

BILLINGS, Timothy, ed. 2019. Ezra Pound, *Cathay: A Critical Edition*. New York: Fordham University Press. Pp. xvii + 364. ISBN 9780823281060, Hardback \$34.95.

In April 1915, at 29 years old, Ezra Pound published *Cathay*, his version of fourteen classical Chinese poems (as well as the Old English “The Seafarer”, a poem Pound had translated as early as 1911). He thereby became “the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time”, as T. S. Eliot would put it in his foreword to Pound’s *Selected Poems* (1928). What did Pound know of Chinese language at this point? Next to nothing, his biographer A. David Moody suggests: “He could not read the Chinese characters — he could not even sound them out” (MOODY 2007, 272). So how does one translate from a language one does not know?

In November 1913, Pound received sixteen notebooks from Mary Fenollosa, the widow of Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908), an American art historian who had worked for several years in Japan. These notebooks, now part of the Ezra Pound papers at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University, included Fenollosa’s rudimentary translations of around a hundred Chinese classical poems. Pound’s work with the material resulted not only in *Cathay*, but also in *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* (1916), later issued in an expanded version as “*Noh*”, or *Accomplishment: A Study of the Classical Stage of Japan* (1916), as well as “The Chinese Written Character As a Medium for Poetry” (1919), a Fenollosa essay edited by Pound (and edited to a larger extent than has usually been assumed, as is made clear in a critical edition of the essay, edited by Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling, and Lucas Klein, and also published by Fordham University Press [2008]). According to Moody, Pound was “absolutely dependent on Fenollosa’s simple crib with its halting one-English-word-for-one-Chinese-character, followed by a paraphrase of the line” (MOODY 2007, 272). Is Moody’s a fair assessment of the material Pound had to work with? And was *Cathay*, as stated by Saussy in his foreword to this new edition, “a masterpiece of the art of editing, an art at which Pound excelled” (xi)?

This edition is very useful to begin answering such questions. It helps us understand the making of the poems of *Cathay*, primarily by supplying annotated transcripts of the most relevant parts of Fenollosa’s notebooks. What is to be found in this edition is, in other words, not the contents of the entire sixteen notebooks, but only the entries corresponding to the poems Pound chose for *Cathay*. There has been some uncertainty as to what one can actually read in Fenollosa’s notebooks, and this new edition brings some clarity. As Timothy Billings notes, even eminent scholars such

as Ronald Bush and Hugh Kenner have made mistakes in their interpretation of them, transcribing, for example, “drum” as “dream” and “red / (of boni)” as “red / (of berri)”. As Billings notes, such errors probably have less to do with Fenollosa’s handwriting than with the scholars’ competence in Chinese and Japanese. Now, at last, we have transcripts that those of us who are ignorant of these languages can presumably rely on. I do not mean to imply that ignorance of the source languages makes one unable to judge Pound’s work. We need not necessarily follow Ford Madox Hueffer’s statement at the time *Cathay* was published: “If these were original verses, then, Pound was the greatest poet of the day” (QIAN 2010, 337). Still, we should recognize the lesson many a poet has been able to learn from Pound: translators first and foremost need to know their *target language*. There is every reason to stress that *Cathay* was an intervention in *English-language poetry*.

The way Ming Xie, who has written on Pound’s appropriation of Chinese poetry, sees it, the “appeal of *Cathay* is largely its exoticism, evoking a poeticized imaginary realm with nineteenth-century Tennysonian associations” (XIE 1999, 211). This somewhat pejorative verdict, which I find hard to agree with, would suggest that a process T. S. Eliot once pointed at has taken place: he said that in 300 years one would come to think of *Cathay* as a “Windsor” translation, the way George Chapman’s Homer and Thomas North’s Plutarch were perceived in 1928 as “Tudor Translations”. Eliot’s point is of course double-edged: on the one hand, Pound’s work is classic; on the other, it will necessarily become dated at some point.

To many readers, myself included, *Cathay* still does not feel dated. Even living with the collection for years and years does not make the poetry wither. But then again, maybe a scholarly edition can affect one’s sentimental feeling for the poems, the same way an analysis of humor might? Recall the rather famous adage: “Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it”.

To put it another, less fatalistic way: one should not approach this scholarly edition without knowing *Cathay* in advance, without having laughed and cried with the poems, without having taken its un-annotated poetry to heart. Pound himself was a kind of editor in his selection and translation of the poems of *Cathay*, but an editor of quite a different kind than is Billings. Pound eschewed almost all contextual information and printed the poems as if the reader would have some sort of direct access to the meaning as well as the art of the poems. Billings, on his part, comments on the most minute details that might be of relevance in understanding how the texts traveled from the original Chinese through Fenollosa’s teachers to the notebooks that Pound had to work with. In other words, this edition seems quite un-

Poundian: as Billings tells us, Pound had advocated the method of *luminous detail* in scholarship rather than the one he claimed was then prevailing, *multitudinous detail*. Billings certainly prefers multitudinous detail, and as he himself suggests, Pound's method was quite different: it was meant to be like that of a miner aiming to "dig up the jewels and present them without the bulk of mud they were found in, the distractions of allusions that require footnotes, or the kind of verbose precision that bedims their luminosity" (76). To do justice to Pound, then, one should initially disregard the annotations and read the poems on their own. Here, I will quote the first two stanzas of "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter" (39):

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.

