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CONTRASTING MODES OF CROSS-CULTURAL ALLUSION IN THE POETRY OF DAVID JONES AND EZRA POUND

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Abstract: The poetry of both David Jones and Ezra Pound is famous, or even notorious, for its wealth of allusions to places and cultural landmarks from non-English-speaking cultures, often including words and phrases from other languages untranslated. While this method can be regarded as a typical stylistic feature of high modernist poetry, both Jones and Pound have specific intentions when employing this procedure, connected to their philosophical outlook. In this paper, I shall contrast Pound's The Cantos, *focusing in particular on Canto 74, with Jones'* The Anathemata, *and his collection* The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments. *I shall argue that, while both Pound and Jones use cross-cultural allusion to establish connections between the particular and the universal, their conception of how particulars relate to universals and to each other differs, leading them to use cross-cultural and cross-linguistic allusion in, partially, contrasting ways.*

David Jones and Ezra Pound are both known for their extensive use of cross-cultural and even cross-linguistic allusion in their poetry, a practice they share with other high modernists, such as T. S. Eliot, although Jones and Pound go to such lengths as to make themselves notoriously difficult to read. Stylistic elements can, however be directed to different ends, and this paper will contrast Pound's and Jones' ways of using cross-cultural allusion, with particular reference to *The Cantos*, and especially *Canto 74*, and to *The Anathemata* (with its *Preface*) and *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments* in the case of Jones, arguing that their strategies arise from, and support, different philosophical orientations. More specifically, Pound is expounding a highly personal worldview in *The Cantos*, according to which he wishes to illustrate the idea of eternally valid values appearing in similar ways in human history, at different times and places, whereas Jones's outlook, partly derived from Thomism, emphasises the particularity and non-repeatability of local phenomena, which are nevertheless manifestations of eternal realities. While there are parallels to be drawn, as well as distinctions to be made, between their metaphysical visions in terms of particulars and universals, they integrate these visions into very different overall philosophical and theological frameworks, traditional Christian in the case of Jones, and not traditionally religious in the case of Pound.

Pound's unfinished epic, *The Cantos*, was written over a period of many years, in fact several decades (sections of it appearing in print between 1930 and 1969), but it is

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nevertheless held together by a notable unity of style, despite the many, sometimes superficially unrelated, historical and mythical motifs which the poem presents. Over *The Cantos* as a whole, a number of fields of interest to Pound are treated, sometimes taking up whole Cantos, or even series of Cantos, and at other times combined in a densely woven fabric in the same Canto – these fields include Italian Renaissance history, especially the life of the political and military leader Sigismondo Malatesta; Chinese history and culture, including a focus on imperial history, Confucius, and also on ideograms; American history of the period before and after Independence, with a special interest in prominent figures such as John Adams; medieval Provencal culture and poetry, particularly the troubadour Arnaut Daniel; and the Odyssey. Pound employs collage in many of the *Cantos*, translating or quoting at length from letters by characters he is interested in, for example – besides techniques of rhythm and juxtaposition he had been developing in his other, shorter poetry.[1] Despite the difficulty of *The Cantos*, however, Pound is not aiming at ultimate obscurity, and, as critics have discerned from early on, the poem contains, and even argues in favour of, his positions on political and financial theory, as well as his metaphysical outlook. In the case of his political and financial positions his advocating for them in the poem is often quite blatant.

Given that *The Cantos* does not have a single subject matter, and that no cultural field he writes about takes up the bulk of the space in The Cantos, it is arguable that the entire poem is constituted by cross-cultural allusions, as there is no home culture dominating the poem – neither the American subject matter of Pound's culture of origin, nor the Italian matter of his adopted country, where he lived during much of the composition of *The Cantos*, is dominant, though both are prominent – and Chinese themes also occupy a considerable portion of the poem, though Pound is only connected to Chinese culture by personal interest. Nevertheless the groups of Cantos dealing with eighteenth-century American politics, Imperial Chinese government and sixteenth-century Italian politics and patronage are gathered together in order to illustrate the same phenomenon, that is, the eternally true principles of good government and artistic understanding – aspects of what he often symbolises as light − showing themselves concretely in different cultures and epochs.[2] Pound could be seen as working with a kind of aesthetic of equivalence, the poetic presentations of different cultures, and the different cultures themselves, embodying and showing forth the same eternal principles, without emphasis being laid on the significance of differences between the outer forms the principles take in different cultures, which are as if different local costumes that happen to be worn by the same person. Rather being able to read the same principles in different local manifestations is evidence of the identity of the principles.

