages follow developmental imperatives of their own.

Seizing upon this opportunity to press further for his own biological view, Snyder asks, “Would you agree that language is also wild?” “Sure,” replies Scollon. “But if language is just one species there must be some other creatures in your mind-wilderness it interacts with, because a wilderness is a system.” To which Snyder responds by appealing to another of his characteristic themes, the notion of a poetry that somehow brings nonverbal or preverbal experience into language: “I’d say it was the unconditioned mind-in-the-moment that eats, transforms, goes beyond, language. Art, or creative play, sometimes does this by going directly to the freshness and uniqueness of the moment, and to direct unmediated experience.”

Snyder’s position here, to be sure, is anti-Derridean, insofar as for Derrida there is nothing outside of language. But it is also similar to that of certain post-Freudian movements in psychology which are impatient with,

and distrustful of, language or talk as a means of gaining access to deep levels of emotional experience stored in the unconscious or even in the body. This is suggested clearly enough at the conclusion of the conversation with Scollon, when he poses what Snyder calls a “Whorfian challenge”: “Is there *any* experience whatsoever that is not mediated by language?” In reply Snyder bangs a heavy beer mug down on the table, “and half a dozen people jumped and looked at us” (PW, 70–1). The primary existence of language itself for Snyder, as he also puts it in this essay, “is in the event, the utterance. Language is not a carving, it’s a curl of breath, a breeze in the pines” (PW, 69).³¹ Thus when Snyder says of himself, in the Preface to *No Nature* (1992), that as a poet his “gesture has been with language,” the remark must be understood in the light of his conviction about the need to bring into language the possibility of seeing the world without it.

A CONSIDERATION of Snyder’s most recent work, especially the essays in *The Practice of the Wild*, brings Emerson back into the picture, in part because of Snyder’s rereading of Emerson and Thoreau during the 1980s.³² As I suggested earlier, much of Snyder’s work may be read as an updating and revision of Emerson. *The Practice of the Wild*, in particular, constitutes Snyder’s most serious and sustained effort in the field of what has come to be known as “wilderness philosophy.”³³ It is a scientifically and historically informed account of the ecological condition of our “backwards time.” But it can also be seen as, in effect, a reversal and displacement of Emerson’s sense of nature, a continuation of a critique of Emersonian transcendentalism that began, according to Max Oelschlaeger, in the work of Thoreau (*The Wilderness Condition*, 275–83).

Yet it is not just transcendentalism that is at stake here. One of the book’s opening gestures, in fact, is a revisionary response to Thoreau’s well-known statement “Give me a wildness no civilization can endure,” which Snyder quite literally reverses. Such a wildness as Thoreau asks for, he remarks, is “clearly not difficult to find. It is harder to imagine a civilization that wildness can endure,” and he goes on, “yet this is just what we must try to do. Wildness is not just the ‘preservation of the world,’ it is the world,” and “We need a civilization that can live fully and creatively together with wildness” (PW, 6). The pursuit of what Snyder calls a “civilization of wildness” (PW,

25), at a historical moment when the two seem increasingly and mutually opposed, thus becomes the book's leading concern.

Emerson's presence in *The Practice of the Wild* is harder to demonstrate, since Snyder never mentions him explicitly. Yet it seems clear that Snyder has him in mind, and not only in critical or revisionary ways, at several points in the course of the book's development, the most important of which are those passages in which Snyder addresses the issue of language. Although his view of language may owe more to Whorf or Chomsky than to Locke, Snyder echoes Emerson when he remarks that "Language is learned in the house and in the fields, not at school" (PW, 17). This recalls the passage in "The American Scholar" where Emerson declares that "Life is our dictionary" and that it "lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get tiles and cope-stones for the masonry of to-day. This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made" (SW, 232). Emerson's focus here, of course, is not the nature of language so much as the value of action or experience as a resource or teacher, a theme which Snyder also takes up (PW, 4, 95). Yet if language, for Emerson, is a means "by which to illustrate and embody our perceptions," and thus a tool for the mastery of experience, Snyder insists, more radically, on the autonomy and natural status of language, seeing it as "a mind-body system that coevolved with our needs and nerves" and that emerged "from our biological-social natural existence."

Although Emerson asserts, in *Nature*, that words are rooted in the "natural facts" of which they are "signs," these facts have no value until they are put to specifically human use, in discourse (SW, 197-8). For Snyder, on the other hand, the power of language "remains on the side of the wild"; it is something that we "cannot as individuals or even as a species take credit for":

It came from someplace else: from the way clouds divide and mingle (and the arms of energy that coil first back and then forward), from the way the many flowerlets of a composite blossom divide and redivide, from the gleaming calligraphy of the ancient riverbeds under present riverbeds of the Yukon River streaming out the Yukon flats, from the wind in the pine needles, from the chuckles of grouse in the ceanothus bushes. (PW, 17)

Snyder's strategy here, as he suggests in a 1989 interview, is to disregard the modern notion of language as a cultural phenomenon and to consider it instead as a "wild system" (CE, 258). Doing so, however, puts him at odds with Emerson, who tends to see nature precisely in cultural terms, seeing in it a whole typology or system of human uses and benefits that includes, apart from language itself, commodity, beauty, and discipline. This typology, moreover, is ultimately a hierarchy that leads outside of nature altogether, to idealism and spirit; and nature, to this extent, is always a means to a further (human) end.

Curiously, then, while Emerson and Snyder both attribute an ultimately natural origin to language, their thinking about it moves in opposite directions. It is Emerson, that is, who humanizes language and sees it as an instrument of culture, or a "vehicle of thought," and who is content to leave the process of its creation unexplored, "hidden from us in the remote time when language was framed" (SW, 197); whereas it is Snyder who primitivizes and virtually renaturalizes language, insisting that it belongs to biology (PW, 69) and that if "the social forces of any given time can attempt to manipulate and shape language usages for a while," eventually it returns to its own "inexplicable directions" (PW, 61) — a position precisely at odds with the thinking of such social linguists as Bréal and Jespersen. Snyder's divergence from Emerson here lies in the way language for him arises as a bodily, biological, precultural response to the external world, while for Emerson, who seems to focus on a later stage in the development of language, it is already an intellectual response to that world, a response in which the signs of natural facts are appropriated as metaphors for abstract or spiritual experience (SW, 197).

If we move from language to nature itself, we can see that there is even a sense in which Emerson could not fully appreciate the natural world, or at least not write about it, until it was ordered and rendered coherent by the cultured mind. As Julie Ellison reminds us, his first book originated not only in his transparent eyeball experience on the bare common but in his visits to the Musée Nationale d'Histoire Naturelle and the Jardin des Plantes during his sojourn in Paris in 1833 (*Emerson's Romantic Style*, 85). On these occasions, viewing the collections of butterflies, shells, birds, beasts, fish, insects, and snakes, Emerson found himself, as he puts it in his

journal, "impressed with the inexhaustible riches of nature." But he seems equally impressed by the naturalist's acts of organization and interpretation, when he writes, "Ah said I this is philanthropy, wisdom, taste – to form a Cabinet of natural history." Given his quest for an original relation to the universe, it is hard not to feel the irony of the situation. As he takes note of the many students "with grammar & note book & a class of boys with their tutor from some school," it becomes clear that Emerson is himself a student at the museum, to be tutored, and to learn the grammar of nature, although his response to the museum's collections, to be sure, is also an aesthetic one. "Some of the birds," he writes, "have a fabulous beauty," and he notices, significantly, that "One parrot of a fellow, called *Psittacus erythropterus* from New Holland, deserves as special mention as a picture of Raphael in a Gallery" (SW, 50). For Emerson, apparently, culture appropriates and subsumes nature, and this is particularly the case in *Nature* itself, a book, as Ellison points out, which is "really about" that appropriation (*Emerson's Romantic Style*, 89).

Snyder's tendency, on the other hand, as we have been observing, is the opposite one – to regard culture as a natural phenomenon – and this tendency becomes satiric when he parodies recent literary theory, naturalizing deconstruction as "decomposition criticism" and intertextuality as "intersexuality." The impulse behind Snyder's playfulness here is to return language and even intellect to their origins as manifestations of animal instincts and impersonal forces in nature that precede or parallel the human. Language, Snyder insists, is a self-sufficient, independent entity, not at all uniquely human, pursuing its own directions and development. Like Emerson, he finds language-like traces in all manner of natural phenomena that may be *read*. Hence the idea of literature or narrative in the animal world is not out of the question:

Narratives are one sort of trace that we leave in the world. All our literatures are leavings – of the same order as the myths of wilderness peoples, who leave behind only stories and a few stone tools. Other orders of beings have their own literatures. Narrative in the deer world is a track of scents that is passed on from deer to deer with an art of interpretation which is instinctive. A literature of bloodstains, a bit of piss, a whiff of estrus, a hit of rut, a scrape on a sapling, and long gone. (PW, 112)

To construct such parallels between nature and human culture is to argue that nature is itself a culture, characterized by processes that are versions of those in the human world, and Snyder carries the operation forward in another section of *The Practice of the Wild* called "Nature's Writing." Here natural history is conflated with humanistic scholarship, insofar as both are concerned with "the scrutiny of texts":

A text is information stored through time. The stratigraphy of rocks, layers of pollen in a swamp, the outward expanding circles in the trunk of a tree, can be seen as texts. The calligraphy of rivers winding back and forth over the land leaving layer upon layer of traces of previous riverbeds is text. The layers of history in language become a text of language itself. (PW, 66)

Largely because he sees it as inaccurate, a metaphor overly biased in favor of the human and the civilized, Snyder ultimately rejects what this passage seems to imply, the notion of nature as a book. "The world may be replete with signs," he writes, "but it's not a fixed text with archives of *variora*. The overattachment to the bookish model travels along with the assumption that nothing of much interest happened before the beginning of written history" (PW, 69). To this we may add, of course, as John Irwin points out (*American Hieroglyphics*, 25), that the Book of Nature belongs to a Renaissance tradition, underlain by a religious ideology, in which it is regarded as the double or the other of the Bible, both being the work of God. As such, it is hardly compatible with Snyder's demythologizing approach to nature. As a reader or translator of natural texts, moreover, his effort is to adhere to nature's own terms and meanings. Nevertheless, he can be seen to be participating here, in his own scientific or naturalistic way, in the tradition of natural signatures, according to which, as Foucault explains, the world "becomes like a vast open book; it bristles with written signs; every page is seen to be filled with strange figures that intertwine and in some places repeat themselves. All that remains is to decipher them" (*The Order of Things*, 27).

To a large extent, of course, Snyder is preceded here by Emerson, for whom nature, as we saw earlier, is also a producer of "texts" – or, in this case, of the distinctly elegiac histories and "memoranda" of things themselves:

Nature will be reported. All things are engaged in writing their history. The planet, the pebble, goes attended by its shadow. The rolling rock leaves its scratches on the mountain; the river its channel in the soil; the animal its bones in the stratum; the fern and leaf their modest epitaph in the coal. The falling drop makes its sculpture in the sand or the stone. Not a foot steps into the snow or along the ground, but prints, in characters more or less lasting, a map of its march. Every act of the man inscribes itself in the memories of his fellows and in his own manners and face. The air is full of sounds; the sky, of tokens; the ground is all memoranda and signatures, and every object covered over with hints which speak to the intelligent.³⁴

There is an important difference, however, between Snyder's proposition that natural phenomena "can be seen as texts" and Emerson's poetic vision of nature producing epitaphs, sculptures, characters, and maps in an account that includes human actions along with natural phenomena. In the chapter on language in *Nature*, Emerson declares that "All the facts in natural history taken by themselves have no value, but are barren like a single sex. But marry it to human history, and it is full of life" (SW, 198), and here that marriage takes place, not only in the sense that the figures in Emerson's landscape are both natural and human, but insofar as the natural ones, no less than the human, are engaged in humanly meaningful acts. Both writers are proposing that nature writes. But whereas Snyder does so with a certain modesty, and in a way that preserves the differences between human culture and nature as its own, parallel culture, Emerson attributes a human and cultural intelligibility to nature itself that seems, finally, to blur or break down the distinction between them.³⁵ This is to say that Emerson, as the author of a book entitled *Nature*, may not be unlike Said's orientalist, whose text "is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such *real thing* as 'the Orient.'" Said's point applies, as he puts it, to "any instance of at least written language," in which "there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a *re-presence*, or a representation" (*Orientalism*, 21). Thus, we may ask, to what extent does Emerson's *Nature*, in its intelligibility as a representation, exclude and displace the reality of what it represents?

