

Excerpted from

日 上 東

ETHNOGRAPHY,

TRANSLATION, AND

TRANSPACIFIC
DISPLACEMENT

INTERTEXTUAL TRAVEL IN

TWENTIETH-CENTURY

AMERICAN LITERATURE

YUNTE HUANG

(The) Sun rises (over) (the) East

©2002 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. May not be copied or reused without express written permission of the publisher.

click here to
BUY THIS BOOK

THREE

The Intertextual Travel of Amy Lowell

One “reads” a landscape the way one reads a text.

Michel de Certeau,

The Practice of Everyday Life

What follows is not a coda or supplement to Imagism, although Amy Lowell’s work is often denigrated as such—“Amygism” is the usual epithet used to parody the poetry activities that went on after Lowell took over from Pound the leadership in promoting Imagism. My focus is on a new mode of conceptualizing Asia as manifested in Lowell’s work. In the preceding chapter, I described the ways in which Pound founded his pancultural program on intertextual ground; in this one, I explore a unique feature of Lowell’s ethnographic writing: her intertextual travel. As a traveler in the world of texts, the Imagist poet Lowell projected the *image* of the Far East in a manner characteristic of a tourist’s fascination with a locale rather than an old-time ethnographer’s devotion to a particular geographical area. However, Lowell’s seemingly superficial intertextual travel should not be understood merely as following a shallow vogue of her time; but rather, it should be understood in the sense of what Michel de Certeau has termed “reading as poaching”: “Readers are travelers; they move

across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves.”¹ Moreover, I argue that intertextual travel is intrinsic to an ethnographic enterprise that uses texts as its fertile ground, its *field*, in an effort to generate ethnographic visions.

Amy Lowell (1874–1925) lived at a time, as she herself recognized, “of adulation of all things oriental.”² It was the widespread craze of *japonisme* that took her elder brother Percival to the Far East. During the years he traveled in Japan and Korea, he wrote his little sister Amy many letters on Japanese decorated notepaper, which kindled her young imagination of the Wild East. As she later recalled,

Every mail brought letters, and a constant stream of pictures, prints, and kakemonos flowed in upon me, and I suppose affected my imagination, for in childhood the imagination is plastic. . . . Japan seems entwined with my earliest memory. . . . [Those books and pictures] all through my childhood made Japan so vivid to my imagination that I cannot realize that I have never been there. (Qtd. in Damon, 55)

What this recollection reveals is not just the power of the imagination, but more important, the intertextual mode by which humans travel and see places they otherwise cannot see. It showcases what Paul Ricoeur has called “the world of the text.” In his theories on hermeneutics Ricoeur made a radical move toward the concept of the textual world, one which we inhabit and wherein we project our ownmost possibilities. Ricoeur further characterizes such a world as follows:

For me, the world is the ensemble of references opened up by every kind of text, descriptive or poetic, that I have read, understood, and loved. And to understand a text is to interpolate among the predi-

1. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 174.

2. Quoted in Foster Damon, *Amy Lowell: A Chronicle* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966), 329.

cates of our situation all the significations that make a *Welt* out of our *Umwelt*. It is this enlarging of our horizon of existence that permits us to speak of the references opened up by the texts or of the world opened up by the referential claims of most text.³

Like her fellow traveler Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell never set foot in the Far East; the land existed to her solely in textual terms. From the Japan in *Can Grande's Castle* (1918) to the China in *Pictures of the Floating World* (1919) and *Fir-Flower Tablets* (1921), the world of the Orient was one opened up by the kinds of texts she encountered and traversed: her brother's writings from and about Japan, her readings of Japanese and Chinese literatures, Ayscough's massive collection of "data" of Chinese poetry and culture, and her own Imagistic poems and translations of Chinese poetry. These texts seemed to have created for Lowell what Ricoeur calls an "as if" effect:

Some texts . . . restructure for their readers the conditions of ostensive reference. Letters, travel reports, geographical descriptions, diaries, historical monographs, and in general all descriptive accounts of reality may provide the reader with an equivalent of ostensive reference in the mode of "as if" ("as if you were there"). (*Interpretation Theory* 35)

Such a verisimilitudinous effect may often be created, as Ricoeur remarks, by travelogues, a genre with which Lowell was intimately familiar.

