

Vagueness: Identity and Understanding Across Literatures East and West

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment for the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

The University of Sydney

2019

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

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31 January 2019

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Abstract

The twentieth century witnessed an explosion in cultural exchanges between East and West. Through the increasing ease with which ideas could be communicated across the globe, and with which people, sometimes willingly, sometimes not, could move between distant countries, intercultural cross-fertilization became increasingly important to both “Eastern” and “Western” art. Yet this intellectual and physical movement also brought new forms of art that defied previous modes of interpretation, and called the very concepts of East and West into question. This dissertation uses the great exchange of people and ideas in the twentieth century to ask what identity cross-cultural literature can have and how we as critics should understand the heterogenous materials “East-West” literature presents us.

My study addresses itself to debates in comparative literature and world literature. In particular, the concept of “literary worlds,” or of works of literature as imaginative worlds unto themselves, is the starting point of this thesis. Though the theory of literary worlds is rich and informative, it falters when dealing with texts founded on different ontologies as it can run the risk of highlighting superficial similarities without attending to deep-level differences. Recent work in philosophical logic, philosophical approaches to vagueness, and Asian Analytic Philosophy fortifies the theory, and the strengthened concept of literary worlds serves as a methodological framework throughout this dissertation.

The ensuing chapters compare literary responses to East Asian texts or sets of texts, then consider what sort of epistemic and ontological relations obtain between these different literary works. Chapter II looks at Ted Hughes’ and Chou Wen-Chung’s unfinished operatic adaptation of the *Bardo Thödol*. Hughes and Chou worked to make the Eastern and Western material from which they were constructing the *Bardo* fuse in a coherent East-West text. The process by which

they attempted to carry out that fusion is the subject of the chapter. Chapter III considers two adaptations, one by Paul Claudel and one by Mishima Yukio, of the classical Japanese Nō play *Kantan*. The ways in which Claudel and Mishima borrowed from *Kantan* to suit their own aesthetic and philosophical visions provides a fascinating case study of identity relations between literary worlds bearing the same origins but having different coherences. Chapter IV compares the poetry of Paul Claudel and Kuki Shūzō written in the 1920s, during which time Claudel lived in Kuki's native Tokyo and Kuki in Claudel's native Paris. To craft short poems on life in one another's cities, Claudel and Kuki drew from similar sources and experiences, yet, as their critical writings show, held divergent views of the fundamental structure of art and, indeed, of the universe. The extent to which these divergent metaphysical viewpoints affect the structure of each poet's poetic worlds is considered. Finally, Chapter V treats the exile poetry of Bei Dao along with Ted Hughes' rewriting of a poem on his native Calder Valley into a "Chinese history". Both Bei Dao and Hughes have spoken in depth about the effects of tradition on poetic composition and reception, and the chapter ruminates on how that conception changes over time, and what it means for Bei Dao's and Ted Hughes' poetry and our comprehension of it. The Conclusion reconsiders the modified theory of literary worlds advanced at the start of the dissertation, and reflects on how the findings of the previous five chapters might affect future study of East-West and comparative literature.

A Note on Translations

Unless otherwise noted, all translations from French and Japanese are my own. For translations from Chinese, I have deferred to extant translations into English, though I have provided the original Chinese texts where beneficial.

Abbreviations

When citing Paul Claudel's work, I have employed the following abbreviations:

Œuvre poétique: Po.

Œuvres en prose: Pr.

Œuvres complètes: Oc.

Théâtre: Th.

All of Kuki Shūzō's writings cited in this dissertation are found in *Kuki Shūzō Zenshū*, Dai Ichi Maki, which I have abbreviated as *Zs*.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to everyone at Sydney and Keio Universities with whom I have discussed the ideas presented here, as well as to those present in the audiences in Copenhagen, Paris, Sydney, and Tokyo at which I have tested parts of this work. Particular thanks are due to Stephane Cordier, Ryland Engels, Ryoichi Imai, and, more than to anyone, to Jessica Sun.

A special debt of gratitude is owed to my supervisor in the French Department at Keio, Ayako Nishino. Her insight into French and Japanese literature, and into the process of comparing literature across languages and cultures, has taught me more than I could hope to express.

My greatest thanks go to my supervisor, Mark Byron. His innumerable insights and steadfast guidance in conversations throughout the past years, along with his inspiring personality and work, have led to a piece of work far better than I would have been able to achieve without him. What I owe him is incalculable.

Part of Chapter I was published as “A Critique of Literary Worlds in World Literature Theory: Multidimensionality as a Basis of Comparison in *The Journal of World Literature* 3:3, pp. 354-372, and Chapter IV was founded on an article in French published as “La Poésie de Paul Claudel et de Kuki Shūzō durant les années 1920 : le Japon, la France, et le monde” in *Cahiers d'études françaises* 23, pp. 31-46. I am grateful to all who helped refine my thoughts during the publication processes of both.

A final word goes to my family, and to Gabriela, to whom I dedicate this work.

Introduction

Les choses ne sont pas seulement des objets de connaissance,
mais des motifs de co-naissance. Elles provoquent, elles déterminent dans le
sujet toutes les attitudes impliquées par sa construction.

Elles suscitent en lui une image animée, leur symbole commun.

Elles lui fournissent le moyen de co-naître,
de se connaître par rapport à elles, de produire et
de diriger la force nécessaire pour assurer
entre les deux termes contact. (Claudel, *Po.* 187)¹

When Paul Claudel began to compose *l'Art Poétique*, he was taking his first look at the “grand livre de l’Orient” as a young consul in China. Fed up with the “l’ancienne [logique qui] avait le syllogism pour organe” [“the old logic with the syllogism as its motor”], Claudel constructed “une nouvelle logique” that could explain the correspondences he found in the “East”:

Jadis au Japon, comme je montais de Nikkô à Chuzenji, je vis, quoique grandement
distants, juxtaposés par l’alignement de mon œil, la verdure d’un érable combler l’accord
proposé par un pin. Les présentes pages commentent ce texte forestier, l’énonciation

¹ “Things are not merely the objects of knowledge [*connaissance*], but the motifs of *co-naissance* (being born together). They provoke, they determine in the subject all of the attitudes implicated by their construction. They elicit in him an animated image, their common symbol. They provide him with the means to *co-naître*, to know himself in relation to them, to produce and to direct the force needed to assure contact between the two terms.”

arborescent, par Juin, d'un nouvel Art poétique de l'Univers, d'une nouvelle Logique.
(*Po.* 143)²

This new logic accounts for the co-naissance of self and other, the way in which two things fill one another's gaps and bring one another into being, just as the greenery of the maple rises to accord with the pine at Chuzenji. It might be more just to say that the two things bring another aspect of being into existence. The pine and the maple complement one another and create a new image that arises from their fusion.

The problem of how to fuse East and West remained a problem for Claudel throughout his life. For those of us writing over a century after the *Art Poétique*, the categories of 'East' and 'West' no longer have the force they had for Claudel and many of his contemporaries. Writing in the shadow of literary movements that have shown either the nefariousness of such categories or the ultimate hollowness of grand categories in general,³ scholars today are more cautious in speaking of East and West. Even the more recent confidence of decidedly anti-colonial writers like Gary Snyder, who look to the East as a discrete other from which the West can learn, looks quaint to critics who to concede that 'East' and 'West' are, at best, shorthand terms for a mass of smaller, regional cultural groups connected to one another in a web too complex to be reduced to a single term.⁴ In short, the phrase East-West fusion sounds offkey to the contemporary ear, and

² "Once in Japan, as I went up from Nikkō to Chuzenji, I saw, however greatly distant, juxtaposed by the alignment of my eye, the green of a maple tree fill the harmony [*accord*] proposed by a pine tree. The present pages comment upon this forest text, the arborescent enunciation, by June of a new Poetic Art of the Universe, of a new Logic."

³ I think here of postcolonialism with its debt to the work of Edward Said, particularly *Orientalism*, and poststructuralism and deconstruction. Though the present work does not take a postcolonial approach, Said's influence continues to be felt in studies dealing with knowledge of the "East." See especially Said (1995), pp. 1-30.

⁴ Practically any modern nation could fit this definition, but China and the United Kingdom, with their shifting historical borders and multiple ethnic groups, lend themselves as immediate examples.

the critic who uses the terms ‘East’ and ‘West’ might feel obliged to quarantine them in scare quotes, as I have done thus far.

Yet the differences between East and West and the possibility of their reconciliation have fascinated thinkers for centuries. The aim of this dissertation is to understand what East and West could mean in literary criticism, and what categories we should give them as we study the various groups and literary productions we find in either region. It looks at ways to “reconcile” East and West in a single text, and pays particular attention to how East and West are constructed during the act of comparison and fusion.⁵ It shows that, when we compare, we create a new *image* of the two things we are comparing. This image is a set of the properties we believe is held by each thing, be it the “East,” “China,” ‘France,’ or “Britain.” But, like Claudel’s maple and pine, this image needs the image of the comparand, the thing to which it is compared, in order to be complete: there are gaps in both that to be filled require a complement. The gappiness of literary categories, of “East” and “West” themselves, suggests their *ontological vagueness*. They are indeterminate, not because we do not know enough about them, but because their boundaries are fixed in comparison and fluctuate depending on the comparand that is used to fix them.

Call the literary work itself a world. This world exists as part of a *set of worlds* that is the totality of the author’s works and beliefs along with the social and philosophical (ontological) principles that might have fed into his or her texts and thoughts. This set is itself placed within a

⁵ The notion of the fusion of East and West naturally directs our attention to Ernest Fenollosa’s “The Coming Fusion of East and West” and his work more generally. Though Fenollosa is slightly out of the scope of this thesis, his importance for East-West literature cannot be ignored. For a discussion, see Park (2008), pp. 4-22.

constellation of belief.⁶ The constellation of belief is the author's wider historical and social context, including what we might call the dominant modes of thought or ontologies that correspond roughly to the time at which the author was writing. Obviously, we cannot know the totality of beliefs of any given time, including our own. Thus, the literary world, set of worlds, and constellation must remain epistemically vague to us: we simply do not have the necessary knowledge to fix the boundaries or flesh out *in full* the interior of any of these things. But we can have a more precise idea of how they correspond, if we adopt a model or a frame of mind analogous to probabilistic approaches to vagueness. Ontological vagueness comes in once we consider that there are a large variety of constellations within the *universe* that comprises the totality of literary works. Since a world is necessarily coherent (it operates according to some logic, even if that logic is non-classical or non-Western), borrowing from it may cause parts of it to become deformed as they are moved into new constellations and sets of belief. There is quite simply no fact of the matter according to which interpretation is correct, for an interpretation that is valid relative to one constellation may not be valid relative to another, because the aspect of a text or parts of a text may change even as original meanings are kept as tokens of word or text types. To give an example, it is not the case, as we will see in the Chapter II, that the Chou-Hughes *Bardo Thödol* project gives a correct or incorrect interpretation of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*; rather, the *Bardo* forms a unique world of the *Bardo* by ferrying across certain elements of the *Tibetan Book* and making them cohere under the organizing principle of Chou and Hughes' conceptions of "Eastern" and "Western" art. There does also not seem to be a single moment at which a text or idea changes its aspect—the boundaries are vague.

⁶ Again see Monneret (2010). I differ from Monneret in that I do not say that literary works range across several worlds but that each world coheres to fit into its constellation, which accounts for deformations as aspects of other literary works are translated into new constellations of belief.

This introductory chapter will give a brief history of the comparison of East and West. It will look briefly at some case studies of thinkers from Europe, China, and Japan who tried to understand and establish dialogue across one another's cultures. How each attempt to understand involves the creation of an image of East and West or some variation thereof will take center stage. The overview will help to reveal what is at stake and what is most disputed in the study of literature East and West.

Chapter I narrows the focus to the history of "world literature" as a conceptual tool. The chapter is most interested in a particular model of understanding world literature: literary worlds. Beginning with the work of Thomas Pavel and Lubomir Doležel in the 1980s, literary worlds have become influential again as a way of allowing, within the framework of a single "world" of world literature, for disconnections between different literary traditions founded on contrasting ways of carving up and interpreting the world. Some of the scholars most prone to use the metaphor of literary worlds are, interestingly, scholars of Chinese literature: Eric Hayot, Alexander Beecroft, and Haun Saussy. But the theory falters when dealing with the trans-world identity of characters, or the identity of characters across multiple texts or worlds, and when explaining how logically inconsistent worlds access one another. By referencing recent work in modal logic, philosophical approaches to vagueness, and G.E.R. Lloyd's notion of the multidimensionality of literature I offer a strengthened model that helps to explain literary interactions between East and West.

Chapter II is the first of four in-depth analyses of literary works that attempt to fuse East and West. In each of these four chapters I triangulate three texts: an East Asian text, with text

understood in a wide sense, and two responses to it, one by a French or English writer and one by a Chinese or Japanese writer. Each triangulation will increase in size. The first triangulation is the unfinished collaboration between Chou Wen-chung and Ted Hughes on an operatic adaptation of the *Bardo Thödol*, more commonly known as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Though Chou and Hughes were dealing with a Tibetan text, or rather Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz's eccentric translation of a Tibetan text, both Chou and Hughes saw the *Bardo* project as a way to bring East and West together in a new sort of literature, one that transcended older national classifications and embraced the mixing of cultures that was already well underway as Chou and Hughes worked in the late 1950s.

Chapter III turns to the Japanese dramatic form of *Nō*. It considers two adaptations to the classical *nō Kantan* 邯鄲, Mishima Yukio's *shinsaku nō* or "new *nō*" *Kantan* 邯鄲 and Scène VII, Journée III of Paul Claudel's *Le Soulier de Satin*. Although this chapter deals with three separate texts, the focus on ways of blending Eastern and Western ideas remains. Only at this point does the difficulty of making separate ontologies cohere in a single text become starker, as the Buddhist-influenced classical *Nō* is made to fit with Claudel's Catholic conception of the world or Mishima's post-war Japanese vision. My aim here will be to see whether we can think of these three texts as being separated from one another by degrees, or whether there is another, more sensitive way of understanding the identity relations between them.

Chapter IV turns to poetry. Paul Claudel again figures, but his partner is now the poet and philosopher Kuki Shūzō. As Claudel worked as ambassador to Japan in the 1920s, during which time he crafted a series of poems and essays on and influenced by Japan and its arts, Kuki studied in Europe. In Germany and Paris he wrote *tanka* on his experiences living in a foreign land and a book, *Iki no kōzō*, outlining the essential differences between Japan and the West.

Kuki and Claudel are not responding to a single text, but to one another's home cities: Tokyo and Paris. The chapter looks at what happens to "Japan" and "France" and the arts associated with them as they enter Claudel's and Kuki's constellations of belief. The role of *impossible worlds* comes into view as a means by which to understand the process of assimilating foreign ideas into a different constellation of belief.

Chapter V compares the exile poetry of Bei Dao and Ted Hughes' vision of China in the final years of his life. It examines how both Bei Dao and Hughes attempt to situate their poetry in a clearly defined national, and occasionally ethnic, tradition, and how their poetic treatments of China modify their understanding of their literary inheritance. The chapter looks at Hughes' substantial revision of his poem "The Trance of Light," which originally takes a stand against the industrialization of the Calder Valley in his native Yorkshire, but then is transformed into "A Chinese History of Calder Valley." My attention fixes on how Hughes' decision to rewrite the poem correlates with his changing attitudes towards English literature. It also treats, with an eye on Stephen Owen's famous critique of Bei Dao's work, the poetry Bei Dao wrote reflecting on China and the Chinese tradition during his time in exile. Because the triangulation here involves not a response to a single text or even city or nation but to the idea of tradition in the late twentieth century, it is the most complex piece of this dissertation. Yet it also shows most clearly the ontological vagueness of literature, and the ways in which understandings of East and West shift depending on the terms brought to the comparison.

The concluding chapter reconsiders the methodological framework introduced in Chapter I. It evaluates how well multidimensionality and ontological vagueness help to explain the many texts analyzed earlier in the thesis. It suggests how the model developed in this dissertation might be applied to East-West and comparative literature more broadly. Conceiving of literature East

and West as multidimensional and ontologically vague, accepting, that is, that the terms and entities we deal with are often necessarily imprecise, can help us, intriguingly, more firmly to grasp our often-puzzling materials. We can have, to paraphrase Cian Dorr, vagueness without ignorance; it is the task of this dissertation to show how such knowledge of the imprecise can be not only possible but beneficial.

“Triangulation” will allow us better to see just what *can* happen to a literary work as it is adapted across time,⁷ space, language, and ontology. After establishing the methodology, the scope of my thesis will therefore expand; starting with a collaboration; moving to a reaction to a single text; going through responses to parts of French and Japanese literary traditions; and concluding with the concept of tradition writ large. Using the framework I set in Chapter I, I will be considering how a single text coheres in translation, how multiple texts belonging to different literary constellations relate to one another, and how worlds, sets, and constellations are conceived in relation to the entire universe of literature.

A word on the historical span of the texts I will be analyzing in Chapters II-V: with the exception of some of the older texts in the various triangulations, most of them fall between 1920 and the end of the century. This puts me in the heart of modernism, two years after the publication of *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, and sees me through Tiananmen Square, the bursting of the Japanese asset price bubble, and the passing of Hong Kong from Britain to the People’s Republic of China. Overstating the revolutions in politics, in economics, in literature, and in the notions of ‘Britain,’ ‘China,’ ‘France,’ and ‘Japan’ during this time would be difficult. Giving an adequate overview of any one of these revolutions would

⁷ David Lewis mentions that the problems of trans-world identity are analogous to the problems of identity over time. See Lewis (1986), pp. 202-210.

itself require a thesis-length study. But some overview of the historical situatedness of the texts that make up this thesis is necessary.

In Japan, the Taishō era during which time Claudel arrived in Japan as ambassador, Kuki departed for Europe, and Mishima was born witnessed a change in Japanese relations with the rest of the world. As Seiji M. Lippit explains, this was the era of “Taishō cosmopolitanism,” when Japanese literature was “placed in into a universal field of modern culture,” a new orientation “[signaling] a weakening of the seemingly unbridgeable gap between Japan and the West that had tended to color the works of an earlier generation of writers such as Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) and Mori Ogai [1862-1922]” (12). Paul Varley describes the emergence of mass culture during the Taisho era: “advances in public transportation, communication, higher education, publishing, and journalism were among the factors that contributed to the widening of opportunities, especially for middle-class urban dwellers, to participate in a new kind of up-to-date ‘cultural life’” (286). Western “habits and fads” became ever more popular; Western interior design became fashionable; western fashion was sported by “modern” urban men and women (Varley 287), and the phonograph and radio became widely distributed and “contributed greatly to the spread of new culture, particularly in making available for the first time to all Japanese Western music” (Varley 288). The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, through which Claudel lived and which he vividly describes in “A travers les villes en flames” [“Across the Cities Aflame”], devastated Tokyo and its surroundings, but accelerated Tokyo’s modernization, “for in the process of the city’s reconstruction it was provided with a greatly increased number of bars, cafés, and other places of leisure and entertainment where the ‘modern’ generation could meet and socialize” (Varley 287). Kuki, of course, was in Europe during this time of change, and Leslie Pincus claims that upon arriving back in Tokyo “the scene that greeted his homecoming

resembled the capitals of Europe more than he might have imagined from the distanced vantage point of Paris” (150). In fact, Pincus speculates that Kuki’s discovery of this unexpected modernization of Tokyo drove him towards a more nationalistic mindset, distraught as he was over the “invasive presence of the West” in his homeland (150).

It was also a time of increased circulation of Western literature in Japan. Hoyt Long has applied distant reading techniques to analyze the literary field of Taishō and early Shōwa Japan. The amount of translated texts in important Japanese poetic journals increased six percent between 1924 and 1929, a small increase but greater than that enjoyed by poetry from other languages (Long, “Fog” 285). Though Carl Sandburg and an assortment of American, British, and Russian writers proved popular in the 1920s, French literature was dominant in Japan, and avant-garde poetry was most dominant of all, with Jean Cocteau, Guillaume Apollinaire, Paul Eluard, and Paul Valéry being among the most popular (Long, “Fog” 305-306). The orientation changed in the 1930s, as modernist texts became widely distributed and leftist writers were pushed offstage and the literary field split more strikingly into partisan camps (Long, “Fog” 312-314).⁸

In China, on the other hand, the 1920s came on the heels of the May Fourth Movement, itself a product of cosmopolitanism, as Tse-tung Chow explains. Young Chinese intellectuals returned home after years spent studying in Japan, Europe, and the United States and looked for

⁸ Long notes that the situation contrasts with that in China, where the field of translated literature was even more variegated: “Although synchronous with the earlier communities map for Japan, it is clear that the critical attention of Chinese writers was attuned to a quite different body of literary information. Setting aside the obvious difference that the Chinese data include journals that published as much fiction as they did poetry, three additional contrasts are worth noting. The first is temporal, in that a majority of the figures in the map, including the Japanese authors, represent a generation at least one, and in some cases several, decades removed from the time of translation. Modernism had yet to make noticeable inroads, which raises important historical questions about the comparative velocities of texts as they circled the globe” (“Fog” 312).

a way to modernize Chinese politics and culture in the face of imperial threats from Japan and the West (41-42). The May Fourth Incident of 1919, from which the Movement subsequently took its name and teleology, was sparked by the Versailles Treaty. Though Germany had lost the war and its grip on its possessions in China, the Versailles Treaty turned German imperial claims not back to China but to Japan (Chow 85-94). Young Chinese intellectuals and students saw this as an intolerable humiliation and proof of the ineptitude of the Chinese government, and on May 4, 1919, took to the streets of Beijing in protest. The demonstrations catalyzed the spread of liberal ideas throughout China and, according to Chow, the “crack up” of “the antiquated civilization” (116). To these political developments we might add that the Movement ushered in a new era of Chinese politics and literature, such as that of Lu Xun 鲁迅 and Zhou Zuoren 周作人.⁹ The 1920s in China thus featured the growth of workers’ rights and women’s rights, the introduction of educational reform, and the general development of a new Chinese national consciousness pitched in opposition to Japanese and Western imperialism (Chow 255-264).

In England and France, the 1920s witnessed the height of modernism, a movement which, of course, owed much to the arts of East Asia, or at least to those of China and Japan. Zhaoming Qian has shown that this debt is not only that of early and high modernism, but even of late modernism, for which the idea of China and the “East” provided inspiration throughout the twentieth century.¹⁰ Though the influence of East Asia on modernism in the West might seem evident, Qian echoes Christopher Bush’s claims that we do not recognize the influence enough.

⁹ For an overview of the origins and aims of the May Fourth Writers and their relation to classical Chinese literature, see He Zhongming (2017). The Movement is discussed further in 5.1 of this dissertation.

¹⁰ For Qian’s takes on East Asia and early and high modernism, see Qian (1995), and, more recently, Qian (2012), pp. xiii-xxiv. For his work on late modernism and East Asia, see Qian (2017). In the same space we should mention Arrowsmith (2010), who shows the incalculable debt of modernist thought to East Asian art.

As Bush has it, “for all its talk of globalization and transnationalism, contemporary modernist studies knows less and cares less about China than did many writers and thinkers in the modernist era itself” (xiv; qtd in Qian, “Introduction” xiv).¹¹ Bush asks us to look at modernist references to China not as ways of talking about “something else,” but to consider that “much of modernism’s China that has been dismissed as offhand, allegorical, ornamental, or *merely* formal in fact constitutes a rich archive of historical artifacts” (xv). Though neither of the European writers considered in this study are, strictly speaking, modernists—Caudel was born too early, Hughes too late—their engagements with East Asia do evince rich and sustained engagements with that part of the world rather than haphazard allusions. But since these East Asian elements transform as they are ferried into the constellations of belief of Claudel and Hughes, they can prove difficult to spot. The same, in fact, is true of Japan and China in the work of Kuki, Mishima, and Bei Dao. The problem of identifying China or Japan or East Asia, or indeed the “West,” is not confined to modernism, nor to writings by Westerners.

This is only the starting point of this thesis, but it is, I think, an intriguing point of departure. We begin in the middle of the great flow of information East and West in the modernist era, and see the cracks begin to widen in the various colonial and national projects East and West. By the time this dissertation gets to Chapter V, we will be dealing with a very different East and West, and the point of that chapter is to trace that change, or at least a miniature version of it in the work of one Chinese and one English poet. Yet the layout of this dissertation is not chronological. In part this stems from the problem of translation and understanding across cultures, a problem that can neither be confined to single era, nor seems to have developed linearly. For all the changes that occurred between 1920 and the end of the

¹¹ Bush’s (and Qian’s) complaint echoes Etiemble’s much stronger and wider ranging one of “l’Europe ingrate” in *L’Europe chinoise*, pp. 1-14.

century, the problems of translation are perennial, the problems of understanding people who, because of language, culture, or history, do not quite seem to be describing the world to which we are accustomed. The historical aspect of this difficulty will emerge again and again across this dissertation, but since the thesis is concerned with a framework for comparing across cultures, slightly disrupting the sense of a chronological progression of understanding and agreement between East and West provides the best chance to avoid falling into a complacent teleological understanding of the problems of translation or of mutual intelligibility between traditions.

When we compare literature, and not just literature “East and West,” what exactly are we comparing? The name suggests that we are comparing different manifestations of literature, in which case “comparative literature” is shorthand for “comparing across cultures” or “comparing literature written in multiple languages.” This, at least, is what Haun Saussy has suggested (Edmond et al., 661). But as Saussy notes whatever foundation we take for our comparison is ambiguous: “we don’t spend much time arguing about whether Japanese literature is more or less this or that than Arabic, whether Dutch realism is more realistic than Danish, or which nation has the most or the best literature” (Edmond et al., 661). In other words, to compare seems to compare the quality of two things. It may be, then, that we are simply “reading” across cultures and languages. Yet even if this does away with the implication that we are pitting pieces of literature against one another in order to crown one tradition or nation as the best, it retains another more fundamental problem: we are presupposing that the things we are reading are all members of the same class of literature, and that they are all therefore mutually intelligible. This means that we are presupposing the identity of the things we study before we even begin to study

them.¹² What may be the most interesting and important task of comparative literature, encountering and categorizing the unknown, the strange, and the foreign on its own terms, is left undone as we assume that everything we come across fits into the general categories we already possess.

