

THE CLASSIC ANTHOLOGY DEFINED BY CONFUCIUS. By Ezra Pound. With an Introduction by Achilles Fang. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1954. xvi, 224 p.

If Pound's *Cantos* is a panorama of modern civilization since Dante, then the *Classic Anthology* is a panorama of the ancient civilization of China before Confucius.

Readers who were annoyed with the *Cantos* for its alleged obscurity and erudition will relish the *Classic Anthology* for its directness of expression and clarity of language. This difference is the result of methods of approach rather than of subject matter. Whereas in the *Cantos* Pound experiments with the "ideogrammic method," in the *Classic Anthology* he is ruled by the "ideogrammic" pattern, as he understands it, already laid out for him by the Chinese text. His mission here is to translate the *Shih Ching* (known as the *Book of Odes* or the *Book of Poetry*), which consists of 305 odes supposedly arranged by Confucius.

To anticipate the righteous indignation of the Sinologists, who tend to examine any translation through their linguistic monocles, and to offset their strictures on inaccuracies, it should be pointed out at the beginning that Pound's *Classic Anthology* is not a *translation* but rather a *transmigration*; it is the reincarnation of the *Shih Ching*, with its ghost made into new flesh and blood, inheriting the characteristics of Pound and of the Western tradition behind him, yet retaining its racial memories of the past. A single example from the text of the *Anthology* (No. 95), will illustrate my point.

SAY IT WITH PEONIES

"Chen and Wei

flow thereby

touching together,

Man and girl, girl and man

to pluck valerian :

`The play ?' says she.

`Seen it' says he.

`If so, let's go

Over Wei

pleasantly.'

Playing there, girls and men

Prescribe this mutual medicine.

Chen and Wei in alacrity

as pampas blades a-gleam

by bank and stream

come girls and a throng of officers.

She says : 'Have you seen ... ?'

He says : 'I been.'

`Let's again.' Over Wei

Pleasantly,

Ready girl, ready man

offer mutual medicine."

Now contrast this with Bernhard Karlgren's literal version, which is perhaps more faithful to the original :

"1. The Chen and the Wei (streams) are just now amply-flowing ; knights and girls are just holding *kien* in their hands ; girl says : 'have you been and looked?' The knight says : 'I have.'—'Shall we go again and look?'—'Beyond the Wei, there is truly great (space) and pleasant.' The knight and the girl, they are going to sport together ; the one presents the other with a peony.-2. The Chen and the Wei, deep and clear-flowing is their clear (water) ; knights and girls, in great crowds they fill (the ground) ; a girl says (etc. as in St. 1)" (*The Book of Odes*, pp. 61-62).

Karlgren's translation is included here only to show the meaning of the Chinese text. What he renders as "peony" is probably, in its archaic usage, quite a different plant—a kind of scented grass, as pointed out by some commentators. However that may be, the original term is a concrete object, used as a symbol of love, which is exchanged between the boy and girl. This symbol, passing through the creative process of Pound's mind, is alchemized into "medicine." Thus the idea merely suggested becomes in Pound's version crudely matter-of-fact.

This is one of the many instances indicative of Pound's way of reading Chinese in isolated ideograms. The Chinese term *shao-yao* is, in its modern sense, peony or peonies. It is composed of two ideograms : *shao*, a measure of weight (in modern writing the "grass" signific is added to indicate the meaning of plant), and *yao*, medicine or drugs. When used in combination, both ideograms lose their independent meanings and become the morphological components of the noun *shao-yao* or peony. But one should not suggest that Pound was uninformed on the general meaning of this term and used erroneously the dictionary meanings of the isolated ideograms. For he has shrewdly forestalled such an assumption by labeling this verse "Say It With Peonies" instead of the original title "Chen Wei" (names of two streams), although the word "peonies" never recurs in the poem. In all probability what happened is that Pound, failing to see the denotation of *shao-yao*, dug into the roots of these ideograms for new possibilities and found that the ideogram *shao* is the homophone of another word (*shao* with "woman" signific instead of "grass") meaning "go-between" and that *yao* means "medicine." From these discoveries, with a little stretch of the imagination, Pound derives the "mutual medicine." The change from "peony" into "medicine" may have intensified the implicit import of the poem in a new language ; it has nevertheless reduced the subtlety and the symbolic value of the original poetry.

Regarded simply as translation, this book is vulnerable to attack. The linguistic inaccuracies, the free additions and omissions, the misinterpretations of the original work, would be considered sacrilegious by philologists. In this work, as Mr. Fang implies in the Introduction (p. xiii), Pound tries with his "thoughts to comprehend the intention" of the *Shih Ching*. But this is not all. He tries also to mold that intention according to his own lights. Compared with the somniferous versions of the same classic by others, Pound's *Classic Anthology*, though often failing to preserve the detail of the original work, does succeed in conjuring up the spirit—poetry—which is absent from most of the other renditions.

Commenting on the renderings of ancient texts, Pound states in a footnote to his edition of Fenollosa's essay, "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium of Poetry" : "The poet in dealing with his own time, must also see to it that language does not petrify on his hands. He must prepare for new advances along the lines of true metaphor that is interpretive metaphor ..." Bearing this in mind, one need not be alarmed at finding in the *Classic Anthology* lines as unclassical and un-Chinese as "Ole Brer Rabbit watchin' his feet ..." (p. 35) ;

billy, hill-billy come to buy" (p. 28) ; and "purse kaput, nothing to pledge" (p. 19) . In dealing with his own time and people, Pound, whom T. S. Eliot called "the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time," has reconstructed the *Shih Ching* in idioms and expressions that are not only comprehensible but startlingly slangy to the English-speaking world.

From the purely literary point of view, many of the pages of the *Classic Anthology* sparkle with brilliant colors and imagery and vibrate with rhythms and emotion charged with primitive beauty. One notices that the musical quality which eluded Pound in the *Cathay* (1915) pervades the *Classic Anthology*. Pound frequently uses onomatopoeia in the Chinese manner : "Cl-ang, cl-ang go the bells," "Ch-in, ch-in of the bells," or "K'an, k'an / axes clank." He also makes extensive use of monosyllabic words in an attempt to imitate the Chinese sound. This growing aural awareness of the Chinese language is of special interest when one recalls that the poet wrote in 1940: "When it comes to the question of transmitting from the East to the West, a great part of the Chinese sound is no use at all. We don't hear parts of it, and much of the rest is a hiss or a mumble ..." (*Letters of Ezra Pound*, p. 347).

Pound's choice of the ballad meter, as Mr. Fang says in the Introduction, is a happy one. But it is rather the variety of the metric patterns which heightens the effect of this work.

Despite his deficiencies as a translator, Pound has enriched world literature with new-found treasure. The richness of the *Shih Ching*, however, is not fully explored. The imagery has for the most part been recaptured with freshness, but the meanings of the Chinese symbols which are foreign to the Western mind are sadly ignored. To reproduce these symbols, however, with their original strength and profundity would require a perfect grasp of both Chinese and Western traditions. This, perhaps, is too much to expect—even from a convert.

ANGELA CHIH-YING JUNG

*University of Oregon*