Tourism to the Far East was on the steady rise during Amy Lowell's adult life, the early decades of the twentieth century. *Asia*, a magazine launched at the time to cater to the Oriental craze, was flooded by amateurish travel accounts, professional ethnographic studies, and travel agency advertisements. The booming business also attracted "serious" literati, among whom, for instance, was Eunice Tietjens, assistant editor of Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* (Chicago), a magazine that had played a key role in promoting Imagism. Tietjens was assigned by Monroe to go to

3. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 37.

China and bring back accounts about the Oriental land. The result was the publication of Tietjens's *Profiles from China*—a collection of poems based on her trip—first in *Poetry* (1916) and then as a book (1917). For the book publication, Lowell wrote a review entitled “An Observer in China” in the September 1917 issue of *Poetry*. Lavishing her praise for Tietjens's poetic accomplishment, Lowell was also quick to notice the travelogue nature of these poems and the process in which the poetic traveler constructs the exotic, “half-apprehended” Other:

The Hand is, not the orient (we could hardly expect that), but the occidental reaction to the orient; and what a happy inspiration it was to depict China under the guise of a hand: a large man with “the hand of a woman and the paw of a chimpanzee.” The passage: “The long line of your curved nail is fastidiousness made flesh” reveals the shrinking of the occidental mind in the face of the only half-apprehended East. . . .

Mrs. Tietjens has lived in China, but she is not in the least of China. As interpretations of Chinese character, these poems are of only the slightest interest; it is as pictures of the fundamental antagonism of the East and the West that they are important. *The poet makes no pretence at an esoteric sympathy which she does not possess.* Her complete sincerity is not the least of the volume's excellences. Only in the section *Echoes* is there the slightest preoccupation with the native point of view. . . . still these poems remain rather as exercises in the Chinese manner, than as an intimate fusing of the author's ego with that of China.⁴

According to Lowell's review, “the author's ego” can never “fuse” with “that of China,” since the East is only “half-apprehended” and the poet is seldom preoccupied with “the native point of view.” Therefore, what's left is only the author's ego facing itself in the incomprehensible wilderness.

4. Amy Lowell, “An Observer in China,” review of *Profiles from China*, by Eunice Tietjens, *Poetry* 10 (September 1917): 328–29; emphasis added.

Here a point Johannes Fabian has made about travel becomes relevant. In *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, Fabian analyzes the “topos of travel” utilized in the European Enlightenment:

For the established bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century, travel was to become (at least potentially) every man’s source of “philosophical,” secular knowledge. Religious travel had been *to* the centers of religion, or *to* the souls to be saved; now, secular travel was *from* the centers of learning and power to places where man was to find nothing but himself.⁵

Fabian points out that the topos of travel as “a vehicle for self-realization of man” led to the secularization of Time for the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie and created a new discourse that was “based on an enormous literature of travelogues, collections and syntheses of travel accounts.” And,

[T]he manifest preoccupation in this literature, in its popular forms as well as in its scientific uses, was with the description of movements and relations in *space* (“geography”) based primarily on visual observation of foreign *places*. (7)

Within the framework of Fabian’s notion that the “topos of travel” is used as a vehicle for self-realization and that such a usage is often manifested in literature by the “visual observation of foreign places,” I now examine the trajectories of Amy Lowell’s intertextual travel and show how by “poaching” her way through the linguistic landscapes of the Far East, Lowell fashioned herself simultaneously as an Imagist poet and an intertextual traveler.