Saussy's concerns are not new. In the mid-century, René Etiemble and René Wellek diagnosed a "crisis" in comparative literature. Noting that the discipline began mostly as comparison across the Rhine with the sort of nationalistic undertones Saussy deplors, Wellek suggested that, while it "has the immense merit of combatting false national histories," comparative literature has neither a well-defined subject matter nor a rigorous methodology (162). He took issue with Western European academics who perpetuated the outdated methods of nineteenth-century scholars by trying "to widen suddenly the scope of comparative literature in order to include the study of national illusions, of fixed ideas which nations have of one another" (163-164). Such a project would appear impossible because literary works do not arise thanks to cause and effect relations, but have their "integrity and meaning violated if we break them up into sources and influences" (164). By turning away from the artificial methodology of comparing across artificial national boundaries, Wellek wants to achieve "a greater mobility and an ideal universality in our studies" (168). He asks us to see that:

There is what has been rightly called an 'ontological gap' between the psychology of the author and the work of art, between life and society on the one hand and the aesthetic object. I have called the work of art 'intrinsic' and that of its relations to the mind of the author, to society, etc., 'extrinsic.' Still, this distinction cannot mean that genetic relations

¹² On the problem of identity in literature, see Strawson (2000), pp. 22-28.

should be ignored or even despised or that intrinsic study is mere formalism or irrelevant aestheticism. Precisely the carefully worked out concept of a stratified structure of signs and meanings attempts to overcome the old dichotomy of content and form. What is usually called the ‘content’ or ‘idea’ in a work of art is incorporated into the structure of the work of art as part of its ‘world’ of projected meanings. (170)

Note Wellek’s invocation, if hesitantly and in inverted commas, of the term “world” to describe the non-coincidence of the work of art and the mind of its author and the society in which it was produced. To rejuvenate comparative literature, it seems necessarily to carve out an ontological space for the work of art outside of a particular socio-historical or psychological frame.

Motivated by his own status as a scholar of Chinese and Japanese literature, Etiemble shared many of Wellek’s concerns. He wished to see comparative literature take a broader scope by comparing not only between literatures within Western Europe but also between Europe and East Asia (*Connaissance* 14-15). But since comparison between such distant languages and traditions might require a different methodology than requires comparison across the Rhine, Etiemble’s evaluation of the state of the discipline left open the possibility that comparative literature could not take on such a task (*Comparaison* 113-114). We can see here that East Asia serves both as a site of promise for comparative literature (it can rejuvenate the field) and as the ultimate check on the discipline (it presents materials for which the European discipline cannot account). The problem of East Asia for comparative literature has not faded. More recently, François Jullien has cast China as an indispensable foil to Western thinking and called for a “philosophy of the gap” between the West and China. When we find ruptures between Western and Chinese thinking, between, say, French and Chinese terms, Jullien asks that we “[n]e

laissons pas recouvrir cet écart, car nous perdrons alors des ressources qui pourraient irriguer notre commune intelligence ; ou, plutôt, faisons *travailler l'écart* de façon à ouvrir d'autres possibles dans la pensée" ["do not cover this gap back up, for we would lose resources that could irrigate our common intelligence; or, rather, let's make the gap work [*faisons travailler l'écart*] in such a way that it opens other possibilities for thought"] ("Paris-Pekin" 191). To his credit, Jullien asks us not only to make gaps work between China and Europe, but within Europe, or within whatever culture to which his readers might belong, as well. Thinking not of unity but of rupture would allow us to "frayer chaque fois un nouvel accès – ouvrir une nouvelle fenêtre – sur l'*impensé*" ["clear each time [we think by way of gaps] a new access—open a new window—on the *unthought*"] ("Paris-Pekin" 192). For both Jullien and Etienne, China can tear the non-Chinese thinker away from expected modes of thought and, by making thought break down, can open up new paths of enquiry and new modes of investigation.

We might view this debate over the means and ends of comparative literature in light of a much older discussion of how the nations, languages, and literatures of East Asia relate to those of Europe. In his preface to the *Novissima Sinica*, Leibniz provided one of the earliest philosophical reflections on Chinese thought. Leibniz, of course, did not have firsthand knowledge of China. His sources were the reports of the Jesuits, who had with some success ingratiated themselves with the Chinese government. This distance notwithstanding, or possibly because of this distance, Leibniz gives a disinterested appraisal of Chinese philosophy and theology. He contends that the extremes of Eurasia—Europe and China—are endowed with the greatest culture and refinement (45). "In profundity of knowledge and in the theoretical disciplines we are their superiors," Leibniz asserts, remarking that "they have remained content with a sort of empirical geometry, which our artisans universally possess" (46). In short, the

European excels in speculation and theory, while the Chinese concerns himself with the practical. Yet Leibniz believes that the Chinese excellence in “practical philosophy” gives them their own advantage over Europe. Because the Chinese care more for the practical, their government is more orderly and their society more harmonious. This in turn grows from the natural religiosity of the Chinese. True, the Chinese are not Christian, but like the Ancient Greeks they have hit upon profound truths and behave as piously as one could expect of Christians (47). Due to their practicality and their natural religion, the Chinese, Leibniz thinks, “rarely show evidences of hatred, wrath, or excitement” (47). Leibniz is so impressed by the Jesuit descriptions of Chinese society that he proposes that the Chinese should send missionaries to Europe. Europeans have much to teach the Chinese about technology and metaphysics, and the Chinese have much to teach Europe of practical science. Indeed, the exchange between Europe and China must be equal if Europe is not to fall behind the Chinese once the Jesuits have successfully communicated to China all that the Middle Kingdom lacks.

The “practical philosophy” Leibniz discerned in China would fascinate later scholars as well, notably Cambridge critic I.A. Richards. In his reading of Mencius, Richards accentuates the materialism of Chinese thought. He feels that what Chinese philosophy does “is not so much inquiring into the nature of man as giving an account of it which will conduce to the maintenance of these fixed, unquestionable observances” (57). The Chinese eschew the Oedipal desire for knowledge at all costs and take on that which is amenable to stable government. The words in which the Chinese frame their enquiries “seem almost willfully to avoid the kind of distinctions which a Western reader craves” (57). Going beyond Leibniz, Richards states that the discrepancies between Western and Chinese enquiry owe to the Chinese thinking in an entirely different fashion from their Western counterparts. Modern Western prose writers feel the

obligation to make “statements”; Mencius seems “to be uttering laws—something which no modern thinker ever consciously does” (61). Though Chinese philosophy provides a practical basis for government, Richards thinks, it may be that Chinese philosophy is also penetrating and insightful about society, not simply a servant of government (59). To determine whether this is so, Richards proposes that Westerners put aside their own modes of thinking and enter into the Chinese mind, assuming that such an endeavor is possible.

Richards’ interest in the concreteness of Chinese thought extends to Chinese aesthetics and the Chinese language. Here Richards overlaps with Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa, though he pushes back against them. He agrees that concreteness makes the Chinese method of writing and philosophizing more poetic. He adds that the Chinese sign—though “not regarded in the least as a pictogram—had an evocative power greater than that of our written words” (59). But ‘concreteness’ has more than a poetic use for Richards. He writes that “our theories of knowledge, such as they are, indisputably succeed best with events observable by the senses.” The ‘our’ here encompasses intellectuals East and West, as Richards is trying to use the particular example of Mencius to make wide-ranging claims for human knowledge formation. For instance, Richards claims that modern psychology, which he understands as a universal human endeavor, builds concepts “that gain their consistency and structure by being transferred from processes of thought applicable to physical, not psychological, occurrences” (63). For Richards, this means that the concreteness of the Chinese sign and the Chinese way of thinking, at least as it is found in Mencius, is oddly well-suited to serve modern psychology, for it does not create what the Cambridge critic would see as an artificial divide between the mental and the physical (64). Of course, Richards does consider the possibility that there could be fundamental differences in some aspects of “Eastern” and “Western” “minds,” so that Mencius, when

speaking of 心 (*xin*) and 性 (*xing*) might have been speaking of something entirely different from and unintelligible to the modern English idea of “mind” (83, 84). If so, then Richards’ attempt at reconciling the two and using Mencius as a universal foundation for cross-cultural dialogue would be threatened. Yet he contends that the differences are ultimately merely social, so there is no reason why the China and the West cannot be made intelligible to one another (81). For Richards as well as Leibniz, then, China differs significantly from Europe, but it is possible for the two regions to enter into fruitful dialogue.

This traffic flows in both directions. Just as these European and American writers endeavored to understand the “East,” so writers from China and Japan have striven to understand the “West.” Notable among them are the philosophers of the Kyōto School 京都学派 and its associates. Beginning with the work of Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870-1945), the Kyōto School sought to fuse Western and Eastern philosophy, or rather Eastern philosophy and Western methods. As Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900-1990) puts it, “The novelty that resulted in [Nishida’s] thinking may be considered either in terms of an Eastern way of seeing renewed by Western thought or a Western way of thinking renewed by an Eastern way of thinking” (40-41). The problem with fusing “East” and “West” is that, according to Nishitani, Western thought is rational while Eastern thought is irrational. To bridge the gap, Nishida found inspiration in the fusion of the irrationality of Christianity with the rationality of Greek science and thought, which he says as instrumental in forming the Western spirit (53).

One of Nishida’s early contemporaries and fellow Kyōto School member, Tanabe Hajime 田辺元 (1885-1962), attempts to achieve just this fusion in *Philosophy as Metanoetics* 懺悔道として哲学. Tanabe finds *zange* 懺悔, Buddhist repentance, throughout Eastern and Western thought. He glosses *zange* as not a lamentation of past wrongs but a “true self surrendering to

despair” occasioned by the repentant person being caught between “ought” and “is” (5). Because a human subject cannot bridge the gap between things as they are and things as they should be, *zange* is never ending; the human subject repents, but because of his or her innate evil,¹³ transgresses against the “ought” again and repeats the cycle (5-6). Tanabe considers this the essential characteristic of human experience, and constructs a philosophy of *zangedō*, or metanoetics as it has been translated. Such a philosophy criticizes the capacity of the self to know the absolute, and highlights surrendering “self-power” (the power to know the world and to control one’s actions) in favor ecstatic experience of the absolute (25-26), of “witnessing” and surrendering to “Other-power” (27). Tanabe then proceeds to find this irrational, mystical thought in both Eastern and Western thought. He finds it in Kierkegaard (28), in Paul (177), in Meister Eckhart (187), and in Pascale’s *Pensées* (193). He criticizes its absence in Hegel (138), Nietzsche (110), Heidegger (148), and mainstream interpretations of Zen (169). Of course, Tanabe is writing amongst the ruins of World War II, during which he did not speak out against the Japanese government. His philosophy as *zangedō* or *metanoetics* is likely a way of excusing his non-action during the War. But my concern here is rather for how Tanabe tries to build a bridge between East and West: by finding an “irrational” basis for all human experience.¹⁴

Nishitani finds a different ground on which to fuse East and West. He believes that Japanese thinkers in the Meiji era were too uncritical in their acceptance of Western ideas. After Hegel “an abyssal nihilism” opened in Europe, he says, ushering “in a time of crisis” during which “religion, metaphysics, and morality” lost their meaning and “life [became] fundamentally

¹³ 悪 *aku*. Though the translation I have consulted renders 悪 as “evil,” in English the word comes loaded with theological baggage (and philosophical baggage if we consider Hegel’s critique of Kant in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*) that is not quite the same in the Japanese, even to a post-Meiji Japanese speaker like Tanabe.

¹⁴ For a thorough explanation of Tanabe’s *Zangedō toshite tetsugaku*, see Tanaka (2015), pp. 107-119.

void and boring” (18). Nishitani sees this as emblematic of a nihilistic phase through which any civilization could pass, and which Japan, by accepting European ideas unsystematically after the end of the Tokugawa era, exposed itself (178). To overcome the problem, Nishitani advocates blending ideas from Nietzsche, Mahayana Buddhism, and Zen: Nietzsche’s *amor fati* and concept of circular time (57-60) joins with Mahayana Buddhism’s similar understanding of time and Zen’s ability to “laugh” despite the vicissitudes of fate (66).¹⁵ A reader with a passing acquaintance of Mahayana Buddhism and Nietzsche can see how Nishitani grounds these Eastern and Western forms of thought: in “the negation of both the phenomenal and the spiritual world,” a “double negation [that] elicits a standpoint in which finitude and eternity are one against the backdrops of nothingness,” an “affirmative nihilism” (174).

In his masterwork *What is Religion* 宗教とは何か, Nishitani calls this double negation *absolute nothingness* 絶対無 (*zettai mu*).¹⁶ Absolute nothingness precedes representation; the field of absolute nothingness contains things as they are, cut off from the subject and inaccessible to reason, but still knowable through “realization” (*Religion* 139). What Nishitani means by “realization” is not entirely clear. He is trying to describe an experience beyond reason—an ineffable experience. But what he has in mind is a loss of the self, a “dropping off of body-and-mind,” leading to an ecstatic experience of the world and all the objects contained within it (183-184).¹⁷ Though it has its origins in Sunyata, the field of absolute nothingness, as fundamental to

¹⁵ Nishitani also finds traces of the Nietzschean attitude towards the world in Stirner and Dostoevsky.

¹⁶ See Casati and Priest (2019) pp. 301-303, for a discussion of Nishitani’s philosophy in relation to Dōgen’s and Heidegger’s.

¹⁷ Nishitani borrows Heidegger’s concept of “worlding” to say that the world of absolute nothingness is the world before it “worlds.” The rationalization of nothingness here reminds us of the role of unformed matter in Christian and in Jewish theology before the Creation. The difference of course is that Nishitani’s absolute nothingness exists independently of any maker and does not have the negative existence implied by “unformed.” What exactly absolute nothingness is remains ineffable, however, which indicates that Nishitani too is ultimately dealing with faith and theology.

all existence, contains both East and West. It is Nishitani's way of securing mutual intelligibility between the two (since all metaphysical questions East and West would need to address the ultimate ground of absolute nothingness, whether those who ask those questions realize it) and opening up a space in which East-West fusion can occur. That which can be fused must, however, take absolute nothingness as the ground of all existence, which excludes Christian and Platonic philosophy, among others (226). But the fusion would generate new forms of religion and thought.

In China, the task of integrating Western and Eastern thought emerged in earnest thanks in part to increasingly aggressive imperial incursions into the country both from the West and Japan. Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927), an influential Confucius reformer in the final years of the Qing Dynasty, tried to integrate Western ideas of historical progress into scholarly discourse. As Wei Leong Tay points out, Kang refashioned "Confucianism as a religious-cultural system" along the lines of post-Meiji Shintoism in order "to protect the indigenous faith [*baojiao*]¹⁸ and to compete with Christianity for the hearts and minds of the people" (104). In a commentary on the *Book of Rites*, Kang proposes that humanity moves through "Three Ages," the Age of Disorder, the Age of Rising Peace, and the Age of Great Peace. Kang writes:

Confucius was born in the Age of Disorder. Now that communications have extended throughout the great earth and important changes have taken place in Europe and America, the world has entered upon the Age of Rising Peace. Later, when all groups throughout the great earth, far and near, big and small, are like one, when nations will

¹⁸ 保教, literally "protect faith."

cease to exist, when racial distinctions are no longer made, and when customs are unified, all will be one and the Age of Great Peace will have come. (Chan 726)

Tay reminds us that Kang's theory here is akin to that of "spirit in Hegelian philosophy" (102). Rather than "spirit" Kang refers to the Confucius' "great Way" in which "[a]ll human beings, all events, and all moral principles are encompassed" (Chan 728). But what is it that ensures that the Confucian Way is applicable across the globe, especially since Chan mentions that "being a barbarian" is one of the great sufferings of humankind (Chan 731)? The common ground is simply humanity, which is evinced by feeling pain at the suffering of others (Chan 734). Since Kang redefines Confucianism as a religion, and since he believes that in the Age of Great Peace Confucius imagines, by "applying the principle of evolution," seeing "all groups, far or near, big or small, as one" (726), he can make Confucianism a doctrine capable of conversing with and subsuming both Christianity and modern science. That is to say, Kang casts Confucius as a reformer seeking to better the world in a teleological progression to make Confucianism fit with and thereby neutralize the threats of Christianity and modern science.

Kang, however, was trying to conserve the old order, and those who took part in the May Fourth Movement would not look on him fondly. For a more "progressive" example, we can look to Hu Shih 胡適 (1891-1962). According to Hu, the differences between East and West lie in the different levels of technological advancement. In the Ancient world, East and West alike, by which he means, going by his examples, China and Greece, saw philosophers like Confucius, Plato, and Aristotle who "lived in those good old days when the human mind was not yet troubled by the medieval dualism of matter and spirit and was therefore able to recognize the ideality underlying the material embodiment of human inventions" (28). The medievalism he has

in mind is not only Christian but also Mahayana Buddhist, both of which he asserts tolerated human suffering on the basis of their being a spiritual realm in which the soul was free from hardship (31). He upbraids “apologists for the spiritual civilization of the East” who apologize for the exploitation of human labor, as in the “rickshaw coolie,” as part and parcel of the East not being dependent on machinery. He asks:

Do we really believe that the life of a ‘rickshaw coolie’ is more spiritual or more advanced than that of the American workman who rides to and from his work in his own motor-car, who takes his whole family outing and picnicking on Sundays in distant parks and woods, who listens to the best music of the land on the radio almost for no cost, and whose children are educated in schools equipped with the most modern library and laboratory facilities? (30)

For the East, or for China, to catch up to the West is for it to take further steps away from medieval ideas. China has already “overthrown medieval religions” in favor of “Chinese Zennism” and the rationality of Neo-Confucianism, but has yet to embrace fully the emancipation of technology (Hu Shih 32). Because China and the West are primordially the same for Hu, only the accident of Medievalism separates them; the industrialization of China will be a sign of the fusion or reemerging of East and West, rather than the ultimate cause.

So much for ways in which different thinkers have tried to understand “East” and “West” and bring about their fusion. It is worthwhile now to bring in a more technical apparatus that will help to understand not just the literatures and traditions with which this thesis is concerned but, more immediately, the individual texts it features. What it means to understand a literary text is

one question, what it means to understand a text in translation another, what it means to compare texts from different languages and backgrounds a third. The nature of my research requires me to grapple with all three questions. From the start, it is important to distinguish between two senses of ‘identity.’ There is a metaphysical sense according to which something *is* what it is for such and such reason. There is also an epistemic sense according to which we *know* that something is what it is for such and such reason.¹⁹ I will take great care across the course of this thesis to keep these senses disentangled, insofar as disentanglement is possible. I have already suggested, without mentioning them by name, that the epistemic and the metaphysical senses are, or appear, closely bound in the study of literature. Just why that is so, and just what importance it has, will come to the fore in the course of this work, and will clarify some foundational misunderstandings in the study of comparative literature.

We run into problems when we study literature because literature has a peculiar ontological status. Allow me to adopt John Searle’s terminology (*Construction* 9-13). Searle splits ontology and epistemology into objective and subjective senses. An ontologically objective entity exists regardless of whether anyone observes it. In this class fall mountains, rivers, and stars. These are *observer independent*. An ontologically subjective entity is *observer relative*. A pain or an itch, for instance, does not exist unless it is experienced by a subject. Now let us look at epistemology. “James Joyce was born in Ireland” (or “Paul Claudel was born in an area of earth called ‘France’ in 1868”) is an epistemologically objective statement. But “Paul Claudel was a great writer” is epistemologically subjective since it is a matter of opinion.²⁰ A piece of literature, then, is ontologically subjective (it is created by consciousness rather than being a

¹⁹ See Williamson (2013), p. 148.

²⁰ Searle’s terminology may falter here, since “France” is itself an ontologically subjective but epistemologically objective entity.

naturally occurring phenomenon) but epistemologically objective (the existence of *Ulysses* does not depend on either you or me perceiving *Ulysses*; a person who writes a thesis on *Ulysses* does not need to spend time convincing her readers that a book called ‘*Ulysses*’ exists). And when we criticize literature, we try to avoid epistemologically subjective statements (“*Ulysses* is a great novel”) in favor of what we think are epistemologically objective ones (“*Ulysses* evinces the modernist concern with language and identity”). I think Searle’s schematization is correct, but since, as Searle himself says, it is a “Background” (particular social rules that allow sounds and gestures to mean something), “Deep Background” (capabilities “common to all human beings”), and “Network” of communal beliefs that allow something to be ontologically subjective yet epistemologically objective (“Wittgenstein and the Background” 120-122), we run into trouble when, in comparative literature, we move between different networks of belief.

I will be especially interested in ways of conceiving of literary texts as ‘worlds.’ The idea of literary worlds, borrowed from early to mid-twentieth century work in the philosophy of language and modal logic – most notably that of Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Hilary Putnam, Saul Kripke, and David Lewis – was formalized in the late twentieth century thanks to Lubomír Doležel and Thomas Pavel. Though working independently, both Doležel and Pavel developed the theory of literary worlds as a response to structuralism, part of the post-structuralist “search for multiple readings, destined to show that there is no such thing as *the* meaning or *the* structure of a work” (Pavel 2). Yet in relying on analytic philosophy and logic, Doležel and Pavel departed from post-structuralist theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, and Jean-François Lyotard. Literary worlds theory aims both to escape the rigid formulations of structuralism and the post-structuralist distrust of metaphysics and grand theories. More recently, critics working in the fields of comparative literature and world literature such as Eric Hayot, Françoise Lavocat,

and Haun Saussy have drawn upon Doležel and Pavel's work to mount an attack on the systematic theories of Francesco Moretti and Pascale Casanova. Instead of one world, they say, world literature, comprises an inexhaustible number of possible worlds. I will return to the theory of world literature and literary worlds in detail in the next chapter.

For the moment, I will note that literary worlds theory, as it is currently conceived, fails to account adequately for trans-world identity,²¹ for differing accessibility relations between texts and between different readers and texts, and for the standpoint of the critic. I have used some technical jargon here, and I will define my terms in the next chapter. My argument is that the theory of literary worlds, and the use of the theory in comparative literature, is promising when combined with recent philosophical treatments of vagueness. I noted above that literary-worlds theory grew out of the work of a variety of different philosophers and logicians. The most recent among them were Kripke, Putnam, and Lewis. The latter two are deceased, and the former's work barely figures in literary worlds theory beyond that which he completed in the 1960s and 1970s. In the past forty years, a wealth of literature has grown concerning vagueness and modal logic. This literature offers us powerful explanations of the reasons for which identity and epistemic access vary between texts and readers. However, it remains largely untouched by literary theorists, even though the notion of closeness and degrees of difference is present in an informal manner in much talk on literary worlds, if not in comparative literature writ large. A significant part of my thesis, then, will attempt to incorporate research in probabilistic modal logic and the philosophy of vagueness that helps to explain how writers, readers, and critics East

²¹ Trans-world identity refers to the identity of the same characters in different worlds. It should not be confused with the identity of *parts* of characters across worlds (where, for instance, Achilles' nose exists at one world and his bravery at another). The latter type of identity David Lewis notes is impossible (211).

and West comprehend literature from different parts of the world, parts in which different ontologies and approaches to literature reign.

If I have started this chapter with a close reading followed by a theoretical enquiry before coming an extended historical survey, I hope the effect is not one of dulling the critical edge of this thesis. The historical dimension is not to be separated from the theoretical. Rather, the questions that this thesis will explore, of how literatures from either side of the Eurasian continent relate to one another, and how theorists are to account for the fuzzy boundaries and seemingly vague identities that East-West interactions present us, are not merely contemporary concerns. The technical philosophical discussion to come in the next chapter is not a *deus ex machina* come to rescue comparative literature from the outside. It itself, I want to suggest, is a logical development of the more familiar theorizing stretching back to Leibniz and Goethe and extending through David Damrosch and the Warwick Collective. More technical logical explorations address the same problems we comparatists face daily. The task of the following chapter is to consider how these different dimensions of the same enquiry connect. So doing will illuminate the workings of East-West literature, and make our examinations of the literary field more perspicacious.

Chapter I: Literary Worlds and Degrees of Distance

This chapter considers different approaches to comparative literature and world literature. Its focus is on the concept of literary worlds, which has attracted much interest from critics who seek to explain and accommodate the diversity found in the apparently unified world of world literature. First is a brief history of world literature as a concept, then a summary of important criticisms of world literature. Attention then falls on literary worlds. The strengths and weaknesses of the theory are presented and a variant, “multidimensionality,” is put forth. None of these theories in its present form can deal in full with the problem of accommodating competing ontologies in a single world system. The chapter concludes by using recent work in philosophical logic and philosophical approaches to vagueness to modify literary worlds theories and multidimensionality. The revised model serves as the basis of the literary analyses across the rest of the dissertation.

1.1 Literature as a World

David Damrosch’s *What is World Literature?* reignited interest in world literature, but the concept has roots stretching back to German Romanticism. In “Conversations on World Literature,” J.W. Von Goethe is reported to have said, “I am more and more convinced [...] that poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men” (22). Convinced that “poetry” is present in every culture, Goethe advocates a transnational understanding of literature, one that can appreciate the work of Serbian and Chinese writers as much as that of German ones. He suggests that an enlarged understanding of literature will lead to greater art. It is worth quoting him at length:

‘But, really, we Germans are very likely to fall too easily into this pedantic conceit, when we do not look beyond the narrow circle that surrounds us. I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise everyone to do the same. National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach. But, while we thus value what is foreign, we must not bind ourselves to some particular thing, and regard it as a model. We must not give this value to the Chinese, or the Serbian, or Calderon, or the *Nibelungen*; but, if we really want a pattern, we must always return to the ancient Greeks, in whose works the beauty of mankind is constantly represented. All the rest we must look at only historically, appropriating to ourselves what is good, so far as it goes.’ (23)

We note that “world literature” is both forward-looking—it logically comes after the period of national development has exhausted itself—and backwards-looking—it is a “return to the ancient Greeks,” who, despite their antiquity, possessed a worldliness beyond that of Goethe’s contemporaries. We will see several times in this dissertation that in the twentieth century as well ancient Greece assumes this dual role for a gamut of writers East and West. What also strikes our attention is the interesting reliance on the national in this ‘world’ literature. Goethe’s world literature is the sum of national literatures. The “we” for whom he speaks benefits from world literature insofar as this “we” is able to borrow from or “appropriate” the literature of foreign nations. It is not, then, that Goethe believes the universality of literature dissolves national literature; this universality ensures that all literatures are mutually intelligible, but the distinction between Chinese and German literature, between a “we” and a “you,” is preserved.