Snyder himself, as the author of a book entitled *No Nature*, calls attention to this very issue, although without specific reference to Emerson, in the book's brief Preface, which is concerned with the meanings of nature and

with the meanings of the book's title. To most readers, at least initially, *No Nature* probably signals the alarming prospect of the disappearance or destruction of nature at a time of mounting ecological crisis, the notion of environmental apocalypse. But this possibility is not mentioned here. Instead, Snyder cites wild nature, the preoccupation of *The Practice of the Wild*, as equal in some ways ("probably equally goofy") to human society, and points out that nature "also means the physical universe, including the urban, industrial, and toxic." Finally he quotes some lines by Hakuin Zenji that are the source of the title and turns our attention to the nature of the self: "self-nature that is no nature/ . . . far beyond mere doctrine." But the important sentences come in between:

But we do not easily *know* nature, or even know ourselves. Whatever it actually is, it will not fulfill our conceptions or assumptions. It will dodge our expectations and theoretical models. There is no single or set "nature" either as "the natural world" or "the nature of things." The greatest respect we can pay to nature is not to trap it, but to acknowledge that it eludes us and that our own nature is also fluid, open, and conditional. (NN, v)

In the sense defined here, "No Nature" is a more accurate way of designating nature, an acknowledgment of its elusiveness and a sign of respect for its otherness. The implication is that any writing about or representation of nature should be accompanied by such an understanding, not unlike Derrida's strategy, derived from Heidegger, of writing under erasure, crossing out and yet retaining a word that is deemed both inaccurate and necessary. Nature for Snyder, clearly, persists as other, fundamentally unknowable, untranslatable, and "No Nature" is a use of language adopted to convey this realization. Accordingly, the passage also informs us that "No Nature" is a pun for "*know* nature," which is, paradoxically, both a Western imperative and precisely, the phrase also suggests, what we cannot do. What we know when we know nature, that is, is no nature.

Emerson becomes implicated in Snyder's thinking here, of course, when we recall that in "The American Scholar," as we saw earlier, "the ancient precept, 'Know thyself,' and the modern precept, 'Study nature,' become at last one maxim" (SW, 226). The title of Snyder's book, to this extent, is virtually an anti-Emersonian manifesto and a disruption of Emersonian humanism, in which the reality of "No Nature" tends to be displaced by

all manner of conceptions, assumptions, and theoretical models. What Snyder's title signals, by contrast, is that "we do not easily *know* nature, or even know ourselves," along with a refusal to displace, or to translate, without at least acknowledging that we are doing so.

Snyder provides his own sense of the elusiveness of nature, and demonstrates his effort not to trap it, in "Ripples on the Surface," the final poem in *No Nature*:

"Ripples on the surface of the water –
 were silver salmon passing under – different
 from the ripples caused by breezes"

A scudding plume on the wave –
 a humpback whale is
 breaking out in air up
 gulping herring
 – Nature not a book, but a *performance*, a
 high old culture

Ever-fresh events
 scraped out, rubbed out, and used, used, again –
 the braided channels of the rivers
 hidden under fields of grass –

The vast wild
 the house, alone.
 The little house in the wild,
 the wild in the house.
 Both forgotten.

No Nature

Both together, one big empty house.
 (NN, 381)

The poem begins with a display of nature's own energies, although, as the opening lines suggest, these can be easily misread and mistaken for each other. What Snyder sees in nature are "Ever-fresh events . . . used, used, again," or "ripples on the surface" brought about by changing causes and conditions, and it is in this sense that nature is a "*performance*," an idea that allows for continual change or variation and new possibility, as opposed to

a “book” regarded as a fixed text. But the poem’s most important images are those of the wild and the house at the end, where Snyder quite deliberately breaks down the distinction between inside and outside, nature and culture, and sees nature as the subsuming force. The opposites are the same: the house as enclosed space also contains the wild and gives way to its unbounded emptiness. Thus “Both together” make up “one big empty house” – the ultimate dwelling which includes the human enclosure.

In its style and structure, we may note here, the poem also exhibits Snyder’s continuing adherence to a Poundian, orientaling approach to composition, a use of features and devices, including an ideogrammatic format, which he has now fully assimilated into his own work. Organized paratactically, the poem consists of a series of discrete, impersonal sections, the first of which is an unidentified quotation. There are no transitions between sections, and there is hardly any predication. This is especially the case in the last section about the wild and the house, where we are given a series of noun phrases, things themselves, whose relations we must work out on our own.

The poem, in addition, is itself an example of an ever-fresh event, or perception, that is used and used again, inasmuch as the images of the house and the wild have been recycled from earlier appearances in other poems by Snyder. Each reappearance is a repetition with a difference, a revelation of something new in what is essentially the same complex of images. Culture, it seems, in the form of literary history, is a self-revising process, not unlike nature itself regarded as a performance of events continually made new. The earliest appearance of these images, in fact, is in one of the Han-shan translations (first published in 1958):

Cold Mountain is a house
 Without beams or walls.
 The six doors left and right are open
 The hall is blue sky.
 The rooms all vacant and vague
 The east wall beats on the west wall
 At the center nothing.

Borrowers don’t bother me
 In the cold I build a little fire

When I'm hungry I boil up some greens.
I've got no use for the kulak
With his big barn and pasture –
He just sets up a prison for himself.
Once in he can't get out.
Think it over –
You know it might happen to you.

(NN, 26–7)

The notion of Cold Mountain as a house is a liberating alternative to the imprisoning circumstances of the kulak, tied to his property and material possessions. In its largely social, or antisocial, concern for independence and self-sufficiency, a kind of reclusive, Thoreauvian thrust away from the world, the poem presents a weak version of what Snyder will do with the image of nature itself as a house in “Ripples on the Surface,” published more than three decades later. Here that image is developed in the paradoxical terms of a house without walls, an enclosure that is open, a natural vacancy regarded as a domestic space. In such a space, the speaker need never worry that “Once in he can't get out”: in and out are the same. But the image seems developed almost entirely for purposes of social criticism. The nature of nature itself is not an issue, although in a later reflection on the notion of “homelessness” in Buddhism and in classical Chinese poetry, Snyder reads “homeless” in Han-shan as “coming to mean ‘being at home in the whole universe,’” and relates this meaning to a more modern sense of the “wholeness of place,” or his own sense of the identity or unity of the house with the world around it (PW, 104).

Finally, Snyder also uses this imagery in the last stanza of “As for Poets” in *Turtle Island* (1974), a poem in which he playfully surveys a variety of poets and poetries, categorized according to their identification with mostly natural elements. Thus there are Earth Poets, Air Poets, Fire Poets, Water Poets, a Space Poet, and last of all the Mind Poet, who seems to be the most inclusive of these figures:

A Mind Poet
Stays in the house.
The house is empty
And it has no walls.

The poem
 Is seen from all sides,
 Everywhere,
 At once.
 (NN, 261)

As Snyder tells us in the Preface to his Han-shan translations, when Han-shan “talks about Cold Mountain he means himself, his home, his state of mind” (NN, 22). In this poem Snyder takes Han-shan’s essential situation on Cold Mountain and presents it in highly condensed and abstract terms. There seems to be little distinction among the poet, the poet’s location, and the poem. The poet “Stays in the house.” But “The house is empty/ And it has no walls.” In this house, or in the mind, the poet is in an enclosure that nevertheless provides access to what is infinitely open and unbounded. The house, like the mind, is a container, so to speak, of “Everywhere,” and what the poet thinks is also “seen from all sides,/Everywhere,/At once.” The concern in this poem is more with poetry and mind than with nature or “mind-wilderness,” but in reading it we find ourselves, nevertheless, at the intersection of inside and outside, that point where nature or wilderness and mind or unconscious meet as one, “one big empty house,” for which Snyder’s latest designation is “No Nature.”

IT WOULD BE both insufficient and misleading, though, to conclude on what seems to be a note of discord between Snyder and Emerson. Despite his dissent from certain Emersonian tendencies or positions, Snyder is an Emersonian poet. My argument in this book, after all, is that Emerson is the ultimate source, in American literary history, not only of the creative reading and orientalizing that characterize the work of Pound and Snyder but of the idea of a natural language for poetry that informs their writing as well as that of other poets. When Fenollosa looked at Chinese, for instance, what he saw, in his own act of creative reading, was Emerson’s language of nature. Moreover, as we have learned in recent years from such critics as Richard Poirier and Julie Ellison, to ascribe certain “positions” to Emerson can be a hazardously oversimplifying enterprise, and we must be prepared to find our assumptions about him undermined as we move through his work.

Emerson, that is to say, is one of the first American writers for whom writing under erasure is not simply a stylistic strategy but an overall mode of thinking, and Snyder's formulation of "No Nature" is thus not merely a critique of *Nature* or a departure from its premises but itself a deeply Emersonian gesture. As Poirier puts it, Emerson is "exemplary in his alertness to the sometimes unacceptable assumptions built into the vocabulary available to him, assumptions disclosed in the very effort at composition." Snyder may disagree with Emerson on occasion, but he is no less Emersonian for doing so. What counts as Emersonian here, after all, is not commitment to some specific idea or belief attributable to Emerson but adherence to a mode of thinking that Poirier defines in terms of its resistance to or "disruptive interrogations" of its own apparent tendencies. Emerson, he says, invites us "to think along with him in a manner always critical of the thoughts to which he seems to subscribe" (RWE, xi), and a good example in Snyder is precisely the way he refuses to endorse our assumption that "No Nature" means environmental apocalypse.

More important than Snyder's specific reversal of Emerson in the Preface to *No Nature*, then, is the act of reversal or contradiction itself, which is Emersonian and which takes place in a discursive or rhetorical field whose terms were anticipated or even established by Emerson to begin with. Snyder's reversal of Emerson, in fact, turns out to be a repetition of what can be seen as Emerson's self-reversal in the essay called "Nature" in *Essays: Second Series* (1844). Here we encounter an earlier version, as it were, of "No Nature," finding, as we saw in part near the end of Chapter 2, not only the elusiveness of nature, its refusal to be pinned down, which constitutes Snyder's notion, but the image of the house as itself a natural phenomenon, which recurs over the course of Snyder's career. "Nature who made the mason, made the house," writes Emerson, in a passage that largely concurs with Snyder's own sense of the ultimate identity of nature and the human:

We talk of deviations from natural life, as if artificial life were not also natural. The smoothest curled courtier in the boudoirs of a palace has an animal nature, rude and aboriginal as a white bear, omnipotent to its own ends, and is directly related, there amid essences and billets-doux, to Himmaleh mountain-chains, and the axis of the globe. If we consider how much we are nature's, we need

not be superstitious about towns, as if that terrific or benefic force did not find us there also, and fashion cities. (RWE, 241)

In his pursuit of nature in this essay, moreover, Emerson discovers, like Snyder, that it is not easily knowable or graspable, and he is forced to acknowledge that “there is throughout nature something mocking, something that leads us on and on, but arrives nowhere, keeps no faith with us. All promise outruns the performance. We live in a system of approximations. Every end is prospective of some other end, which is also temporary; a round and final success nowhere” (244). In opposition to what seem to be the categorical and definitional certainties of his first book, with its optimistic faith that “A life in harmony with nature . . . will purge the eyes to understand her text” (17), here Emerson finds that he cannot get “near enough to his object. The pine-tree, the river, the bank of flowers . . . does not seem to be nature. Nature is still elsewhere” (245). Or, as Snyder puts it, “Whatever [nature] actually is, it will not fulfill our conceptions or assumptions. It will dodge our expectations and theoretical models” – conclusions already nearly explicit in Emerson’s essay and acknowledged, perhaps, in the very fact that he felt obliged to produce another text called “Nature” (another “momentary stay against confusion,” as Poirier might have it)³⁶ only eight years after the first.

Notes

PREFACE

1. Hayden Carruth, "Of Distress Being Humiliated by the Classical Chinese Poets," in *Collected Shorter Poems, 1946-1991* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Copper Canyon Press, 1992), pp. 353-4.

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION: THE EUROPEAN HALLUCINATION

1. Jean Pierre Abel-Rémusat, *Essai sur la langue et la littérature chinoises* (Paris: Treuttel et Wurtz, 1811), pp. 11-12 (my translation). On "energy" in language, see Gerald Bruns, *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 42-67, and Hans Aarsleff's Introduction to *On Language* by Wilhelm von Humboldt, trans. Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), pp. liv-lv. Although Humboldt is often identified with the concept of linguistic energy, or *energeia*, Aarsleff points out that it had been "an integral part of the philosophy of language" since the appearance of Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* in 1746, and that it was especially prominent in the writings of Diderot, to whom Humboldt, as Aarsleff shows, was greatly indebted. For Condillac, interestingly, "the concentration and synthesis of the original language of action, 'in which a single sign often was the equivalent of an entire phrase,' " could only be recovered in a highly inflected language like Latin. To this extent, Abel-Rémusat's attribution of a very similar "energy" to the uninflected signs of Chinese seems to represent something of a shift or a new departure in the philosophy of language.
2. Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1964), p. 9. Hereafter references will be included in the text with the abbreviation CWC.
3. Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1970 [originally published in 1915]), p. 88.
4. See "A Retrospect," in *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 3.