Lowell’s closest contact with China came in her four years of collaboration with Ayscough on *Fir-Flower Tablets: Poems from the Chinese* (1921). Lowell explained the procedure of their collaboration as follows:

5. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 6.

Mrs. Ayscough would first write out the poem in Chinese. Not in the Chinese characters, of course, but in transliteration. Opposite every word she put the various meanings of it which accorded with its place in the text, since I could not use a Chinese dictionary. She also gave the analyses of whatever characters seemed to her to require it. (ix)

Lowell's part of work was to turn Ayscough's "literal translations into poems as near to the spirit of the originals as it was in my power to do" (v). Not knowing Chinese, Lowell had to depend on Ayscough (who depended on her Chinese teacher) as a travel guide who could take her through the textual landscape. Ayscough, who, as exemplified in *A Chinese Mirror*, had mastered the Chinese genre of literary tourism, turned out to be a very capable guide.⁶ To facilitate Lowell's literary travel, she sent Lowell batches after batches of literal translations ("cribs"), as well as maps of Chinese landscapes and drawings of Chinese interior designs.

But the burden of the tour guide's work lay mainly in identifying the sensual scenery in the landscape of Chinese written characters. Let's take one poem to illustrate how Ayscough guided Lowell through the trip. The following is a poem by Tao Yuan-Ming (Pound's "To-Em-Mei"), entitled "Once More Fields and Gardens":

Even as a young man
 I was out of tune with ordinary pleasures.
 It was my nature to love the rooted hills,
 The high hills which look upon the four edges of Heaven.
 What folly to spend one's life like a dropped leaf
 Snared under the dust of streets,
 But for thirteen years it was so I lived.

 The caged bird longs for the fluttering of high leaves.
 The fish in the garden pool languishes for *the whirled water*
Of meeting streams.

.

6. See chapter 1 for my discussion of *A Chinese Mirror* as a travelogue modeled on the Chinese genre of literary tourism.

There is no dust or clatter
In the courtyard before my house.
My private rooms are quiet,
And calm with the leisure of moonlight through an open door.
(*Fir* 132–33; emphasis added)

Compared with the terseness of the five-character lines of Tao's original, Lowell's *vers libre* translation sounds more or less like a tourist's tedious journey.⁷ But it is a journey that leads to the point where, facing the great scenery on the spot, one may experience the long-awaited moment of ecstasy. For the sake of such a revelatory experience, the lengthiness of boring transportation is truly worth the "trip."

The scenery spots in Chinese linguistic landscape through which Lowell traveled lay in places where a particular Chinese character was singled out, etymologically analyzed (by Ayscough, as a tour guide), and rendered into a phrase or a line in English. In the translation of Tao's poem, the phrase "the whirled water of meeting streams" stands for the Chinese character, 淵 (*yuan*, whirlpool). The line "And calm with the leisure of moonlight through an open door" also corresponds to just one character, 閑 (*xian*, leisure). What justified the seemingly disproportional rendition were, of course, the visual appearances of these characters. As Ayscough explains in "Amy Lowell and the Far East": "The pic-

7. A character-by-character literal translation of the corresponding lines from the poem runs like this:

young-no-fit-ordinary-tune
nature-originally-love-hills-mountains
mistakenly-fall-dust-net-midst
once-gone-three-ten-years
captive-birds-yearn-old-woods
pond-fish-miss-old-stream
.
door-courtyard-no-dust-triviality
empty-room-has-extra-leisure

togram for ‘a whirlpool’ shows rivers which cross each other, and Miss Lowell’s version reads: ‘the whirled water of meeting streams.’”⁸ The same with the character for “leisure,” 閑, or 閒, which visually demonstrates “seeing the moon through the open door.” Apart from these two places, the rest of the poem in Lowell’s hand is a “literal,” though at times loose and prosaic, rendition of the Chinese, in a manner Peter Boodberg has characterized as being “in favor of idiomatic clichés.”⁹ In contrast to Pound, who in his translations tried to intensify almost every line to make it sound more Imagistic and more “Oriental,” Lowell seemed very concerned with particular characters, with those tourist spots in Chinese poetry that attract intertextual travelers like herself and Ayscough.