Goethe's vision of world literature resembles other romantic systems that attempt to discern the structure of humanity and human culture. Among the most famous systematic explanations of the world is G.W.F. Hegel's *Philosophy of History*. Hegel identifies a law of development running through all nations. Unlike Goethe, he does not hesitate to distinguish between advanced and retrograde nations and, consequently, cultures. The level of development of a culture depends on the strength of the "universal spirit" within it:

The content of this tradition is what the world of the spirit has produced, and the universal spirit does not stand still. But it is with this universal spirit that we have essentially to do here. It may indeed be true of one people that its culture, art, science, its spiritual possessions generally, make no headway, as seems to be the case with the Chinese, for example, who may two thousand years ago have got as far in everything as they have now. But the spirit of the world is not engulfed in this unconcerned peace. This follows from what it simply is, because its life is *act*. An act presupposes some available material on which it is directed and which it does not just enlarge or expand by adding matter to it; on the contrary, it necessarily works on it and transforms it. This inheriting is both an adoption and a setting up of an inheritance; at the same time it is reduced to being a material metamorphosed by the spirit. Thus what is received is altered and enriched and simultaneously preserved. (13)

The Chinese, though animated by the same spirit as the Germans, are stuck at a lower stage of development. Hegel sees this as true of all of the cultures and nations of the East: all developed early but stagnated, and the power of the universal spirit passed to the West, the first Western

heir being ancient Greece. From Greece, the West has, Hegel says, inherited philosophy and all of the arts that aim at universality. Universality and the intellectual freedom that comes with it are the evidence of the higher development of Western culture:

But in the Oriental world there can be no question of philosophy strictly so-called. The reason is that, to characterize the East briefly, the spirit does arise there, but the situation is that the subject, the individual, is not a person but has the character of being submerged in the objective. What dominates there is *substance*. Substance is envisaged there, sometimes as super-sensible, as thought, at other times as more material. In that case the situation of the individual, the particular, is that of being only something negative in face of the substance. (227)

In contrast, in the West the individual subject is capable of thinking in terms of universal laws and achieving freedom, which “is to rest, not in the finite, but in independence, in an infinite being-at-one-in-oneself, and this cannot be assailed” (230).²² Hegel’s universal principle leads to the hierarchical ranking of cultures that Goethe’s concept of world literature skirts.

Taking a more relative view of cultural development is Johann Gottfried von Herder. Herder contends that “all mankind are only one and the same species,” but that “every man is ultimately a world,” an absolute “individual” (3, 4). He further argues against dividing humans into different races, because ‘race’ suggests “difference of origin” (7), and because all humans are, he says, endowed with reason. At the same time, he does not dispense with nationalism any more than Goethe. The nation allows each person to connect to a larger whole. The totality of

²² Cf. I.A. Richards on Mencius, discussed in the Introduction to this thesis.

humankind is perhaps too grand to form a community, at least for Herder writing in the eighteenth century, so the nation steps in as an intermediary between the world and each individual “world” that Herder thinks every man comprises. All the same, his nationalism emphasizes the contingencies of every nation. He writes that “each [nation] bears in itself the standard of its perfection, totally independent of all comparison with others” (98). We have once again a dialect between a universal principle, “the transcendence of human reason, which endeavours to produce unity out of multiplicity, order out of disorder, and out of a variety of powers and designs one symmetrical and durable whole,” and the particular manifestations of this principle in art, such as the art of China, Greece, and Egypt (99). Because each particular artwork manifests the universal principle in its own unique way and according to the best materials and ideas available to it in its environment, the question concerning which nation produces the “best” art never arises. Rather, all artistic productions are relative in value; the art of ancient Greece is the best that could have been produced in that nation, but is not intrinsically better than that of ancient China, owing as both do to the same “transcendent” human impulse manifested in a different social and historical milieu (99, 100). We have in Herder the same conviction that all works of art are comparable, but we find a greater emphasis on cultural relativism here than in Hegel.

Taking Goethe and Herder as exemplary cases, we find that theorists of world literature, regardless of whether they call it explicitly by that name, struggle to resolve the tension between world, individual, and nation. We will find throughout the course of this dissertation that the tension never fully disappears. Writing in the late nineteenth century, Georg Brandes noticed that, although world literature refers to that which touches upon something universal, to desire recognition as part of literature is to enter in the “universal struggle for fame” (62, 63). In this

struggle, language is a “weapon,” for the more widely spoken a language is the more likely work written in that language is to be read (63). This means that a mediocre writer speaking a common tongue such as English may have a better chance of achieving world literary fame than a superior writer in command of lesser known language such as Danish. Just as pessimistically, Brandes argues that “to capture general attention, such a writer must merely be inoffensive, he need not directly cater to dominant prejudices; he can do so indirectly, as when he crudely and superficially counters a banal idea with a banal idea of his own” (63). The reason, Brandes continues, for this bias towards the common and the mundane is that “most of humanity is dull, ignorant, of limited judgment” and that, as world literature becomes less an ideal and more a reality, authors “began writing for an invisible, abstract public, and this does damage to literary production” (65). Hence, “there is something dangerous in the courting of world fame and of world literature” (66). How to counter this general lack of taste and production of literature not geared towards the writer’s own public? Brandes says that the most universal literature is written for a definite public, but that “one should not write for those who live in the same city as oneself, as polemical writers in particular do” (66). What is needed, then, is a deep nationalism, which gives writers a specific community rather than an abstract “global” one, but which goes beyond writers’ immediate and limiting social settings. Although he lacks Herder’s idealistic fervor, Brandes too ends up requiring the nation as an intermediary between world and individual.

We can see that early conceptions of world literature struggle to reconcile the universal and the particular, and invoke some intermediate category, be it the nation or the more ambiguous locality, in which to ground the work of each writer. I will turn to a newer intermediate category, that of possible worlds, in a moment. But first it is worth looking in more

detail at some of the more recent (and orthodox) theories of world literature against which theorists of literary worlds react.

As I mentioned, world literature is today almost synonymous with the work of David Damrosch. In *What is World Literature?* Damrosch goes through various examples of translations of foreign literatures into English. He shows that the way in which translators present their material in English often skews the original to fit the translator's particular socio-historical situation, with all of the aesthetic and political biases that entails. Damrosch writes:

Our sophisticated critical methods and refined cultural sensitivity have not yet sufficed to keep us from falling into errors and abuses that were common a hundred and even a thousand years ago. We ought to do better, but this will require a better sense of what it is we do when we circulate works through the shifting spheres of world literature. (*World* 36)

There are two assumptions here that, as we will see in the next section, are the driving force behind the interest in literary worlds and modal logic. Firstly, Damrosch implies that literary criticism "ought to do better" today, because we are better critics than we were previously. Today, we have "sophisticated critical methods and refined cultural sensitivity." Secondly, Damrosch quietly concedes that "world literature" is not a monolithic category. Instead, it is composed of "shifting spheres." What are these spheres? Presumably, they are demarcated by location, language, history, ethnicity, and so on; the problem of navigating these qualities is what Damrosch discusses throughout the book. But the problems remain. He is arguing for world literature as a unified category that can appear across the globe, and that might have the

consequence of blunting the peculiarities of literary production. In the place of the specificities of location, language, history, ethnicity, etc., we might get “spheres” that are, in the end, just spheres of world literature.

Damrosch does write “that world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike” (*World* 5), and that a work of literature “*manifests* differently abroad than it does at home” (*World* 6). He even states that “a single work of world literature is the locus of a negotiation between two cultures,” the original culture and the culture into which it is brought (*World* 283). Nonetheless, the presuppositions he makes and the problems he glosses over must be dealt with. It seems illogical to think of “world literature” as a monolithic category. Instead, “world literature” should be a byword for comparative literature. There are many things that cannot be translated; and this is not simply because of differences in language but because of the whole social network in which both the translated author and the translator write. There are academics who argue against the concept of world literature and for untranslatability. A recent case is Emily Apter and her *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*. Strikingly, Apter does not reject any of Damrosch’s underlying assumptions. Her objection rather is moral: we should not accept the idea of World Literature not because it is illogical; we should reject it because it is Eurocentric and imperialist.²³ The problem for Apter is that the idea of world literature is not internationalist enough because it still has centers of power that determine literary value.

²³ Apter lambasts “Eurocentricism” in literary criticism even while she herself refers mostly to critics who occupy a similar academic and social status as her own. Damrosch (2014) criticizes her for this in his review of her book.

A different critique of world literature comes from Stephen Owen, whose dismissal of Bei Dao and “world poetry” we will meet in Chapter V. Thirteen years later, Owen reevaluated Bei Dao and reversed many of his earlier complaints. He contrasts Bei Dao with Nobel Prize winner Gao Xingjian. As an author who “prides himself on being an international writer, which for all intents and purposes means a European writer who uses the Chinese language,” Owen writes, Gao was palatable to the foreign jury of the Nobel. Owen argues that Gao is not popular in China not because of the “sensitivity” of his writing. Bei Dao, Owen says, is “also politically sensitive yet well known in China” (“Stepping Forward” 540). Yet Bei Dao was passed over for the Nobel, indicating that Gao is the sort of rootless author Owen disproves of, while Bei Dao has managed to retain a local identity that makes him “truly worthy of international renown” (“Stepping Forward” 542). Thus, while Owen came to appreciate Bei Dao, his problems with the concept of world literature and the literary trends it signifies remain as strong as ever.

He objects to world literature because “[t]he very idea of world literature depends on the continued power of national literary establishments sorting and recommending, giving us representatives” (“Stepping Forward” 542). He approvingly notes the existence of writings that exist outside “the notice of those who take a global overview of contemporary poetry” (“Stepping Forward” 548). These writings are outside of world literature because they adhere to classical models particular to the country in which they were produce. In other words, these writings ignore the literary models imported from the West. The problem, of course, is that the West, or rather the West that, according to Owen, “created” so-called “international rules” for literary production and consumption (“Stepping Forward” 546), is not a monolith standing athwart the rest of the world. We should enquire after the *specific* community in which such a

writer can belong.²⁴ She surely cannot exist in a vacuum any more than as an atomized “global writer.” All of this is to say that the distinction between the West and the rest of the world, between international and national, between pre-Western and post-Western is neither as simple nor as absolute as Owen and Apter imagine.

None of this is to suggest that theorists of world literature seldom interest themselves in the problem of mutual intelligibility. Marcel Detienne describes the process by which academics can compare the incomparable. In order to go “without a passport” between the art of divergent cultures, you need a team of specialists—Africanists, sinologists, classicists, for instance—who can approach a “category” from a variety of angles (24). The category must be “generic enough to allow the beginnings of comparison but neither too general nor too specific to any particular culture” (Detienne 25). Even if a category does not appear at all in a given culture, its absence is significant (Detienne 26, 27). If the Japanese lack, as Detienne claims, the concept of a ‘founding’ or a ‘founder’ of a site or place of living, then that difference can allow the team of comparatists to delineate the boundaries of the concept of ‘foundation.’ It also allows each comparatist to see the contingency of his own tradition, says Detienne (37), an argument we will see G.E.R. Lloyd repeat. Detienne is not concerned about the possibility of understanding across cultures. He takes it for granted that cross-cultural (and cross-conceptual) understanding is possible.

From a Marxist perspective, The Warwick Research Collective criticizes Franco Moretti, whose work we will examine in the next section, for positing a homogeneous European core from which the novel spreads to the colonial periphery (55), and for ignoring the influence of the periphery on writers living at the core (56). The Collective writes that world literature may be

²⁴ This enquiry is central to Chapter V.

analytic and value free as the mereological sum of all literature written anywhere on earth.²⁵ On the other hand, it might be the product of modernity, marked “by the *dialectics of core and periphery* that underpin all cultural production in the modern era,” and an “irrealist” corpus of literature describing the “lived experience of creative destruction (or destructive creation)” (Warwick 51). We see clear problems with the Collective’s take on world literature. Most immediately, it wants to reject the notion of a stable core and periphery while relying on just those terms to be stable in order for its dialectic to work. Furthermore, the Collective’s insistence on “the lived experience of capitalism” as the *sine qua non* of world literature takes its article into the same troubled waters in to which drifts Apter’s book: even if we accept that this experience is the foundation of world literature, would we not need to account for a multitude of different experiences? Once more the Collective’s take, while cognizant of the shortcomings of some definitions of world literature, might need some modification to accommodate the diversity of opinions and texts that we might want to include in our concept of world literature.

Attempting to transcend the nation or the local, world literature and its critics return to the intermediate concepts in order to make world literature work or to critique the universalizing pretensions of world literature theorists. From this need for an intermediary between the world and the individual, and intermediary that precludes the aggressively nationalistic pretensions that, as we have seen,²⁶ have been attributed to earlier methods of comparative literature, that motivates the notion of possible worlds of world literature. In the next section, I will first outline the theory of literary worlds, then show how its reliance on modal logic brings in a mass of

²⁵ Though what counts as literature is not at all given, which the Collective does not account for. The problem is more fully addressed by Hayot and Saussy in 1.3.

²⁶ In the Introduction.

philosophical baggage that undermine its viability. I will then present a modified version of the theory that I will defend throughout the rest of this dissertation.

1.2 Mutual Intelligibility²⁷

In recent years, critics of Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova's application of Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory to literary theory have argued that not one world but many possible worlds make up world literature. Following in the footsteps of the work of Thomas Pavel and Lubomír Doležal,²⁸ these critics have described world-systems as Eurocentric, and accused them of ignoring the peripheral and semi-peripheral centers in which literature emerges. Possible worlds attempt to break free from this perceived imbalance in world-literary theory. A possible world is a world that is not identifiable with a place or a time in the actual world, or the physical world that all humans, presumably, share. The notion of possible worlds is most familiar from modal logic, which talks about how things might be or might have been in terms of necessity and possibility.²⁹ Alexander Beecroft, Eric Hayot, and Haun Saussy are prominent among those who have attempted to ground literary theory in something akin to modal logic, and it is their work that I will focus on in this chapter.³⁰ I will push the analogy with modal logic further to uncover problems with how literary worlds place the critic in relation to texts and texts in relation to one another. Namely, I will be concerned with how literary worlds run into trouble

²⁷ Much of the rest of this chapter is based on Johnson, "A Critique" (2018).

²⁸ See Pavel (1986) and Doležal (1998).

²⁹ For two famous contributions to our conception of necessity and possibility, see Kripke (1980) and Lewis (1986), p. 165.

³⁰ We might also include here, again, Apter, who has argued against world literature and for the notion of "untranslatability" between different languages and literary cultures. Apter's denial of mutual intelligibility puts her outside of the modal version of world literature that this article considers, but it is worth keeping her *Against World Literature* in mind as the denial of a single world of world literature taken to its logical end.

regarding symmetry between worlds, the distinction between possible and impossible worlds, and trans-world identity of characters.

I will begin with an overview of Thomas Kuhn, W.V.O Quine, and Donald Davidson on translation across ontologies. This will allow us to understand where critics are coming from when they speak of literary worlds and incommensurable paradigms. I will then look at Beecroft, Hayot, and Saussy and connect their work to Asian Analytic Philosophy (AAP) and G.E.R. Lloyd's notion of multidimensionality. AAP and Lloyd also deal with the problem of translation across literary and conceptual spaces, but they arrive at slightly different solutions. Saussy is an intermediary between the more famous literary worlds model and the conception of multidimensionality that I will advance, and he will be instrumental in my attempt to reconcile the two.³¹ I will weigh the pros and cons of each approach, and gradually move towards a different model of transnational or world literature.

Two names have become synonymous with the problem of mutual intelligibility, Thomas Kuhn and W.V.O. Quine. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* argues that science is not progressively getting closer to absolute truths about nature; rather, science operates within paradigms that are mutually unintelligible. For instance, the change from classical mechanics to relativistic mechanics was not a refinement of a worldview. The relativistic paradigm dethroned the classical; a scientist, according to Kuhn, could not subscribe to both paradigms at once. The reason is that the terms used by both paradigms appear the same but have different extensions. In classical mechanics, mass is discrete, but in relativistic mechanics mass is integral with energy.

³¹ Given Saussy's long and rich career, pinning him down to a single viewpoint is difficult if not impossible, but note that his first monograph begins by arguing against those who would make too much of incommensurable ontologies. The role of ontological difference that I am highlighting throughout this thesis is different and read in light of different approaches to comparative literature, but it is worth revisiting Saussy (1993), pp. 1-12.

A scientist could not use the term ‘mass’ in both the classical and relativistic senses at once because it refers to two different things. A scientist working within the classical paradigm and one within the relativistic paradigm live, Kuhn says, in “different worlds” (116-117).³²

Quine argues for the indeterminacy of translation and the inscrutability of reference. His well-known thought experiment, to which Saussure devotes much time, imagines being with a member of a tribe whose language we do not know. A rabbit jumps forth and the tribesman utters “*gavagai*.” Quine argues that we cannot know whether *gavagai* means “rabbit” or whether it has an extension unknown in our language such as “undetached rabbit parts” or “time slices of rabbit.” There is no fact of the matter that determines what *gavagai* means. Any translation we attempt will always refer to the conceptual scheme upon which our language is based, which Quine calls the “background language.” Therefore, we have no absolute reference to determine what a word in another language means. Since all reference is relative to a background, all reference is contingent. Given this contingency, Quine’s argument may seem adequate for world literature, but the idea of indeterminacy throws the entire enterprise of literary comparison into doubt, and each of the critics to whom I will shortly turn attempts to balance their relativism with an absolute ground that ensures mutual intelligibility between languages and literatures.

Donald Davidson criticizes Kuhn and Quine and influences Lloyd and Saussure. In “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” Davidson argues that Kuhn and Quine have a mistaken idea of communication. While agreeing that experience is relative to a conceptual scheme, he notes that incommensurability presupposes comparison of the supposedly incomparable. “The dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism, that of differing points of view, seems to betray an underlying paradox,” writes Davidson, since we need “a common coordinate system” to notice

³² Both supporters and critics have regretted Kuhn’s metaphor. See for example Rorty and Searle (1999) pp. 48-50.

difference (6). There must be a common ground to make the very concept of failed translation intelligible; otherwise, we would be unable to measure the success of translation at all. Davidson notes that for Kuhn the shared ground is “nature,” while for Quine it is “experience” (12). Where Kuhn and Quine go wrong according to Davidson is in presupposing the “dualism of scheme and reality,” since our sense of reality always grounds our conceptual schemes (20). And language mediates our understanding of schemes. Yet we cannot know the totality of truth conditions of the propositions of our own language, let alone the language of another person. Working within this ignorance, we are bound by the principle of charity in interpretation: “whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters...Nothing more is possible, and nothing more is needed” (Davidson 19).

In sum, Kuhn’s incommensurable paradigms and Quine’s indeterminacy of translation and inscrutability of reference cause us to doubt the ground on which circulation and comparison of literature takes place. Davidson encourages us to doubt in turn Kuhn and Quine as he draws attention to the necessity of some shared ground for even the charge of incommensurability and indeterminacy to make sense. In the next section, I will look at how critics of world literature and philosophers in AAP have responded to these problems.

1.3 Literary Worlds

I will focus in this section on Beecroft, Hayot, and Saussy’s theories. I will order them in terms of how discrete they believe literary worlds are and, concomitantly, how much overlap their ideas have with world-literary systems. I will then criticize literary worlds theory by referencing modal logic and AAP. Most of my attention will be on Hayot and Saussy, but it is worth looking

at Beecroft because his work is a bridge between totalizing world-systems and discrete literary worlds.

But first I will look at a core text of the theory of literary worlds, Pavel's *Fictional Worlds*. He distinguishes between "segregationist" and "integrationist" attitudes towards fictional discourse (*Fictional* 11). Segregationist attitudes are strongly associated with the work of logical atomists such as Bertrand Russell and more recent analytic philosophers including P.F. Strawson and John Searle. Segregationists keep fictional and non-fictional discourse strictly separate. In general, they rely upon the correspondence theory of truth and the truth-making principle to divide fictional claims from non-fictional ones. The theory and the principle both assume that sentences have meaning in relation to the real or actual world: a proposition is true if and only if there is an entity or state of affairs in the world that makes that proposition true. Since fictional entities have no correspondents in the actual world, propositions relating to them can be construed as meaningless. There is no one way of keeping the two distinct: "While in a Russellian framework segregation rests on ontological and logical grounds, the speech-act theory [associated with Searle and J.L. Austin] derives fictionality from the linguistic attitude of the speaker" (Pavel, *Fictional* 20).

Integrationists on the other hand "claim that no genuine ontological difference can be found between fictional and nonfictional descriptions of the world" (Pavel, *Fictional* 11). Alexius Meinong and his followers belong to this camp. For Meinong, anything that possesses a property is real, whether or not it exists. Among such objects are golden mountain and the square circle (Pavel, *Fictional* 28). In fact, Meinong's tolerance of impossible objects that prompted Russell's segregationist approach. Pavel gravitates towards Meinong's theories. He adds the stipulation that we consider that there are degrees of being, a notion that "may serve in the

internal ontological models describing mythical and religious thought, and more generally symbolic activities of the mind” (*Fictional* 30). He does not develop this notion of degrees but leaves it as a heuristic tool.

Pavel also looks at how we gain epistemic access to literary worlds. Epistemic access is not constant over time. He writes, “The actual world as well as the relation of accessibility are different for the authors of medieval miracle plays compared to the author of a modern mystery novel” (*Fictional* 47). Every person, when presented with a proposition or a fictional sentence, must determine whether the new information belongs to the realm of possibility (Pavel, *Fictional* 47-48). What is this realm of possibility? Pavel takes his lead from the work of Saul Kripke: there is an actual world that we inhabit that exists among a universe of possible worlds. Propositions describing impossible things are out of this universe. Those propositions may be mapped to impossible worlds, though the issue of what those impossible worlds consist of and how we gain epistemic access to them if they are outside of our “universe” Pavel does not resolve (*Fictional* 49). No more does he ever quite resolve the problem of having multiple actual worlds, or of having different multiple actual worlds between East and West. This is not an indictment of Pavel’s insightful and influential work: he is not a specialist in East Asian literature, and his work, being the first to bring to bear advances in modal logic on literary theory, remains immensely valuable despite its shortcomings. I will return to the problem of degrees and impossible worlds. For now, let me turn to more contemporary critics writing in response to the development of the discipline of world literature.

Beecroft does not use the term “worlds.” In “World Literature without a Hyphen: Towards a Typology of Literary Systems,” he takes world literature as the mereological sum of all literary texts, with each place in which a text emerges operating under a specific mode of

textual production. Elsewhere, criticizing the economic models underpinning world systems, he speaks of modes as “ecologies” of literature. As do all literary worlds theorists, Beecroft opposes Moretti and Casanova’s core-periphery schema. Looking at ancient and modern literature, Beecroft distinguishes between “cosmopolitan” or “panchoric” literature and vernacular or “epichoric” literature. Often empires, bringing with them the mass circulation of literary works and ideas, usually in print, produce the panchoric. Epichoric stems from oral tradition and small-scale circulation. It precedes the panchoric and persists at the margins of empire. Beecroft is more concerned with the transmission of literature than with its ontological status. His ecologies, though resembling worlds, obey transcendent laws. The relation of ancient Japanese literature to Tang Chinese literature is of the same type as the relation of Norse literature to Latin literature in the Middle Ages, even if, as he stresses, they are qualitatively different. With modernity the relationships change but the generality of Beecroft’s theory remains the same. Each ecosystem has its own climate, flora, fauna, and other peculiarities, but each is, as a literary ecosystem of the world as a totality, subject to the same rules and so mutually intelligible. Beecroft’s approach attempts to modify world-systems to allow for relativism between literary worlds and for more focus on peripheral literatures without sacrificing the common ground that Moretti and Casanova establish as grounds for comparison across even the most disparate literary works.³³

Hayot opposes the “‘world’ of ‘world literature’” to the “‘world’ of ‘world systems’” (33). The world of world systems is total. More precisely, it is a unified market that emanates from the West. Moretti traces the novel as it emerges in Europe and spreads across the globe,

³³ Beecroft tends towards unity of literary systems, most notably in his “Eurafrasiachronologies,” in which he tries to eschew “Eurocentric” periodization. Rather than relying on European periodization, Beecroft seeks “a more inclusive narrative one which identifies elements of change and of continuity in all regions, and which seeks to understand the development of late premodern cultures on their own terms, and not from the end-point of European modernity they were foredoomed not to reach” (22).

with a “compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials” (58). Casanova speaks of literary capital. Certain capitols of culture—Paris, New York—determine the criteria for what is high art and artists from around the world adopt these criteria to further their careers (282-283). In both Casanova and Moretti, Hayot notes, the center, usually Europe, is in tension with the periphery, usually the so-called “third world.” He writes that by generalizing European aesthetic criteria the world-systems model can not only distort our appreciation of non-European literature but also blind us to what goes on in the “peripheral” areas of literary production (35).³⁴ Thus comes his notion of literary worlds, in which the ‘world’ in world literature does not mean the whole world but the world of a particular group, place, or time. Drawing upon the Heideggerean concept of “worlding,” he writes that worlding in literature draws attention to the act of making a social world, for to “world is to enclose, but also to exclude” (40). Each world has many undetermined parts. We do not know the price of apples in Dickens’ London or what time of day Racine’s *Phèdre* prefers. There is no right answer; the original or subsequent writer or audience may supply answers and fill in the missing details of the literary world. Rather than being a closed totality, the world of world literature is a multiplicity of possible worlds that can expand and change over time (Hayot 61).

Though Saussy is more critical of Moretti and Casanova, his approach strongly resembles Hayot’s. In his opinion, world systems risk “flattening” literary study, identifying literature with

³⁴ Hayot takes the Chinese word for literature, 文 (*wen*), as an example: “There is no guarantee that this latter term is not the universalizing vision of a European concept inappropriate to the analysis of texts and stories operating under radically different conceptions of the meaning of writing or storytelling—as in the Chinese context, where the word *wen* 文 includes forms of textual production and culture that do not belong to “literature” in its modern European uses. That is why Damrosch and others are willing to risk making both “literature” and “world” more expansive categories, and to insist that any literary history worth its salt will have to take account of a far broader list of works and movements than has so far been necessary under the largely unconsciously Europe-centered regimes of literary study” (35). This problem has long beset comparative literature. See also Miner (1991) and Lavocat (2012).

its place of production as a dot on the map, and missing the underlying dimensions of literary texts. What are these dimensions? They are akin to Hayot's worlds. "There may be only one physical world," writes Saussy "but there are a great many imaginative projections of possible and conceivable worlds; and people spend most of their lives in those latter worlds" ("Dimensionality" 293). Literary works are the result of a writer coming into contact with the social and physical reality of her time and place. But the literary work does not describe that world; it is its own world. How can a literary work be a world unto itself? Simply because it is rooted in a particular way of viewing the world—a particular ontology. A literary work is a world determined by each writer's engagements with reality, and reality is already determined by the concept and norms of each writer's society. The literary world is not generalizable because the society in which it was produced constrains it. In other words, not all concepts found in a literary world are transferable. This has implications for how the critic of world literature approaches the literary text. Saussy stresses that world literature contends with the "uncertainty of reference" occasioned by encounter with different ontologies that structure different literary texts ("Dimensionality" 291).

Hayot and Saussy vary in how they connect literary worlds to one another. Hayot, we have seen, is more concerned with connections between worlds, Saussy with disconnections. While Hayot is aware of "the dangers or the uniformity of the actual world's single-worldedness" (37), he proposes that every literary text is itself a product of and contributor to "world" (85). Here the lines blur between "world" as a totality and the "world" of a particular group of people. But what Hayot seems to mean is that by contributing to the structure and understanding of a particular world, literary texts contribute to the structure and understanding of the world in which every person lives. The world of *Genji Monogatari* is distinct from the world

of *Bleak House*, yet both of these particular worlds are part of the world of world literature. Hayot can say that there are certain transcendent modes, Romanticism, Realism, and Modernism, that characterize all literary texts' relation to the larger world because, however differently imagined, the world of world literature is ultimately *one*. Saussy also argues that there is a common ground for all literary works. Like Kuhn, he calls this "reality," or more precisely "the reality effect." Every ontology, he says, stems from the encounter between a group of people and one and the same reality, so mutual intelligibility between even the most radically different ontologies is possible.³⁵ However, without the transcendent modes that Hayot proposes, Saussy's approach is more contingent. For Saussy, the comparatist is always unsure "what to expect" when approaching the world of a foreign literature ("Interplanetary" 447). There are no familiar modes indicating the author's worldview. Hayot and Saussy agree that all literary works have a common ground, but they disagree about how connections between worlds affect the critic.