5. George Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), p. 359.
6. Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1948), pp. 14-15.
7. Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1971), p. 199. Hereafter references will be included in the text with the abbreviation PE.
8. A. C. Graham calls the "art of translating Chinese poetry" a "by-product of the Imagist movement," implying that prior to the appearance of Pound's work the artistic merit of translations of Chinese poetry was negligible. See *Poems of the Late T'ang* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 13.
9. In *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), Lentricchia writes that the "mainstream of aesthetic modernism . . . has primarily characterized itself not by its misleading propaganda against science and philistinism that the aesthetic world is a thing wholly apart, but by its claim that the aesthetic world plumbs the nature of things; and the pivot of this claim is the prior ontological claim for a natural bond between signifier and signified, and between sign and thing. At key moments in Coleridge and Hegel on symbol, in Croce and Hulme on the expressive image, in the New Critics on metaphor, and in a myth critic like Philip Wheelwright on depth language, what is indicated is a theory that language in the aesthetic mode overcomes the arbitrariness of ordinary discourse by achieving ontological participation" (p. 119).
10. *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, pp. 57-8. For Hegel, on the other hand, German is the medium for philosophy par excellence by virtue of its wealth of "logical expressions," its "many prepositions and articles [which] denote relationships based on thought," and, in a move that seems thoroughly typical of nineteenth-century German thinking, he contrasts it with Chinese, which he describes as a language without inflection, with only a few prepositions and no articles, and therefore barely capable of articulating logical knowledge. See Zhang Longxi, "The *Tao* and the *Logos*: Notes on Derrida's Critique of Logocentrism," *Critical Inquiry*, 11 (1985), 385-6.
11. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 76-92. For an interesting argument against the Derridean view of Chinese writing as a development "outside of all logocentrism," see the article by Zhang Longxi cited in note 10 to this chapter.
12. See Ezra Pound, "Status Rerum," *Poetry*, 1 (1913), 125.
13. Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 25. Aarsleff goes on to point out that "something like [the Adamic] doctrine arose again in the early nineteenth century and then caused problems very similar to those the seventeenth century had faced in the relations between language and

- knowledge" (p. 26). Hereafter references will be included in the text with the abbreviated title *From Locke*.
14. Emerson's phrase occurs in the opening paragraph of *Nature* (1836). See *Selected Writings*, ed. William H. Gilman (New York: New American Library, 1965), p. 186. Hereafter references will be included in the text with the abbreviation SW. Stevens's poem, "Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself," is quoted from Wallace Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), pp. 387-8. Crane's statement is from "General Aims and Theories" (1937) in *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane*, ed. Brom Weber (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1966), p. 221.
 15. See Robert Essick, *William Blake and the Language of Adam* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), p. 55. In a long but still admirably succinct chapter of this study, Essick provides a historical account of what he calls the "motivated sign," which he defines broadly as "the word or gesture or image bearing more than an arbitrary relationship to its referent" (p. 28). This is essentially Aarsleff's Adamic doctrine or what I am referring to as the "language of nature," and Essick (pp. 28-103) usefully traces its history in Western thinking from the pre-Socratic philosophers to Blake and Humboldt.
 16. For a transcript of the conference, edited by Gregory Orr, see *Ironwood*, 9 (Spring 1981), 11-61.
 17. See Harold Bloom, *Figures of Capable Imagination* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976); Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature* (New York: Random House, 1987); Hyatt Waggoner, *American Poets: From the Puritans to the Present* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968); Albert Gelpi, *The Tenth Muse: The Psyche of the American Poet* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975); Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Continuity of American Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961); R. A. Yoder, *Emerson and the Orphic Poet in America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1978); and David Porter, *Emerson and Literary Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978). For a dissenting view of Emerson as the authorizing source of American poetry, see the introductory chapter in Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *American Poetry: The Rhetoric of Its Forms* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1987).
 18. The classic study is Arthur Christy's *The Orient in American Transcendentalism* (1932; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1963). See also Frederic Ives Carpenter, *Emerson and Asia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1930).
 19. For an account of Schlegel's place in the history of the development of the "new philology," see Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780-1860* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 154-9. Hereafter references will be included in the text with the abbreviated title *Study of Language*. See also Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, pp. 314-16, and Stephen Land, *From Signs to Propositions: The Concept of Form in Eighteenth-Century Semantic Theory* (Lon-

- don: Longman, 1974), pp. 105-9. Hereafter references to Land will be included in the text with the abbreviated title *From Signs*.
20. In *The Wisdom of Words: Language, Theology, and Literature in the New England Renaissance* (Middletown: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1981), Philip Gura emphasizes the importance to the development of the transcendentalist movement of James Marsh's edition of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* in 1829, a text that largely introduced contemporary Continental philosophy to New England. For a brief account of Coleridge's animus against Locke, see Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, pp. 125-6.
 21. See Lawrence W. Chisolm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 218-19.
 22. Reed's phrase appears in his oration "Genius," delivered at Harvard in 1821 and published in 1849. See Sampson Reed, *Observations on the Growth of the Mind, Including Genius* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), p. 60.
 23. Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska*, p. 92; Gary Snyder, *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), p. 67.
 24. Murray Cohen, *Sensible Words: Linguistic Practice in England, 1640-1785* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), p. xxiv. Hereafter references will be included in the text.
 25. See John Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 5-7.
 26. Juan Gonzales de Mendoza included Chinese characters in his *History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China*, which was translated into English in 1588. See William Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1951), p. 35. Hereafter references to Appleton will be included in the text.
 27. Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), in *Selected Writings of Francis Bacon*, ed. Hugh G. Dick (New York: Modern Library, 1955), p. 300.
 28. For a detailed account of the surge of linguistic speculation and activity during the latter half of the seventeenth century, see Cohen, *Sensible Words*, pp. 1-42. For a comparison between Wilkins and Leibniz, see Land, *From Signs to Propositions*, pp. 136-7.
 29. Matthew Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583-1610*, trans. Louis J. Gallagher (New York: Random House, 1953), pp. 27-8.
 30. Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Robert A. Greenberg (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 158.
 31. Quoted in Bruns, *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, p. 35.
 32. Quoted in Essick, *William Blake and the Language of Adam*, p. 42, n. 45.
 33. "Adam and Eve," Reed writes in "Genius," "knew no language but their garden. They had nothing to communicate by words" (*Observations on the Growth of the Mind, Including Genius*, p. 63). I shall discuss Reed more fully in Chapter 2.

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34. *Samuel Johnson: Prose and Poetry*, ed. Mona Wilson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1951), p. 312.
35. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 1, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1953), p. 132.
36. See Gerald Bruns's essay "Systems versus Tongues; or, the New Rhetoric versus the Old," in *Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Understanding in Literary History* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 88-107, especially p. 106.
37. But see *William Blake and the Language of Adam*, pp. 56-7, where Essick offers an important qualification of Land's argument about the changeover from signs to propositions, a qualification reflecting Essick's sense of "an uneasy mingling" in eighteenth-century linguistics of what he calls "mentalism" and "sensibilism," respectively the theory that "words refer to ideas or mental functions" and the competing theory that they refer to things, both of which appear in Locke. (See also pp. 43-5.) As Essick puts it, "the separation of mentalism and sensibilism into mutually exclusive doctrines is at best a useful simplification" (p. 57). This same "uneasy mingling," it seems to me, will reappear in Emerson's chapter on language in *Nature*.
38. For an account of British efforts to expand trade with China in the eighteenth century, culminating in the Macartney Embassy in 1792, see Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay*, pp. 157-73. In *The Study of Language in England*, Aarsleff comments on the connections between the Asiatic Society of Bengal and the East India Company, pointing out, for instance, that several of the society's members taught at the company's colleges, established "for the training of its civil servants." Aarsleff refers in addition to the "rich collection of manuscripts in the East India Company's library" in London, donated by one of the society's leading members, Henry Thomas Colebrooke (pp. 137-8 and 159). For a discussion of the arrival of English and American Protestant missionaries in China, beginning in 1807, see Raymond Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon: An Analysis of European Conceptions of Chinese Civilization* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 132-54. See also Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China* (Hong Kong: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 46-53.
39. Joshua Marshman, *Dissertation on the Characters and Sounds of the Chinese Language* (Serampore: Mission Press, 1809), p. iii.
40. In a footnote, Gerald Bruns reproduces one of Wilkins's "nonverbal but on that account precisely definable marks" (*Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, p. 41), the character in his system for the term "father." It requires a brief but still fairly dense paragraph of explanation. See p. 269, n. 65.
41. *On the Origin of Language*, trans. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode (New York: Ungar, 1966), p. 11.
42. Joshua Marshman, *Elements of Chinese Grammar* (Serampore: Mission Press, 1814), pp. 2-3. Like some of the missionaries to China, including Morrison

- and Legge, Marshman justifies his interest in Chinese by appealing to the needs of Britain's expanding imperial enterprise.
43. All the linguists whom Cohen discusses in his chapter covering the period from 1640 to 1700 "are interested in the correspondence between the elements of language and the order of things," though he offers some important distinctions among them. Wilkins and Cave Beck, for instance, in opposition to Comenius and in spite of their acceptance of the "arbitrariness of words and invented symbols," "work to make the presentation of linguistic elements correspond to the composition of the world. The antagonisms between these two tendencies [those of Comenius on the one hand and Wilkins and Beck on the other] have been noted by historians," Cohen writes, "but the linguists of the period share a taxonomic methodology and a theory of correspondence between linguistic features and the nature of things, whether 'nature' refers to the essence, the composition, or the order of things" (*Sensible Words*, p. 143, n. 14).
 44. T. E. Hulme, *Speculations*, ed. Herbert Read (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1924), p. 135. Hereafter references will be included in the text.
 45. Richard Trench, *On the Study of Words* (New York: Macmillan, 1892; originally published 1851), p. 6. T. E. Hulme's similar account of language appears in *Speculations*, pp. 151-2.
 46. See especially "Bréal vs. Schleicher: Reorientation in Linguistics during the Latter Half of the Nineteenth Century," in Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, pp. 293-334.
 47. Otto Jespersen, *Progress in Language* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1894), p. 83.
 48. Chisolm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture*, p. 168; Jespersen, *Progress in Language*, p. 24.
 49. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1970). Further references, as here, will give canto number and page number in the text.
 50. "Poetry and Imagination," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Richard Poirier (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), p. 442. Further references will be included in the text with the abbreviation RWE.
 51. Emerson is preceded in his thinking here by Sampson Reed, who writes, in his *Observations on the Growth of the Mind* (1826), that "Reason is beginning to learn the necessity of simply tracing the relations which exist between created things, and of not even touching what it examines, lest it disturb the arrangement in the cabinet of creation" (p. 82).
 52. I am referring here to Cohen's chapter titles. See also his section on Locke, in *Sensible Words*, pp. 38-42.
 53. Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1960), pp. 18, 20, 26. In *Critic as Scientist: The Modernist Poetics of Ezra Pound* (London: Methuen, 1981), Ian Bell argues not only that Pound's poetics is significantly informed by science but that his deliberate effort to create such a poetics is a characteristic

sign of his modernity. Most interesting, with respect to my remarks here, is Bell's suggestion that Pound's use and understanding of science are best accounted for in the context of a "transcendentalist ideology" which attests to a harmony between matter and spirit. See especially his third chapter, "Correspondences: Modes of Idealist Science," where Bell traces intriguing connections among Pound, Fenollosa, the Harvard biologist Louis Agassiz (with whom Pound begins the *ABC of Reading*), and Emerson, particularly the Emerson who visited the Jardin des Plantes in Paris in 1833 and felt "moved by strange sympathies" with all of biological life (p. 113). What Bell calls the lesson of "direct observation of the order of natural objects" at the Jardin des Plantes (p. 114) clearly continued to reverberate for Emerson in "Poetry and Imagination."

54. Gary Snyder, *The Back Country* (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 22.
55. This discussion of "Burning the Small Dead" is drawn from my article "Silence in Prosody: The Poem as Silent Form," *Ohio Review*, 26 (1981), 34-52 (reprinted in *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder*, ed. Patrick D. Murphy [Boston: Hall, 1990], pp. 105-22).
56. For an account of Emerson's reading in sinology, see Christy, *The Orient in American Transcendentalism*, pp. 317-21.
57. See Donald Murray, "Emerson's 'Language as Fossil Poetry': An Analogy from Chinese," *New England Quarterly*, 29 (1956), 204-15.