This aesthetic of equivalence can also be seen at work in individual Cantos, and this paper will take Canto 74 as an example. It is the first of the "Pisan Cantos", those Cantos Pound wrote while interned at a prison camp run by the American Army immediately after the Second World War. From his cage he could see a mountain which

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[1] See Terrell xiv, as well as the rest of his work, for Pound's use of sources in *The Cantos*. Brooke-Rose (e.g. 33, 104, 112, 177) discusses Pounds technique of juxtaposition at length.
[2] See Kenner 423 for the "subject-rhyme".

he labels as Mount Taishan, a Chinese sacred mountain, as in the following quotation: "sinceritas / from the death cells in sight of Mt Taishan @ Pisa/as Fujiyama at Gardone" (Pound 447).[3] As can be seen, he compares his identification of the Pisan mountain with the Chinese, with another identification involving seeing something which reminds him of the famous, and also sacred, Japanese Mount Fuji, near Lake Garda in Northern Italy. Having introduced Mount Taishan in this way, it then reappears frequently as a motif in the Canto (448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 454, 457, 463, 469). By the identification, Pound indicates that the abstract qualities associated with Mount Taishan in Chinese culture can be seen in other mountains by those who know and can recognise the qualities: in the case of the prison camp near Pisa, unlike ancient China, it may be that only Pound has the capability of discerning sacred qualities in the mountain near the camp, but he does not need to be in China to see them embodied in a mountain, and yet he sees them in a real mountain, and not just in a mental image of a mountain.

The mention of Mount Taishan soon after in the Canto links the mountain to a favourite philosopher of his, Johannes Scotus Eriugena: "'sunt lumina' said Erigena Scotus / as of Shun on Mt Taishan" (Pound 449). Here the early medieval Irish philosopher is shown invoking light, an important motif for Pound, and then compared to a legendary Chinese emperor,[4] as if Scotus Eriugena might have said "sunt lumina" to describe the emperor on Mount Taishan, had he been there, or known about it, or perhaps as if the Chinese emperor might have said the equivalent there, and they are associated as if they are separate people possessing the same wisdom, which appears in disparate times and places, as Pound believes the 'light' does.[5]

In another more complex equivalence, early in the Canto, just before the first mention of Taishan, using cross-linguistic word play to make a point, Pound writes: "but Wanjina is, shall we say, Ouan Jin / or the man with an education / and whose mouth was removed by his father" (Pound 446-7) – here Pound is recounting an indigenous Australian story, about Wondjina (Terrell 365), who creates the world by naming things, but his mouth is removed, to stop him making too many – Pound's French spelling of "wén rén", Chinese for "man of letters", or "gentleman",[6] is used by him to imply that civilisation has a tendency to overcomplicate, "thereby creating clutter" (447). He introduces "Wanjina" with a play on "OὝ TIΣ" ("no one") the name the crafty Odysseus tricks the Cyclops into calling him (446), connecting obliquely the speechless Wanjina and the educated Odysseus. Here, even if his "Wanjina" and "Ouan Jin" are not the same people in different languages, he is using elements from different cultural traditions to build up to a single point, implying that the cultural traditions he is interested in all point in the same direction, to general truths.

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[3] See for example Ramazani 52, Brooke-Rose 11.

[4] See Terrell 368, Brooke-Rose

[5] On Pound's juxtaposition of light-related references, see, for example, Wilson (209), and also Woodward (32-33), who calls Pound's technique "syncretism". Bacigalupo (100-111) discusses the technique using the term "ideogrammatic correlation".