There are three problems with Hayot and Saussy's literary worlds. I will begin with the problem of symmetry. Simply put, the relationship between the critic's world and the literary world is not symmetrical. There are many different ideas on this in hermeneutics, but I will argue here that literary world is necessarily closed in so far as it belongs to a prior time. Whenever the critic approaches a text, the text is complete. This is true even if the text is a work in progress, for there is always a latest stage at which the text has arrived before the critic begins analyzing it. Take again the world of the *Genji*. Everything that happens in the text has been written, even if there are lost manuscripts and other details of which we are unaware, and everything that happened in the society in which *Genji* was set down, Heian Japan, has already happened. Theoretically, we could know everything that occurred in Heian Japan down to the most banal

³⁵ Saussy approvingly cites Davidson here. For a similar argument that builds upon Davidson without speaking of possible worlds, see Zhang (2016), 1-26.

details of what each member of that society thought at a given moment. And there is a possible world at which a member of the court had a flash of insight and developed quantum mechanics. Because the same writer or other writers can expand the world of the original text, then these sorts of possible events allow the literary world to expand indefinitely. This is not true, though, from the standpoint of the critic. The society in which a work arises is finite: there is a limit to what could have happened and what did happen. In contrast, the critic works in the present in a society unknown to the writer and audience of the original literary world. Naturally, there is a limit to what the critic can know and what can happen in her society. But that limit is, at the time at which the critic works, necessarily unknown simply because the future is unknown. It follows that the literary world cannot access the world of the critic. This is the asymmetry of the literary world and the critic's world.³⁶ That is not to say that criticism of which the author or original audience of a text may not have thought, say a feminist reading of *Genji*, is unfounded, only that the boundaries of the literary world are fixed in a way the borders of the critic's world are not. Although we can find new readings, those readings are constrained by what has already been written.

From the problem of symmetry follows the problem of accessibility. In modal logic, worlds are connected by accessibility relations. If there is no accessibility relation between our world, the actual³⁷ world @, and another world w , then w is considered an impossible world.

³⁶ Asymmetry violates the second constraint on accessibility relations in modal logic: σ : for all w_1, w_2 , if w_1Rw_2 , then w_2Rw_1 [for any two worlds, if world1 accesses world2 then world2 accesses world1] (Priest, *Logic* 36). The critic's world goes beyond the critic's knowledge and any alteration to the texts that make up the literary world still leaves the world anterior to developments in the actual world.

³⁷ I define the actual world as existing in a physical space that we all share, though can perceive differently, and at the vague moment "now." I understand a text as having an existence prior to any criticism of or reflection upon it. How we understand "now," and time in general, is also an artefact of our culture: for example, in Greek and Buddhist thought we can find examples of circular time at odds with our conception of linear time. Whatever conception of time the critic has, the problem of accessibility between @ and a literary world would hold.

There are metaphysically impossible worlds and logically impossible worlds. Here, I will focus on logically impossible worlds. A logically impossible world somehow violates the logic that obtains at @. We might say that at @ the law of non-contradiction holds absolutely: nothing can both be and not be. It cannot be the case that I am currently in Sydney and Tokyo. At a logically impossible world *w*, contradiction is true: I can be in both places at once. Between @ and such an impossible world, there is no accessibility relation (Yagisawa 177).

Does accessibility impact our critical approach? I will argue yes, but first will look at a counterargument from a modal logician. In AAP, a debate has been taking place over the ontological status of some Buddhist logic. Some Buddhist logic uses the tetralemma, which has four truth values: True, False, Neither True nor False, Both True and False. It is obvious that this makes a world at which fourfold logic holds inaccessible from most academics' understanding of @. Some philosophers, such as Takashi Yagisawa, do not see this as a problem for mutual intelligibility between worlds at which this type of logic obtains and @. These worlds are impossible worlds, but they are no more difficult to understand than other impossible worlds, such as a fictional world at which Pegasus, the winged horse of Greek myth, exists.³⁸

Yasuo Deguchi, Jay Garfield, and Graham Priest (DGP) object to Yagisawa's diffusion of the problem. In criticism, we are used to encountering fantastic or paradoxical situations, hence the utility of the willing suspension of disbelief. DGP contend that suspending disbelief and confining certain literary worlds to impossible worlds jaundices our critical view and has implications for how we interpret and classify literary texts from ancient and foreign literary traditions.³⁹ They reason that Buddhism seeks to eliminate suffering in this world, so when a

³⁸ Note that Yagisawa diverges from David Lewis. Lewis argues that all possible worlds, or all worlds other than the actual world @, are real, so there can be no room for impossible worlds (165).

³⁹ This resembles Hans-Georg Gadamer's argument for the necessity of prejudice. See Gadamer (1970).

Buddhist text speaks of true contradictions⁴⁰ it is speaking of contradictions that are about this and not a possible or impossible world. Full understanding, not simply disinterested evaluation of truth and falsity, comes when the actual world of the critic coincides with the world of the text. Saussy admits this when he says that fully to understand Hebrew poetry, the reader must live as if she were one of the ancient Hebrews and “forget that there is a wider world of poetry out there” (Edmond et al., 671). DGP write,

How could the Madhyamaka project be to know that at *other* worlds, but not at this one, everything is empty? It is not like the analogous temporal case, where knowing things about the future and the past can tell us something about the present. This is so because there are causal connections between situations at different times. There are no causal connections between situations at different worlds. (“Contradictions” 371)

It follows that relegating tetralemmic worlds to impossible worlds distorts our appreciation of Buddhist philosophy. More strictly, DGP reject the compromise of making tetralemmic worlds possible worlds. They argue that this world is itself paraconsistent, that is, it has true contradictions (“Mountain” 371); this acceptance of true contradictions seems a prerequisite to understanding Buddhist philosophy. Now, this is an extreme stance. Though Priest has been advocating dialetheism, the view that, contra classical logic, contradictions are true, for thirty years, his view remains contentious. Surely a critic does not need to subscribe wholly to the views of the text she reads in order to evaluate it; surely, contra Kuhn, we do not actually live in

⁴⁰ DGP are not saying that all Buddhist texts assert true contradictions, only some texts descended from the Madhyamaka school. Whether these texts do assert true contradictions is itself a matter of debate. See also Tanaka (2016), pp. 1294-1298.

different, irreconcilable worlds if we have different conceptual schemes. At the same time, DGP make an intuitive argument: if we treat a text as belonging to another world, possible or impossible, our approach to that text does, as I have been arguing, change. DGP often liken Buddhist logic to quantum physics, where, in famous cases such as the wave-particle theory of light and the problem of Schrodinger's cat, the actual world itself appears contradictory. We do not necessarily need to be versed in quantum mechanics to understand, say, the poetry of medieval Sōtō Zen poet Dōgen, but it does seem, as DGP claim, to help us grasp the logic of Dōgen's work. This is another way of thinking of the problematic accessibility relations between @ and literary worlds.⁴¹ Even if we reject their prescriptions, we should look more closely at the conceptual difficulty DGP have uncovered.

I have noted that all versions of literary worlds theory assume a common ground that allows for mutual intelligibility. Here I will look at that ground more closely. For each critic, the ground is shared physical space. Neither Beecroft nor Hayot criticizes Moretti and Casanova too much; both simply wish to supplement the world-systems model with literary ecologies or worlds that allow for more pluralism. Saussy, on the other hand, sharply rebukes Moretti and Casanova. He writes:

Moretti commends 'distant reading': not reading actual literary works but reading descriptions of literary works, compiled by experts in the different languages and traditions, and making possible a kind of universal overview. Such encyclopedism really only takes to a caricatural proportion a certain relation often found between comparative

⁴¹ As Friederich Schleiermacher writes, inhabiting the world of the writer is impossible. The literary critic forms an approximate idea of the meaning of a text by reference to the unknowable totality of meanings of the writer's language. See Schleiermacher (1977), pp. 78-84.

work and the work in ‘national languages,’ as we call them, that comparison relies on for its material (“Edmond et al., 667).

In Saussy’s opinion, world systems “flatten” literary works, robbing them of their depth, reducing them to points on a map. He advocates comparison that is constantly “reaching over into other people’s areas of knowledge” and mapping “new frontiers” (Edmond et al., 673-674). Yet Saussy’s literary worlds still exist in a single dimension. This is evident when he takes the metaphor of literary worlds literally, speaking of comparison as akin to communicating with unknown planets (“Interplanetary” 446) or different attempts to chart the universe in the eighteenth century (Edmond et al., 668). Although Saussy rejects the world-systems model, he relies upon spatial metaphors to understand how communication between literary worlds is possible. For Beecroft, Hayot, and Saussy, literary worlds may be out of this world, but they are never out of this universe.

A common ground is indispensable for world literature, but does that entail a metalanguage, or something like Beecroft and Hayot’s modes? In the next section, we will see that Lloyd explicitly rejects a metalanguage. Here, let us look at what Priest has to say. The limits of expression and thought, Priest says, always lead to contradiction. We noted earlier Davidson’s claim that the totality of truth conditions is beyond the knowledge of any one speaker. For Davidson, as Priest notes, the truth conditions of every language form a Tarskian theory of truth: A theory of truth for a language allows us to give truth conditions for any sentence in that language. Any statement in language *L* can be described through a metalanguage *M*, allowing us to analyze *L* without the circularity that analyzing one sentence in *L* with another sentence in *L* would entail. Priest says that a theory of truth will give an analysis of a sentence *s*

such that “s is true IFF s is not true,” i.e. the theory will generate the Liar Paradox (*Beyond* 206).

The same is true for the ineffable: “To say what cannot be expressed, one has to express the very thing” (*Beyond* 207). What this means is that meaning of all of the sentences of a language always goes beyond what that language can express. What about Quine, who declares that all reference is relative to a language and conceptual scheme?

Quine says that we can make the sense of a query determinate by translating into a background language. But it cannot do this if the statements of the background language do not themselves have determinate sense. And of course, they do not, according to Quine. (*Beyond* 202)

Since the background language must, following Quine’s logic, be itself indeterminate, there is no way to understand “how we manage to refer to one thing rather than another” (*Beyond* 202).

Priest says that this too is a contradiction, because if reference is not absolute it would be relative, which would take us down a regress where truth “is relative to an idiolect, and so to a person,” which Quine himself rejected elsewhere (*Beyond* 203). In order for his theory of indeterminacy to work, Quine ends up needing the absolute reference that he disavows. Priest shows that Quine and Davidson alike wind up with self-contradictory notions of translation. I will develop this thought with Lloyd’s multidimensionality in the next section.

What about trans-world identity, when one character appears across worlds? A change in a text could create a new literary world or change a possible world to an impossible world. Let us imagine changes in character. Take the character Sherlock Holmes. Arthur Conan Doyle explained that after being defeated by Professor Moriarty Holmes spent two years posing as a

Norwegian in Tibet. Recently, Jamyang Norbu picked up on this idea and wrote *Sherlock Holmes: The Missing Years*, which develops the story of Holmes' time in the Himalayas. Intuitively, we understand Norbu's Holmes to be the same as Doyle's, and the world of *The Missing Years* to be the same as the world of *A Study in Scarlet*. Still, we understand that Norbu, writing from a postcolonial perspective, has described neither Holmes nor Tibet as would have Doyle. Upon reflection, it seems that Holmes has multiple identities given to him by writers responding to his original creator, Doyle. We might say that one is Norbu's Holmes and the other Doyle's Holmes. There is, naturally, the distinction between world types and world tokens: every instance of Sherlock Holmes in fiction is part of a token world of the type "Sherlock Holmes." Different representations of Holmes lead, as Priest notes, to "bifurcating worlds" (*Towards* 121). Yet if this leads to worlds where not only Holmes has drastically changed from his typical characterization but also where the very ontology of the world has become one that is inaccessible from @, then the problem of critical understanding reemerges. Here the difference between modal logic, concerned with truth, and literary worlds, about the truth of which we usually do not care, becomes important. The criteria of identity for a literary work and for literary characters can lead to contradiction when we adopt literary worlds theory, and our own socio-historical grounding can cause us to behave differently towards characters of the same type across different worlds. Literary worlds can reproduce the problems that Beecroft, Hayot, and Saussy, by invoking modality, strive earnestly to avoid.

The difficulties arise because literary experience involves not disinterested contemplation of counterfactuals but belief. That is to say that a modal space filled with possible worlds is not well equipped to deal with belief as there is a difference between asserting that something is the case, and that something is the case relative to a set of beliefs. David Chalmers has discussed the

shortcomings of possible worlds in modeling epistemic modality. An epistemic space is constrained by knowledge. The assertion sounds tautological, but Chalmers means that the more knowledge a subject has the fewer things she can imagine are possible: possibility is constrained by the subject's knowledge of the actual world.⁴² "When a subject knows something," Chalmers writes, "some scenarios are excluded. Every piece of substantive knowledge corresponds to a division in epistemic space: some scenarios are excluded out as epistemically impossible for the subject, while others are left open" (61). Belief works similarly to knowledge:

One can naturally suppose that the space of scenarios is equally divided by *belief*, and perhaps that the division by belief underlies the division by knowledge. Every substantive belief, whether or not it qualifies as knowledge, corresponds to a division in the space of scenarios. When a subject believes that p , we might say that some scenarios (in particular, scenarios in which $\neg p$) are ruled out as *doxastically impossible*, while others are left open. A scenario is doxastically possible for a subject if and only if it is not doxastically ruled out by any of the subject's beliefs. When a belief qualifies as knowledge, the scenarios ruled out as doxastically impossible are also ruled out as epistemically impossible. (61)

If doxastic possibility does supervene on epistemic possibility, if our beliefs do determine what we imagine to be possible, as the main four chapters of this thesis will argue, then the division of literary space into possible worlds, giving privileged position to @ and not fully distinguishing between the two types of possibility, might give a misleading picture of what goes on in

⁴² Phillippe Monneret says the same thing. See Monneret (2010).

comparative and East-West literature. It modifies the assertions of Zhang Longxi, for instance, who has long argued powerfully for the mutual intelligibility of Eastern and Western literatures.⁴³ The problem is not so much that there is rarely a word in one language that corresponds to a word in another, but that the possibilities comparatists and the writers they choose to study are already constrained by networks of possibility the boundaries of which are determined not only by knowledge but by belief. We can understand across literatures and cultures and ontologies, but we need to pay close attention to the deformations not only of language but also to those occasioned by networks of belief in which a text is placed once it is translated or understood.

Before turning to a method that can help focus our attention on just that problem, a final word on modal logic: it is not only logical heretics like Priest who criticize its application in certain contexts. Timothy Williamson notes that a “natural metametaphysical hope is that logic should be able to act as a neutral arbiter of metaphysical dispute, at least as a framework on which all parties can agree for eliciting the consequences of the rival metaphysical theories” (“Logic” 212). Williamson indicates that most people who take the time to think about logic assume that logic is more mathematical than it is philosophical; the origins of a given logical system may be in philosophy, but as it matures it becomes the ward of mathematics (“Logic” 213). At the same time, we have a riot of different logics, including modal, classical, intuitionist, and paraconsistent ones. How does the objectivity of logic square with this proliferation of different logical systems? “The answer lies in the role of metalogic,” says Williamson. As he sees it,

⁴³ See especially the opening chapter of Zhang (2005), pp. 1-61.

All these systems are normally studied from within a first-order non-modal metalanguage, using classical reasoning and set theory. Scientific order is restored at the meta-level. Not only are the systems susceptible to normal methods of mathematical inquiry with respect to their syntax and proof theory, their model theory is also carried out within classical first-order set theory. (“Logic” 214)

Metalogic often pulls against the ontological beliefs of philosophers working in first-order logic. In second-order fuzzy logic, it is easy to show that the law of the excluded middle is false; in the metalogic of modal logic, @ loses its privileged place and becomes one world amongst many.⁴⁴ Seemingly neutral things like connectives might appear to have different meanings in different logics, as some argue ‘not’ has in classical and intuitionist logic, though, since even “deviant” logicians hold themselves accountable to a “public language,” such differences look “implausible” (Williamson, “Logic” 225). Since terms are stipulated at the meta-level, “no equivocation over technical metalogical vocabulary explains why one philosopher accepts and another rejects [for instance] the dialetheist claim ‘The Russell set is a member of itself and it isn’t’ (Williamson, “Logic” 226).

Different metalogics may be proposed, and indeed have been proposed, to favor logicians’ pet metaphysical beliefs. Attempts to diffuse the proliferation of metalogics by

⁴⁴ Let us map degrees of truth on the real interval [0,1]. “Let $v(A)$ be the degree of A . Then :

$$v(\sim A) = 1 - v(A)$$

$$v(A \ \& \ B) = \text{minimum} \{v(A), v(B)\}$$

$$v(A \ \vee \ B) = \text{maximum} \{v(A), v(B)\}$$

$$v(A \rightarrow B) = 1 - (v(A) - v(B)) \text{ if } v(A) \leq v(B)$$

$$= 1 \text{ otherwise”}$$

It is simple to prove using this semantics that $v(p \vee \sim p) = 0.5$. See Williamson (2014), p. 217. The reason for which @ loses its privileged place is that worlds are just binary sets of natural numbers. See *ibid.* 221-222.

claiming that these various candidates are not in competition with one another but merely equivocating on certain technical vocabulary remain unconvincing. For as Williamson shows we really are dealing with competing metaphysics, not simply different ways of saying the same thing (“Logic” 227). Efforts to evade these difficulties by shifting the onus of proving what is correct onto mathematicians is wrongheaded. As Williamson puts it, “We will have to do it ourselves. One of the greatest pleasures in philosophy is to imagine one’s way into a radically different pattern of thinking. To watch logical differences reassert themselves in metalogic is to experience just how radical such differences can be” (“Logic” 228). There may be one correct metalogic, but for the moment we do not know what it is. Shutting down debate by appealing to the scientific basis of logic is, for logicians and literary critics alike, premature. We should continue searching for a metalanguage, but acknowledge that our metalanguage is unlikely to be shorn of metaphysical or ontological assumptions.

1.4 Multidimensionality

The next approach to consider, G.E.R. Lloyd’s multidimensionality, shares many properties with literary worlds theory. It concedes that literary texts may exist in different spaces from the world that the critic inhabits and agrees that communication across conceptual frames is possible. The difference is in multidimensionality’s emphasis on the ontologies that underlie different literary worlds and in its explicit discarding of a meta-language to make all texts mutually intelligible. However, without a meta-language, multidimensionality founders.

The “very otherness of the Other,” Lloyd contends, “when we can get a hold of it, is a precious resource for us to broaden our intellectual and imaginative horizons” (*Analogical* 31).⁴⁵ Focusing on difference can allow critics to imagine alternatives to their concepts. Do we need one origin to explain everything? That is, do we need all cultures and literatures to have a common origin in order to compare? A common origin or ground may be asserted but comparatists, Lloyd argues, do not need to prove that different concepts need to be compared before comparing. The fact that concepts can be put in some sort of opposition entails mutual intelligibility. No “meta-language” is needed. “Cosmologies are not generally encapsulated in well-formed formulae and normally allow a good deal of room” for interpretation (Lloyd, *Analogical* 38). This is a Davidsonian approach, of course. The point is that the ground on which comparison takes place is primitive, unable to be grounded without circularity, as, for instance, in Hayot’s assertion that all human propositions are mutually intelligible because all human propositions are human (*Analogical* 121).

Nonetheless, Lloyd does envision a *tertium comparationis*: reality. Unlike in Saussy’s formulation, reality here is not synonymous with nature. Lloyd believes that nature is an artifact of human culture. Different cultures carve up nature in different ways. Lloyd’s favorite example is color. One culture may classify color according to hue, others according to luminosity, but there is no one correct classification (*Analogical* 24). These different ontologies suggest that our experience of nature is not given but varies according to how we experience reality. It is difficult to say what “reality” itself is, but presumably it is the brute physical world, or the world of sense data, that each human being encounters. This is the multidimensionality of reality. Rather than

⁴⁵ On the surface, this is similar to Francois Jullien’s belief that the alterity of China is a valuable resource for French scholars. However, Lloyd is concerned with degrees of difference between separate languages and literary traditions, not irreconcilable otherness. For a critique of Jullien, see Zhang (2016), pp. 11-14.

having a single actual world @, or an actual world that is a mereological sum of its parts, we can speak of an actual world with many dimensions. Multidimensionality draws attention to the ontological beliefs of the critic and the writer and the many contending ontologies that abound in the actual world. Reality is stripped down to the most basic level, that of a shared space, and all of our presumptions of what reality entails are called into question. These are aspects that, as DGP have shown, may not even be present in a given text but that, like James Joyce's author, are nowhere seen but everywhere felt.

But we have made less progress than we might think. Lloyd may be more explicit about ontology, and he may go further than other critics in insisting that nature itself is an artefact and opening the possibility of multiple actual worlds. This only defers the problem. In fact, it strikingly resembles a theory of literary worlds that Françoise Lavocat advances. Lavocat distinguishes between three types of worlds: the real world, the actual world, and the fictional world. The real world is the world that every human being inhabits. It exists before any human interpretation.⁴⁶ The actual world is plural. Every country, every era, every author can generate a new actual world.⁴⁷ This is because the actual world is the world as it is interpreted by a person or a group of people. To take the example of Kuki Shūzō and Paul Claudel, discussed in Chapter IV, both men describe in their poetry and prose the France and the Japan of the early twentieth century. Yet each, according to his temperament, language, and social background, conceives of the world differently. Claudel's optimistic Catholic world stands at odds with Kuki's pessimistic world made up of a collage of Japanese and Asian belief systems. Thus, each inhabits the same real world but a different actual world. And the literary world of Claudel's writing refers to

⁴⁶ We might think of it as the world of brute sense data, or, better, as the set of ontologically objective things, to use Searle's terminology.

⁴⁷ This is obviously not in keeping with the axioms of modal logic.

Claudel's actual world, the literary world of Kuki's to Kuki's actual world. Lavocat thereby allows the possible world of literature to refer not to one *single actual world* but to many actual worlds generated from a *single real world*.

How is this any better? It gives the literary world more autonomy. Since it is doubly removed from the real world, the literary world, or rather the truth of the totality of propositions of which the literary world is made does not concern us. But it seems to me that this is just a Kantian turn. The real world, as Lavocat formulates it, is just the noumenal world, and the actual world the phenomenal. Since, in positing multiple actual worlds Lavocat breaches the laws of modal logic and returns to idealism, it is not altogether clear what ultimate role logic plays in her argument. In any case, we may subject her form of literary worlds to the same criticism that we gave to those above.

Because Lloyd is not relying on modal logic, or on any loose analogy with it, we cannot mount these same charges against multidimensionality. What we can do is call into question his reliance on the principle of charity.⁴⁸ Reality, we have noticed, acts as a shared ground for Lloyd; all of his dimensions are dimensions of one and the same thing. Consequently, it is odd that he would downplay the need for a critical language that can encompass all literature when he has a conceptual scheme that does just that. Lloyd might respond that 'reality' is pre-linguistic. It makes communication possible, but what exactly reality is remains ineffable. That is fair enough. However, the fact that all human perception and communication is reducible to a shared ground, however inexplicable, suggests that all languages themselves are mutually intelligible in some way; the fact that we cannot know the nature of the ground on which they are mutually

⁴⁸ We should not forget Saussy's own use of Davidson, and, implicitly, the principle of charity, both in his criticism of world literature discussed earlier and in his older article "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares." See Saussy (2006), pp. 11-12.

intelligible is not a problem if we can rely on the principle of charity to deliver a reasonably good understanding of other people's languages and ontologies.

There is reason to doubt the reliability of the principle of charity. The most powerful argument against it comes from Cian Dorr. Dorr asks whether there is a metalanguage that can translate propositions from different ontologies without affecting truth values or metaphysical necessity. Dorr asks us to imagine some tribes living in isolation in some far-off land. When at last the tribes meet, "all were amazed to discover how similar to one another. All of them spoke languages with exactly the same syntax—that of English" (234). Underneath these superficial similarities, there are "systematic behavioral differences among the tribes" (234). Namely, the tribes disagree on what constitutes an object: can several objects compose a larger object, or is every object without parts? "Universalists" say that all objects compose something; "Nihilists" counter that all objects are simple; "Organicists" claim that parts may constitute an object only if that object is living; "Stuck-Togetherists" pragmatically remark that an object may be made of multiple parts if those parts are stuck together tightly (Dorr 234-235). For example, what Universalists call a ship, Nihilists and Organicists would call parts "'arranged'" shipwise (235). Dorr asks whether we think these tribes are speaking one language with differences of belief or multiple languages that "differ systematically in the truth values they assign" (235). Dorr argues for the second view, which he calls the "conciliatory view," and which he inherits, as we have seen, from Quine. His objective is to "give a uniform compositional semantics for all the different tribes' languages, which will work just as well no matter which language the conciliatory might happen to be speaking" (235).

What exactly is at stake here? Firstly, each of these tribes may use quantifiers differently. If so, then we "need to posit variation in the meanings of predicates like "'part,' 'chair,' and

‘thing,’” since, for example, Nihilists do not believe in parts, and Nihilists and Organicists think that a chair is really just a bunch of things “arranged chairwise” (Dorr 235-236). Dorr’s first port of call is counterfactual semantics. We use counterfactual semantics to express belief in other languages, so there is seemingly no reason why an Organicist could not describe a Universalist’s belief in the existence of composite objects by saying, “If Universalism were true, then there would exist objects that are composed of separable parts.” But, asserts Dorr, we run into trouble when we think of actuality. Because for Organicists “nothing is a chair at the actual world, nothing would be *actually* a chair no matter how things had been different” (240). Since “actually” varies in meaning, a counterfactual that reports in Organicese a Universalist’s belief about the actual world will always turn up false. As Dorr notes, there is vacuism, according to which counterfactuals with impossible antecedents are vacuously true; but Dorr argues that “there is every reason to disbelieve the claim that all counterfactuals with impossible antecedents are vacuously true” (239). We saw earlier Graham Priest reject vacuism, and for the remainder of this section we will not pursue the issue further. Let us assume that from *ex falso quodlibet* or the principle of explosion, that is, the principle that from a contradiction anything follows, fails to give us an adequate counterfactual semantics to preserve truth values between the various tribes’ languages.