Recalling Fabian’s notion that a Western tourist is usually preoccupied with visual observation of foreign places, we may be able to say here that these Chinese characters are those “foreign places” that Lowell, as an intertextual tourist, had chosen to observe visually: 淵, “the whirled water of meeting streams”; or, 閒, “the leisure of moonlight through an open door.” Lowell chastised other translators who tried only to paraphrase the original in order to understand the culture: “It would be no good at all if you did it in free translation; no good at all as an approach to the Oriental mind, that is” (*Correspondence* 28). Just as Tietjens’s travel poems reveal an obsession with the author/tourist’s own experience in the foreign land, Lowell’s translations create a travelogue, a narration of the translator/traveler’s experience in the linguistic landscape that features such “hot spots” as 淵 and 閒. *Fir-Flower Tablets* highlights plenty of these revelatory moments, while rendering the rest of the poems almost “literally.” It is no wonder that the Lowell/Ayscough collaboration has always been dismissed as an inferior comparison to the Pound/Fenollosa project, for critics often miss these

8. Florence Ayscough, *Florence Ayscough and Amy Lowell: Correspondence of a Friendship*, ed. Harley Farnsworth MacNair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 27.

9. See Peter Boodberg’s comment on Ayscough in “Cedules from a Berkeley Workshop,” now published in *Selected Works of Peter A. Boodberg*, comp. Alvin P. Cohen (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 182–83.

tourist “hot spots,” unable to grasp a work that features above all the experience of intertextual travel.

Yet, devaluating a tourist’s experience as “inauthentic” is a norm not only in literary studies; anthropology, for instance, from the very beginning has shared such a bias. Whereas realistic fiction (an oxymoron) has always been the preferred genre in literature when it comes to cultural description, social science–based ethnography has been regarded in anthropology as the only kind of work by means of which a culture can be adequately interpreted. The achievement of the authenticity requires vigorous fieldwork, which, in turn, entails physically *dwelling* among the Other. What therefore differentiates a professional ethnographer from a tourist is this fieldwork that fixes the former to the “field.” However, such fixity, as James Clifford has argued, disguises the “travel” aspect of the anthropologist’s work.¹⁰ Or, to expand on Fabian, a social science–minded ethnographer travels to a remote village only to face his own ego, not in the wilderness, but in the midst of the scattered scientific, theoretic tools he has brought with him. To say that cultural knowledge thus procured may not always be different from strings of exotic beads or seashells a tourist takes home is not to dismiss all anthropological work as specious, but rather to foreground the intimate relationship between fieldwork and travel. Especially in the case of Amy Lowell, ethnographic representation of the Far East did take place in the field of language and text that she traversed.

• • •

Forcing, abbreviating, pushing, padding, subtracting, riddling, interrogating, re-writing, she pulled text from text.

Susan Howe, My Emily Dickinson

When Lowell asserted, as noted above, that poetry is “no good at all as an approach to the Oriental mind,” she did not mean to deny the ethno-