[6] See Terrell 447, Brooke-Rose 10. Bacigalupo 121 identifies Wondjina, punished for producing too much, with Pound himself.

It is also worth noting that the Chinese characters (ideograms), which are such an eye-catching feature of *The Cantos*, scattered as they are liberally through the text (though more in some Cantos than others), are often translations of words or phrases near them in the text, reinforcing rather than commenting. A straightforward example of this practice can be found early in Canto 98, where, close the line "Make it new" (Pound 704) is a character meaning 'new' (it could also mean 'make new'), together with its transliteration in the Wade-Giles system ('hsin¹').[7]

So this paper's contention is that, amidst the various ways in which Pound uses his abundant cross-cultural and cross-linguistic references in The Cantos, a tendency is present to see similar words and cultural concepts from different cultural spheres as equivalent, representing universal ideas,[8] and he can reinforce his invocation of a given universal concept by naming it in various languages, or by associating a number of, as he sees it, overlapping cultural references to reveal the idea he discerns in them.

Jones can be considered a modernist poet in the style of Pound and Eliot, and was in fact recognised as one of this group by Eliot himself (Jones, *In Parenthesis* vii-viii), but unlike Pound and the early Eliot writes from a consistently orthodox Christian viewpoint. While superficially Jones' poetry can seem opaque and crowded with obscure allusions and phrases from languages other than English, like Pound's, the way he selects his references is quite different, and the metaphysical vision they support is subtly different.

Jones understood the role of the poet as being bardic; that is, he considered that the poet's role is to remember a society's culture in poetry, whether or not that society recognises the poet's role to be to do this, a situation which may obtain in modern conditions (Jones, *The Anathemata* 20-1). The society on behalf of which Jones saw himself performing a bardic role was that of the inhabitants of the Island of Britain – as he makes clear in his dedication to *The Anathemata*.[9] He is both aiming to preserve the culture of the island for present and future generations, and also to commemorate past generations. As a consequence, Jones' sources for his multi-lingual and cross-cultural allusions have to be part of British culture or contributory to it, as well as being cultural elements which he, as someone of his time and place, has come across as part of his cultural experience. Thus he disapproves of doing research specifically for the purpose of find material for his poems: "There must be no mugging-up, no 'ought to know' or 'try to feel'; for only what is actually loved and known can be seen sub specie aeternitatis" (*The Anathemata* 24). So, in accordance with his principles, his main cross-linguistic references involve Welsh and Latin: Welsh because it is a language of Britain, as well as prominent in his experience, as he had a Welsh father and was an enthusiast for Welsh culture, and Latin because it is a culturally contributory language in a British context, and in particular because as the Catholic Church's liturgical language it was the vehicle of sacramental activity in Britain over many centuries. He also occasionally quotes from

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[7] This word would be transliterated "xīn" in the Pinyin system.

[8] Dennis 98 analyses his aim as being the retrieval of time across time and space.

[9] The dedication is a piece of calligraphy by Jones featuring the following text: "PARENTIBUS MEIS ET PRIORIBUS EORUM ET OMNIBUS INDIGENIS OMNIS CANDIDAE INSULAE BRITTONUM GENTIS" (48).

French and German, which are both neighbouring languages, and also emblematic of two of the three principal linguistic-cultural groups which he sees as having come together in British culture (Celtic, Latin and Germanic).[10] It is worth noting that he either does not quote, or rarely quotes, from a number of languages which would appear to be obvious contributors to British culture over the centuries, such as Greek, Hebrew and Irish, and this omission is likely to be due to his lack of personal familiarity with these languages, and his unwillingness to study material specifically for the purpose of including it in his poetry – unlike Pound, he considered himself to be short on ability in languages, and did not even claim mastery of the languages he used extensively, Welsh and Latin.[11] The contrast is clear with the method employed by Pound, who drew his allusions from cultures connected only by his personal interest in them, such as the Chinese and the Provencal, and by his capacity for discerning universal themes in them.