Counterfactual semantics do not work for every translation, and on top of that we find that some words simply fail to refer in some languages—“Mars” would not signify anything in Organicese—so the problem of empty names might arise. Certainly, we could turn an empty name into a description à la Bertrand Russell, but we can imagine cases in which this would fail to account for the truth of counterfactuals. Continuing with the example of Mars, Dorr mentions that we would

...need to substitute for ‘the unique planet composed by the members of S’ some description of which we can truly say, in Universalese, that it possesses an *individual essence* of Mars—a property possession of what is necessary and sufficient for being Mars. Something along the lines of ‘the unique planet composed by the members of the unique *F* set’, where *F* expresses some complicated property of sets of simples should do the trick. (246)

However, here we look to dispense with psychological reality: by taking Mars and the descriptive phrase as equivalent, we “will have trouble accounting for the truth, in Universalese, of sentences like [...] ‘Many people believe that Mars is red but do not believe that the unique planet composed by the members of the unique *F* set of simples is red’” (Dorr 246). To make the conciliatory approach succeed, we need somehow to distinguish between these different types of semantic content.

Crucial here is that this shortcoming of counterfactual semantics weakens a key weapon in the arsenal of many critics of comparative and world literature: the principle of charity. Dorr first presents a “limited principle of charity: a correct interpretation of some language-users will never impute to them systematic error as regards the ontology of composite objects, at least if their discourse about composite objects is internally consistent” (242). We will find that this limited principle fails. Ordinary speakers of English generally do not have a precise set of ontological beliefs. If anything, they believe in “folk mereology,” or “the theory that comprises general claims about composition which we typically take for granted” (Dorr 247). Folk mereology is what tells us that a set of blocks forms a stack or four legs, a seat, and a back form

a chair. Even if ordinary speakers are not aware of their ontological assumptions, folk mereology, according to Dorr, “plays the same general sort of role for the community of ordinary English-speakers that each tribe’s central dogmas play for that tribe” (247). And since the sentences that Dorr has been considering “express truths in that community’s language,” we can conclude that “the sentences that comprise folk mereology express truths in ordinary English,” a proposition that Dorr calls “the *argument from charity*, since its second premise is a highly circumscribed version of the principle of charity” (247). If this is true, then the methodology needed for the conciliatory view is just the “methodology of ordinary language philosophy,” since, like the language of folk mereology, it is in ordinary English (Dorr 248).

Sadly, this will not do. The language of ontology is not the language of ordinary English (Dorr 249). A philosopher who rejects the existence of chairs because he does not believe in composite objects, would likely have no problem asking a colleague to “take a chair” in everyday speech. When the philosopher speaks in the language of ontology, he can clearly express his conviction that there are no chairs or other composite objects; when he speaks in ordinary English, he pragmatically can refer to composite objects whose existence he rejects. There is no contradiction, because the language of ontology and of ordinary English assign different truth values and therefore are discrete languages. Thus Dorr: “Once we have recognized the possibility that the language of ontology is distinct from the language of ordinary English, we can no longer rely on the argument from charity to establish the truth of folk mereology” (Dorr 249). It is not even enough to say, as Doležel does, that everything conceivable is possible, and thus every literary work generates a possible, not an impossible, world, for there is a difference between something being conceivable and it being possible. There are many things of which we

can conceive but that we would decline to say are possible.⁴⁹ The rift between the possible and the conceivable grows larger, creating a further problem for literary worlds and multidimensionality.

I have no desire to claim that we cannot compare across different cultures and ontologies. It would be disingenuous to do so in a thesis on comparative literature. My argument is that there is reason to doubt whether the principle of charity itself is enough to sustain such comparison, and that the cogent work of Lloyd and Saussy would benefit from being put in dialogue with recent work in philosophical approaches to vagueness. The very fact that I have been comparing pieces of literature founded on different ontological schemes suggests that mutual intelligibility is possible. Otherwise, as G.E.R. Lloyd rightly points out, comparison itself would be off limits. The question remains, however, of just how all of these different visions of the world can cohere such that readers can understand them. My focus, in other words, will be shifting in this conclusion back from individual test cases to the problem with which I started: is there a logical framework that can encompass contradiction? I gestured in the Introduction towards an answer. Texts, I posited, could be thought of as ontologically vague entities, and the distance between different texts in the space of comparative literature be like that between vague predicates. Our only obstacle would be providing a formal model accommodating the different dimensions that make up our literary world.

We return yet again to Saussy. In *Great Walls of Discourse*, he draws attention to the ambiguities that make translation possible. Translators, of course, do not reproduce in the target language that which they found in the source language. Instead, they make words mean *for* a

⁴⁹ Priest develops this argument in *Towards Non-Being*. As he notes, something being conceivable does not entail that it can be imagined visually: “I cannot form a visible image of a chiliagon (a regular 1,000 sided figure), even though there is nothing impossible about this. Conversely, I can picture a state of stationary motion, even though this is contradictory” (193).

select group of people, into whose network of language and social practices the translated word comes to fit. In Saussy's words, "the job of the translator is not reproductive, representing a pre-existing meaning in a new milieu, but rather expository and applicational—the task of making something mean something to somebody" (*Great Walls* 31). He suggests that a translated text amounts to an allegory, since an allegory "is unstable, suspenseful, loosely related to facts, latently contradictory—and so, as I see it, it furnishes a model for a global media culture that addresses everybody all the time but does not stop to integrate all the responses" (*Great Walls* 31). The translated work transcends the particular boundaries of its place of origin and enters into the world. But it does so by entering into an uneasy compact between its original meaning and the meaning given to it by its translator and the group of people for whom she is translating. Or rather the meaning is just that negotiation between the original language and its social situation and the language and social situation, the language game, we might say, of each society.

I think Saussy is correct, but I would like to modify his theory by considering not only translations but adaptations. In an adaptation, the translated word, and by extension the translated text, is not a correspondence between two stable entities (the word in the source and target language) or collections of entities. Rather, words and texts on both sides become ontologically vague through the act of translation. As it is translated from one culture to another, or what I have called one constellation of belief to another, the text undergoes a deformation of meaning. In exchange for some of those which they possessed before, texts and the words of which they are composed accrue new senses in virtue of the approximate equivalences that they are given in the new language and constellation. Yet the original constellation itself changes in this act. In the act of making new equivalences when writing across East and West, our understanding of the original constellation of belief changes—those new senses become a part of our understanding of

the original constellation. We will see this in Chapter III: both Claudel's and Mishima's adaptations of the original took those elements which they thought could fit with their own beliefs. In doing so, their understanding of *Kantan* becomes bound up with the adaptation, and this occurs for our understanding as well. We can think here of T.S. Eliot's formulation of tradition: the space that the texts of a given tradition occupy changes as new texts enter into the space and alter the relations and, at the same time, the significances of all other texts contained therein ("Tradition" 37-38). The same is true of our understanding of *Kantan*. Once these adaptations, these "equivalences," between original and adaptation are established, they become part of our corpus of knowledge surround the original text.

If this is the case, then something peculiar has happened to our understanding of the original text. I proposed earlier that the actual world @ of any text is inaccessible to the critic. Does this commit us to an odd understanding of @? It seems that, if the actual world of any text is inaccessible to us after its completion and publication, the reason must either be that we have imperfect knowledge of @ as such, or @ changes from moment to moment. The latter interpretation appears absurd: if @ changes from moment to moment, the 'actual world' is akin to an indexical. Just as that to which 'I' refers changes depends on the speaker, and changes even given the "same" speaker depending on the spatiotemporal point occupied by and the physiological composition of the speaker, so the actual world refers at every moment to something different. This, of course, is thinly veiled idealism, precisely the sort that I have rejected. The only other possibility is that we simply have imprecise knowledge of the @ of any given text, which sounds like a more workable proposition. Yet we run into similar problems. If our understanding of @ is always imperfect, and this makes the @ of a given text inaccessible, then surely each of us possess an understanding of this @ that is subtly different from everyone

else's knowledge. Idealism too rears its head here. Worse, this means that none of us ever inhabits the same @ as any other. And, moreover, it *invites* the problem of the first alternative: our usage of @ becomes indexical, shifting depending on time and place of use. If this is how we understand @, our notion of an 'actual world' is too loose to tell us anything useful.

Are we able to save this understanding of @ that I advanced? It is intuitive. Few scholars would contest that our knowledge of all of the conditions that went into the production of any given text is incomplete, and so our knowledge of what makes up the @ of the text is imperfect. Could we retain this conception without giving in to idealism? I think the answer is yes, but we first need to find out what happens to things that move from being real *and* actual to being apparently inaccessible from our actual world. And we need to find out how community consciousness fixes the boundaries of the actual world.

1.5 Ontological Vagueness

We have seen that models of world systems, literary worlds, and pragmatic compromises between one and many worlds all feature some flaws in their efforts to model that which happens in the communication and comprehension of literature between languages and literatures. My concern now will be to supplement the concept of literary worlds and multidimensionality with current work in the philosophy of vagueness. For the rest of this chapter, and the rest of this dissertation, I am going to argue that *ontological vagueness* characterizes the space of literary interaction. By ontological vagueness I mean that the boundaries between ideas are indistinct; there are no sharp cut-off points. The boundaries are not fuzzy because we are unaware of where the boundaries lie—that would be epistemic vagueness, and the fault would be our own ignorance. On the contrary, the borders between ideas are necessarily fuzzy, and, regardless of

how much we know, fuzzy they will remain. I will present a model that, building upon recent work in philosophical logic, allows us to map relations between different literary works. But first I need to justify my claim of ontological vagueness.

It is best, then, to think of two literary worlds, not as possible worlds that access (or do not access) one another, but as composed of different domains that have different correspondences with different worlds. Each “dimension” of a literary space is made up of multiple domains: stylistic, formal, historical, ontological.⁵⁰ The correspondences between Tang and Romantic French poetry are different in terms of what is shared and how much is shared from the correspondences between Tang and Heian poetry. I am taking my lead here from probabilistic approaches to vagueness. Nicholas J.J. Smith describes his probabilistic approach as “motivated by the basic idea that outside precise realms such as mathematics, objects may possess properties to intermediate degrees, in between complete possession and complete lack thereof” (211). This is in contrast to modal logic in which each proposition is mapped to a crisp (i.e. non-fuzzy) domain as a subset of a possible world (Smith 225). Instead of the all-or-nothing problem that underlies literary worlds, when we apply this line of thinking to world literature we allow for the unexpected overreaches into other people’s areas of knowledge that Saussy calls for without relegating those areas to different worlds. We keep all the worlds here as dimensions of the same reality. This is possible because vagueness is built into our understanding of how world literature works.

⁵⁰ Without considering ontological differences, Hoyt Long and Richard Jean So have recently tried to map stylistic proximity between literatures. I believe their approach is congenial to multidimensionality. My thesis also recalls recent work by Harsha Ram on a “scalar” account of global modernism, an account that tries to deal with “the collision of nation and empire and the persistence of shifting older legacies, local and transregional” (1375). The difference of my approach in relation to Ram’s is my interest not only in how different literary traditions interact in the modern era but also in how foreign and older ideas are brought into the realm of intelligibility.

The particular concept that I wish to take from Smith and add to multidimensionality is *relative closeness*. Closeness refers to the judgment a competent speaker of a language makes regarding the degree of similarity between a group of objects. Smith defines *relative closeness* as a ternary relation: “x is at least as close to y, in *F*-relevant aspects, as it is to z” (143). For multidimensionality, let us say that “*F*” is a predicate, such as “is Romantic,” “is Modern,” “is French.” Here, x, y, and z are texts or parts of texts. We automatically discern closeness relations between works and types of literature; this is what goes towards making up literary worlds, or, more generally, classification of movements like Modernism or genres like theater. This notion of closeness reveals an underlying metrical structure, a mapping of items linearly according to their distance from a given predicate, that accords well with the spatial metaphors that underlie literary worlds theory and Lloyd’s multidimensionality. It also highlights the role of contrast in forming literary worlds. To say that a work from an author other than Arthur Conan Doyle is part of the world or set of worlds of Sherlock Holmes, we ask whether the work in question presents a world that is at least as similar to a work already known to be in the world of Sherlock Holmes as it is to any other work. The notion here of what makes up a world, and so what properties we are comparing is vague, and any attempt make such a comparison would imply an effort beyond the scope of this dissertation. The *F*-relevant predicate may focus on style, voice, character, depiction of background characters, or stances towards colonialism. For the time being, let me say that this approach is one of contrast or difference: classification depends on a text being at least as similar to another text as it is to any other text rather than being “sufficiently” similar to any text.⁵¹ I will spell this out in greater detail in a moment.

⁵¹ This is analogous to some recent work in cognitive science in the field of conceptual spaces. See Dietz (2013).

Vagueness gives us a better sense of what happens in translation between East and West. This approach especially tries to retain the sense of difference that each of the critics I have discussed finds important to the study of literature. It does so by foregrounding the different ontologies upon which works of world literature are based. Though it is not possible to view Hebrew poetry as the Hebrews did, or for most critics to appreciate aspects of Dōgen with the immediacy of a dialetheist, bringing deep ontological differences to the fore can enhance our appreciation of foreign works. Discussing *Journey to the West*, whose Buddhist themes Arthur Waley downplayed in his translation, Anthony C. Yu states that “our understanding of the text demands our taking the allegorical elements seriously” (178). A translation or a critical appraisal that makes the foreign familiar and tries to ground the many works of world literature on a single plane helpfully reminds us of the common elements that all texts, if only as human productions, share. Yet we also need “[e]xternal knowledge and references” to help “in our attempt to decipher intentionality and meaning” that a particular author or society had (Yu 178). By focusing on ontologies, we foreground the deeply rooted elements that make up the texts of world literature, that nourish literary ecologies and create literary worlds. We get the sense of otherness, but we also get a sense of commonality because everything stems from contact with a single reality and exists as a dimension of this one world. The metaphor of multidimensionality ultimately balances the twin claims of identity and difference better than does that alone of literary worlds that are either too immanent or too remote. Speaking further about *Journey*, Yu writes, “I can conclude with the assertion that taking religion seriously in the case of this novel has the paradoxical effect of retrieving historicity by attentiveness to contemporaneity, of preserving foreignness in the very quest for readability” (307). This paradox of living in one

world that seems to be several, of having one conceptual scheme yet being capable of understanding others, is the bedrock of multidimensionality.

Any formulation of the theory here would take into account two principles: asymmetry and ontological vagueness. Asymmetry says that the more x something becomes the less y it becomes. Applying this to world literature, we say that the closer one gets to living in, to use our standard example, the world of the Hebrews, the less one lives in any other world, including @. Ontological vagueness says that there is no sharp cutoff between parts of literary dimensions. There is no precise moment at which we cross from, say, the stylistic domain of Tang poetry to that of French Symbolism. And differences between dimensions are not equal. Instead of all-or-nothing accessibility relations, we have degrees of proximity, so that Tang poetry may be closer to French symbolism than either is to Anglo-Saxon hagiography. Everything is connected, but those connections are manifested variously.

Now to address some problems: how exactly will this candidate language work? Recall John Searle's formula "X counts as Y in context C" (*Construction* 28). The formula works well for things like money that have clear-cut application. Paper money either has a value in a given context or it does not. There is no case in which a person carrying U.S. dollars goes to a foreign country and has his money accepted at a shop to a certain degree.⁵² But there are a multitude of cases, and we will meet many of them throughout this dissertation, where a text translated into English from Chinese or into Japanese from French is *sort of* philosophy, or *kind of* poetry, or *maybe* like the ancient literature of the target country.⁵³ Ideas and texts admit of degrees of belonging and degrees of identity. When Yukio Mishima translates *Kantan* into a modern Nō or

⁵² I'm not talking about an exchange rate. What I mean is that something either counts as currency or it does not. There's no case where something is kind-of sort-of money. If it has a value, it's money; if not, not.

⁵³ The country or language into which the text has been translated.

shinsaku nō, and when Claudel takes inspiration from *Kantan* to stage a dream sequence in his *Le Soulier de Satin*, both Claudel and Mishima's plays are separated from the medieval *Nō Kantan* by degrees. And it is not the case, to quote Emily Apter, that "nothing is translatable" and "everything is translatable" (*Translation* 226). Or, rather, it is the case, but translation is far more complex than this aphorism suggests, correct as it might be. Things change across languages, nations, and ontologies. But, as most critics would agree, that does not entail that identity becomes unimportant or is as you would like it to be.

A crucial problem is that our experience of vague entities usually does not admit of jumps: changing a few words in a text probably does not change it into an entirely different entity. Some changes are more important than others, and some amount of changes is sufficient to change identity, though we generally cannot say which changes or what amount. This means that, unlike in classical logic, there is no "sharp boundary." In philosophical approaches to vagueness like Smith's, this problem remains. True, we now think of identity in degrees. Still, is it not true that an entity changes from x to not- x at a given point? We might admit of a vague zone in which something is neither definitely x nor definitely not- x , but there still would be a sharp boundary between this interzone and the two zones of definite identity. For instance, say we are talking about the predicate 'blue.' We have a series of shades ranging from dark blue on one side to orange on the other. Clearly, the first shade is blue and the last is definitely not blue, and, clearly, as we progress we get first less and less definitely blue and then more and more definitely not blue (or more definitely orange). Since we are mapping degrees of identity on the real interval $[0,1]$, we assign each shade a number. For argument's sake, say that everything between 1 and .70 is blue, everything between .69 and .31 is indeterminate, and everything between .30 and 0 is definitely not blue. Obviously, we have another sharp boundary, or rather

two. We can, I think, do this same experiment with a series of translations, each less ‘faithful’ than the last in some respects, or more arbitrarily with fewer elements changed.⁵⁴ If this is the case, we have not at all avoided the original problem by adopting an analogy with probabilistic logic. Is there a way to avoid these sharp lines?

Smith’s solution is just that notion of *Closeness*. Closeness does not say things a third of the way between our definitely blue shade and our definitely orange shade are bluer than they are orange. This is because we have a ternary relation. The context is partly contrastive:

For example, the orange things in the room are closer in red-relevant respects to the red things than are the green things. This is not to say that orange things are more red than are green things: neither orange things nor green things are red at all. Rather, it is to say that in the respects that determine whether something is red, orange things are closer—or more similar—to red things than are green things. Think of a colour wheel—or better, a colour solid—and imagine locating each visible object in the room on the point of the colour wheel that has the same colour as that object. The closeness relationships amongst objects in the room in red-relevant respects correspond to the relationships of spatial closeness amongst these objects when they are located on the colour wheel in this way.

Because this contextualization of membership relative to a third item generates a “Closeness” relationship, two objects cannot be very close to one another without being close in truth.

Therefore, the jolt problem does not occur.

⁵⁴ We might think of the Waley and Yu translations of *Journey*, and then imagine a multitude of other translations that, in language, style, and theme gradually move from Yu’s translation towards Waley’s. Assigned a value of 1 here would be the original (Chinese) *Journey* (西遊記 *Xiyouji*).

The upshot of Smith's approach is its admittance of a variety of interpretations. A "group of speakers," a 'we' or 'us' determines what relative closeness is:

The guiding idea behind all our discussions of problems of the determination of meaning (beginning in §2.1.1) has been that language is a human artefact, and that the meanings of terms depend essentially on the ways in which speakers use them. From this perspective, the idea of some words having some meanings in abstraction from a set of speakers whose practice confers upon them those meanings is a non-starter. (Smith 314)

Now we can reintroduce the idea of possible worlds, and degrees of belief. A person, who is part of a definite community with a Background and Network, assigns to a predicate a probability that that it belongs in a given world w . The upshot of this method over the ideas framing standard literary worlds theory is that this one is centered on the role of belief in determining what gets counted as belonging to that privileged world, $@$. Membership is partly a function of belief, and belief is understood to be part of a we-consciousness.

The problem with accessibility relations between possible worlds and $@$, then, is not that each individual person has an $@$ that changes moment to moment and cannot access any other (this would be absurdly solipsistic and render much, if not all, scholarly work useless). Rather, it is the problem of changing we-consciousness. *Who* makes up the *we* in this consciousness is itself vague. We could not pin down all of the members of Zeami's community in medieval Japan, or fix all the points in the constellation of belief in which Claudel's Catholic vision of the world is contained. It is a non-crisp set, or set of such sets, that we are bound to use heuristically. We can neither be sure exactly which elements go into the set nor know when exactly the set

ceased to be actual. No more can we precisely know when our own set came into existence and what boundaries it has. Yet by paying attention to this concept of accessibility and vagueness we can guard against the overreaching confidence that, as have shown, can go into the study of East-West literature.

If this is correct, then we need a revised understanding of the principle of charity. Since the principle makes a statement spoken in reference to one ontology coherent in another, it can actually make a statement less intelligible. I have given a detailed overview of Dorr's views on the matter, but Priest also touches on it, and does so more directly in relation to fiction. Should a critic encounter an inconsistent story (a story closed under a non-classical logic), it would be incorrect to use the principle of charity to make the story intelligible to the critic and his or her audience. Priest wrote his own inconsistent short story, "Sylvan's Box" closed under a paraconsistent logic (a logic that allows for contradiction) to illustrate the point. Priest writes:

...it is quite possible to have a story that is inconsistent, and essentially so. *Sylvan's Box*, as related in the appendix to this chapter, is a story that is inconsistent. But the inconsistency is no accident; it is essential to the plot. In particular, anyone who misapplied the principle of charity to interpret the story in a consistent way would have entirely misunderstood it. And its essence is entirely lost in any (collection of) consistent parts of it. Yet it is a coherent story. There is a determinate plot: not everything happens in the story; and people act in intelligible ways, even when the inconsistent is involved. (*Towards Non-Being* 121)

If Priest is correct, and I am inclined to think he is – the various examples of understanding across cultures and languages that make up the rest of this dissertation will show my reasons for so agreeing – then there is not necessarily a danger, but a deformation that can occur when the principle of charity is applied. Why this deformation occurs and how we, as literary critics should approach it, is still to be addressed. Beginning with the Chou-Hughes *Bardo Thödol*, the following four case studies will help to work through the notion of vagueness and identity in literature, through how the literary world, the set of worlds, and the constellation of belief as I described them in the Introduction interact in practice. The case studies will enable us better to see when “charitably” interpreting a foreign text furnishes a useful bridge over a cultural divide, and when, as suggest Priest and Lloyd, the “very otherness of the other” provides the most rich and rewarding literary encounter.

Chapter II: The Chou-Hughes *Bardo Thödol* and the Problem of Classification

This chapter analyzes an incomplete East-West text, Ted Hughes' (1930-1998) libretto *Bardo Thödol* (hereafter *Bardo*). Conceived in collaboration with the Chinese-American composer Chou Wen-chung (1923-), whom Hughes had met at the New York artist colony Yaddo in 1958, the *Bardo* is an operatic adaptation of Walter Evans-Wentz's 1927 *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (hereafter *Tibetan Book*), a translation of texts related to Tibetan Buddhism. The opera was never staged, and we have very little direct knowledge of the *Bardo*, nor much knowledge of its intended audience, aside from the assumption that it would have likely been American or British. Neither Chou nor Hughes ever stated in detail what type of opera they envisioned the *Bardo* to be, nor did they explain but in passing the evident debt of the libretto script to East Asian and European theaters. To understand the *Bardo*, we need to examine both the unfinished *Bardo* text and the scraps Chou and Hughes left behind. Such a process reveals the *Bardo* as a fascinating if failed attempt to fuse East and West, an attempt that would preoccupy Chou and Hughes throughout their careers.

Reflecting the interests of its author and his collaborator, the *Bardo* is a very heterogeneous text. It borrows elements from genres East and West, from texts including *King Lear* and Yeats' *Wanderings of Oisín*, and from a variety of theatrical modes. As such, the *Bardo* has a significant amount in common not only with Elizabethan drama and Irish and modernist literature, but also with Nō and Chinese Yuan Drama (雜劇; *zaju*) and the later *kunqu* or *kunju* (昆曲; 昆劇), a more sophisticated and recondite form of musical theater that arose during the

Ming (1368-1644).⁵⁵ On the surface, this is not terribly interesting. Hughes, like Yeats before him in his experiments with crafting *Nō* from Irish myth, tried to blend elements from multiple sources to make a new kind of theater. But what I will look at here is just what happens to these heterogeneous elements founded on different conceptual schemes as they are made to cohere in a single text; what happens, that is, when a Tibetan Buddhist text becomes, to borrow Hughes' words, a "Buddhist Mass" (Hughes and Reid 304-305).

A way to classify works that draw upon multiple foreign genres is to call the work a "hybrid."⁵⁶ Perhaps the most influential work on this is "Rhetorical Hybrids: Fusions of Generic Elements" by Jamieson and Campbell. The article argues that works of hybrid genre are more capable of drawing attention to the individual elements of the literary work: "a generic critic recognizes the combination of recurrent elements that forms a hybrid, but, on the other hand, such a critic can perceive the unique fusion that is a response to the idiosyncratic needs of a particular situation, institution, and rhetor" (157). Though I agree that works that draw from more than one genre may help to foreground the generic elements present in the work and the social situation of the writer, the term "hybrid" suggests a radical newness that so-called hybrid works do not possess. What is this work that is inspired by Elizabethan, Japanese, and Chinese Theater? Well, it is a hybrid. Notice that this assumes that the subgenres from which the hybrid takes are "pure," even if we protest otherwise. It would be a tautology to say that the combination of hybrid genres gives us a hybrid genre. Things in the past were pure; things in the

⁵⁵ *Kunqu* is officially known as "Kun Qu Opera" by UNESCO, though *kunqu* was not inscribed as an intangible heritage property until 2008. Both *zaju* and *kunqu* are part of *xiqu* (戲曲), or traditional Chinese theater. Though *zaju* would have had musical accompaniment, its music, unlike *kunqu*'s, is no longer extant. For more on *kunqu*, see Stenberg (2015).

⁵⁶ For a recent discussion of the domain of hybridity in genre studies, see Masschelein et al. (2014). They define a hybrid genre as a "genre belonging to different domains and performing different functions" (39). For a consideration of East-West collaborations as hybrid or contrapuntal in strict postcolonial sense, see Taxidou (2007), pp. 118-147.

present and things in the future will be hybrid. Naturally, historic subgenres were not pure but themselves grew from various influences. *Nō*, for instance, has roots in agricultural celebrations, Buddhist and Shinto rituals, and Chinese performance, not to mention its debt to earlier Japanese poetry, which itself borrowed from Chinese poetry. Here, the term “hybrid” assumes that East-West cross pollination is new, when in fact the process is old hat.⁵⁷ Now, it is true that the term has a special application in postcolonial criticism; but Hughes’ work can hardly be read as postcolonial. Haun Saussy has already called attention the limits of the concept of hybridity in comparative literature. The *Bardo* collaboration draws attention to the peculiar methods of analogy that go into constructing an East-West work. These methods give the resultant work an identity that, though of diverse origins, is more specific than the term hybrid might suggest; as Saussy puts it, “hybridity as such often becomes a one-size-fits-all term good for blotting out specific interactions” (“Cadavers” 29). The *Bardo* project serves as an example in support of Saussy’s claim.