CHAPTER TWO. EMERSON AND THE LANGUAGE OF NATURE

1. Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature* (New York: Random House, 1987), p. 33. (Hereafter references will be included in the text with the abbreviation RL.) Similarly, Sheldon Liebman, in a useful survey of Emerson's evolving ideas about literary expression, remarks that "Language, rather than form, became for him the principal preoccupation in his writing." See "The Development of Emerson's Theory of Rhetoric, 1821-1836," *American Literature*, 41 (1969), 201.
2. *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. William H. Gilman et al., 16 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960-82), vol. 5, p. 353. Hereafter references will be included in the text with the abbreviation JMN.
3. "[A]s confident as Emerson was that words are things," Liebman writes, "he was never fully satisfied with the capacity of words to convey the fact, for the fact is, after all, a symbol in itself and therefore too complex and multidimensional to be caught in even a complex figure" ("The Development of Emerson's Theory of Rhetoric," 197).
4. See B. L. Packer, *Emerson's Fall* (New York: Continuum, 1982), and Julie Ellison, *Emerson's Romantic Style* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press,

- 1984). References to both of these books will hereafter be included in the text.
5. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. xi.
 6. See, for example, Gerald Brun's discussion of language as a substantial medium in *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, pp. 11-41.
 7. See Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, pp. 60-1. In *Inquiries into the Origin of Language* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), James Stam classifies Emerson with those romantic writers who "became absorbed in the movements of mystical illumination and esoteric wisdom," writers for whom "All was potential language in a world full of hieroglyphs" (pp. 204-7).
 8. Words, Locke argues, "came to be made use of by men as the signs of their ideas; not by any natural connexion that there is between particular articulate sounds and certain ideas, for then there would be but one language amongst all men; but by a voluntary imposition, whereby such a word is made arbitrarily the mark of such an idea." See *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (1894; rpt. New York: Dover, 1959), 3.2.1. Despite this conventionalism in Locke, he is also led by his sensationalist assumptions to "remark how great a dependence our words have on common sensible ideas," so that "if we could trace them to their sources, we should find, in all languages, the names which stand for things that fall not under our senses to have had their first rise from sensible ideas" (3.1.5). The result, as Michael West observes, is "a certain ambivalence" in Locke "about the relation between language and physical reality," an ambivalence, it seems to me, that reappears in *Nature*. See West's article "Thoreau and the Language Theories of the French Enlightenment," *ELH*, 51 (1984), 750 (and see note 37 in Chapter 1). West also reminds us here how potent an influence Locke was throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, especially in America, and that his *Essay* "long remained a key text in almost all college curricula." Emerson, in any case, also encountered a Lockean approach to language in another standard university text, Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783). See Liebman, "The Development of Emerson's Theory of Rhetoric," 178-9 and 182.
 9. For an account of Reed and his influence on Emerson, presented largely in theological and anti-Lockean terms, see Philip Gura, *The Wisdom of Words*, pp. 79-86. Also see *Emerson's Fall*, pp. 38-9, where Packer argues that Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondence appealed powerfully to Emerson because Lockean empiricism and Unitarian theology had left him starved for spiritual meaning. All quotations from Reed are from *Observations on the Growth of the Mind, Including Genius* (New York: Arno Press, 1972).
 10. Joel Porte offers a superb reading of the opening of the Divinity School Address in *Representative Man* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 117-20.

11. *Walt Whitman: The Complete Poems*, ed. Francis Murphy (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 252.
12. See Walt Whitman, *Daybooks and Notebooks*, ed. William White (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1978), vol. 3, p. 750.
13. For a brief account of Oegger, and for the text of Peabody's translation of *The True Messiah*, see Kenneth Walter Cameron, *Emerson the Essayist* (Raleigh: Thistle Press, 1945), vol. 1, pp. 295-302, and vol. 2, pp. 83-99. The reference here is to vol. 2, p. 87, and further references will be included in the text.
14. For Locke's account of the dependence of words, including names of concepts, on common sensible ideas, see note 8 to this chapter. On Vico, see Land, *From Signs to Propositions*, pp. 55-6. On James Harris, see Essick, *William Blake and the Language of Adam*, p. 57.
15. For an account of Stewart's critique of Tooke and of "etymological metaphysics," the assumption that the historical investigation of words can provide real insight into what Locke calls "the original of all our notions and knowledge," see Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England*, pp. 103-9, particularly p. 107. Much of Aarsleff's book is concerned with Horne Tooke; see especially pp. 46-53. Good, brief accounts of Tooke are available in Land, *From Signs to Propositions*, pp. 116-20, and Essick, *William Blake and the Language of Adam*, pp. 60-6, where Essick comments interestingly on the political implications not only of Tooke's work but of linguistic projects in general.
16. In *The Pound Era*, Hugh Kenner notes that Emerson borrowed Horne Tooke's *Diversions of Purley* from the Boston Library Society in 1829 (p. 105). In *Nature*, in a passage that reflects the influence of both Locke and Tooke, Emerson writes, "*Right* means *straight*; *wrong* means *twisted*. *Spirit* primarily means *wind*; *transgression*, the crossing of a *line*; *supercilious*, the *raising of the eyebrow*. We say the *heart* to express emotion, the *head* to denote thought; and *thought* and *emotion* are words borrowed from sensible things, and now appropriated to spiritual nature." And following upon this is a passage, reflecting Emerson's Swedenborgian reading, that illustrates Oegger's "natural emblems": "An enraged man is a lion, a cunning man is a fox, a firm man is a rock, a learned man is a torch. A lamb is innocence; a snake is subtle spite; flowers express to us the delicate affections," and so on (SW, 197). For Emerson's later criticism of Swedenborg, see the essay on the Swedish mystic in *Representative Men* (1850), where Emerson writes, "He fastens each natural object to a theologic notion; a horse signifies carnal understanding; a tree, perception; the moon, faith; a cat means this; an ostrich, that; an artichoke, this other; and poorly tethers every symbol to a several ecclesiastic sense. The slippery Proteus is not so easily caught . . . Nature avenges herself speedily on the hard pedantry that would chain her waves. She is no literalist . . . His theological bias thus fatally narrowed his interpretation of nature, and the dictionary of symbols is yet to be written. But the interpreter whom mankind must still expect will find no

- predecessor who has approached so near to the true problem" (*The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Joseph Slater and Douglas Emory Wilson, [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987], vol. 4, p. 68). It is hard to imagine, of course, that any "dictionary of symbols" could satisfy Emerson, since the interpretation of nature is an imaginative enterprise, and "the quality of the imagination is to flow, and not to freeze." The problem with Swedenborg, in the terms of "The Poet," is that he "nails a symbol to one sense, which was a true sense for a moment, but soon becomes old and false" (SW, 322).
17. John Irwin points out that Oegger's interpretive method for reading the Bible is generally based on Swedenborg's in *Arcana Coelestia* (1749-56), "a decipherment of Genesis and Exodus by means of the hieroglyphical key to the language of nature" (*American Hieroglyphics*, p. 26).
 18. In *From Signs to Propositions*, pp. 50-74, Land usefully surveys eighteenth-century speculation about the status of metaphor in language and about the extent to which passionate language is naturally figurative.
 19. Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), pp. 18, 138; also quoted by Land in *From Signs to Propositions*, p. 55.
 20. Ezra Pound, "Status Rerum," *Poetry*, 1 (1913), 125.
 21. See the Introductory Note in Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions, 1974). For some characteristic examples of the use of etymology, or what Michael Davidson calls "lexical archaeology," in Snyder's poems, see "Wave" in *Regarding Wave* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 3, and "The Blue Sky," a section of *Mountains & Rivers without End*, in *No Nature* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), pp. 76-80. Also see Davidson's suggestive article "'From the Latin *Speculum*': The Modern Poet as Philologist," in *Contemporary Literature*, 28 (1987), 187-205, where he points out that although Emerson was the first writer to think of the poet as a philological archaeologist, it was Pound who introduced lexical research into poetic texts. He argues in addition that lexical archaeology in more recent poetry not only serves to place the poem in history - by foregrounding the act of composition, which includes the poet's pursuit of linguistic origins - but also contradicts this historicizing gesture by appealing to an "ideal of origins" (196). The idealization of origins and of the primitive is featured most prominently in the "ethnopoetics" movement, an alliance of poets, translators, and anthropologists with which Snyder is associated, which was organized in the late 1960s largely by Jerome Rothenberg. The movement is extensively surveyed in *Symposium of the Whole: A Range of Discourse toward an Ethnopoetics*, ed. Jerome Rothenberg and Diane Rothenberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1983).
 22. Ian Bell makes this point in his shrewd essay "The Hard Currency of Words: Emerson's Fiscal Metaphor in *Nature*," where he argues for a historicist ap-

- proach to Emerson's text and shows the extent to which it is embedded in a specific historical situation, that of the political debates during the 1830s about hard and paper currency. See *ELH*, 52 (1985), 733-53. For a broader treatment of this topic, in the context of a consideration of American writers' reactions to the rapid growth of a market economy between 1830 and the Civil War, see Michael T. Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), especially the Introduction and the chapter on Emerson, pp. 1-17 and 18-34.
23. On this point, see David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991). Especially useful is Murray's second chapter, "Languages" (pp. 14-33), an analysis of the accounts, highly susceptible to deconstruction, of American Indian language by nineteenth-century observers, who often saw it, in the terms that Derrida uses in his reading of Rousseau, as "a language without discourse, a speech without sentence, without syntax, without parts, without grammar, a language of pure effusion, beyond the cry but short of the hinge that articulates, and at the same time disarticulates the immediate unity of meaning" (quoted by Murray, p. 16). I have also relied here on Murray's explication, particularly pertinent to Emerson, of Derrida's analogy between general and restricted economies and languages that take their meaning from the play of signifiers as opposed to languages whose signs are directly linked to things (p. 16).
24. This version appears in a lecture on taste in English literature, in *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1833-1836*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher and Robert E. Spiller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), vol. 1, p. 221; it is quoted by Liebman in "The Development of Emerson's Theory of Rhetoric," p. 201.
25. Emerson's language here recalls that of the Preface to the German edition of a hieroglyphic Bible, printed in 1842, which explains that the Bible originally arose in response to the human failure to comprehend the Book of Nature: "But, alas, finite natures did not comprehend the glorious book. The divine word, in which it was written, remained unintelligible for many a century in every land . . . The book was too great for finite spirits, the characters themselves prevented the characters from being read, and when they were seen, men, though endowed with the keenest intelligence, failed to interpret them for want of the necessary light." Quoted by Irwin from W. A. Clouston's *Hieroglyphic Bibles, Their Origin and History* (1894) in *American Hieroglyphics*, p. 28.
26. This phrase is from Coleridge's "Outline of the History of Logic" (1799-1803), quoted by Bruns in *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, p. 56.
27. Both this phrase and the term "desynonymizing" occur in Coleridge's *Philosophical Lectures*. See Bruns, *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, p. 57.

28. *On the Origin of Language*, trans. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode (New York: Ungar, 1966), p. 162; also quoted in Land, *From Signs to Propositions*, p. 71.
29. On Peirce, Jakobson, and iconicity in poetry, see Antony Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse* (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 103-7.
30. Michael Shapiro, *The Sense of Grammar: Language as Semeiotic* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1983), p. 4.
31. See Crane's "General Aims and Theories" (1937), in *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane*, ed. Brom Weber (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1966), p. 221. Also see my article "Frost and Modernism," in *American Literature*, 60 (1988), 1-16, where I argue that Frost's notion of "sentence-sounds" constitutes his own version of a modernist return to linguistic origins.
32. *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Joseph Slater and Douglas Emory Wilson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987), vol. 4, p. 151.
33. The relevant text here is Derrida's "Signature Event Context," in *Glyph*, 1 (1977), 172-97. See also Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse*, pp. 13-15.
34. Lawrence Buell, "Reading Emerson for the Structures: The Coherence of the Essays," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58 (1972), 58-69. In a related essay, Buell writes that Emerson, along with Whitman and Thoreau, did not try "to write poems but nature," and that all three were "convinced that the secret of design in art rested rather in the ability to perceive the natural order than in imposing an aesthetic order upon their perceptions." See "Transcendentalist Catalogue Rhetoric: Vision Versus Form," *American Literature*, 40 (1968), 325-39; rpt. in *Critical Essays on American Transcendentalism*, ed. Joel Myerson and Philip Gura (Boston: Hall, 1982), pp. 412-24; the quoted material is from p. 420.
35. Donald Wesling provides a valuable discussion of "form as proceeding" in romantic and postromantic lyricism in *The New Poetries: Poetic Form since Coleridge and Wordsworth* (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 52-69.
36. In *Emerson and Literary Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), David Porter forcefully argues that "Emerson's extensive remarks on poetry are fundamentally the poetics of his prose" (p. 172). See the chapter "Apologia for Prose," pp. 160-84.
37. Quoted by Buell in "Reading Emerson for the Structures," 68.
38. Gary Snyder, *Earth House Hold* (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 122.