Jones' aim in using cross-cultural allusions is not the kind of estrangement effect possibly envisaged by some other modernists, who want their readers to puzzle over the abstruse allusions, and perhaps pursue research to uncover them, but he often provides his own extensive footnotes in order to elucidate less accessible allusions, as he does, for example, in both of his long poetic works, *In Parenthesis* and *The Anathemata*. He also explains the need sometimes to use a foreign-language term in the Preface to The Anathemata, on the basis that a given word or expression in a particular language carries with it connotations which its translation in another language does not (Jones, *The Anathemata* 11-13) – all the echoes associated with a given word or expression being, for Jones, part of its poetic meaning, and thus part of the material a poet has to work with: "'Tsar' will mean one thing and 'Caesar' another to the end of time" (13). Here again there is a contrast with Pound's methods, who is interested in the equivalence value between intertranslatable terms in different languages, arguably, more than in their unique and variant resonances.

Another aspect of Jones' approach to the use of cross-cultural allusions is his sense of the importance of particular location. He writes about this in an essay on James Joyce ("James Joyce's Dublin"), where he praises Joyce for his artistic dedication to a locality, and speculates that Joyce's Catholic education has contributed to this sensibility (Jones, *Epoch and Artist* 306). Jones makes this speculation because he sees in Joyce's localism the Thomist principle, to which Jones himself is committed, that the universal is discernible to humans only by means of the particular and material. Therefore, in Jones' understanding, it is by careful attention to the concrete details of some definite time and place that the artist can reproduce truth – an artist's representation of a given reality may contain the abstract and universal truths that the original specific reality did.[12] This commitment to the local does not mean that Jones may not engage in cross-cultural allusions, but that his allusions must be relevant to the cultural reality of a given place, a version of which he is re-elaborating in his poetic work. Thus, in the case of Britain, apart

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[10] He is explains this view of the composition of British culture in *The Anathemata* 241 note 2.

[11] Jones disclaims knowledge of any language but English in his essay "On the Difficulties of One Writer of Welsh Affinity Whose Language is English" (Jones *The Dying Gaul* 31).

[12] Nichols 139 discusses how for Jones art represents something beyond itself.

from the importance of the different cultural and linguistic strands settled in the island historically, places and peoples which are part of the cultural history of Britain, by means of influence, or being present in legends and folklore, are part of the cultural picture. Jones' attention to the particularities of place will often then extend to a concern for the localities associated with cultures which have contributed to shaping British culture; so, for example, he is interested in Rome and Jerusalem, and other localities of the Roman Empire, and they are prominent themes in his collection of shorter poems *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments* – while there is an extent to which Rome, Jerusalem and London can evoke each other in his poetry, this mutual referencing does not outweigh the close attention to their individuality.

Jones' long poem, *The Anathemata*, is richly illustrative of his use of cross-cultural allusion. It is a fragmentary poem, in eight loosely connected sections, and it is a kind of epic on the cultural history of Britain, with an emphasis on late antiquity and the middle ages. Five of the sections, from the second to the sixth, show a ship's voyage, from the Mediterranean to London and back – it is also a journey through time, although not unidirectionally. This voyage represents the way that British civilisation is to a significant extent derived from antique Mediterranean culture, so allusions to classical culture support the symbolic import of the voyage. They are numerous, and abound, for example, in the fifth section, "The Lady of the Pool", in which the ship's captain is addressed by a London woman – her monologue is full of references to places of Roman London which underlie the localities as known later. Latin terms are present alluding, for example, to pagan religious statues found under churches, such as "matres" (Jones, *The Anathemata* 127), and to "flamens" (Latin with an English inflection), pagan clergy, who, as Jones explains in a note, a London legend recounts as having become converted to Christianity and become bishops (162, 162 note 4). Latin is also prominent in the poem because of its place in the traditional Catholic Eucharistic liturgy. The poems as a whole is compared to a mass, in which humanity is remembered and prayed for, and as part of the complex analogy the first section begins with a priest offering the bread and wine at a stage of the mass just before the consecration: making a quotation from the liturgy in Latin here, the language in which it has most often been celebrated in Britain, makes present in the poem all those occasions. The words he uses, "ADSCRIPTAM, RATAM, RATIONABILEM"[13] (*The Anathemata* 49) are his aspiration for the poem, which is also a kind of prayer. Liturgical Latin also occurs plentifully in the rest of the poem.