The *Tibetan Book* is itself a collaboration, as Donald S. Lopez explains. In 1919, Evans-Wentz, “chanced upon a Tibetan text and asked the English teacher of the Maharaja’s Boarding School for boys in Gangtok, Sikkim to translate it for him. What is known in the West as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* is the result of their collaboration” (Lopez 2).⁵⁸ The *Tibetan Book* is not the only text known as the *Bardo Tödöl* in Tibetan, nor is the Evans-Wentz text, with its mass of commentaries and prefaces, nearly equivalent to any one of these *Bardos*. Evans-Wentz

⁵⁷ As Chou mentions, cross-cultural (and cross-aesthetic) interaction “has always taken place wherever and whenever individuals of different cultures have come into contact — whether along the so-called Silk Road or in the course of the spice trade” (“U.S.-China”). Chou is assuming that each of these cultures is, in itself, a stable entity, but his notice that hybridity is not a particular feature of the modern era is important.

⁵⁸ Lopez mentions that Evans-Wentz never visited Tibet, and argues that the popularity of the *Tibetan Book* owes in part to Tibet never having been colonized by European powers and remaining a mysterious and “largely inaccessible” place (5-6).

and his collaborator worked with an eight-century text attributed to “the great Indian tantric master Padmasambhava, who visited Tibet in the eighth century,” a text which was subsequently lost before being rediscovered in in the fourteenth century (Lopez 2-3). Not only is the *Tibetan Book* not famous in Tibet, but it has been translated, commented upon, and received worldwide in such a way that it is less a Tibetan than an American book. As Lopez puts it,

Removing the *Bardo* from the moorings of language and culture, from time and space, Evans-Wentz transformed it into *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and set it afloat in space, touching down at various moments in various cultures over the course of the past century, providing in each case an occasion to imagine what it might mean to be dead. (10-11)

Lopez does not use the term, but his framing of the *Tibetan Book* recalls Damrosch’s definition of a piece of World Literature, of a text that achieves a life in another language. The *Tibetan Book* “touched down” in the middle of Hughes and Chou, and each attempted to ground it in his own specific understanding of what it could mean for a text to bring East and West together.

I will use Chou and Hughes’ *Bardo* in this chapter to explore what can happen when “East” and “West” are brought together in a cross-cultural collaboration. My attention will be on whether the multiple elements that make up the *Bardo* cohere into a recognizable unity. For all of its heterogeneous sources, the *Bardo* is yet a work that, rather than being given an amorphous label like hybrid or globalized, does have a definite composition. As we will see, however, that composition is given its coherence thanks to an organizing principle that structures the literary world. The necessity of making the various elements that go into an “East-West” work like the *Bardo* changes the aspect of the various elements that are included in the libretto, as different

senses accrue to terms borrowed from other literary constellations in different cultural and linguistic universes.

2.1 General Background

The direct influence of East Asian aesthetics on Hughes is difficult to see. Hughes is after all known firstly for his poetry, secondly for his works for children. In comparison his theatrical productions have not received much attention. His best-known work for theater is perhaps *Orghast* (1971). A collaboration with the British director Peter Brook, *Orghast* is an experimental drama written in a nonexistent language. A printed version of the play is not in circulation. Indeed, the only available MS and TS copies are contained in Hughes' library at Emory.⁵⁹ The play draws freely from Ancient Greek and Near Eastern myths and was performed in Tehran by an international cast, including a Japanese actor, Katsuhiro Oida, and players from such disparate places as France, Iran, and Cameroon. The composition and performance of *Orghast* encapsulates Hughes' general approach to foreign art and literature: the desire to find beyond all appearance of difference an essential, primordial *spiritus mundi*.⁶⁰

When approaching Hughes' *Bardo*, we should bear in mind that the text is incomplete. It is incomplete, firstly, because it was never performed or published. It never received a 'final' version that would have taken into account that which Hughes and Chou would have learned as they transferred the libretto to the stage. It is also incomplete because it lacks Chou's music. The

⁵⁹ The play is described in detail in Smith, *Orghast at Persepolis* (1972).

⁶⁰ The preoccupation may stem from what Reid calls "Hughes' unusual teenage reading, in which Shakespeare, Yeats, Jung, folklore and Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* dominated," thanks to which "Hughes appears to have set out on a journey" (10). I also draw attention to Hughes' fascination with Jung. Jung even wrote an introduction to Evans-Wentz translation of the *Bardo* that Hughes owned. Studies of the similarity between Hughes' poetry and Jungian psychology include Hibbet (2003) and Loizeaux (2004).

Bardo is, after all, a joint project. Chou's music is as important as Hughes' text in understanding this version of the *Bardo*. Aside from the scraps we get from Hughes' letters, we do not know how the words and actions of the performers were to function in relation to the music. Finally, the *Bardo* is incomplete because the text has few stage directions. As he wrote the libretto, Hughes would have imagined the actors' gestures, their placement on stage, and their costumes. He has nonetheless given us no indication of any of these things. In fact, we do not know in detail how the dancing and threatening deities whom the Solo describes throughout the *Bardo* were to be represented. Given that the actions of the deities are the most dramatic elements of the *Bardo*—they are the only ones who are described as moving, not simply speaking—their representation would have been crucial any performance of the opera. All of these uncertainties hinder an interpretation of the libretto that Hughes left.

What we do have is a text that foreshadows Hughes' later preoccupations with death, birth, and myth. Whereas those later texts mix various mythic ideas to form a new mythic substructure, here we have Hughes adapting an East Asian religious text. This means that the mythic substructure here is oddly for Hughes restricted to one region and religion. The text gives us a rare glimpse of Hughes working specifically with East Asia. As such, it gives us our best glimpse into how Hughes imagined the region. The *Bardo* allows us to see what Hughes felt he had to adapt in his habitual poetic practice to work with materials from East Asia.

I say 'East Asia' here rather than Tibet because Hughes' *Bardo* draws from Chinese and Japanese aesthetics to structure his text. To put it differently, the content is Tibetan, or rather is Tibetan material, already deformed by Evans-Wentz's 'translation'. The form, however, is more amorphous. To give the *Bardo* a recognizable structure, Hughes, I will show, drew upon his knowledge of shamanism, of Chinese drama and opera, and of Japanese Nō Theater. Given

Hughes' collaboration with Chou, the most obvious theatrical referent for the *Bardo* is Chinese Opera. Chou drew upon the Opera throughout his career. That Chou's composition of the *Bardo* would have evinced a strong debt to the Chinese Opera seems likely, and we will see why in the final section of this chapter. While Hughes was at Yaddo, he was working on *The House of Taurus*. In a letter to T.S. Eliot in 1959, Hughes mentions working on a play that he initially conceived of as an opera for which he had been awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship.

Christopher Reid, editor of Hughes' letters, conjectures that *The House of Taurus* is this initially operatic play (Hughes and Reid 142-143). If so, then when Hughes met Chou at Yaddo he would have been more easily persuaded to take on Chou's project, the thought of opera already on the Englishman's mind. Indeed, it is possible that this mutual interest in opera, albeit opera from two very different traditions, drew the two men to collaborate. Hughes would have had Chinese Opera in the front of his mind when writing the *Bardo*. We assume that there are parallels between Hughes' text and knowledge of the Chinese Opera that could have been reasonably available to him in 1960, aside from that which Chou could have been communicated to him.

The possible Nō influences is more indirect. It would likely have come through Hughes' youthful fascination with W.B. Yeats (1865-1939), whose work on Irish "Nō" and impact on Hughes is discussed in Section 2.3. Thus, in his *Bardo Thödol* we find that Hughes, in working with an East Asian source, turned to one of the most familiar forms of East Asian theater, Nō, in order to give his work a coherent form. And he did so in part, I will show, because Nō had exerted such an influence on the theater of the poet who, according to Hughes himself, had influenced him tremendously in his early life.⁶¹ First, however, I will give an overview of the *Bardo* itself.

⁶¹ In a letter from 16 December 1992 in which he describes his teenage development, Hughes writes: "I was looking one day in the School library for more poems in those same long rhythms, when I came

The action goes thus. The Reader of the Bardo and a “Guide and Instructor,” termed ‘A’ and ‘B’ in Hughes’ draft, await the appearance of a dead soul, called ‘Solo.’ Throughout there is a chorus of mourners and karmic voices. A and B begin by invoking the names of the Buddha and various deities. They coax Solo into accepting his death. Should he do so, he will attain Buddhahood. Solo is not willing. He is confused by the sight of mourners around his dead body. He wishes to return to life, and misses the first opportunity at Buddhahood. A and B continue to coach him. Solo becomes fixated on a series of deities that slowly grow more threatening. Solo misses chance after chance to “break the cycle of death and rebirth.” His “passions” bind him to his body. Eventually, Buddhahood passes him and he is doomed to be reborn. At the end A, B, and Solo invoke the Holy Dharma. Solo swears never again to be bound to the flesh and to succeed when next in the Bardo.

From the outline, we can see that little happens in the text. Solo is offered the chance of liberation but does not take it. He is to be reborn and to return at some date to the Bardo. Indeed, he may have already passed through the Bardo and been reborn numerous times. We doubt even whether Solo has learned from his experience. Consequently, the plot is circular. The end of the play brings us back to the beginning. Nothing has been accomplished, nothing changed. Michael Sayeau argues that an interest in the uneventful marks modernist narrative. The modern paradox, he writes, is that we live in a world of endless change and endless boredom (3). Whereas much post-French Revolution literature deals with the possibility of an event by which an old order is

across the last part of *The Wanderings Of Oisín*, by Yeats. It so happened, my particular craze, in folklore and mythology, was the Irish (very rich, as you know). So here was an Irish myth and my special verse metre all in one. I then read the whole poem—for the legend. Then I searched Yeats for more—not tramping rhythms but—folklore made into poems. So I was swallowed alive by Yeats. From that point, my animal kingdom, the natural world, the world of folktales and myth, and poetry, became a single thing—and Yeats was my model for how the whole thing could be given poetic expression. It all happened pretty quickly. I simply tried to learn the whole of Yeats (and eventually did learn the complete poems)” (Hughes and Reid 624).

destroyed and a new one built, modernism is defined by its distrust of novelty and its sense that the world is composed of the quotidian rather than of “revolutionary shocks” (Sayeau 3-5).

Sayeau believes that our interest in modernism is as much in the movement’s use of older forms as in any novelty it contains, though the use of old forms is much of modernism’s novelty (39).

We glimpse in the *Bardo* this fascination with the non-event.

Naturally, Hughes was born far too late to be a modernist *à la lettre*. As Daniel O’Connor points out, though, “Hughes’ work is not a wholesale rejection of Modernism but is in many ways late Modernist” (2). Hughes’ work is late Modernist because it retains the Modernist preoccupation with myth. Just as James Joyce used, to paraphrase T.S. Eliot in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” a mythic “method” to structure banal events occurring in Dublin on July 16, 1904, according to the events of Homer’s *Odyssey*, thereby adding depth to modern mundanity (*Selected* 177-178), in the background of rural life in twentieth-century England Hughes often places myths drawn from every corner of the globe. Yet in much of Hughes’ work there is a crucial difference between his handling of myth and the modernist preoccupations that Sayeau highlights. As we will see in Chapter V, the Calder Valley becomes in Hughes’ hands the site of a mythic restoration of the primacy of nature, with the decaying industry of the region swept away first by Northern European mythic forces, then, in a complex dream vision, by Chinese mythology, and the area returned to its natural state. The idea of the revolutionary moment that restores order, an idea that Sayeau says modernists rebelled against, is alive in Hughes’ writing. Not only does this make it more difficult to classify Hughes as a late modernist, it makes us wonder why he should have produced such an uneventful libretto.

We might look at Hughes’ conception of his audience. In this regard, Neil Corcoran traces Hughes’ attitude to Shakespeare. Corcoran reminds us that Hughes thought Shakespeare

adopted a “pincer” movement,⁶² drawing close the common tongue and the aristocratic tongue (190). This, Corcoran says, fits in with Hughes’ dialectical view of the history and language of England: the Celtic against the Saxon; the Saxon versus the Norman; the feminine (Catholicism) against the masculine (Protestantism); the various dialects of the country, Hughes’ West Yorkshire dialect included, versus standard English; the Anglo versus the Latinate. According to Corcoran, Hughes aims to bring all of these contradictions together and rescue peripheral dialects from the “smothering figure” of the “Queen’s English” (195). Eventually Hughes became resigned to the necessity of “silence” in relation to Shakespearean language and English at large, silence necessitated by the antinomies of English. But what Corcoran does not point out is the contradiction in Hughes’ own stance. Hughes certainly liked to think of himself as anti-establishment. He took pride in his accent and rural upbringing and stubbornly clung to them despite his life at Cambridge and later as the Poet Laureate. Yet Hughes was also, as Corcoran points out, resentful of the Glorious Revolution, which was a revolt against the aristocracy and Catholicism, and which sped up the process of parliamentary rule begun with the English Civil War. In this, I think, we see something of Yeats and Eliot, that opposition not to elitism but to the middle class. Hughes’ identification with the rural was also identification with a deposed elite; his antipathy was directed at the middle class even as he himself became a member of it. The stance explains Hughes’ desire to produce an opera that, uneventful and foreign to contemporary British audience, would not easily have achieved popular appeal.

⁶² The “pincer movement” is hendiadys, the use of two nouns rather than a noun and its qualifier, as in “storm and weather” rather than “stormy weather”; though as both Corcoran and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton notice Hughes never uses the term ‘hendiadys’ (Corcoran 191; Tudeau-Clayton 193). The “pincer” is a predicate with one Anglo-Saxon and one Latinate word.

The focus of the play is on speech. But we would be hard pressed to say that this is dramatic dialogue. A, B, and Solo appear to hear one another but do not pick up on the threads of one another's statements. A small sample of the text will help to indicate this:

Solo: Others, others. Who are these others.

A&B: Recognise Vajra Heruka, the blood-drinker;

Recognise Vajra Krotishaurima:

Recognise Ratna Heruka, the blood-drinker;

Recognise Ratna Krotishaurima;

Recognise Padma Heruka, the blood-drinker;

Recognise Padma Krotishaurima;

Recognise Karma Heruka, the Blood-drinker;

Recognise Karma Krotishaurima.

Solo: I am blown like a breath through the Bardo.

B: Evil Karma drags you further, further and deeper into the Bardo.

Solo: I am blown like ashes through the Bardo.

B: Evil Karma catches you from yourself and from Liberation

A&B: Recognise these forms for your own mind

Solo: Filling the skies they carry me away

A: Evil Karma carries you away,

Darkens your eyes, and fills you with terror, bears you ever deeper into the Bardo. (*Bardo*

16)

Solo demands to know who the fearful gods before him are. When A and B tell him in detail, Solo seems to take no notice. Rather, he focuses once more on his own suffering and speaks laconically. The difference between the lengthy and highly stylized expository speech of A and B and Solo's more direct lyricism separates the three characters. Because Solo's register diverges from A and B's, because Solo's concern is with his suffering while A and B's is with exposition of that which passes in the Bardo, the three characters cannot enter into conversation. They seem to be speaking past one another. No sense of drama or character development emerges from their dialogue.

From Hughes' letters we can glean a better idea of how the play was to capture the audience's interest. In a letter to Chou dated 1 January 1960, Hughes writes: "[After you left Yaddo] I got a great deal done—my play, among other things. The play is, I believe, unperformable save as a curiosity, but among its extravagances I did achieve here and there what I set out to do" (Hughes and Reid 154). He then promises to send part of the play to Chou. As he wrote, Hughes appears to have been unaware of how Chou hoped to structure the play. He looked forward to receiving Chou's thoughts and revising the play following "a year or two at other things" (Hughes and Reid 154-155). Hughes was aware of the dramatic limitations of his *Bardo* and knew that any performance of it would rely heavily on the nonverbal elements handled by Chou.

In a letter from December 1960 to Sylvia Plath's mother and brother, Hughes expands on his work on the Bardo and Chou's plans:

I wrote this oratorio for the Bardo Thodol, The Tibetan Book Of The Dead. I've just sent off a final version. That will be something for you to hear: it's quite awesome. It's the

progress of the soul during the 49 days between death and rebirth, a sort of Buddhist Mass. I really enjoyed doing it, though I spent all the summer months just getting the material into shape and telling myself I ought to be working harder at it. However, if the musician, Chou Wen-chung is ready for it, in himself, it could easily be a terrific musical work as it provides wonderful opportunities. He wants to do it with an illuminated backcloth, showing the various deities as they rise before the soul, and the various lighting effects of the different regions through which the soul is driven by his furies, and with a dancer—to mime the events of which the chorus *and* solo sing. So, when this work is completed you shall both have tickets. (Hughes and Reid 174)

Chou's idea for an "illuminated backcloth" solves the problem of representing the various fantastic supernatural beings that Solo and the chorus describe throughout the play. With the dearth of action and dramatic dialogue, the main interest in reading Hughes' typescript of the *Bardo* lies in its ornate poetry and in the descriptions of the deities. These figures are by turns seductive and horrifying.

Solo: A figure out of the East

White-hot, moon-white,

Brandishing the blade

Bearing the skull

That brims blood,

Body coiled

By a white woman

And furiously dancing, furiously dancing,

Smiling upon me:

Strengthen me, strengthen me

B: Do not fear them, do not fear them:

Supplicate them, supplicate them.

Solo: Out of the South

A figure of flame

Flame-yellow, a figure

Flourishing a blade, balancing a skull

Brimming blood, and furiously dancing

Wrapped in the flame of a yellow Dakini,

Smiling upon me. Out of the West

A figure crimson

As the sun's core

Wound by a woman

Crimson as the sun's core

Furiously dancing. (Hughes, *Bardo* 11-12)

Hughes has written “furiously dancing” here and in other places in the transcript. We do not know how “furious” the dancing represented on the backcloth would have been. We can remark that this sense of movement and power stands in marked contrast to the motionlessness of Solo and A and B in the typescript. The three, at least in the typescript with minimal stage direction, only stand and speak. The discord between the motionless actors and the figures represented only

by an abstraction of their movements on an illuminated backcloth adds a dramatic element that is difficult to quantify.

2.2 Comparison with Evans-Wentz's *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*

Hughes modified much of Evans-Wentz's rendering of the *Bardo Thödol*. Rather than narrating the experience of the deceased in the Bardo, the *Tibetan Book* is read aloud to the dying. It specifies how much time should pass for the reading of a given part of the text according to where the soul is in the Bardo. For example, we read:

But if it be feared that the primary Clear Light hath not been recognized, then [it can certainly be assumed] there is dawning [upon the deceased] that called the secondary Clear Light, which dawneth in somewhat more than a mealtime period after that the expiration hath ceased. (Evans-Wentz 97)

Hughes ignores this entirely. The text specifies different readings for people of “noble” or “common” birth (Evans-Wentz 95). Hughes does not. We can also see that Evans-Wentz, like Hughes, uses a slightly antiquated diction. There are poetic passages, “prayers,” that closely resemble Hughes' text. However, the reader of the *Tibetan Book* instructs the deceased to repeat the prayer, a detail missing from Hughes' *Bardo*.⁶³ On the other hand, the *Tibetan Book* assigns

⁶³ “Put thy whole thought earnestly upon Vairochana and repeat after me this prayer:
‘Alas! when wandering in the Sangsāra, because of intense stupidity,
On the radiant light-path of the Dhartna-Dhātu Wisdom
May [I] be led by the Bhagavān Vairochana,
May the Divine Mother of Infinite Space be [my] rearguard;
May [I] be led safely across the fearful ambush of the Bardo;
And may [I] be placed in the state of the All-Perfect Buddha-hood.’

colors to different parts of the afterlife: “dull white light” signifies the land of the Devas (124); “dull, smoke-coloured light” signifies Hell (109), etc. Hughes will adopt this color symbolism exactly, and this, as we will see, draws Hughes’ libretto close to the conventions of Chinese drama.

We noted that Evans-Wentz’s book pays close attention to time. In fact, the book is divided into fourteen days. On each day a different event takes place; for instance, the Wrathful deities appear on the eighth day. But it is not necessary that the soul spend every day in the Bardo. The soul may take the chance at liberation on day one or day nine. Obviously, if Hughes wants to use material from the entirety of the *Tibetan Book*, he cannot allow the Solo to achieve liberation on the first day. Rather, Hughes has taken the material from all fourteen days and compressed it into a single occurrence. Of course, there is still the suggestion of time in Hughes’ *Bardo*. The deities still appear in succession. But the amount of time that passes is ambiguous. The audience has no indication that two weeks are passing on stage.

We also mentioned the *Tibetan Book*’s distinction between “noble” and “common” souls. The book further distinguishes between “those who have meditated much” and those who have been “limited” in their “religious practices” (151). The more the departed “meditated” on religion in life, the easier it will be to achieve enlightenment. In other words, while in the Bardo the soul can recall knowledge of the Bardo obtained while alive, Hughes’ Solo seems to have no knowledge of the Bardo. He is overwhelmed by surprise and horror. Hughes has given us a character that is at the furthest extreme of ignorance, and whose ignorance perhaps mirrors the audience’s lack of knowledge of the Bardo and the *Tibetan Book*. On top of that, he has given no

Praying thus, in intense humble faith, [thou] wilt merge, in halo of rainbow light, into the heart of Vairochana, and obtain Buddhahood in the Satnbhoga-Kāya, in the Central Realm of the Densely-Packed.” (Evans-Wentz 107)

sign to his audience that the *Tibetan Book* encourages stratification along lines of class and education.

Hughes has remained faithful to the diction, symbolism, and overarching themes of the *Tibetan Book*. He has ignored from those features of the book that would have given his libretto a more dramatic element. He has eschewed notions of class, education, and society, and has marginalized the passage of time. Reducing his characters to pure types existing in a formless space, Hughes has departed from that in the *Tibetan Book* which would have allowed him to make his work more conventionally Western. In doing so, he has made his *Bardo* superficially similar to East Asian theater as filtered to him through intermediaries, to which this chapter will now turn.

2.3 W.B. Yeats and the *Bardo*

Yeats' influence on the *Bardo* was substantial. Evans-Wentz himself was fascinated by Yeats, and dedicated his first book, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Folklore*, to the Irish poet and his compatriot George William Russell (Lopez 23). The "fairy-faith" was Evans-Wentz's interpretation of Celtic myth, at the heart of which he puts "Fairyland," "a supernatural state of consciousness in to which men and women may enter temporarily in dreams, trances, and in various ecstatic states; or in an indefinite period at death" (*Fairy-Faith* 2; qtd in Lopez 26). A critic would be hard pressed not to recognize the line connecting Evans-Wentz' first book to his most famous project.

It is unknown whether Hughes was aware of Evans-Wentz's admiration of Yeats, but it is fitting regardless that he chose for his collaboration with Chou a "Tibetan" text passed through the hands of a fellow admirer of his Irish forebear. Hughes told Ekbert Faas that "Yeats

spellbound me for about six years. I got to him not so much through his verse as through his other interests, folklore, and magic in particular. Then that strange atmosphere lay hold of me” (202). These six years spanned the middle and end of the 1950s. In his collected letters, Hughes directly mentions Yeats eighteen times throughout the decade, then only once in the 1960s. The last incidence occurs just under three months before Hughes and Plath would arrive at Yaddo in a letter of 19 June 1959 to Lucas Myers. Hughes derides Hart Crane and praises John Crowe Ransom for failing and succeeding to capture the “whole human being” (146). Invoking Eliot’s “disassociation of sensibility,” he writes that this “wholeness” died in English poetry with the Glorious Revolution thanks to “the inner-conflict of upper and lower classes in England, the development of the English gentleman with the stereotype English voice (and the mind, set of manners etc that goes with the voice) & the tabu on dialect as a language proper for literate men” (Hughes and Reid 146). He asserts that “the best moments of Shakes, Donne, Yeats, even Eliot, are ‘gestures’ [a concept that Myers conceives of as related to the Poundian persona] in [Myers’] sense. But in all that I’ve written since my book this ‘gesture’ is just what I’ve been trying to avoid” (146). A month before that, in a letter dated 19 May 1959, Hughes writes to Myers: “Don’t you really like the Yeats before Byzantium? There’s something is spoiling my taste for Yeats. Maybe I knew him too well. Something inflexible about him that disagrees with me at present” (145). On account of his desire for “wholeness,” or sincerity, in poetry, Hughes’ mania for Yeats ended just before meeting Chou at Yaddo. The *Bardo* project may have appeared as a new path for Hughes after he tired of the route he was travelling.

The “Japanese” influence on Hughes likely comes by way of Yeats. Japanese art had long influenced its Western counterpart before Yeats wrote his first Irish “Nō” *At the Hawk’s Well*. The importation of Japanese prints or *ukiyo-e* especially had cemented the idea of Japan as a

mysterious, magical place in the minds of European artists. As Gayle Zachmann points out, Impressionism, the revolutionary artistic movement in France that rejected Classicism and Realism and favored subjectivity and allusion, was so tied to Japanese art that the movement was “widely known as *japonisme* before gaining its current and originally pejorative appellation, ‘Impressionism’” (78). From the beginning, then, Japanese art had a revolutionary potential for Western artists, even if the Japanese art to which Europeans were drawn was, for the Japanese themselves, neither particularly modern nor impressive. For Stephane Mallarmé (1842-1898), according to Zachmann, Japanese art allowed for an “aesthetic politics that proposes itself as a more accessible, more immediate, and therefore more legitimate real—one grounded in individual observation, visual memory, and effect, as well as the social and political histories that subtend individual and artistic agency, and even national image” (81). Japan or *japanisme* for Mallarmé and the average French consumer became “a form of cultural capital” that could signify a variety of intellectual and cultural concepts such as Impressionism and Symbolism (Zachmann 82). In other words, in Europe Japanese art acquired political and aesthetic significance that it did not possess in Japan. European artists valued Japanese work because of its difference from European works, but ultimately European artists were less concerned with imitating the Japanese than with using this new Japanese aesthetics as vectors for new personal or political Western ideas.

Aoife Hart argues that Yeats’ Nō should not be judged according to classical Japanese Nō but in the context of Irish and Japanese treatments of Nō in the twentieth century. Hart contends that Yeats did not mean for his Nō to be Nō in the strictest sense. Rather, Hart says, Yeats thought of his Nō as using something ancient and Japanese to make something new and Irish, so discussing Yeats’ fidelity to classical Nō misses what Yeats was trying to accomplish (311-315).

Hart's approach is similar to my own; but I would like to engage with Yeats on a more theoretical level by asking how it is possible for 'Nō' to transcend nation and language, and what significance Nō could hold in an international modern context.