There is something about the verbal sobriety of this poem, its lack of ornamental detail, that makes it stand out, at least compared with much English-language poetry of the early 1900s. Its simplicity may still serve poets of our own day. Thankfully, this volume — after Saussy's foreword and the two introductions, by Christopher Bush and by Billings — presents the poems of *Cathay* in their more or less pure form, without notes on the page (they are later in the volume), echoing the original edition.

In the section after the poems of *Cathay*, Billings offers the notebook entries related to each poem, line by line, annotating them along the way. Billings also supplies Chinese characters for each line of poetry, characters that are not to be found in the notebooks. One line can illustrate: "You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse" (118). Billings first gives us the Chinese original: 郎騎竹馬來. He then prints Fenollosa's Japanese-influenced pronunciation guide for the five characters: "rō + Ki + Chiku + ba + rai"; and then the crib: "second person masculine, you, young man! lit. 'young man' + ride on + bamboo + horse + come". Then follows Fenollosa's paraphrase of the line: "When you came riding on bamboo stilts". We can

see that while Pound used Fenollosa's paraphrase, he also added an interpretation of the image, one he found in Fenollosa's crib. Billings says that the initial word-for-word glosses are correct, "suggesting a hobbyhorse", but that Fenollosa's Japanese teachers Mori and Ariga must have been misled when they saw in the compound term the specifically Japanese expression "bamboo stilts". Pound, in short, went for *both* solutions, inventing, Billings concludes, "a uniquely Anglo-Sino-Japanese line" (127). Interestingly, Billings tells us that he expected to find many such "Japanese" mistakes when examining the notebooks but found only two or three significant instances among the hundreds of glosses for the poems included in *Cathay*.

As for the line "At fourteen I married My Lord you", I have always loved the inverted word order in the address to "My Lord you". However, perhaps this strange syntax sounded unnecessarily exotic to Pound on a second reading, Billings muses, for Pound later revised the translation for his essay "Chinese Poetry" (1918) in the journal *Today* (and included in this edition). There the line simply runs "At fourteen I married you, My Lord". More sober, but is it not lacking the heart-breaking frustration one can sense in the first version, where the somewhat childish expression "My Lord you" insists on the age of the girl at the time she married, not at the time she speaks, or indeed sings (if there are arguably only a few years between the two)? Once again, and this is important: now these textual details are there for us to discuss.

In his *Orientalism and Modernism* (1995) Zhaoming Qian claimed that *Cathay* is "first and foremost a beautiful translation of excellent Chinese poems" (65), implying that Pound was essentially faithful to the Chinese originals. I find this hard to reconcile with Billings' important discovery that Fenollosa's teacher Mori must have practiced *kundoku* (a particular kind of Japanese gloss-reading of Chinese written characters) with his student, something which implies that the *paraphrases* are the true "decipherings" in the Fenollosa notes, while Pound generally preferred the crib, what Billings calls the "preparatory notes". The fact that Pound followed the crib, not the occasionally somewhat verbose paraphrase, is undoubtedly crucial for what he achieved artistically in these poems. As Billings shows in numerous specific instances, Pound's preference moved his versions away from the originals.

I do not envy this volume's editor. Timothy Billings must have had a tremendously difficult job giving the manuscript material a readable form. Initially, I was tempted to say that he has succeeded only partly, because *Cathay: A Critical Edition* is surely not a book that is easy to work with. Working with it for some time, I realized that this has to do with the nature

of the manuscript material, not with the choices made by the editor. This critical edition will be indispensable for the discussion of Pound's early relation to China, and not least for our understanding of how Pound worked on his translations.

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WIGGINTON, Caroline. 2016. *In the Neighborhood: Women's Publication in Early America*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press. Pp. 240. ISBN 9781625342225, Paper \$25.95.

What was the place of women in the early American "republic of letters"? Women's writing, reading, and role in eighteenth-century print culture has been the subject of much recent scholarship (see DILLON 2004; KELLEY 2006; and HACKEL and KELLY 2008), but few works have redefined the parameters of the topic as decisively as Caroline Wigginton's *In the Neighborhood*. In describing how women's "relational publications" shaped real and imagined neighborhoods, Wigginton's work suggests that a better question might be: what sorts of *places* did women craft for themselves and others in the textual landscape of early America?

*In the Neighborhood*, winner of the 2018 *Early American Literature* Book Prize, argues that reading women's publications both with greater expansiveness and greater particularity may undo the very notion of a "republic of letters" as the primary mode of authorship in early America. The role of republican print culture in shaping the modern nation-state has been influentially described by scholars such as Benedict Anderson and Michael Warner. Women authors, however, "mediated between the extremes of detachment and amalgamation" (134) set forth by this imagined fraternity, unable and unwilling to fully anonymize within a print culture that insisted on the male nature of the nation and its citizens. Wigginton makes