Jones' collection *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments* also contains many interesting examples of Jones' method in cross-cultural allusion. In "The Fatigue", for example, Jones imagines a group of Roman soldiers from Britain stationed in Jerusalem at the time of the Passion, a theme also present in "The Wall" and "The Tribune's Visitation" (Jones, *The Sleeping Lord* 24). The fact that Jones had visited the Holy Land himself made it possible for him to write about Jerusalem, as he had acquired a degree of familiarity with the place.[14] In "The Sleeping Lord" he imagines the blessing of a feast by

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[13] "appointed, established, agreeable to reason".

[14] Jones made an association between British soldiers he saw stationed in Jerusalem and Roman soldiers who were there, as pointed out, for example, by Aldritt 89-90. See also Jones' own letter

a priest, described in such a way as to make it sound almost like a mass, in an early medieval hall in Wales. Jones uses a number of Welsh words for items to be found in the hall, parts of the hall's construction, and other elements in the surroundings, including the word for 'hall' itself, "neuadd" (76) – here using Welsh words makes his description that of a different kind of hall, and setting generally, than if he had only used English vocabulary. The priest is then shown remembering various people – leaders, heroes and saints, some of them not British (79-83) − in the way a priest remembers people to pray for at a mass, but the long and varied list only contains names Jones estimates an early medieval Welsh priest might have heard of. "The Tribune's Visitation" and "The Tutelar of the Place" both thematise the idea that imperial and bureaucratic civilisations seek to flatten local particularities – in the case of "The Tribune's Visitation" a Roman tribune is imagined enjoining a group of soldiers to abandon local loyalties in favour of the Empire. Although some twentieth-century British military terminology is included here (e.g. "you junior N.C.O.s" *The Sleeping Lord* 49), making the point that that there is a parallel between the Roman Empire and the British Empire,[15] the emphasis is on a wealth of detail about specificities of the Roman army, and places in the ancient world where various soldiers are from or have been.

In terms of the metaphysical implications of the ways Jones and Pound employ cross-cultural allusions, while both believe that concrete particulars can reveal universal truths, Jones, faithful to his neo-Thomist standpoint, sees any place or set of circumstances, closely observed, as embodying and capable of revealing universal principles, which are also divine principles. Each particular physical reality, specifiable in its place and time, will reveal divine principles in its own unique way, however, and perhaps different portions of these principles, never understandable to humans in their totality, in each case. Pound's vision, while not based on any single well-articulated traditional philosophy, seems to be that certain universal principles or sets of principles are revealed at identifiable and various times and places, but not at all times and places, and that when they are manifested the fact that they are manifested, and the sameness of the principles manifested, is of interest to the beholder. Thus periods and places of interest to Pound are those in which he believes universal principles have manifested themselves, where- and whenever that may have been, and whether or not the privileged times and places are closely related to his own cultural upbringing and experience. Pound's universal principles are principles of the good, but their metaphysical status is less clear-cut than those of Jones, who subscribes to a theistic position. For Pound, as for Jones, for universal principles to be perceived, the beholder needs certain capabilities, which may or may not be present.

What emerges from a comparison of Pound's and Jones' prolific use of cross-cultural allusion is that their methods and aims show similarities while being ultimately different. Pound selects his source fields for his allusions according to their suitability for illustrating an abstract point, and is guided by the belief that the universal good is

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to Saunders Lewis on his visit to Jerusalem and its influence on his writings (Jones *Dai Greatcoat* 56-7).

[15] See Pagnoulle 59.

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especially discernible through particulars at certain times and places, which can be treated as equivalent in that they show forth the same universal good. Jones' allusions are selected according to their belonging, even if at a distance, to a cultural complex of which he is at the centre, and that cultural complex, which happens to be his, reveals aspects of the universal, which he believes is the divine, in its own ways.

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