Raphael Ingelbien notes that for Yeats the Symbolism of Mallarmé and Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) also joined with notions of class, national politics, and aesthetic value (192). Ingelbien argues that Yeats eventually broke with Mallarmé and embraced the Belgian Symbolism of Maeterlinck because the former was too involved with the idea of *l'art pour l'art* whereas the latter, preoccupied with regional dialects and valorizing the lower and upper classes as more noble in spirit than the bourgeois middle classes of the cities, paralleled Yeats' own concerns with the Irish language and the rise of the Catholic middle class in Ireland in the early years of the twentieth century (197). Unlike T.S. Eliot, whose interest in symbolism, Ingelbien says, tended towards the Southern, Latinate, and imperial strain of Paul Valéry, Charles Baudelaire, and Tristan Courbiere (184), Yeats was interested in the Northern strain of symbolism, characterized by mysticism and magic (199). And unlike Mallarmé, Yeats used silence and ellipsis for more than "aesthetic isolation"; for Yeats, silence was a way for the poet to form "an understanding that would, among other things, connect the poet with the common folk" whose language, Irish, Yeats romanticized but could not speak (Ingelbien 198). From the Symbolist movement influenced by a peculiar reading of Japanese aesthetics, Yeats took the notion of silence and nobility in art that would eventually influence his own interpretation of Japanese Nō Theater.

Yeats' first encounter with Nō came through his amanuensis, Ezra Pound. Sanahide Kodama explains that in 1914 Pound had gotten hold of Ernest Fenollosa's rough translations of several Nō and, at the request of Fenollosa's widow, Mary, turned them into more literate pieces

for publication in literary journals (99). Yeats wrote the introduction for Pound's *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* (1916), wherein he says that the plays will help him "to explain a certain possibility of the Irish dramatic movement" (I). That "possibility" was realized that same year with the inaugural performance in London of *At the Hawk's Well*. Yeats imagines his Cuchulain, hero of Irish myth, wearing a mask as in *Nō* and in Greek Drama. By "wearing this noble half-Greek half-Asiatic face," the figure of Cuchulain, Yeats writes, "will appear perhaps like an image seen in revery by some Orphic worshiper" (I). *Nō* conjures up in Yeats' mind Greek theater, and this correspondence between two foreign, ancient art forms allows him to express a myth belonging to a language he does not speak. Indeed, as a mythic figure of the Irish people, Cuchulain is even further removed from Yeats, a Protestant Anglo-Irishman whose ancestors were not of those people among whom the myth first arose.

We find out, though, that in Yeats' view Greece itself is "half-Asiatic." These Asiatic influences represent the antithesis of what European theater by the early twentieth century had become: rational, realist, naturalist, fixated on the idea of progress in the arts.⁶⁴ For Yeats, art should speak a different language from that of everyday speech. "Realism was created for the common people," Yeats contends, "and it is the delight today of all those whose minds educated alone by school-masters and newspapers are without the memory of beauty and emotional subtlety" (VIII). Against the depiction of the banal and the naturalist reduction of life to mechanistic processes, Yeats, as both Kodama and Akiko Manabe mention (100; 427), envisioned an "aristocratic" theater "having no need of mob or press to pay its way" (II). Yeats envisions a theater with minimal setting and music, where the actors speak with "slight variations upon old cadences and customary words, all that high breeding of poetical style where

⁶⁴ Cf. Claudel's distinction between the French and Japanese temperaments in Chapter IV.

there is nothing ostentatious, nothing crude, no breath of parvenu or journalist” (IX). There is no better form, Yeats thinks, than the Japanese Nō, which he believes is a purely aristocratic form, performed for and occasionally played by nobles, in a language that the common people and the middle classes do not understand, with highly stylized movements and speech that are far away from the conventions of public entertainment and media—a theater whose very name means “accomplishment.” This is no ordinary accomplishment; rather, “it is [the nobility’s] accomplishment and that of a few cultured people who understand the literary and mythological allusions and the ancient lyrics quoted in the speech or chorus, their discipline, a part of their breeding” (XI). Both the form and the history of Nō accord with Yeats’ ambitions for a new and aristocratic European theater.

Thanks to Yeats’ mistrust of progress, it is the antiquity of Nō that attracts him. It is not that Yeats believes that everything new is poor. But he imagines that the further European art moved from its sources, the more it lost its noble and spiritual core, of which the shift from Shakespeare’s high poetic drama to the prose drama of Dryden is exemplary (VI). Yeats charges that this movement towards prose and the mundane is tied to the increasingly rational mindset of Europeans, and had modern Europeans “been Greek, and so but half-European, an honourable mob would have martyred though in vain the first man who set up a painted scene, or who complained that soliloquies were unnatural, instead of repeating with a sigh, ‘we cannot return to the arts of childhood, however beautiful’” (VI-VII). Japanese Nō’s sparse props, exemplified by the representation of “a fruit tree by a bush in a pot,” suggest to Yeats “a child’s game become the most noble poetry” (XIII). The childlike simplicity has the effect of encouraging the audience to use its imagination; the Nō playwright, unlike the realist, does not break the magic of the theater by “[setting] before us all those things which we feel and imagine in silence” (Yeats

XIII). The antiquity of the theater means that it has retained the affective childlike aspect of art that has been cast aside by the progress of rationalism in Europe, and so Yeats values the antiquity of Nō because he may set it against all that he deplores in modern European art and society.

There is a third aspect of Yeats' interest in Nō: the perceived proximity of Shinto to Irish myth. Yeats notes that Nō grew from ritual Shinto dancing before "receiving its philosophy and its final shape perhaps from priests of a contemplative school of Buddhism" (X). He states that in Nō a "god, goddess, or ghost reminds me at times of our own Irish legends and beliefs, which once it may be differed little from those of the Shinto worshipper" (XIV). He then proceeds to draw more parallels between the Nō tales he has read and the Irish myths to the study of which he had devoted much of his life. Of course, Ireland did not have a native theater like Japan. But because Irish and Japanese native beliefs are close in Yeats' mind, he can use the Japanese theater to express Irish myth. That is to say, because Irish and Japanese myths are, he thinks, at root so similar, the Nō Theater that acts as a vessel for the one can easily act as a vessel for the other. This helps Yeats to solve the problem of adapting Irish myth for the European theater, a problem that he says he had long struggled (XV). Yeats goes even further, in fact, in claiming that among the medieval Nō playwrights and theatergoers "some would have understood the prose of Walter Pater, the painting of Puvis de Chavannes, the poetry of Mallarmé and Verlaine" (XIX). This is because in Nō, and in all ancient Japanese art, Yeats finds "the most vivid and subtle discrimination of sense and the invention of images more powerful than sense; the continual presence of reality" (XVIII). He sees in Japanese art the answer to the question that occupied Mallarmé and other modern European artists: how to create art in "an industrial age" dominated by "a mechanical sequence of ideas" and in which people are unable fully to

experience life and art because they can no longer enter into a “confusion of the senses” in which the rational mind stops working (XVIII-XIX).

In Nō Yeats spied a dramatic form that could escape the realism popular among “the mob” and lead to a dramatic European theater. He believed that the antiquity of Nō and its “Asiatic” provenance gave it the vitality that existed in Greek theater but had been stripped from European art by the rational mind. He justified joining Irish myth with Japanese theater through a perceived correspondence between the native Irish and Japanese beliefs. From these aesthetic, historical, political, and spiritual threads Yeats wove his new European performance art. The similarities between that which Yeats tries to do with Nō and Hughes with the *Bardo* are striking.

More narrowly, what Hughes retained from Yeats is his preoccupation with shamanism. Yeats himself knew something of Evans-Wentz’s *Tibetan Book* and had a copy of it in his library (Wilson 49). In an article from 1964 entitled “Regenerations,” Hughes writes: “Traces and variations of shamanism are found all over the world, but it has developed its purest and most characteristic procedures in north-eastern and central Asia” (56). He mentions that shamanism “flourishes alongside and within the prevailing religion” and that “[the] Buddhist influence on Asiatic shamanism is strong” (*Winter* 56). Because of this intertwining of Buddhism and shamanism, Hughes feels justified in concluding that the *Bardo Thödol* is essentially shamanistic. While in the text “the geography and furnishings of the afterworld are Buddhist”:

...the main business of the work as a whole, which is to guide the dead soul to its place in death, or back into life—together with the principal terrific events, and the flying accompaniment of descriptive songs, exhortation to the soul, threats, and the rest—are all

characteristically shamanic. This huge, formal work has long ago lost contact with any shaman, but its origins seem clear. (*Winter* 56)

He goes through the various tasks of the shaman, mentions that “[the] calling is not exclusively male: in some traditions (Japanese) women predominate,” and argues that “[in] a shamanizing society, *Venus and Adonis*, some of Keats’s longer poems, *The Wanderings of Oisin*, *Ash Wednesday*, would all qualify their authors for the magic drum” (58). By the early sixties, Hughes was familiar with the history of shamanism, including Japanese “shamanism,” identified shamanism as a Central and East Asian phenomenon, understood its role in relation to Buddhism, viewed the *Bardo* at its core as shamanistic, and tried to recuperate some of his favorite English poets by casting some of their monumental works as shamanistic. Hughes’ work on the *Bardo* appears to have convinced him of the fitness of shamanism as a poetic guide just as he was losing enthusiasm for Yeats. The *Bardo* allowed him to rationalize the appearance of authentic or “whole” poetic texts in an England increasingly suffering from a “disassociation of sensibility” as manifestations of a suppressed shamanistic spirit, which Hughes undoubtedly thought was manifested in himself.

I think that the role of the *Bardo* in Hughes’ career is clear. It helped him to transfer from the English poetic tradition with which he had grown dissatisfied to a global but principally Central and East Asian “shamanistic” tradition. At the same time, it confirmed his indebtedness to Yeats. Since Yeats would always be the poet who introduced Hughes to shamanism, Hughes’ conception of shamanism would always be built on top of a structure that he inherited from the Anglo-Irish poet. Hughes’ work on the *Bardo* was a catalyst for change and retrenchment of his youthful interests.

Rand Brandes explores Hughes' debt to Yeats. Brandes points out that the central text in Hughes' dialogue with Yeats is *The Wanderings of Oisín*, whose "circular structure begins and ends in the same moment" (205). Brandes does not say so, but in this "circular structure" we can find an aspect of Yeats' work that would have appealed to Hughes in his search for poetry that embodies "wholeness." Circularity goes against teleology; it suggests that its subject exists outside of time, that is, that its subject is transcendent. If something is outside of time, it cannot change. When Brandes asserts that shamanism "is the master metaphor / narrative of Hughes' thinking a writing," when he says that Hughes saw shamanism as the root of all religion, including Christianity, he is highlighting Hughes' investment in the transcendent and the essential (202-203). He continues: "The shaman brings together East and West, ancient and modern" (204). Searching for a belief system that could give wholeness to all world characterized by difference and conflict, Hughes would have been interested not only in the subject matter of *Oisín* but also in its form. This aspect of *Oisín* would influence the structure⁶⁵ Hughes gave to his *Bardo*.

The late Earl Miner draws a line between European drama and Nō. In European drama the problem of representation is always present, Miner claims. Even if the playwright, in the vein of Samuel Beckett, jettisons Aristotelian mimesis, the problem of mimesis remains (*Comparative* 58). In other words, mimesis is so ingrained in the European tradition that even if the playwright disavows mimesis she still engages with mimesis negatively, meaning that however much it tries even the most radical post-War avant-garde theater never escapes the issue of representation (Miner, *Comparative* 59). In Nō, on the other hand, the emphasis is on narrative, and narrative, being diegetic, cannot be incorporated into drama, so the problem of realistic representation did

⁶⁵ Circular structure figures often in modernism (*Finnegans Wake*) and early to mid-twentieth century theater (*Endgame*).

not arise as it did in Europe (Miner, *Comparative* 70-72). Miner notes that the reception of Nō in Europe mirrors the “sensation that Ibsen’s *Doll’s House*” created in Asia, for the presence of psychological realism and mimesis in the one seemed just as radical in Asia as the opaqueness and symbolism of the other did in Europe (*Comparative* 72). Miner is largely correct. But he overlooks the fact that, even though Nō did not have to deal with the concept of mimesis during, say, the Edo period *in Japan*, it certainly did have to once it came into Europe. The reception of Nō in Europe is inseparable from its interpretation as a non-realistic play, and the *image* of Nō in Europe is bound up with the idea of mimesis just as a Western genre might be.

I am not suggesting here that Hughes’ *Bardo* is a ‘Nō’ or an ‘Asian’ play because it fulfills much of the criteria Miner suggests make a Nō a Nō. I would like to draw attention to the complications that we face when we try to classify Hughes’ *Bardo*. His *Bardo* is non-mimetic, symbolic, and driven by poetic narrative rather than action. If we accept Miner’s definition, then it seems that Hughes’ *Bardo* is a Nō, which, of course, it is patently not. Miner’s safeguard against this sort of erroneous classification is his caveat that all Western theater necessarily labors under the influence of Aristotelian mimesis. How can we tell this? Is there any telltale in the text itself that identifies the mimetic legacy? I do not believe so, not in the case of Hughes’ *Bardo*. That is not to say that Aristotle’s theory was not present in Hughes’ mind as he wrote, or that there is nothing remotely mimetic in the *Bardo*. Rather, my point is that the playwright’s psychology is something of which we can only have secondary knowledge at best, and that the representation of action in the *Bardo* is, if present at all, too sparse to justify any identification of the legacy of mimesis without saying, quite bluntly, this is a Westerner’s play, ergo mimesis affected it.⁶⁶ Consequently, looking only at Hughes’ text, or relying on large-scale divisions

⁶⁶ I agree with Miner that any European playwright would have to come to grips with mimesis; my point is that the legacy of mimesis need not be evident in the text itself.

between East and West, we are stuck with the problem of classification. This modern European text, with many European influences, that in many ways seems “Asiatic,” and that owes much to a Chinese-American collaborator—what is it?

2.4 The *Bardo* in Relation to Chinese and European Theater

It should be clear that Hughes’ *Bardo* is both an exercise in translation in cooperation with a Chinese-American composer that exhibits sporadic fidelity to its source material and a personal project for a young English poet growing beyond his spiritual apprenticeship under Yeats. Before getting into the Chinese and Japanese elements of Hughes’ *Bardo*, we should mention the possible influence of “Asian” theater, broadly defined, on the opera.

To this end we turn to the books in Hughes’ library. Hughes did not habitually leave notes in his books. The critic’s task is therefore more difficult in connecting the books in Hughes’ library to his works than it is in *Samuel Beckett’s Library* (2013), for instance. Going by the publication dates of books Hughes owned that are related to his later work, that is, books the publication of which predate certain of Hughes’ works, we can conjecture a relationship between what Hughes read and what he produced. But as we cannot conclusively state lines of influence, we must proceed with caution through this survey.

In his library is Faubian Bowers’ *Theater in the East* (1956). Bowers had specialized in Japanese and Indian theater before writing *Theater in the East*, in which he took on not only Japanese and Indian but also Chinese and Southeast Asian performance art. The book was the first of its kind and was well received at the time of publication. We can reasonably surmise that Hughes acquired his copy before or, more likely, during his work on the *Bardo* and used it as reliable reference to construct his “Asian” play. If so, then in accordance with the general

perspective of Hughes studies, the English author would have had access to information on a wide variety of national Asian theaters when writing the *Bardo*. Earl Ernst describes the information Hughes might have absorbed:

To make matters somewhat easier for the Western reader, he distinguishes between dance and drama, drawing a line which, except with reference to the imported realistic theatre, the native of the Orient has not drawn. There is no time to discuss the apparently universal Asian aptitude for dance, nor to consider explicitly the deleterious influences which the realistic theatre and film have already exerted upon traditional forms of expression. (115)

Bowers' book would not have conveyed the niceties of "Oriental" theater to Hughes, but it would have encouraged him to think of "Asian" drama as symbolic and musical. The very attributes that, as we will see in this chapter and the next, Yeats and Claudel thought were essential to *Nō* might, to Hughes, have been presented as less a part of the Japanese Theater and more vaguely "Asian." A specialist in Subcontinental and Southeast Asian theater would be able to say more on the possibility of such influence on Hughes' *Bardo*. Here, let us simply say that the presence of *Theatre in the East* in Hughes' library suggests the multiplicity of influences that might have fed into the *Bardo* opera; and it indicates the intellectual climate into which the *Bardo* would have been released.

I also should point out the possible Western influences on Hughes' work, by which I mean the influence of Western playwrights who were not themselves working with East Asian materials. The most obvious is Shakespeare. Shakespeare was so important to Hughes that we

could convincingly argue that nothing Hughes wrote was unaffected by Shakespeare.⁶⁷ But the *Bardo* has a specific allusion, namely to the famous line in *King Lear*: “Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill” (IV.vi); and the line “Never, never, never, never, never!” (V.iii). In Part 2 of Hughes’ *Bardo*, the chorus joins Solo’s description of the horrors before him:

C1: SLAY! SLAY! SLAY! SLAY! SLAY!

C2: Om Mane Padme Hum (Continuing under what follows)

Solo: Clashing armaments of bone

Braying through their thigh-bone trumpets

Treading to drums and to skull-timbels

Bannered with whole hides of Rakshasas

Pennons of man-skin, man-skin canopies

C1: SLAY! SLAY! SLAY! SLAY! SLAY!

C2: Om Wagi Shari Mum (Continuing under what follows)

Chorus 1’s “SLAY! SLAY! SLAY! SLAY! SLAY!” deliberately echoes *Lear*. In fact, when Hughes wrote *Eat Crow* (1971), a closet drama that also draws heavily on his knowledge of the *Bardo Thödol*, he directly mentions *Lear*:

MORGAN: “Never, never, never, never, never!”

⁶⁷ For a recent study of Hughes and Shakespeare, see Corcoran (2010).

MORGAN PRODUCER (After a long pause): It won't do, will it. See, here the King is using this word Never like a knife, to carve up his own insides. This is Hara-kiri on the astral plane. He's forcing it down into the lust, deepest cellars underground resistance of his life—illusion murdering himself: once—not enough, no visible effect, he's in full strength: twice—and he's still missed, but the wave hits him and suddenly its horrible; three time—and it's agony, but he's gone too far to stop; he'll have to finish it quick; so four times—and he still hasn't got it, he's wild, he's already out of this world, he's a beast, a god, but alive—so five times—and relief! Relief! He's cracked open the foundations—the light floods in. You see, here, he dies, two or three lines later. End of the King. Got it. Now. Go. (11-12)

As the division between Morgan and Morgan Producer indicate, *Eat Crow* is a psychological exploration of a man's descent into madness following the fracturing of his subjectivity. The exclamation "Slay!" comes from Evans-Wentz' translation: "Thick awesome darkness will appear in front of thee continually, from the midst of which there will come such terror-producing utterances as 'Strike! Slay!' and similar threats. Fear these not" (476). Hughes takes this note and transforms it into an allusion to Shakespeare. In 1971, working alone, Hughes drew more openly on Shakespeare, but we can see that the influence was already quietly present in his *Bardo*.

One other Western work bears mentioning: Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). As is well known, *Cathedral* is Eliot's attempt to create a Christian tragedy. Along with Yeats, Eliot was the primary influence on Hughes early in his career. Hughes even insisted that of living poets he had only seriously read Eliot and Dylan Thomas (Schulard 52). This religious poetic

drama by his favorite living poet could logically have been a point of reference for Hughes during his work on the *Bardo*. Eliot was himself impressed by Yeats' drama, though he took Yeats to task in *After Strange Gods* (1932) for his "artificial" myth and religion and his "supernatural world' [that] was the wrong supernatural world" (46). In 1950 Eliot lauded one of Yeats' Nō-influenced plays, *Purgatory* (1938), for having "solved the problem of speech in verse, and laid all his successors under obligation to him" ("Poetry and Drama" 20). *Purgatory* came three years after *Cathedral*, of course, but for Hughes the question of influence would not have mattered as much as the fact that his two favorite poets were writing poetic drama at the same time, and that one, Eliot, was partly under the influence of the other. *Cathedral* may have been in the back of Hughes' mind as he wrote his *Bardo*, and its use of verse to describe a spiritual scene might have helped Hughes as he worked. Nonetheless, *Cathedral* and the *Bardo* are markedly different. *Cathedral* owes to the Greek tradition; it is Eliot's attempt to revive classical theater. As such, it is more dialogic than Hughes' *Bardo*. And I think this is what indicates most the extent to which Hughes was trying to make his *Bardo* "Asiatic" after Yeats. Hughes' *Bardo* has music, a chorus, a mythic-religious subject, verse, and possibly even masks and dance. But the speech is much more descriptive or lyrical, even diegetic, than dialogic; the chorus is meager, making its presence felt through "wailing" and words that are evocative rather than descriptive; the characters are types rather than individuals; it feels very different from not only antique drama but also from Eliot's eminent attempt to revive the conventions of antique drama. The similarities to Greek drama in Hughes' *Bardo* are superficial, and through contrast with Eliot we can see how Hughes was striving to make his drama non-Western.

Perhaps due to Chou's influence, or perhaps fortuitously, the *Bardo* also resembles certain aspects of Chinese theater.⁶⁸ Just as Japanese theater began in ritual, Chung-wen Shih writes, so Chinese drama began in Shamanism before itself spawning light entertainment, puppet theater, shadow plays, and opera (*Golden* 10). The "Golden Age" of Chinese drama occurred in the Yuan period (1271-1368). During this period, China was ruled by a Mongol class that disliked Confucianism and Classical Chinese. Moreover, the civil service exams were suspended from 1237 to 1314. Scholars who previously could have taken the exam and made a career in government had to find other ways to support themselves and many turned to writing plays. These scholars had an audience in an emergent middle class wishing to be entertained (Shih, *Golden* 18-20). From these fortuitous circumstances emerged a drama that was more populist than the *Nō*. Being more populist, Chinese drama is also less tragic. The language may still be poetic; the content is never tragic, and the suggestiveness that characterizes *Nō* differs from the totality of Chinese drama. In Chinese drama, the good is rewarded, the bad punished, and everything rectified according to the logic of a just cosmos. Here the influence of Confucianism, whatever opposition it faced from the Yuan dynasty itself, is felt, as is the taste of the merchant class. One of the most celebrated of Yuan dramas is *The Romance of the Western Chamber* by Wang Shifu (1250-1337). The play derives from a short story of the Tang epoch (618-907) by Yuan Zhen (779-831). The short story has a tragic ending, but the play is not tragic, for as Shih puts it, the tragic "would have been too sophisticated and disappointing for a popular audience" (*Golden* 16).

⁶⁸ Shortly before meeting Hughes, Chou composed *Soliloquy of a Bhiksuni*, a composition "based on a scene in a sixteenth-century Chinese drama, in which a Bhiksuni (Bhuddist nun) worships before statues of Bhuddas" (Lai, *Theory* 206). Peter M. Chang elaborates: "The piece is for solo trumpet and wind ensemble and is based on a scene from a sixteenth-century Chinese drama, the famous *kunqu* tune, *Si Fan*. Initially, Chou planned to use this material for a one-act opera and wrote most of the libretto but later decided to compose an instrumental piece instead" (68). For more on *Si Fan*, consult Goldman (2001).

Chinese opera is not tragic either, not in the European sense of tragedy. It relies heavily on theatrical conventions and symbolism, and it presupposes the audience is familiar with the story taking place on stage.

Over several centuries, Chinese opera has developed a series of stage conventions that has become familiar to regular theatre goers. They know when they see the oily white-faced actor that they have a villain before them. When they see the actor walk in a circle they know that he or she has made a journey. Knowing the conventions of this stage language means the new audience is no longer excluded from the rich theatrical experience of Chinese opera. The centre of all these conventions is the actor. Traditional Chinese opera has focused its attention upon the actor rather than the lighting, scenery, or even the director. The audience already knows the stories well. They come not to see what happens, but rather how highly trained actors present that familiar story in their singing and their mastery of stage technique. In other words, the real pleasure in store for a new audience to the Chinese opera is savouring how the actors unfold the story through their mastery of stagecraft. (Siu and Lovrick 1)

There are a variety of different operas in China, with the various styles “connected to [the] places” in which they are performed in terms of dialect and conventions (Siu and Lovrick. 2). Peking opera is the most famous version in the West, but Chou Wen-chung was not a fan of it. The reason is that Peking opera blends Chinese and European instruments, whereas Chou preferred to use Western instruments to perform traditional Chinese music in order, in the words of Eric Chiu Kong Lai (2011), to achieve a “kind of cultural fusion” (40). This fusion is the

“*confluence* of musical cultures, which aims at inner representation, and not *influence*, which shows only the outward experience” (Lai 20). Simply combining the outward form of music, the instruments, is not enough for Chou, and perhaps some of this mindset was communicated to Hughes. This stated universalism obviously accords with the universalism usually attributed to Hughes. At any rate, it indicates that we should understand “Chinese opera” here to mean something other than the Peking opera popular abroad, even if we doubt the extent to which Hughes could have known of such opera in his youth.

Again, though, we have reason to doubt the depth of knowledge Hughes could have acquired of Chinese theater by the time he ceased working on the *Bardo*. What he likely would have abstracted from the limited materials available to him would have been the anti-realism of the opera,⁶⁹ its use of song and dance, its costumes and face paint, and its generic characters. As we stated earlier, we cannot know how music, song, dance, and costume would have functioned in the *Bardo*. We do know that the *Bardo* is an anti-realist text with generic characters. If anything in the text is discordant with Chinese opera, it is the ending. It is true that the ending is didactic: the audience watches Solo fail continuously to escape the cycle of death and rebirth, and the play gives the audience an explanation for that failure: Solo is reborn because he cannot free himself from his ego. All of this is very clear in the text. It suggests a well-delineated worldview, where good and evil are distinct, the good rewarded, the bad punished. All the same, the circularity of Hughes’ *Bardo* makes the play non-eventful. There is the promise of change, of Solo’s transformation into something higher or lower. In the end, we are right back where we started. In Chinese opera, in Chinese drama, there is a clear result: Zhang Sheng marries Yingying, Zhao kills Tu’an Gu and reclaims all that he lost, Niulang and Zhinu are separated but

⁶⁹ “Anti-realism” referring to Hughes’ possible interpretation. Chinese opera did not have to contend with the European concept of “realism,” so it can hardly be termed anti-realist.

can meet once every year.⁷⁰ The structure of Hughes' plot diverges from those of Chinese opera or drama. Additionally, Chinese opera has four basic character types: the clown, the villain, the female, and the male, though others may appear (Siu and Lovrick 2). Hughes' characters are generic, but they elide the typical Chinese roles.