CHAPTER THREE. CHARACTER ASSASSINATION:
REPRESENTING CHINESE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
LINGUISTICS

1. From J. G. Hamann, *Aesthetica in nuce*, quoted by Raymond Schwab in *The Oriental Renaissance*, p. 210 (see note 2 to this chapter). On Hamann's "inspired

- fantastications" about language, see George Steiner, *After Babel*, pp. 76-9. Also see Roger Langham Brown, *Wilhelm von Humboldt's Conception of Linguistic Relativity* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), pp. 56-65; and James Stam, *Inquiries into the Origin of Language*, pp. 131-64.
2. Schwab's great book, first published in 1950, has been translated, by Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking, as *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Re-discovery of India and the East, 1680-1880* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1984). See p. 6 for Schwab's initial remarks about the superficiality of Western knowledge of China. Hereafter references will be included in the text.
 3. Murray not only surveys the scholarly literature dealing with the connection between the Orient and American transcendentalism but provides what is clearly an exhaustive account of all the opportunities that ever came Emerson's way to pursue an interest in China and Chinese. "One wonders," he writes, "how deep [this interest] went, and whether Emerson's questing mind ever concerned itself with the language of China." But this is as far as he can go toward any definite connection between Chinese and Emerson's linguistic thinking. See "Emerson's 'Language as Fossil Poetry': An Analogy from Chinese" (cited at the end of Chapter 1, note 57).
 4. In *A Short History of Linguistics* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 113-14, R. H. Robins describes some of the seventeenth-century misunderstandings of Chinese that apparently persist even into our own time, the chief one being that Chinese writing is entirely picto- or ideographic.
 5. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 21. Hereafter references will be included in the text.
 6. But see William Cain's analysis of Said's *Orientalism* in *The Crisis of Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 209-15, where attention is called to the contradiction between Said's notion of a "real" Orient and his insistence, nonetheless, on the inevitability of falsifying representations.
 7. See Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, pp. 179-80, where Franz Bopp is recognized as the founder of "the new world of language," and as the discoverer of the idea that "language in its most ancient state was also language at its most complex." This idea in particular, Schwab points out, marks a change from the eighteenth-century assumption that "languages began in poverty and gradually grew richer" (p. 177), and led, regardless of what Bopp himself may have thought about it, to the sudden and immense prestige of Sanskrit.
 8. Robert Morrison, *View of China for Philological Purposes* (London, 1813), p. 1. Morrison went to China in 1807 and produced the first Chinese-English dictionary, published in Macao in six volumes between 1815 and 1823. Re-printed in 1865 (in Shanghai and London) and again in 1879 - and despite its incorporation of certain mistaken beliefs about Chinese - Morrison's dictionary was an important early tool for Western students of the language (including

- Fenollosa). For an account of its influence, see Scott Johnson, "The 'Tools' of the Ideogramic Method," *Paideuma*, 10 (1981), 525-32.
9. On Edgar Quinet, who first used the term "Oriental Renaissance" in his *Le Génie des religions* (1832), see Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 137-8; also see Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, p. 11. Said's concern is largely with the Semitic Near or Middle East.
 10. For Abel-Rémusat's remarks on the difficulty of Chinese, see his *Mélanges asiatiques* (Paris: Dondey-Dupré, 1826), p. 11. See Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, p. 65, for a brief consideration of the work of the early sinologist Etienne Fourmont; see also Arnold Rowbotham, "A Brief Account of the Early Development of Sinology," *Chinese Social and Political Science Review*, 7 (1923), 125-6.
 11. See the Prefatory Note to Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Lettre a M. Abel-Rémusat, sur la nature des formes grammaticales en général, et sur le génie de la langue chinoise en particulier* (Paris: Dondey-Dupré, 1827), p. v (my translation). Abel-Rémusat's quiet insistence here on the *apparent* poverty of Chinese may perhaps be taken as a small protest against the low esteem in which the language was held.
 12. *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*, in Frederick von Schlegel: *The Aesthetic and Miscellaneous Works*, trans. E. J. Millington (London: Bohn, 1860), p. 445. References hereafter will be included in the text.
 13. Hans Aarsleff provides a powerful account of this reorientation in his essay "Bréal vs. Schleicher," in *From Locke to Saussure*, pp. 293-334. While he notes that the effect of the attack on the German school was to do away with the racist elements inherent in a good deal of nineteenth-century philology (p. 307), it seems clear, nevertheless, that the attack was motivated by other considerations as well, often of a more purely linguistic and perhaps ideological cast. See also Aarsleff's "Bréal, 'la sémantique,' and Saussure," in the same volume, pp. 382-98.
 14. See Brown, *Wilhelm von Humboldt's Conception of Linguistic Relativity*, p. 52.
 15. David Porter points out the inconsistency in Emerson's language here - he calls it an "ambivalence" - in *Emerson and Literary Change*, pp. 180-1.
 16. See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 1, pp. 153-5 and 163-6.
 17. Steiner, *After Babel*, p. 82.
 18. See also *Wilhelm von Humboldt's Conception of Linguistic Relativity*, pp. 47-8, where Brown notes Humboldt's indebtedness to Schlegel's *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*.
 19. Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Linguistic Variability and Intellectual Development*, trans. George C. Buck and Frithjof A. Raven (Coral Gables: Univ. of Miami Press, 1971), p. 39. References hereafter will be included in the text with the abbreviation LV. In *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, pp. 63-7, Gerald

- Bruns takes Humboldt as a perfect representative of the “romantic” idea of language, an idea which includes the notion of the identity of word and thing. There may well be a difference, however, between Humboldt’s thinking in the 1812 text which Bruns uses to make this point and that in *Linguistic Variability*, which dates from the early 1830s. Indeed, Bruns’s concluding emphasis on the ultimately cultural identity of language for Humboldt seems to be at odds with any insistence on mythic or romantic unity between word and thing.
20. Virtually every writer on Humboldt takes note of Kant’s influence on his thinking. For a detailed discussion, see Roger Brown, *Wilhelm von Humboldt’s Conception of Linguistic Relativity*, pp. 85–95 and passim. Also see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 1, pp. 157–63. Hans Aarsleff, on the other hand, takes strenuous exception to the notion of Kant’s influence on Humboldt, declaring that “Not even by the wildest stretch of speculation can Humboldt’s linguistic thought be derived from Kant,” and proposes instead the primacy of Diderot for Humboldt’s thinking. See Aarsleff’s important Introduction to Wilhelm von Humboldt, *On Language*, trans. Peter Heath, p. lx. Wallace Stevens’s lines are from “The Idea of Order at Key West,” in *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, p. 98.
 21. According to Aarsleff, the two most fundamental principles of Humboldt’s thought are the subjectivity of language and its social nature. Thus we speak in order to share and in a sense confirm our understanding. See *From Locke to Saussure*, p. 343. Aarsleff also argues here, in ways consistent with his more recent emphasis on the importance of Diderot for Humboldt, that the latter’s linguistic thinking is thoroughly in accord with eighteenth-century language philosophy, especially that of Condillac and the French *idéologues*, a suggestion that calls, as he insists, for some revision of the intellectual history of romanticism.
 22. See Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, pp. 383, 343, and 346.
 23. In *After Babel*, Steiner provides a more literal version of Humboldt’s German title: “*On the Differentiation of the Structure of Human Language, and its Influence on the Spiritual Evolution of the Human Race*” (p. 81).
 24. As R. H. Robins points out, however, this three-part typology of Humboldt’s – closely related to similar ones devised by Schlegel’s brother, August Wilhelm, and by Franz Bopp – plays almost no role in *Linguistic Variability*, where the typology instead “is one of description and grading.” See *A Short History of Linguistics*, pp. 176–7. In fact, later in his discussion, Humboldt despairs of the very possibility “of formulating an exhaustive classification of languages,” given the “multiplicity of varying linguistic structures man is capable of creating” (LV, 215).
 25. In *A Short History of Linguistics*, Robins comments helpfully on this contradictory element in Humboldt’s thinking in the following terms: “Humboldt’s *innere Sprachform* is the semantic and grammatical structure of a language, em-

bodying elements, patterns and rules imposed on the raw material of speech. In part it is common to all men, being involved in man's intellectual equipment; but in part also the separate *Sprachform* of each language constitutes its formal identity and difference from all other languages" (p. 175). Robins goes on to suggest that Humboldt's *Sprachform* bears some similarity to Saussure's *langue*, understood as the internalized system of a language which makes possible any particular utterance within it (*parole*). In Steiner's account (*After Babel*, pp. 81-2, 85), language for Humboldt is situated "midway between . . . phenomenal reality . . . and the internalized structures of consciousness." It is simultaneously material and spiritual, belonging both to "man" and to separate groups or nations, and to this extent Humboldt's argument about it is both relativist and universalist in tendency.

26. The emphases in this quotation are not Humboldt's but his translators'.
27. See Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, pp. 346-7.
28. Elsewhere, in explaining "the interweaving of the intellect with language more precisely," Humboldt provides a similarly dualistic account of the nature of language, one that goes to the heart of his sense of the task of comparative philology. We must distinguish, he says, "the grammatical and lexical structure as the fixed and external attribute of language from its innate character which, similar to a soul, resides in language and produces the effect which every language produces peculiarly upon us as soon as we begin to master it. This does not mean in any way that this effect is foreign to the external structure. The individual life of a language extends through all its fibers and permeates all phonemic elements. Attention should merely be drawn to the fact that the external realm of morphology is not the only area which the comparative linguist needs to investigate. Furthermore, he must realize that there is something lofty and primitive in language beyond the limits of recognition which remains to be divined" (LV, 127). Just such a distinction, we might add, would form the basis, later on, for Schleicher's separation of linguistics and philology - though this was an outcome, apparently, which would not have pleased Humboldt.
29. I am quoting somewhat out of context here. In this entire passage (LV, 213-14), Humboldt is not so much praising Sanskrit as explaining just which criteria lead to the recognition of it as "the only principled type" of linguistic form. His point is that other criteria might yield a different result. What is clear, nevertheless, is his preference for Sanskrit, as well as for the criteria underlying that preference.
30. Robins remarks that, as one of the few early nineteenth-century linguists not focusing primarily on historical issues, Humboldt exercised a weaker influence than the quality of his work truly merited. In several important ways, though, he clearly belongs in the mainstream of German linguistics. See *A Short History of Linguistics*, pp. 174 and 200.

31. Steiner, *After Babel*, p. 84.
32. Humboldt here contrasts significantly with Schlegel, for whom the "division" of languages is a matter of virtual predestination and rigid finality.
33. Humboldt, *Lettre a M. Abel-Rémusat*, p. v (see note 11 to this chapter). Hereafter references will be included in the text with the abbreviation L.
34. See Humboldt, *Linguistic Variability and Intellectual Development*, p. 27. Also see Bruns, *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, pp. 64-5.
35. After this passage, Humboldt reminds Abel-Rémusat that "the points of view from which one can regard what one calls perfection and imperfection, superiority and inferiority, in a language are so different that if one does not say precisely what one means, these judgments are quite uncertain. You, sir, fix your attention in your researches principally on clarity and precision of expression; my reasoning here has led me to examine how far the distinction of grammatical categories has been adopted and perfected" (L, 50). By this reasoning, though, we may well wonder how Chinese can be the equal of the classical languages, since "the distinction of grammatical categories" is precisely what it has not adopted, let alone perfected.

CHAPTER FOUR. OTTO JESPERSEN AND CHINESE AS THE
FUTURE OF LANGUAGE

1. Jespersen, *Progress in Language*, p. 12. References hereafter will be included in the text with the abbreviation PL.
2. Quoted from Bréal's early essay "De la forme et de la fonction des mots" (1866) in Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, p. 297.
3. Michel Bréal, *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning*, trans. Nina Cust (1900; rpt. New York: Dover, 1964), pp. 2, 6-7.
4. Jespersen hardly mentions Schlegel, although Bréal takes both "Schlegel's mysticism" and "Schleicher's naturalism" (in Aarsleff's phrasing) as prime targets in his attack on German philology. See Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, pp. 382-6. Curiously, Humboldt escapes criticism, even though he holds some of the same positions for which Schlegel and Schleicher are taken to task. On the contrary, he comes in for high praise from both Jespersen and Bréal, perhaps because in his voluminous and many-sided work they were able to discover anticipations of their own sense of language. Jespersen, for instance, refers approvingly to Humboldt's idea "that language means speaking, and that speaking means action on the part of a human being to make himself understood by somebody else" (PL, 13). Aarsleff, as we have already seen, suggests that the whole question of Humboldt's intellectual background and indebtedness needs to be reexamined. After such a reexamination has taken place, he argues, it will not be Herder and romantic linguistics but the French *idéologues* with their own roots in eighteenth-century thought who will emerge

- as the more important influence. "The *idéologues* and Humboldt were revived together," Aarsleff writes, "because they stressed that the study of language must be man centered" (*From Locke to Saussure*, 350). Without disputing this idea, one may still argue that there are significant continuities between Humboldt's thinking and that of both Schlegel and Schleicher.
5. See Gerald Bruns's commentary on this concept in *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, pp. 56-8. Whereas "Coleridge knew," as Bruns points out, "that he had in this concept of 'desynonymizing' a firm way of distinguishing between poetic and philosophic language" (57), and whereas "it seems to have been Coleridge's impulse to regard poetry and philosophy as complementary rather than simply antithetical activities of discourse" (58), for Jespersen desynonymizing seems to be a more purely historical means of accounting for the development of language in terms of its communicative and expressive efficiency, so that what has been desynonymized is both antithetical and superior to what precedes it in the history of language. For Jespersen is not concerned with the language of poetry - except to the extent that, as he says near the end of his study, "Primitive man . . . on account of the nature of his language, was constantly reduced to using words and phrases figuratively: he was forced to express his thoughts in the language of poetry" (PL, 353). Such terms as "reduced" and "forced," to be sure, express little if any sense of romantic nostalgia for the primitive. Famous as Jespersen may be for his reiteration of the Viconian and romantic idea that "Men sang out their feelings long before they were able to speak their thoughts" (PL, 360), it is important to recognize that in his imagination this primitive singing was essentially "meaningless" (PL, 363-4).
 6. For Ernest Fenollosa, as we shall see, the order of subject-verb-object is also "natural," but in a sense very different from Jespersen's. In Fenollosa's thinking, the sentence, far from being a human construct and the product of human development, is instead a direct reflection of natural processes. "It was not we who made it," says Fenollosa. "The sentence form was forced upon primitive men by nature itself." See *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, p. 12.