10. See my earlier discussion of Clifford’s *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) in chapters 1 and 2.

graphic function of poetry per se. Rather, she was dismissing the practice of interpreting poetry thematically in an effort to find ethnographic truth in it, a practice that went against the grain of her habit of reading. In his discussion of reading as poaching, Michel de Certeau distinguishes two acts involved in reading: one is the “lexical act” and the other the “scriptural act.” Drawing upon results from psycho-linguistic experiments, de Certeau writes, “The schoolchild learns to read by a process that *parallels* his learning to decipher; learning to read is not a *result* of learning to decipher.”¹¹ In other words, deciphering lexicons or comprehending meanings believed to be stored in texts constitutes only part of what we know as reading; the other part involves reading as a process comparable to that of inscribing: it entails wandering through a text, not observing the laws of ownership (meanings owned by untouchable texts), but rather inventing new relations between the text and the act of reading. To de Certeau, it is wrong to assume that to read is merely to receive a text from someone else without putting one’s own mark on it, without remarking it. He believes that to read is to wander through an imposed system and to modify the text, that the reader “deterritorializes himself, oscillating in a nowhere between what he invents and what changes him,” and that “to read is to be elsewhere . . . to constitute a secret scene, a place one can enter and leave when one wishes” (170–73). Looked at in this way, reading is not completely a hermeneutic act. Reading intends neither to reestablish nor to occupy the space of meaning promised by the text; instead, the reader moves through the textual space the way a traveler does through a landscape. And such a fascinating story about a reader’s travel through texts—“drifts across the page, metamorphoses and anamorphoses of the text produced by the travelling eye, imaginary or meditative flights taking off from a few words, overlapping of spaces on the militarily organized surfaces of the text, and ephemeral dances”—remains, as de Certeau laments, in large measure untold (170). The remaining part of this chap-

11. Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 168.

ter, therefore, accompanies Lowell on her travels through texts, travels out of which came her poetic travelogues, produced in manners that Susan Howe has attributed to Lowell's New England predecessor, Emily Dickinson—that is, “she pulled text from text” by various means.¹²

In contrast to her fellow traveler Ezra Pound, who envisioned transcending cultural and linguistic boundaries, Lowell often foregrounded the differences between the East and West, as seen in her *Can Grande's Castle* (1918). This is a book of four long poems, or rather, four intertextual travelogues. The poetic vision moves from the Mediterranean in “Sea-Blue and Blood-Red” to Japan in “Guns As Keys: and the Great Gate Swings,” to England in “Hedge Island,” and finally back to the Mediterranean Sea in “The Bronze Horses.” What makes this movement possible, as Lowell indicates in the preface, is her diligent digging into the dusty volumes of books:

For it is obvious that I cannot have experienced what I have here written. I must have got it from books. But, living now, in the midst of events greater than these, the books have become reality to me in a way that they never could have become before, and the stories I have dug out of dusty volumes seem as actual as my own existence. (ix–x)

This daughter of New England did bow to her Transcendentalist forefathers who “beheld God and nature face to face,” admitting that “this is the real decadence: to see through the eyes of dead men” (viii). But she immediately reassured herself of the necessity of seeing “through their eyes”:

Yet to-day can never be adequately expressed, largely because we are a part of it and only a part. For that reason one is flung backwards to a time which is not thrown out of proportion by any personal experience, and which on that very account lies extended in something like its proper perspective. (viii)

12. Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1985), 29.

The inadequacy of today and here creates a need for returning to yesterday and there not just transcendently “on the viewless wings of Poesy” (Keats being Lowell’s favorite poet, on whom she wrote a monograph), but more mundanely by digging into the books. Perhaps this is why Lowell not only chose Richard Aldington’s poem “At the British Museum” as a motto to her book but also adopted Aldington’s line as the title for her poetic travelogue:

I turn the page and read . . .

 The heavy musty air, the black desks,
 The bent heads and the rustling noises
 In the great dome
 Vanish . . .
 And
 The sun hangs in the cobalt-blue sky . . .
 And the swallows dive and swirl and whistle
 About the cleft battlements of Can Grande’s castle . . .

In this poem by Aldington, the reader is sitting inside the great dome built of books. He turns his eyes off the page for a moment and looks outside at the sunny blue sky and the battlements of the time-old castle; or is he looking through the page, through the words and eyes of the author he is reading, dead or alive?