CHAPTER FIVE. LANGUAGE IN ITS PRIMARY USE:
FENOLLOSA AND THE CHINESE CHARACTER

1. An early instance of a modernist slogan, similar to William Carlos Williams's "No ideas but in things" and Wallace Stevens's "Not ideas about the thing but the thing itself," as well as Pound's "Go in fear of abstractions," this phrase appears in the editorial Fenollosa wrote for the first issue of his journal *The Golden Age*, published in June, 1906. See Lawrence W. Chisolm's biography *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture*, p. 168.

2. The first phrase is quoted from James J. Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 3; the second is quoted from George A. Kennedy, "Fenollosa, Pound and the Chinese Character," in *Selected Works of George A. Kennedy*, ed. Tien-yi Li (New Haven: Far Eastern, 1964), p. 444; rpt. from *Yale Literary Magazine*, 126 (1958), 24-36. Kennedy's derisive essay, it may be worth pointing out, is not a complete hatchet job. Indeed, he finds some of Fenollosa's observations quite valuable, particularly the "brilliant" idea that "every written Chinese word is properly . . . an underlying word, and yet it is not abstract. It is not exclusive of parts of speech, but comprehensive; not something which is neither a noun, verb, nor adjective, but something which is all of them at once and at all times." For Kennedy, this is the beginning of "a true and fruitful line of thought," even the starting-point for "a new descriptive grammar of Chinese" (p. 447). For an interesting account of some of the factors that seem to have shaped Fenollosa's thinking about Chinese, see Scott Johnson's article "The 'Tools' of the Ideographic Method," cited in note 8 to Chapter 3.
3. Pound's own antagonism toward "professors" seems to derive, in large part, from his sense that the academic study of literature and history tends to cut itself off from the needs of real life. In a fine discussion of his attitudes toward the past, Sanford Schwartz calls attention both to Pound's indebtedness to nineteenth-century historicism and historical scholarship and to his awareness of their dangers as merely antiquarian pursuits. See *The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot, and Early Twentieth-Century Thought* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 133-48.
4. Chisolm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture*, p. 218.
5. T. E. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," in *Speculations*, ed. Herbert Read (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1924), p. 134. References hereafter will be included in the text with the abbreviation S. For a perceptive critique of Hulme's view of science and scientific discourse, see Ian Bell, *Critic as Scientist: The Modernist Poetics of Ezra Pound*, pp. 95-100.
6. See "The Poet" in *Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. William H. Gilman, p. 316.
7. Hulme, "Notes on Language and Style," in *Further Speculations*, ed. Sam Hynes (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1955), p. 81.
8. In a concise discussion of Hulme, Schwartz points out that his distinction between the visual language of poetry and the counter language of prose, along with his general notion of the metaphorical origins of language, derives most immediately from Nietzsche and Remy de Gourmont, and less so, contrary to the usual belief, from Bergson. See *The Matrix of Modernism*, pp. 52-60. We have already noted, of course, that the idea of the metaphorical origins of language has a much longer history and can be found in Vico, Locke, and other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theorists.

9. After *Nature*, where Emerson's thinking about language is selectively Lockean, Adamic, and Swedenborgian by turns, he seems to have adopted an outlook informed by more recent philological speculation, primarily by the comparative grammar of Bopp, Schlegel, and others that was itself influenced by new scientific methodologies, such as those in comparative anatomy. Generally speaking, this move may be defined as part of a larger shift from a mystical or theological view of the divine or natural origins of language to a more scientific view of language as a natural object, albeit one in which the question of its divine origins is by no means thereby rejected. Aarsleff points out that comparative anatomy, particularly in Georges Cuvier's definition and practice of it from 1795 on, "became the model science, and its principles were quickly adopted in language study and anthropology." Emerson's description of language as "fossil poetry," he adds, is a direct reflection of this influence. Behind what Aarsleff sees as the formation of an alliance between language and science at this time is an ideological reaction against eighteenth-century philosophy, a general fear of revolutionary thought, and a reemergence of various forms of orthodoxy, which in Cuvier's natural history meant an insistence on final causes and on the fixity of species "since the moment of Creation." In the study of language this return to orthodoxy brought with it a similar emphasis on "finalism" and a revival of a fixed, natural definition of language, as opposed to a social definition of it as a constantly changing structure subject to the conditions of its use. In this context, Emerson's move from Adamicism to natural science may not cover very much distance, though, characteristically, his thinking is eclectic. See Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, pp. 31-5; and on the general connection between language and natural science, specifically between comparative grammar and comparative anatomy, see Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. 250-302, and especially pp. 280-2.
10. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, ed. Geoffrey Clive (New York: New American Library, 1965), pp. 503-15. References hereafter will be included in the text with the abbreviation PN. For a pertinent discussion of this much-commented-on piece, see Schwartz, *The Matrix of Modernism*, pp. 75-9. Nietzsche's stance, according to Schwartz, is anti-Platonic in the sense that he opposes the establishment of hierarchies of experience in which abstract concepts are granted priority over the concrete particulars they subsume. But Nietzsche goes beyond opposition; he also aims to deconstruct the logic that supports such habits of thought. There is no such thing, he argues, as a "leaf." This is a concept which we arrive at by overlooking everything which differentiates one leaf from another in nature, a fiction which we use to organize experience, but which we then identify with experience itself, forgetting its fictive status. The danger here is not only that we mistake concepts for reality but that, through socialization, we tend to identify certain privileged concepts with reality exclusively, thus limiting or suppressing our ability to order ex-

perience in new ways. Schwartz also makes the useful point that Nietzsche's thinking about language and metaphor was not unique but very much a part of a developing modernist outlook in philosophy and poetics around the turn of the century.

11. "The 'Thing-in-itself' (it is just this which would be the pure ineffective truth) is also quite incomprehensible to the creator of language and not worth making any great endeavor to obtain. He designates only the relations of things to men and for their expression he calls to his help the most daring metaphors" (*The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 507).
12. See Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, p. 240.
13. Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, p. 31.
14. See Michel Foucault, "Language to Infinity," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 55-6. Foucault's distinction between ideogrammatic and phonetic writing systems provides the basis for a further distinction. The "presence of repeated speech in writing," he says, "undeniably gives to what we call a work of language an ontological status unknown in those cultures where the act of writing designates the thing itself, in its proper and visible body, stubbornly inaccessible to time" (p. 56). Yet according to the work of one recent writer, both of Foucault's distinctions here are fallacies, themselves part of Western mythology about Chinese. The linguist Jerry Norman puts the matter quite plainly: "The notion which is sometimes encountered that Chinese characters in some platonic fashion directly represent ideas rather than specific Chinese words is patently absurd, and leads to gross misunderstandings concerning both the Chinese script and the nature of writing in general. For this reason, the term ideograph, which has often been used to refer to Chinese characters, is best avoided. Chinese characters represent Chinese words, and an understanding of the semantic and phonological make-up of these words is essential to an understanding of how the Chinese writing system works" (Jerry Norman, *Chinese* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988], pp. 60-1).

For a somewhat different view of this issue, see Bernhard Karlgren, *Sound and Symbol in Chinese* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1923 [originally published in 1918]). Karlgren argues that whereas in alphabetical languages writing tends to alter over time in accord with changes in pronunciation, in Chinese "there has been no modification whatever. The composition of the character was fixed once and for all thousands of years ago, and there is no modification of the script corresponding to the extensive change of sound which most words have undergone" (pp. 57-8). In this sense, although Chinese characters represent Chinese words, there is no certain indication in the characters themselves of how they are to be pronounced.

15. On the point that Chinese lacks grammar, however, Norman is again very plain: "Some early Western students of Classical Chinese," he writes, "came

to the startling conclusion that Classical Chinese had no grammar." By "Classical Chinese" here, Norman means "the written form of Old Chinese," which was the language of the period extending from 770 B.C. to A.D. 220. He continues, "what most of these people seem to have meant was that Chinese had no morphology, and because of their Western classical education, they naturally equated grammar with the study of morphology. Nowadays no one would claim (seriously at least) that any stage of the Chinese language lacked grammar. By definition, any language is a structured symbolic system, which is no more than another way of saying that it is a grammatical system." Norman goes on to say that in the absence of morphology, "grammatical processes in Classical Chinese are almost totally syntactic," a point that some of the early Western students he might have in mind were equally aware of. But Norman also insists that the "classification of words into major paradigmatic classes plays an important role, since very often the interpretation of the structure of a string of words depends on their class membership." At the same time, he admits that classical Chinese "is extremely resistant to any formal word class analysis," and he seems to endorse Fenollosa's notion of the "alive and plastic" quality of Chinese when he refers to the "extraordinary freedom that almost any word enjoys to enter into what one might call atypical syntactic functions; nouns can function like verbs; verbs and adjectives, likewise, may be used like nouns or adverbs, depending on the syntactic and semantic context."

As his qualified thinking here suggests, in any case, a definitive conclusion about the grammatical nature of Chinese seems difficult to reach, and Norman himself finally arrives at a compromise between two positions, either one of which alone, he clearly feels, would be inadequate. "One is sometimes tempted to think," he remarks, "that Old Chinese lacked word classes altogether, and that words simply took their function from their position in the sentence, but this would be an extreme position to hold. A more measured approach would be to posit the existence of word classes, but to recognize that most words may function as other parts of speech depending on their place in the sentence" (*Chinese*, pp. 83-4; 87).

16. Norman confirms the assumption here about the primitivism of Chinese writing when he points out that in the postclassical period, written Chinese "began to take on an archaic aspect as the spoken language underwent a very different and by and large independent development. Thus Classical Chinese came to play a role in China analogous to that played by Latin in Western Europe; it became a purely written vehicle, used alongside related but historically more evolved spoken varieties of the same language" (*Chinese*, p. 83). Karlgren argues similarly in *Sound and Symbol in Chinese*. Addressing the problem of homophony in the spoken language, he describes the various means Chinese speech has adopted in its long evolution to avoid the difficulties, especially

acute in a monosyllabic language, of having to represent an ever-increasing number of meanings with a limited number of sounds. One such means, for instance, involves the coupling or combining of synonymous words that had formerly been used alone, a practice which greatly cuts down on the possibility of misunderstanding which meaning a speaker intends when she utters a single word that by itself may have a whole series of different and unrelated meanings. An example in Anglo-Chinese pidgin-English is the expression "look-see" for "see," which ensures that a listener will understand that "see" means "see" and not "sea." Interestingly, Karlgren points out that compound expressions of this kind "will gradually cease to be felt as compounds; they will be felt as simple words, and thus [contra Jespersen] the monosyllabic Chinese will develop into a polysyllabic language."

The more immediate point, however, concerns the differences between written and spoken Chinese. Obviously, forms that are homophonous in the spoken language will not necessarily be identical or even similar when they are written, and so, as Karlgren puts it, "while the spoken language had to reshape its word-material, the written language did not need to modify the old stock of simple words." The result, despite the fact that "there is any number of different colloquial idioms in China," is that "the whole population possesses in its old literary style a common book language, a written esperanto" (*Sound and Symbol in Chinese*, pp. 25-37). Karlgren's attitude toward literary Chinese, it should be clear, is an idealizing one. It emerges most fully when he contrasts Chinese writing with "our jejune and matter-of-fact script," which stands in relation to Chinese writing as "a useful but unbeautiful menial" stands in relation to "a fair and beloved lady."

In opposition to the nineteenth-century German philologists, Karlgren regards Chinese script as an organic language, "a genuine product of the creative power of the Chinese mind and not, like our writing, a loan from unrelated peoples, distant in time and space" (p. 67). This attitude, however, which leads him to argue that its script, its "written esperanto," is "indispensable" to the unity and preservation of Chinese culture, needs to be modified in the light of more recent linguistic history. Norman points out, for instance, that beginning in the 1920s, the old Chinese literary language was gradually replaced by the written vernacular, so that "at the present time, the old literary language is to all intents and purposes defunct."

Norman also observes, however, that the historical relations between literary and vernacular Chinese are not so simple as this statement suggests, and he offers an account of those relations that is fully alert to their complexities, noting, for example, that while vernacular forms of Chinese often invaded the literary language, it was equally the case that the influence moved in the other direction, so that elements of the literary language were also making inroads into the vernacular. From this standpoint, Karlgren's view of literary Chinese

- as a more or less static system of representation, one which not only enables speakers of widely different dialects to communicate with each other in writing but which also makes available to present-day readers "the literature of millenniums" (pp. 37-8), will not stand up to scrutiny. As Norman points out, while most writers of the postclassical era attempted to imitate the old literary language, "there were inevitably features of this language which were not fully understood and which consequently were not correctly emulated; moreover, changes in society necessitated the constant creation of new words to accommodate new concepts and changes in the environment and material culture. Thus the later literary language was by no means identical with the Classical language" (*Chinese*, pp. 108-10).
17. Andrew Welsh makes this point in his fine chapter on "Ideogram" in *Roots of Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), p. 102. Helpful discussions of Fenollosa may also be found in Schwartz, *The Matrix of Modernism*, pp. 86-91; Laszlo Géfin, *Ideogram: History of a Poetic Method* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1982), pp. 13-26; and more briefly in Michael André Bernstein, *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 37-8, 157-9, and *passim*.
 18. For Karlgren, on the other hand, Chinese is no exception to the rule that language, as he puts it, "is a gallery of faded metaphors." Although it is particularly rich in vivid figures of speech, Chinese, like any other language, has its share of dead ones. See *Sound and Symbol in Chinese*, p. 101.
 19. For Schwartz, the ideogram is also a sort of dualistic construct, one which enables us "to see simultaneously the unifying form and its constituent particulars," or an abstract concept and the concrete things of which it is composed (*The Matrix of Modernism*, p. 88). And in *The Tale of the Tribe*, Bernstein similarly suggests that ideograms "have a kind of double focus, pointing to both the world of human activity and to the unchanging patterns of natural energy." Their authority for Pound was ensured by their "mediation between the co-equal realms of nature and culture" (pp. 157-9).
 20. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Richard Poirier, p. 442.
 21. Welsh, *Roots of Lyric*, p. 126.
 22. In the article cited in note 8 to Chapter 3, Scott Johnson makes the useful point that while modern archaeology has discovered a more pedestrian meaning for the ideogram signifying "to have" ("meat on the fork"), thus proving Fenollosa wrong, his error is not only his, but a general Chinese error as well: "For hundreds of years scholars, poets and philosophers accepted and used the image of the hand and the moon in their analyses of this ideogram." What is interesting here is the suggestion that the idea of the visible etymology of ideograms is not simply Fenollosa's fantasy but reflects a Chinese tradition of creative analysis and interpretation of characters whose true etymological origins had been lost over thousands of years. See "The 'Tools' of the Ideographic

- Method," p. 530. Also, cf. Karlgren's complaints about the "far-fetched explanations" and "scholastic speculation" that sometimes mar Chinese philology (*Sound and Symbol in Chinese*, p. 66). Again, it would appear that Fenollosa's approach to Chinese is not without powerful (because native) precedent.
23. Quotations from *The Waste Land* are from T. S. Eliot, *Selected Poems* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), pp. 51, 62, 66-7, 73. Also see Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era*, pp. 109-10.
 24. Perry Meisel, *The Myth of the Modern* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1987), p. 90. It is uncertain whether Eliot himself ever read Fenollosa's essay - though, given Pound's energetic promotion of it, it seems likely that he did. In a letter of 1940 to Eliot, Pound mentions Fenollosa in a way that suggests Eliot's familiarity with his work. See *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), p. 336.
 25. It may be of interest to note here that Karlgren, whose admiration for Chinese is as great as Fenollosa's (though not uncritically so), is in essential agreement with Jespersen regarding the general evolution of language and the place of Chinese within that evolution. It is a fact, he writes, that, "though inflexional endings may seem too precious a possession for any language to get rid of them, the evolution of the European languages is steadily making for their entire abolition. What was formerly conveyed to the hearer by means of inflexions is coming more and more to be expressed in other ways. And in this the European languages are becoming more and more like Chinese, which has gone further in this respect than any of our Western languages" (*Sound and Symbol in Chinese*, p. 70). For both Jespersen and Karlgren, Chinese represents the future of language, whereas Fenollosa values it for precisely the opposite reason - because it represents linguistic beginnings, language in a pre-fallen state.
 26. See Section III of Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, in *Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1957), p. 62.
 27. See Meisel, *The Myth of the Modern*, pp. 7 and 78.
 28. I am paraphrasing a famous passage in Eliot's essay "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921). See *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), p. 247. For an elaborate and interesting account of Eliot's defensive rewriting and rerouting of literary history in this piece, see Meisel, *The Myth of the Modern*, pp. 75-80.
 29. Again, the most direct attempt to explain "the atmosphere in which Fenollosa worked," in connection with what looks like his "fundamental misperception of the nature of ideograms," is Johnson's "The 'Tools' of the Ideogrammic Method."
 30. Bernstein's instructive point about the "privileged, almost sacred, value" of the ideogram for Pound is relevant here: "By its joining of cosmic order and human observation, the ideogram, like a religious icon, can induce calmness

- and meditation. It forces the reader 'to stop and reflect,' but it also compels the poet to go slowly, to draw each character with a care and patience that make anger or bitterness impossible." See *The Tale of the Tribe*, pp. 157-8.
31. See *Sound and Symbol in Chinese*, p. 52, where Karlgren cites the same characters.

INTERCHAPTER. POUND, EMERSON, AND THE POETICS OF
CREATIVE READING

1. See "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris" in Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 21. References to this volume hereafter will be included in the text with the abbreviation SP.
2. *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, p. 409.
3. James Longenbach, *Modernist Poetics of History: Pound, Eliot, and the Sense of the Past* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), p. 32.
4. Longenbach, *Modernist Poetics of History*, pp. 96-103, and Schwartz, *The Matrix of Modernism*, pp. 141-8.
5. Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (London, Dent, 1910), p. v.
6. Hugh Kenner, "Ezra Pound," in *Voices & Visions: The Poet in America*, ed. Helen Vendler (New York: Random House, 1987), p. 207.
7. Michael Davidson, "'From the Latin Speculum': The Modern Poet as Philologist," p. 191.
8. Emerson's remark is quoted by Richard Poirier in *The Renewal of Literature*, p. 44.
9. For commentary on Pound's sources in Canto 23, see Carroll F. Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1980), pp. 92-5.
10. Guy Davenport, *Cities on Hills: A Study of I-XXX of Ezra Pound's Cantos* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), p. 219.
11. See Davenport, *Cities on Hills*, pp. 219-20.
12. John Peck, "Pound's Lexical Mythography," *Paideuma*, 1 (1972), 5-6.
13. Margaret Dickie, "The Cantos: Slow Reading," *ELH*, 51 (1984), 819.

CHAPTER SIX. MODERNIZING ORIENTALISM/ORIENTALIZING
MODERNISM: EZRA POUND, CHINESE TRANSLATION, AND
ENGLISH-AS-CHINESE

1. See Eliot's Introduction to Pound's *Selected Poems*, pp. 14-15 (cited in note 6 to Chapter 1).
2. A. C. Graham, *Poems of the Late T'ang*, p. 13.
3. Raymond Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon*, p. 105; see pp. 90-105.

4. Jonathan Spence, *Chinese Roundabout* (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 90. References hereafter will be included in the text.
5. David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts*, pp. 2-3.
6. Rolf J. Goebel, "Constructing Chinese History: Kafka's and Dittmar's Orientalist Discourse," *PMLA*, 108 (1993), 60.
7. Roy Teele, *Through a Glass Darkly: A Study of English Translations of Chinese Poetry* (Ann Arbor, n.p., 1949), p. 44. References hereafter will be included in the text.
8. See William Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay*, p. 50.
9. See Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, p. 41; also see Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay*, pp. 37-52.
10. Robert K. Douglas, *The Language and Literature of China* (London: Trubner, 1875), p. 2.
11. See, for instance, Appleton on Sir William Temple and Matthew Tindal, in *A Cycle of Cathay*, pp. 42-8 and 49-51.
12. Quoted in Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon*, p. 57.
13. Herder, quoted in Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992), p. 46.
14. The circumstances surrounding Jones's translations from Chinese are not entirely clear: see *A Cycle of Cathay*, pp. 136 and 154, where Appleton points out that Jones's sinology was weak in comparison with his knowledge of other oriental languages, and that his plan to produce a complete translation of the *Shih Ching*, perhaps with a Chinese collaborator, never materialized.
15. See Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon*, p. 118; also see Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay*, pp. 82-7, for an account of the fortunes of this play in England.
16. Kenner, *The Pound Era*, p. 198.
17. Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay*, pp. 140-2.
18. Wai-lim Yip, *Ezra Pound's Cathay* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 11-12.
19. Dawson gives a good account of these reasons in *The Chinese Chameleon*, pp. 121-4.
20. Quoted by Yip in *Ezra Pound's Cathay*, p. 10.
21. Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 134-6; see also the title essay in Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 16-39.
22. Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, p. 47.
23. On the mottled fortunes of the Bible in China, see Jerome Ch'en, *China and the West: Society and Culture, 1815-1937* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1979), p. 103.

24. Lindsay Ride, "Biographical Note," in James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Press, 1960), p. 10.
25. Dawson points out that in the early twentieth century the United States "was able to wallow in the sentiment of a completely disinterested affection" for China because of an outlook that was "self-consciously anti-colonial." See *The Chinese Chameleon*, p. 144. At the same time, however, there was very little affection for those Chinese who had emigrated to the United States during this period, a fact that was clear in the formulation of policy, particularly of immigration law, and in the rise of racist attitudes among European immigrants, who were led to see their Chinese counterparts as a threat to their own social and economic position. See Spence, *Chinese Roundabout*, pp. 85-6.
26. Saint Jerome, quoted in Hugo Friedrich, "On the Art of Translation," in *Theories of Translation*, ed. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 12-13.
27. See Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, p. 52, and Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon*, pp. 138-40.
28. See, for instance, David Lattimore, "Discovering Cathay," *Parnassus*, 1 (1973), 5-26.
29. This distinction between the scholarly and the poetic seems related in several respects to a more general problem in translation, identified by Wilhelm von Humboldt as an inevitable conflict that no translator can hope to avoid: "he will cleave with too much accuracy either to the original, at the expense of his people's language and taste, or to the originality of his people, at the expense of the work to be translated" - quoted by Antoine Berman in *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany*, trans. S. Heyvaert (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1992), p. ix.
30. See Kenner's Introduction (1953) to Pound's *Translations* (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 12. References hereafter will be included in the text.
31. Pound is linked to Cranmer-Byng not only through their adoption of a similar mode of translation but through their common acquaintance Allen Upward, author of *The New Word* (1907) and *The Divine Mystery* (1913) - both of which Pound reviewed enthusiastically (see SP, 403-12) - as well as of a sequence of poems "in the Chinese manner" for whose publication in *Poetry* (September 1913) Pound arranged. In a letter to Harriet Monroe (September 23, 1913, in *Letters*, pp. 22-3), Pound writes that Upward's sequence "Scented Leaves - from a Chinese Jar" is neither translation nor paraphrase but that Upward "made it up out of his head, using a certain amount of Chinese reminiscence." This is to stray even further from Chinese than Cranmer-Byng's translations of translations, and Pound seems surprised and even somewhat alarmed by Upward's revelation, pointing out to Monroe that some notice of the purely invented nature of Upward's "Chinese" poems should be given in a future issue of *Poetry*. It was Upward who first directed Pound to Confucius, as well

- as to Giles's *History of Chinese Literature*, and it was also Upward who, with his partner Cranmer-Byng, launched a series of books under the general title "Wisdom of the East." The series includes several volumes of Cranmer-Byng's Chinese "translations" and is dedicated to "good-will and understanding between East and West, the old world of Thought, and the new of Action," as he puts it in the "Editorial Note" that accompanies each volume in the series. See, for instance, *A Lute of Jade* (London: Murray, 1936). On Upward, see Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), p. 218, and for a detailed account of the influence on Pound of Upward's primitivism and etymological thinking, see Ronald Bush, *The Genesis of Ezra Pound's Cantos* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 91-102. On Upward and Cranmer-Byng, see J. J. Wilhelm, *Ezra Pound in London and Paris, 1908-1925* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 120-2.
32. See the transcript of the conference on "Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination," ed. Gregory Orr, in *Ironwood*, 9 (1981), 11-12.
 33. See Howells's Preface to Stuart Merrill, *Pastels in Prose* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890), p. vii.
 34. Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign*, p. 4.
 35. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 80-1.
 36. Donald Davie, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 5.
 37. See Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, pp. 20-38.
 38. See Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, pp. 41-2.
 39. Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska*, p. 83.
 40. Giles, *History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Appleton, 1923), p. 100.
 41. Hugh Witemeyer, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound: Forms and Renewal, 1908-1920* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1969), p. 142.
 42. See Graham, *Poems of the Late T'ang*, p. 34.
 43. See Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, pp. 70-1.
 44. See Yip, *Ezra Pound's Cathay*, pp. 90-2.
 45. On this point see John Gage, *In the Arresting Eye: The Rhetoric of Imagism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 68-9.
 46. Ezra Pound, *Personae* (1926) (New York: New Directions, 1950), p. 108.
 47. See Michael Alexander, *The Achievement of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1979), pp. 93-4.
 48. See Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, pp. 40-1.
 49. Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska*, p. 83. What Pound means by "image," of course, is not simply the content of this line but the whole poem, which consists of the relation between this line and the rest of the text, or the "superposition" of the one part upon the other.