The poetic traveler in Lowell’s book is sightseeing through other books, however “decadent” it might seem to her New England forefathers. In “Guns as Keys,” for instance, the postlude places in juxtaposition the Japan and the America of 1903, fifty years after Commodore Perry entered the Imperial gate of the East:

1903. JAPAN

The high cliffs of the Kegan waterfall, and a young man carving words on the trunk of a tree. He finishes, pauses an instant, and then leaps

into the foamcloud rising from below. But, on the tree-trunk, the newly-cut words blaze white and hard as though set with diamonds:

“How mightily and steadily go Heaven and Earth! How infinite the duration of Past and Present! Try to measure this vastness with five feet. A word explains the Truth of the whole Universe—*unknowable*. To cure my agony I have decided to die. Now, as I stand on the crest of this rock, no uneasiness is left in me. For the first time I know that extreme pessimism and extreme optimism are one.”

1903. AMERICA

“Nocturne—Blue and Silver—Battersea Bridge.
Nocturne—Grey and Silver—Chelsea Embankment.
Variations in Violet and Green.”

Pictures in a glass-roofed gallery, and all day long the throng of people is so great that one can scarcely see them. Debits—credits? Flux and flow through a wide gateway. Occident—Orient—after fifty years. (172–73)

But the first scene, a young Japanese jumping off the Kegon waterfall, was witnessed and represented by Lowell only intertextually:

I owe the scene . . . to the paper “Young Japan,” by Seichi Naruse, which appeared in the “Seven Arts” for April, 1917. The inscription on the tree I have copied word for word from Mr. Naruse’s translation, and I wish here to express my thanks, not for his permission (as with a perfect disregard of morals, I never asked it), but for his beautiful rendering of the original Japanese. I trust that my appreciation will exonerate my theft. (xvi–xvii)

What Lowell humbly calls “theft” is often termed “quotation” in rhetoric. But as I argued earlier by way of Bakhtin and Kristeva, this intertextual strategy may also be called “transposition,” a process of displacing textual elements from one signifying system to another. Applied to Lowell, transposition is an act of intertextual travel: she produces cul-

tural description by traveling through what Ricoeur has called “the ensemble of references opened up by the texts,” and by means of what Susan Howe has described as “forcing, abbreviating, pushing, subtracting, riddling, interrogating, re-writing.”¹³

As a whole, the poem “Guns as Keys” is a poetic narrative of the first encounter between the West and Japan in 1853. Part I unfolds the historical drama by staging a contrast on the level of composition: whereas the peaceful and aesthetic life of the Japanese is described in almost Imagistic lyrics, the aggressive, adventurous voyage of Commodore Perry’s ship, the *Mississippi*, is written in the so-called polyphonic prose. These two styles alternate in the course of the poem’s progression:

At Mishima in the Province of Kai,
 Three men are trying to measure a pine tree
 By the length of their outstretched arms.
 Trying to span the bole of a huge pine tree
 By the spread of their lifted arms.
 Attempting to compress its girth
 Within the limit of their extended arms.
 Beyond, Fuji,
 Majestic, inevitable,
 Wreathed over by wisps of cloud.
 The clouds draw about the mountain,
 But there are gaps.
 The men reach about the pine tree,
 But their hands break apart;
 The rough bark escape their handclasps;
 The tree is unencircled.
 Three men are trying to measure the stem of a gigantic tree,
 With their arms,
 At Mishima in the Province of Kai. (163)

13. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 36; Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*, 29.

The pastoral scene of a Sleepy Hollow–like legend, written in a simple, lyrical style, is immediately contrasted with a picture of the domineering, coal-burning, engine-running ship, depicted in polyphonic, prosaic words, mixtures of mechanical terminology and seafaring jargon:

Furnaces are burning good Cumberland coal at the rate of twenty-six tons per diem, and the paddle-wheels turn round and round in an iris of spray. She noses her way through a wallowing sea; foots it, bit by bit, over the slanting wave slopes; pants along, thrust forward by her breathing furnaces, urged ahead by the wind draft flattening against her taut sails. (Ibid.)