50. See Gage, *In the Arresting Eye: The Rhetoric of Imagism*, p. 69.
51. See Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, p. 19; note too that Pound uses a name for China that is historically closer than "China" itself to the era of the poems in the volume.
52. See Davie, *Poet as Sculptor*, p. 43.
53. L. S. Dembo, *The Confucian Odes of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1963), p. 89.
54. See Ronald Bush, "Pound and Li Po: What Becomes a Man," in *Ezra Pound among the Poets*, ed. George Bornstein (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 40.
55. See *Ezra Pound among the Poets*, pp. 38-40, and also Alexander, *The Achievement of Ezra Pound*, pp. 101-2.
56. *World outside the Window: The Selected Essays of Kenneth Rexroth*, ed. Bradford Morrow (New York: New Directions, 1987), p. 187.
57. Rexroth, *World outside the Window*, p. 268. Although Rexroth uses these terms with reference to Japan, they seem to be particularly applicable to this poem.
58. Pound's note in *Translations*, p. 194.
59. Arthur Cooper, *Li Po and Tu Fu* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 127.
60. Schwartz quoting Wilhelm Dilthey, *Descriptive Psychology and Historical Understanding*, trans. Richard M. Zaner and Kenneth L. Heiges (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977), p. 143, in *The Matrix of Modernism*, p. 140.
61. This is Raymond Dawson's description of Confucianism, given without reference to Pound. See *The Chinese Chameleon*, p. 146. See also Pound's "Immediate Need of Confucius," in *Selected Prose*, pp. 75-80.
62. Pound's source is the *Histoire Générale de la Chine*, an eighteenth-century French translation by Père de Moyriac de Mailla of the twelfth-century work *Thung Chien Kang Mu* by Chu Hsi. See Kenner, *The Pound Era*, pp. 230-1 and 454.
63. Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), p. 108.
64. This point needs some qualification because Pound, in the Chinese history cantos, is still pursuing a kind of Sino-English and glossing his ideograms.
65. Bernstein, *The Tale of the Tribe*, pp. 157-8.
66. David Simpson, "Pound's Wordsworth; or Growth of a Poet's Mind," *ELH*, 45 (1978), 668.
67. For useful background information on Canto 49, see "Appendix B" in Daniel Pearlman, *The Barb of Time* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 304-11.
68. See Sanehide Kodama, "The Eight Scenes of Sho-Sho," *Paideuma*, 6 (1977), 131-45.
69. Snyder will also adopt Pound's tactic of recovering and reevaluating the "prim-

- itive,” the apparently antiquated, as an alternative to postindustrial values and practices.
70. “Stillness,” it should be noted, is not necessarily an “oriental” concept for Pound. It occurs elsewhere in the poem (Cantos 2, 17, 36) in nonoriental contexts. See Pearlman, *The Barb of Time*, p. 207.
 71. Kodama, “The Eight Scenes of Sho-Sho,” p. 139.
 72. See Pearlman, *The Barb of Time*, p. 195, and Tim Dean, “How Long Is the Pound Era?” in *Paideuma*, 21 (1992), 45–63.
 73. Kodama, “The Eight Scenes of Sho-Sho,” pp. 144.
 74. In *Sailing after Knowledge: The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), George Dekker sees the poem as clearly implying that “imperial power may mean a good deal to us if it should happen to want fuel for its engines” (p. 180).
 75. Gary Snyder, “Statement on Poetics,” in *The New American Poetry*, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 421.
 76. Blasing, *American Poetry: The Rhetoric of Its Forms*, p. 143.
 77. Laszlo Géfin points out that Pound’s successive concepts of the image, the vortex, and the ideogram are all versions of a technique based on juxtaposition. See Géfin, *Ideogram: History of a Poetic Method*, p. xii; also see Blasing, *American Poetry: The Rhetoric of Its Forms*, p. 147. In his discussion of “The Poundian Ideogram” (pp. 27–46), Géfin offers a useful account of the different types of ideogrammatic arrangement employed by Pound in *The Cantos* and elsewhere in his work.
 78. See the note appended to Pound’s 1914 essay on Vorticism (in *Gaudier-Brzeska*, p. 94), where he writes, clearly with his own long poem in mind, “I am often asked whether there can be a long imagiste or vorticist poem.”
 79. Blasing, *American Poetry: The Rhetoric of Its Forms*, p. 146. Blasing also notes here that Pound’s employment of such a language has strongly affected the work of Gary Snyder.
 80. Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, p. 240.
 81. Albert Gelpi, *A Coherent Splendor: The American Poetic Renaissance, 1910–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), p. 192. In his valuable discussion of Pound, Gelpi presents him as not only linked to Emerson through Fenollosa but as a figure whose “Modernism is in part modified by, in part undermined by, his deep-seated Romanticism” – a romanticism, as Gelpi puts it, which “antedated his Modernism and persisted through it” (p. 182). For Blasing, however, it is not Emerson but Whitman who is Pound’s most authentic precursor. See *American Poetry: The Rhetoric of Its Forms*, p. 129 and pp. 134ff. for Blasing’s critique of the nearly universal assumption that Emerson and Whitman themselves are strongly linked.
 82. Guy Davenport points this out in *Cities on Hills*, p. 119.
 83. My observations in these two paragraphs are largely indebted to Donald Da-

- vie's classic account of Pound's prosody in *Cathay*. See *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor*, pp. 41-6.
84. I borrow this useful phrase from Gelpi, although I am using it in a sense different from his. For Gelpi, there are two principles of structure in *The Cantos*, indicated respectively by the "So that" at the end of Canto 1 and the "And" at the end of Canto 2. As he explains it, these phrases "are clues to the different but complementary kinds of open-endedness that proceed from Pound's attempt to reconcile Modernist space with Romantic time. Where the 'And . . .' of Canto 2 suggests the paratactic and metonymic accretion of ideogramic elements," and thus leads to a sense of the poem as "collage-like" and discontinuous in its organization, "the 'So that:' of Canto 1 points to the other principle of structure - namely, the consequential continuity of the parts which gives *The Cantos* a coherence more akin to the direction and temporal development of a psychological narrative" (*A Coherent Splendor*, p. 195).
 85. Davenport, *Cities on Hills*, p. 59. All the quotations from Davenport in this paragraph are from pp. 59-61.
 86. On Canto 4, see Davenport, *Cities on Hills*, pp. 127-36; Schwartz, *The Matrix of Modernism*, p. 91; and Gelpi, *A Coherent Splendor*, p. 197.
 87. G  fin, *Ideogram: History of a Poetic Method*, pp. 37-8.
 88. See *Ideogram*, p. 39, for G  fin's account of Canto 4 as a "cumulative ideogram," one based on an accumulation of events and experiences that are identical in structure.

CHAPTER SEVEN. SEEING THE WORLD WITHOUT LANGUAGE:
GARY SNYDER AND CHINESE AS AMERICAN SPEECH

1. Gary Snyder, "Afterword," in *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), p. 65. References hereafter will be included in the text with the abbreviation RCM.
2. Gary Snyder, *No Nature: New and Selected Poems* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), p. 201. Hereafter references to this book, which contains a substantial selection from almost all of Snyder's earlier volumes of verse, will be included in the text with the abbreviation NN.
3. Gary Snyder, "The Etiquette of Freedom," in *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), pp. 10, 18. References hereafter will be included in the text with the abbreviation PW.
4. Charles Molesworth, in his comments on this poem, is reminded of the haiku and the koan. See *Gary Snyder's Vision: Poetry and the Real Work* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1983), p. 84.
5. Snyder quoted in Ekbert Faas, *Towards a New American Poetics: Essays & Interviews* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1978), p. 129.
6. But see Zhang Longxi's essay "The Tao and the Logos: Notes on Derrida's

- Critique of Logocentrism," in which he demonstrates that, contra Pound, Fenollosa, and Derrida, classical Chinese writing is no more immune to the woes of logocentrism than any Western language. The essay is in *Critical Inquiry*, 11 (1985), 385-98.
7. Let us note, as Snyder himself does, that the short, intense, "silent," oriental-ized poem is only one among several kinds of poetry that he pursues. "There is a place," he writes, "for passion and gaudiness and promiscuous language. The plain poems that I launched in this book [*Riprap*] run the risk of invisibility. But the direction they point is perhaps my favorite, and what a marvelous risk!" (RCM, 67).
 8. The structure of the poem is essentially consistent with Pound's account of "the ideogrammic method" in the *ABC of Reading*, pp. 19-23 - a method, as Laszlo Géfin neatly puts it, involving "the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated particulars capable of suggesting ideas and concepts through their relation." See Géfin, *Ideogram*, p. 27.
 9. Gary Snyder, *The Real Work: Interviews & Talks, 1964-1979*, ed. Wm. Scott McLean (New York: New Directions, 1980), p. 31.
 10. Zhang Longxi, "The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West," *Critical Inquiry*, 15 (1988), 130-1. The text to which Zhang refers, in the passages from his essay that I quote, is Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, ed. and trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).
 11. In addition to Géfin's *Ideogram*, see Christopher Beach, *ABC of Influence: Ezra Pound and the Remaking of American Poetic Tradition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1992).
 12. In his essay "North Beach," in *The Old Ways* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1977), p. 45, Snyder seems to have this poem in mind when he writes, "In the spiritual and political loneliness of America of the fifties you'd hitch a thousand miles to meet a friend." The remark helps to contextualize the poem and to show that it is a response, albeit an oblique one, to contemporary culture.
 13. See Altieri's article on "Gary Snyder's *Turtle Island*" in *Boundary 2*, 4 (1976), 761-77, and Molesworth's *Gary Snyder's Vision*, p. 64. For an interesting account of Snyder as translator that argues against his own insistence on the literalism of his versions of Han-shan, emphasizing instead that Snyder is drawn to Han-shan to begin with because of his own strategies and thematic interests as a poet, see Lee Bartlett, *The Sun Is But a Morning Star: Studies in West Coast Poetry and Poetics* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1989), pp. 77-92.
 14. See Burton Watson's Introduction to his own translation, *Cold Mountain: 100 Poems by the T'ang Poet Han-shan* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970 [originally published 1962]), p. 11.

15. As early as 1916 Waley, perhaps under Pound's influence, experimented with, but then decisively retreated from, a radically direct and literal style of translation in some of his earliest attempts. See Yip, *Ezra Pound's Cathay*, pp. 26-7.
16. Arthur Waley, "27 Poems by Han-shan," *Encounter*, 3 (September 1954), 6.
17. In "Gary Snyder, Han Shan, and Jack Kerouac," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 11 (1984), 185-93, Jacob Leed provides an interesting glimpse of Snyder's working methods as a translator derived from his examination of the original manuscripts of Snyder's *Cold Mountain Poems*, located at Kent State University Library. This material, which suggests the seriousness and thoroughness with which Snyder approached the project, includes a typescript of Waley's "27 Poems by Han-shan"; notes on suggestions for Snyder's translations made by the scholar Achilles Fang, to whom Snyder had sent the manuscript; the Chinese text of each poem to be translated; and several English versions of each poem, progressing from a five-word version, in which Snyder provides one English word for each Chinese character in Han-shan's five-character lines, to a first, second, and final revision of each translation.
18. Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-century* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), p. 29.
19. For interesting related points, see Molesworth, *Gary Snyder's Vision*, p. 21, and Alan Williamson, *Introspection and Contemporary Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 67-8.
20. Gary Snyder, *The Back Country* (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 130-50.
21. Linda Hamalian, *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth* (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 234.
22. See Rexroth's *An Autobiographical Novel*, ed. Linda Hamalian (New York: New Directions, 1991 [first published 1966]), p. 122, for his own account of this antipathy. References hereafter will be included in the text with the abbreviation AAN.
23. Kenneth Rexroth, *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese* (New York: New Directions, 1956), p. 146. Significantly, Rexroth avoids mentioning *The Cantos*, reserving his praise for Pound's translations exclusively.
24. *The Jade Mountain*, trans. Witter Bynner from the texts of Kiang Kang-hu (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1964 [originally published 1929]), p. 3.
25. Kenneth Rexroth, "Lyell's Hypothesis Again," in *The Collected Shorter Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1966), pp. 180-1.
26. Marjorie Perloff, "The Contemporary of Our Grandchildren: Pound's Influence," in *Ezra Pound among the Poets*, p. 198.
27. Gary Snyder, *Myths & Texts* (New York: Corinth Books, 1960), p. 4. References hereafter will be included in the text with the abbreviation MT.
28. Gary Snyder, *Axe Handles* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983), p. 10.

29. Gary Snyder, "The Wilderness," in *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 106.
30. Gary Snyder, *Earth House Hold* (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 122.
31. Snyder's view here is consistent with the romantic idea of language as what Gerald Bruns calls "the dynamics of speech" – an idea in which the word cannot be isolated "from that human reality whose life is revealed in the immediacy of thought and feeling" (*Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, p. 51).
32. See David Robertson's interview with Snyder in *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder*, ed. Patrick Murphy (Boston: Hall, 1991), p. 257. References hereafter will be included in the text with the abbreviation CE.
33. See, for example, *The Wilderness Condition: Essays on Environment and Civilization*, ed. Max Oelschlaeger (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1992); see also Oelschlaeger's *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1991).
34. "Goethe; or, the Writer," in *Representative Men* (1850), *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Joseph Slater and Douglas Emory Wilson, vol. 4 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987), p. 151.
35. See Julie Ellison, *Emerson's Romantic Style*, pp. 88-90.
36. See Poirier's comments on "Emersonian skepticism" in *The Renewal of Literature*, p. 16.

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