The purpose for the contrast, Lowell explains, is that she “wanted to place in juxtaposition the delicacy and artistic clarity of Japan and the artistic ignorance and gallant self-confidence of America” (xvi). But in doing so, these “print-like lyrics,” which “summarize Japanese civilization in its respective attitudes toward nature, sex, popular and aristocratic entertainments, the state, the church, the stage, politics, and death,” have in effect ethnographically essentialized what is “Japanese.”¹⁴ For using what is supposed to be lyrics of “Oriental” style to represent the life of the Orient often works to the effect of reifying the Orientalist ideal, an effect experienced in Pound.

Yet, compared with Pound’s transcendental view of a “world civilization,” Lowell’s essentialization at least recognizes the particularity of a culture: “the delicacy and artistic clarity of Japan” versus “the artistic ignorance and gallant self-confidence of America.” Despite the differences, however, both Pound’s pancultural *paideuma* and Lowell’s relativist view of culture require certain authentication. Whereas Pound tried to collect “a live tradition in the air” by willfully misreading or mishandling textual samples, Lowell, who did not hide the fact that she was an intertextual traveler and that her writing of culture depended upon her readings, needed to authenticate by other means the knowledge thus acquired.

14. Damon, *Amy Lowell*, 474–75.

The authentication comes mainly in two ways, both of which are related to the scenes of “arrival” or gestures of “having-been-there” familiar in anthropological work. Since going to the field is defined in the discipline of anthropology as the stepping-stone for any ethnographic work, it is common for ethnographers either to begin with an account of their own arrival at the designated field or to devote at least some narrative passages to reassure of their “having been there” in the field.¹⁵ However, for Lowell, who traveled in the intertextual world, her readerly arrival could not automatically validate the texts she traversed; the truth claims made in her writing would have to be confirmed by another physical arrival or having-been-there. Hence, first, in the case of translating Chinese poetry (or traveling through the landscape of Chinese poetry), she needed to establish the “authority” of her tour guide, Ayscough; and second, she bolstered her own travel account by soliciting positive responses from “reliable” readers and travelers.

On June 19, 1918, the eve of the first publication of her collaboration with Ayscough in *Poetry*, Lowell wrote to the editor Harriet Monroe:

So I am afraid that you will have to take Mrs. Ayscough's and my final results as the best we can both of us do in the matter. She knows a lot about Chinese, and what passes her ear will, I am sure, satisfy you. You see she has had much more opportunity to know Chinese than most people, for she was born in China and lived there all her childhood, only coming home to finish her schooling and come out. She married when she was about twenty-two and returned to China, having also spent another Winter in China before that, bridging the time between her two residences there. She has lived there steadily now for twenty years, except for occasional visits to England and America. Chinese is, therefore, to some extent, her native tongue. For although she has only taken up the reading and speaking of it seri-

15. See also chapter 5 for another instance where the “arrival” trope is used in ethnographic writing.

ously in the last ten years, I think, she has been surrounded by the sound of it, and the feel of it, and the psychology of it, all her life.¹⁶

A few days later, in a letter to Ayscough, Lowell wrote:

I also gave her [Monroe] a great song and dance as to your qualifications as a translator. I told her that you were born in China, and that it was, therefore, in some sense your native tongue (Heaven forgive me!), although you had only taken up the serious study of it within the last few years. I lengthened out your years in China until it would appear that you must be a hundred years old to have got so many in, and altogether I explained that in getting you, she was getting the *ne plus ultra* of Chinese knowledge and understanding; it being assumed, of course (though not by me expressed), that in getting me she was finding the best Englisher there was going. Anyhow, judging from the quick return upon herself evidenced by this post card, she is properly impressed with what she will get, as a result. (Ibid. 38)

Establishing Ayscough's authority on the Chinese matter was crucial because Lowell was, at the time, competing with Pound, who had published *Cathay* in 1915 and was trying to put out Fenollosa's article. Lowell lashed out at her competitor, as she wrote to Ayscough:

My reason for suggesting that you put in the little hint of our discovery about roots is simply and solely to knock a hole in Ezra Pound's translations; he having got his things entirely from Professor Fenelosa [*sic*], they were not Chinese in the first place, and Heaven knows how many hands they went through between the original Chinese and Professor Fenelosa's Japanese original. (Ibid. 43-44)

On another occasion, when Lowell wrote to the editor of the *Literary Review*, which had published Arthur Waley's negative review of *Fir-*

16. Ayscough, *Correspondence*, 252.

Flower Tablets, she was again trying to get a lift not only from Ayscough but another “Chinese professor”:

Although I cannot read the Chinese characters, I have analysed a number of “fu” in transliteration with Mrs. Ayscough, and have lately talked the matter over at some length with a Chinese professor connected with one of our Universities, so I think I may make some claim to know whereof I speak. (Ibid. 259)

This “Chinese professor” turned out to be a Dr. Chao, about whom Lowell told Ayscough:

I saw Dr. Chao last night, but it was a terrible disappointment. The child is a young boy, not long out of college, I should think, who is greatly interested in the new poetry movement in China, the writing of poetry in the vernacular, but has not kept up his classics at all. . . . Chao is a good little boy, but he is only teaching the Chinese language here, nothing to do with the literature; and, in spite of his compiling a new dictionary of rhymes, I do not think he has any literary sense. He told me before he came that he had only the knowledge of the classic literature which any educated non-literary Chinese would have, and that he was non-literary there was no manner of doubt when he arrived. (Ibid. 186–88)

No further commentary is necessary.

The second way to confirm the authenticity of the Japanese scenes she had intertextually created was by soliciting readers’ responses to her poems. For instance, Lowell was always happy to tell this anecdote: After the appearance of “Guns As Keys” in a magazine, a Japanese wrote to her, “expressing his wondering admiration of [her] descriptive power,” and, in closing, he even “asked how many years she had lived in his country!” (ibid. 21). Commenting on the lyrical poem starting with “At Mishima in the Province of Kai,” which I quoted earlier, Ayscough wrote:

Whoever has stood on the road above Mishima in the Province of Kai knows that this is a perfect description of the great Tokaido, the

Imperial highway lined with pine trees, which runs from Kyoto to Tokyo. (Ibid. 22)

A real tourist's "having-been-there" will confirm the intertextual tourist's recreation and will also confirm that

[T]he "tiger rain" of Japan falls just as Miss Lowell describes it in a later passage:

Beating, snapping, on the cheese-rounds of open
umbrellas,
Licking, tiger-tongued, over the straw mat which
a pilgrim wears upon his shoulders. (Ibid.)

An Imagistic scene. An Oriental(ist) scene. A traveler catches this snapshot of a pilgrim, another traveler, in the middle of a journey through the tiger-tongued raindrops (or words). But, isn't this a narcissistic reflection?

Lowell wrote in the first poem of her "Chinoiserie" in *Pictures of the Floating World*:

REFLECTIONS

When I looked into your eyes,
I saw a garden
With peonies, and tinkling pagodas,
And round-arched bridges
Over still lakes.
A woman sat beside the water
In a rain-blue, silken garment.
She reached through the water
To pluck the crimson peonies
Beneath the surface,
But as she grasped the stems,
They jarred and broke into white-green ripples;
And as she drew out her hand,
The water-drops dripping from it
Stained her rain-blue dress like tears. (27)

Whose eyes are these in which “I” sees the reflections of all these “essentially” Chinese things and the Chinese woman in the rain-blue silk dress? Maybe they are I’s eyes? The crimson peonies beneath the surface of the water will be jarred and broken into white-green ripples when one tries to reach them; for they are only reflections of reality, of the real peonies. But soon as the water stills, they are there, again.

So it is the surface that creates, and hides.

So do words, in the world of intertexts.