Finally, a characteristic of Chinese theater is a non-consideration of psychological conflict. Shih writes that "great Western tragedies are largely dramas of personality, while Yüan plays are dramas of events and their meanings" (41). He continues:

Several theories have been proposed to explain this failure of Chinese drama to explore intense inner conflict. Ch'ien Chung-shu points out that the modes of behavior in traditional Chinese society were so ordered that persons in all ranks of life knew how to act in any given situation. A Chinese royal prince whose father was murdered and whose mother remarried the alleged murderer would have been expected to avenge his father; the prolonged wavering that paralyzes Hamlet's will would not have appealed to the Chinese mind. In *The Chao Family Orphan*, for example, twenty years elapse between the murder of the father and the final vengeance of the son, but as soon as Ch'eng Po is informed of the injustice to his family, he sets out to kill his father's murderer, even though the murderer is his own devoted foster father. (41-42)

To the contemporary reader, the division that Shih sets up between the "Chinese mind" and the European tragedy might seem too simple. Shih is correct, however, that Chinese drama generally

⁷⁰ In *The Story of the Western Chamber* (西廂記 *xixiangji*), *The Orphan of Zhao* (趙氏孤兒 *zhaoshi gu'er*), and *The Cowherd and the Weaving Girl* (牛郎織女 *niuliang zhinü*).

focuses on the fulfillment of social expectations rather than on the inner lives of characters. Solo's wavering in the *Bardo* does not accord with this type of drama.⁷¹

Earlier, we saw that one of the recurrent features of the Evans-Wentz translation and Hughes' *Bardo* is color symbolism. The various deities are associated with a particular color. The same is true for the paths that Solo may take out of the Bardo:

A: Now a dull white light beckons to rebirth in the land of the Devas
And a dull white light beckons to rebirth in the world of the Pretas
And a dull blue light beckons to rebirth in the land of the brutes
And a dull green light beckons in the land of the Asuras
And a smoke-coloured light beckons to rebirth in the world of Hell
But that brightening yellow claims you for the human world.

(*Bardo* 21)

Undoubtedly, these colors would have been illuminated on stage as A spoke. Chinese opera employs colors in its complex symbolism. When the audience sees a particular color in the actor's face paint or costume, the audience gains instant understanding of the character's personality. Red, for example, signifies strength, black loyalty (Kronthal 2001, 5). Hughes does not adopt the symbolism of the Chinese opera; even if Hughes knew of this facet of Chinese theater, his Western audience would likely not have understood Chinese conventions. And the color symbolism found in Evans-Wentz's translation already works well with Western symbolism; for example, the "smoke-coloured light" suggests fire, and in fortuitous agreement

⁷¹ The absence of tragedy in the European sense in China is a much-noted phenomenon. See Wallace (2013).

with Western depictions of fire and brimstone represents Hell. Given his knowledge of Chinese theater, Chou would have realized that the color symbolism of the *Tibetan Book* would have translated easily into Chinese drama. A final production may have seen these colors represented on the characters themselves according to Chinese convention. Regardless, there is no indication that Hughes was aware of this. At most we can say that this resemblance to Chinese theater is coincidence.

The final part of Chinese theater worth noting is Shadow Theater. This would have been referenced in a performance of the *Bardo* through Chou's plan to represent the deities through an illuminated backdrop. The problem here is one of representation, of representing that which Hughes describes in the text; it may be that Chou came up with the idea after reading one of Hughes' draft, or that Hughes wrote these scenes following Chou's suggestions. It is difficult, if not impossible, to say whether this reference to Shadow Theater is present in the text itself (i.e. whether it is Hughes' idea or a response to one of Chou's ideas) or whether it is added *post hoc* (i.e. whether Chou came up with the idea after reading the last draft Hughes sent). Let us say then that it is possible that Hughes has drawn inspiration from secondhand knowledge of Shadow Theater, but that it is of less import to our discussion than are his allusions to other Eastern and Western forms of theater.

In summary, Hughes' *Bardo* sources material from Hughes' own English literary tradition and resembles the theater of China and Japan as refracted through the insight he could have gained from his own reading of literature from or studies of these traditions, through correspondence with Chou, and through Yeats' early experiments with Nō. Because the opera was never finished, there is much of which we are ignorant. We do not know how Chou and Hughes would have solved many of the staging problems presented by Hughes' narrative driven

and often fantastical script. We also do not know whether some of the apparent allusions to Chinese theater originated with Hughes or Chou, or what role Chou had as Hughes wrote his script. But these epistemological problems aside, we are certain that much in Hughes' libretto accords well with the conventions of Chinese or Japanese theater. However, the *Bardo* appears to mix influences from various different Chinese and Japanese theatrical forms together with subtle influences from English theater. This heterodox script suggests that the usual meaning of words and ideas have undergone a change in aspect as they have been wrenched out of their old contexts and placed into a new one. It is to this phenomenon that we will now turn.

2.5 The *Bardo* and Its Worlds

I turn to the internal coherence of the world of the *Bardo*. The libretto draws from a variety of sources and liberally combines them. How each of these possible sources would be realized in performance depends on the way in which Chou would have finished the music and staging. Both Chou and Hughes would have been constrained by their Western audience's familiarity with the source material and with the many fountains of inspiration from which both men took. Considering this heterogenous background, the problems of collaboration, and the difficulties of translation across languages and cultures, the final opera would have difficulty accommodating any one of its sources. Is it possible to find *internal coherence* in the world of this libretto?

I will start with obvious points. Even if we bracket Hughes' ethnicity and background, we still cannot classify his libretto as belonging to a tradition of East Asian theater, for Hughes' *Bardo* spills across various genres of Chinese, of Japanese, and perhaps even of other national theatrical traditions. No more can we say that it fits in with English or Western theatrical tradition. Hughes' work as a whole is atypical for his time. Other poets of his era were concerned

with the everyday, while Hughes was interested in grand myth. And Hughes does not treat myth ironically; he earnestly believes that there is cosmic significance underpinning even the most banal occurrences, and he makes it his business to find out just what that significance is. Hughes was a “late modernist” at a time when modernism was already passé. Yet even if Hughes was aloof from the *avant garde* of the fifties and sixties, his collaboration with Chung yielded a typescript that, in its openness towards Buddhism and the conventions of a variety of East Asian theatrical genres, is in keeping with the experimental openness to East and Central Asian religion among Western artists in the same time period.⁷²

I am belaboring the point. It is important, I think, to stress just how interesting the *Bardo* project could have been in the late 1950s. Recall that Stephen Owen set literature created according to Western models against literature created according to classical models.⁷³ The former is for mass consumption, the latter for the consumption of people within the writer’s community. Hughes’ *Bardo* does not fit this description. It is a “classical” text in so far as it draws earnestly from a religious text, is elevated poetry, and tends towards classical rather than contemporary theater. At the same time, the religious text and much of the theater from which the *Bardo* draws is foreign to Hughes and, presumably, would have been to his audience as well. Moreover, Chou and Hughes meant the text to break ground by taking as their model a religious text popular in Europe and North America because it was non-Western and non-modern.

The *Bardo* is an intriguing case for its era, but even much earlier works have roots in the traditions or languages of East Asia. Let us try to appreciate this heterogeneity and work with the

⁷² Hughes drew attention to this in an interview with Ekbert Faas: “I rewrote [the *Bardo*] a good deal. I don’t think I ever came near what was needed. I got to know the *Bardo Thödol* pretty well. Unfortunately the hoped-for cash evaporated, we lost contact for about nine years, and now of course we’ve lost the whole idea to the psychedelics. We had no idea we were riding the *Zeitgeist* so closely. We had one or two other schemes...and maybe we’ll do them some day” (Faas 205).

⁷³ Discussed in 1.1.

vague boundaries it generates. The problem arises when we take an all-or-nothing, national-or-international approach, and when we forget that ideas change their aspect in translation. There is nothing transcendent or eternal lying behind the sources from which Hughes borrows. The genres exist in *use*, as formed in a specific social milieu, be it Elizabethan England, Yuan China, or Medieval Japan. Hughes is separated from each of these milieus by different degrees. It would be odd to say that Hughes is as close to Medieval Japan as he is to Elizabethan England, as it would be to say that he is as close to Elizabethan England as to post-industrial Yorkshire. Here Searle's theory of the Network, Background, and Deep Background are helpful.

We take as Hughes' Network his knowledge of literature, his own literature, foreign literature, English literature, aesthetics. We take as his Background his social milieu. Here, Searle's idea of the Background needs more nuance; Hughes did not live in one social milieu. His youth in Yorkshire should be distinguished from his time at Cambridge, and that should be differentiated from his life as a budding poet in London and New England. Hughes' attachment to each of these places is different.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, Hughes' relation to each social stratum affects how he communicates to his audience as a whole.

Is there anything of Yorkshire in the *Bardo*? There is definitely not in the language. Curiously, despite Hughes' commitment to his Yorkshire identity and accent, the language of his poetry in general is, well, *general*. Because Hughes was always turned towards the past, his diction approximates Yeats and Shakespeare, two models well integrated into the consciousness of most English language speakers who read poetry. We can contrast this with the practice of another late modernist, Basil Bunting (1900-1985), in whose poetry was strongly expressed the

⁷⁴ Neil Roberts (2013) describes Hughes' feeling of being an outsider at Cambridge and the myth Hughes made of his non-elite origins.

Northumberland dialect.⁷⁵ We can term Hughes' diction here *classical*, insofar as it is distant from the diction of most of his contemporaries. On the other hand, the *Tibetan Book* with which Hughes is working is modern. The sources from which Evans-Wentz drew to make the *Tibetan Book* may be old, and Evans-Wentz may adopt antiquated diction. However, from Hughes' point of view, and that of the English-speaking world, the *Tibetan Book* is modern because it emerged only in 1927. This old book becomes something new and groundbreaking. The same is true for Hughes' collaboration with Chou; because of the source material and Hughes' presentation of it, formally the opera appear might appear conservative and backward-looking. But when the project is appreciated in the context of 1950s England and America, it seems *avant garde*.

What of Chou and Chinese music? We have seen that the "Chinese" elements of the *Bardo* are varied. I touched earlier on Chou's interest in fusing East and West. I'll turn to this in more detail. According to Chou, the modern Chinese diaspora further frustrates efforts to single out a particularly "Chinese" experience or concern:

Who is a Chinese? It depends on whether the term is defined ethnically, politically or culturally. There are those from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and throughout Southeast Asia, and, of course, overseas Chinese on every continent. And what about mainland Chinese now settled in the West or elsewhere? All of them have different political, cultural and even ethnic identities, and yet most Chinese assume every other Chinese has the same cultural heritage as theirs. And this is also an assumption of Westerners. The truth is no assumption can be made that all Chinese are the same

⁷⁵ At Emory there is a letter from Bunting to Hughes in which Bunting rejects Hughes' invitation to speak at a poetry festival in the late 1960s. The reason for Bunting's irritation was that he did not want to encourage such a spectacle of poetry. Poetry, he writes, was meant to be intimate, focusing on the poet's voice rather than making compromises in order to communicate with a large audience (Bunting, "Letter").

politically, culturally and ethnically in view of the fact that Chinese culture historically embodies a large number of indigenous ethnicities. Today, much depends on when they were born, where they spent their childhood or formative years, where they were educated and where they now live. (“Whither” 501)

In other words, the term “China” or “Chinese” masks a wealth of diversity. As a mainland Chinese expatriate in the United States, Chou brings a set of concerns and experiences that direct his attention to certain elements of Chinese and East Asian culture, but these are not necessarily essential elements of a trans-historical entity called “China.” Therefore, we need to take a more fine-grained approach to understand what is happening in this fusion of “East” and “West” in the *Bardo*.

However, even as Chou argued against a single Chinese identity, he tried to find essential differences between Chinese and Western composers:

An even greater difference between [Chinese and Western composers] is that the Western composer traditionally is considered a genius without any social or political responsibility, whereas his Chinese counterpart is never referred to as a composer and has never enjoyed the public recognition accorded to his Western colleague, nor is he compensated. Instead, he (and sometimes she) is an all-round philosopher-artist (wenren, 文人), who composes idealistically about nature and larger issues rather than personal emotions, and often shares a moral responsibility for, as well as influence over, the society with scholars, painters, calligraphers and poets. (“Whither” 503)

It seems contradictory that, in the space of a single article, Chou moves from arguing that there is no single Chinese identity to finding an irreducible disagreement between the historical roles of Chinese and Western composers. There is no attempt here to look more sensitively at what is meant by “Chinese” and “Western.” In fact, the opposing term to “Chinese” varies across Chou’s articles. At times it is Europe, at others the “West,” at still others “Western Europe.” At other times still Chou slips between talking about China and about Asia more generally.⁷⁶ The reason may be the restrictions of comparison: when Chou talks about China itself, he feels free to complicate the term, to draw out its various senses and contradictions. But in order to compare Chinese music and art to that found in Europe and the United States, he relies on broader terms that obscure the differences that he elsewhere underlines.

This process of simplifying terms when comparing between East and West helps us better to understand the motives behind the *Bardo* project. Chou chose the *Bardo* in part because it was a text of some renown outside of East and Central Asia. As he would later claim:

I am attracted to these classics of the East that have come to be fairly well-known in the West, not only because of the dramatic impact of their multicolored content and the universal appeal of their humanistic message at a time like ours, but also because of their polygenetic and polymorphous history. It is my belief that these qualities will afford me opportunities to carry out some of my own ideals--musical or otherwise. (Slominsky 3)

What are these ideals? Throughout his career, Chou desired the “*confluence* of musical cultures, which aims at inner representation, and not *influence*, which shows only the outward experience”

⁷⁶ See, for example, Chou (1971).

(Lai 20). To achieve this, he believed that both Eastern and Western music must understand their deep-rooted differences (Chou “East and West, Old and New” 20). “Turkish Marches” should be abandoned, Chou says, in favor of music that, should it go “East” for inspiration, looks critically at the philosophical foundations underpinning the art and music of that community. Musicians inspired by China, therefore, would do well to learn from Daoism, Buddhism, and the *I-Ching* as these are, Chou argues, the philosophical roots of Chinese music, abstracted from which Chinese music loses its sense (Chou “East and West” 22).

It seems intuitive enough for Chou to say that a fusion of East and West is a deep-level combination of the philosophical histories of the two. Yet Chou gives a more concrete rationale. Part of his reasoning is that philosophy affects musical composition. He writes that “inimitable performances by the great Fukeshu shakuhachi master, Watazumido Shuso, are but one example, though exceptional, of how deeply music can be affected by the state of mind on the part of the performer—in this case under the influence of Zen and Tao” (“East and West” 21). Chou’s theory suggests that he was interested in the *Bardo* as a *religious* text, an ancient *Buddhist* text that could contribute to deep-level fusion between East and West.

As we have seen, however, Hughes was convinced that the shared term that would allow for fusion of East and West is shamanism. In other words, an ancient shared heritage between East and West justifies cross-cultural collaborations and over-reachings like those of the *Bardo* project. In fact, this is also Chou’s reasoning. His fusion of East and West is in fact a “re-merger of Eastern and Western musical concepts and practices,” for Chou believes “that the traditions of Eastern and Western music once shared the same sources and that, after a thousand years of divergence, they are now merging to form the mainstream of a new musical tradition” (“East and

West” 19). The logic here is the same as Hughes’, only Hughes goes further in giving these “shared sources” a name and a lineage in Shamanism.

In *Analogical Reasoning*, Paul Bartha goes through what makes analogies work. He argues that analogies rely on horizontal and vertical relations. Vertical relations are between properties within a term; horizontal relations are relations between terms. These are the source and target domains. If there are horizontal relations between a source and target domain, then we can infer properties in the target domain based on what we know about the source. Bartha gives the example of sound and light. In the seventeenth century, Huygens drew vertical relations between the two: just as sound echoes, so light reflects; sound bends around corners and light refracts through slits; sound has volume, light brightness; sound pitch, light color. Knowing that sound travels through either the medium of air or water, Huygens concluded that light too must pass through a medium, which he concluded was ether (Bartha 14). That Huygens was incorrect is not at issue. We can take Bartha’s formalization of analogical arguments to understand Chou and Hughes’ logic.

What happens in the *Bardo*? More exactly, what has happened to all of the elements that have been pooled together to create the *Bardo*? I present a passage already considered:

Solo: Others, others. Who are these others.

A&B: Recognise Vajra Heruka, the blood-drinker;

Recognise Vajra Krotishaurima:

Recognise Ratna Heruka, the blood-drinker;

Recognise Ratna Krotishaurima;

Recognise Padma Heruka, the blood-drinker;

Recognise Padma Krotishaurima;

Recognise Karma Heruka, the Blood-drinker;

Recognise Karma Krotishaurima.

Solo: I am blown like a breath through the Bardo.

B: Evil Karma drags you further, further and deeper into the Bardo.

Solo: I am blown like ashes through the Bardo.

B: Evil Karma catches you from yourself and from Liberation

A&B: Recognise these forms for your own mind

(TS 16)

Here is the source of this episode in the Evans-Wentz translation:

On the Tenth Day, the blood-drinking [deity] of the [Precious]-Gem Order named Ratna Heruka, yellow of colour; [having] three faces, six hands, four feet firmly postured; the right [face] white, the left, red, the central, darkish yellow; enhaloed in flames; in the first of the six hands holding a gem, in the middle [one], a trident-staff, in the last [one], a baton; in the first of the left [hands], a bell, in the middle [one], a skull-bowl, in the last [one], a trident-staff; his body embraced by the Mother Ratna-Krotishaurima, her right [hand] clinging to his neck, her left offering to his mouth a red shell [filled with blood], will issue from the southern quarter of thy brain and come to shine upon thee. Fear not. Be not terrified. Be not awed. Know them to be the embodiment of thine own intellect.”

(Evans-Wentz 141)

Evans-Wentz' archaic diction and use of hyphenated words encourages Hughes to think of the *Bardo* as akin to an early or pre-modern English text, one brimming with Anglo-Saxon rather than Latinate words. This in turn helps Hughes to connect the *Bardo* to the more mystical non-Latinate civilization that he identifies with pre-Christian Britain, and so on to Shamanism. But for this to occur, something must happen to the words themselves.

In short, the *aspect* of the words changes even as the words retain their original meanings as tokens of word types. For instance, putting aside its possible source in the Tibetan language, “blood-drinker” in the context of the *Bardo* serves not only as an epithet that describes a trait of a Buddhist deity and through inflated language elevates it; it also points to the “pre-modern” aspects of the *Bardo*. Hughes turns Evans-Wentz' adjective “blood-drinking” into the hyphenated noun “blood-drinker.” Yet “blood-drinker” cannot help but remind us of kennings, medieval rhetorical devices in which a circumlocutive phrase metonymically associated with an object is used in place of that object's name.⁷⁷ Accordingly, the aspect of the term changes in the *Bardo* as Hughes tries to draw out not only whatever meaning he believes lies in the *Tibetan Book* but also the early English and “shamanistic” meaning that he believes is latent in the *Bardo*. Moreover, if Chou is correct, then the “Buddhist” nature of the terms must take on a heightened importance in the *Bardo*. “Vajra Krotishaurima” would refer not simply to a Buddhist deity, but also, now that this name is appearing not in the context of Tibetan ritual but an opera written by an Englishman and a Chinese expatriate, refer back to the very *Buddhist* aspect of that word. Taken from its original context, the deities' names highlight their own status as Buddhist names in a way that they could not do in a purely Tibetan or Buddhist context. At least in this case, translation forces words to change in aspect purely by them being placed in a new social

⁷⁷ E.g., “sea-wood” for “ship.”

and aesthetic context, and this change allows words and the pieces of literature that they form to *cohere* within the literary universe into which they are shifted.

Had the opera been completed, there may have been a musical correlative to Hughes' medievalism. In the 1950s and 1960s, while studying medieval composition at Columbia and Greek composition in his spare time, Chou was experimenting with composition that could express the ideas of the *I Ching*.⁷⁸ He devised a system called variable modes, which, as Sau Woon Au puts it, "owes a great deal to classical Chinese modal systems, Indian raga practice, medieval and Greek theories as well as various modern theories and practice" (122). The experimentation, evident in *Metaphors* (1960) and fully expressed in *Pien* (1966), was another of Chou's attempts to find a common ground on which to fuse Eastern and Western music (Au 67, 68), and it is not difficult to imagine that the modal techniques Chou employed, hearkening as they do back to medieval compositions such as those of the Gregorian chant as well as Chinese compositional practices, was such a shared source. Indeed, Eric Lai suggests that in the 1950s Chou's search for a common source attracted the Chinese-American composer to "ancient Greek, Medieval, and Renaissance music, in particular the topic of modal theory, for he discovered certain affinities between European modal principles and ancient Chinese music theory" (*Music* 13-14). The heterogenous influences from which Hughes crafted his libretto would likely have been mirrored in the Chou's music. The odd associations Hughes made would have gone beyond his libretto and been expressed in conceivably every facet of the *Bardo*.

Here is *multidimensionality* as discussed in the previous chapter. The text and the entities of which it is composed have different extensions depending on the contexts into which they have been placed. I have been referring to the contexts as the universe, constellation, and world

⁷⁸ A more detailed explanation is in Chou, "A Brief Explanation of Variable Modes."

of a society, author, and text. But it is not just the text that changes in aspect. The senses of “English,” “Chinese,” “Asian,” “European,” “Buddhist,” and so on are not quite the same in the *Bardo* or in a comparative context generally.

Chou’s source domain is the Chinese composer, a philosopher-artist who is defined by being socially engaged, retiring, and unpaid. The target is the Western composer, who is a celebrated amoral genius who is dedicated to one craft and is remunerated. There is, he says, a vertical relation between these traits and Daoism and Buddhism in China. Since there are no horizontal relations between China and the West at the top level, any fusion between the two must be a deep-level philosophical combination. This, I think, is the reason Chou stresses the need to attend to the philosophical foundations of China and the West in comparative and collaborative musical projects.

Hughes follows the same logic, but his terms differ. He traces a lineage for himself to an ecstatic, occult, and pre-modern “English” literature that achieved fruition in then languished after Shakespeare. This is his source category. He then constructs a broadly “Asian” target category that is also ecstatic, occult, and pre-modern, epitomized by the *Bardo*. There is a one-to-one correspondence at the top level, and since the target domain already has vertical relation between these three items and “Shamanism” (Hughes thinks) the same vertical relation should exist within English literature. Hughes has carried out the process Chou aspires to complete, but does so by changing the deep-level term in the target domain from Buddhism and Daoism to Shamanism, and by focusing less on analogies between artists East and West as on analogies between the texts themselves. This is a haphazard process with an essentialist reading of English and Tibetan and Asian literature and religion, yet it allows Hughes to give an internal coherence to the world he was trying to construct out of the *Bardo* and to his own poetic universe.

One way to think of this is as finding a new world. Frank Arntzenius has given a heuristic model for the discovery of fresh concepts. Say we have states in a statespace, where a state is a possible combination of properties an object could have at a given time and the statespace is the set of all possible states (Arntzenius, “Heuristic” 357). More specifically, a statespace is a person’s total knowledge of the properties of an object or concept. The statespace may change if “new theoretical properties” are postulated and accepted (Arntzenius, “Heuristic” 367). Applying this (heuristically) to our theme of possible worlds, we could say that a world is like a state in a statespace: it is a coherence of matter that has been isolated from the rest of the statespace—the entire universe of a literary tradition—and reformed under a new organizing principle. In Hughes’ case, properties from the *Tibetan Book*, his knowledge of Chinese and East Asian art as filtered largely through Yeats, and from pre- and early modern English literature have been yoked together under the organizing principle of *Shamanism* to form a new literary world, that of the *Bardo* libretto. What is found in this world or state is not the *totality* of Hughes’ knowledge of the concepts from which these properties were taken—it is not the entire constellation or statespace. It is rather a single possible state.

This accounts too for Chou’s shifting conceptualization of China: when he focuses just on China, he can roam more freely over the entire statespace, the entire sum of his knowledge, and identify points of contradiction. But when he moves to a comparative context, he singles out a state from this statespace along with one from his knowledge of “Western” art, music, and philosophy. These two states are then used to form a new state in a new statespace. As he gains knowledge of China, Asia, Europe, and the West, his statespaces will change, and he can focus on new combinations of properties, new states; but this does not necessarily need to happen. These states or worlds are possible combinations. The entire statespace need not, or rather

cannot, be present at once. Call this comparative perspectivalism. The state conceived may be relative to an agent. It is not, however, arbitrary, for it is determined by the knowledge the agent possesses (the entire statespace); the agent can choose from among the possible arrangements within her statespace those states she wishes to focus on and she wishes to combine, but the possibilities she can imagine are constrained by the totality of her knowledge. The same, I argue, is true for Hughes: his reading of English, Tibetan, and Asian literature and religion is highly eccentric and quite wrong in the sense of being misleading and partial, but in trying to fuse East and West in the *Bardo* he is constrained by his knowledge of shared properties between the English literature and the *Tibetan Book* and from among his possible organizing principles or deep-level similarities chooses one that most plausibly grounds both.

I am discussing a process that goes beyond East-West literature; if Bartha is correct, it is a facet of human reasoning itself. My interpretation of the *Bardo* does not claim to find a unique process that led to its development or a unique feature of East-West literature. But I do claim that focusing on this deep-level reasoning aids us in discovering what counts and what must be overcome in order to make a “fusion” of “East” and “West” take place. It reminds us why East and West often merit the inverted commas in which I have yet again put them, and to doubt the apparent naturalness of the two categories that the term ‘fusion’ suggests. The “Tibetan” source of the *Bardo* is not exactly Tibetan, and Chou and Hughes’ treatment of it pushes Tibet further into the background. In turn, Britain and China swell in importance for the *Bardo* as the text becomes an experiment in bringing East and West closer together. Yet even Britain and China, and East and West, are categories molded during the process of fusion. Chou and Hughes need an East and a West that *can* be combined, and this requires highlighting certain dimensions to the disadvantage of others. Both Chou and Hughes suggest a primordial sameness between East and

West that allows for fusion. Chou leaves ambiguous the terms that will be used in bringing the two regions together, while Hughes identifies a single term, Shamanism, as the essential source of art East and West. The need to find a deep-level horizontal relation between the two things Hughes tries to make one in his libretto explains the strange features of the text and of his few commentaries upon it.

The process leaves us with an East and West in the *Bardo* that are not identical with the totality of cultures, languages, and literatures in two independently existing regions but possible arrangements of elements mainly pulled from the unstable categories of Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, and British literature. The categories of East and West, then, and indeed all of the national subcategories used for the *Bardo*, are *images*, possible states of each of these categories as made to cohere in a particular constellation of belief. Think back to the ternary relation introduced in the last chapter: x is at least as close to y , in F -relevant aspects, as it is to z . Because there is no precise application of “Eastern” or “Western” or even “Chinese” and “British,” their applications are fixed by focusing on a relevant aspect of one that brings it as close to the other as it is to a third category. For Hughes, the concept of Shamanism, or the predicate “evinces Shamanic roots,” brings Old English literature at least as close to Chinese and “Asiatic” literature as it is to post-Civil-War English literature. In treating these categories as if they were vague predicates, Hughes establishes a common ground that allows him to handle a large amount of material from ontologically inconsistent traditions. Looking at his libretto now, and the work and comments that he and Chou left during and after the *Bardo* project, we begin to see how important the ontological vagueness of texts and literary traditions themselves are to comparative literature, in which the *Bardo* project might be considered an exercise.

This discussion will continue in the next chapter as the dissertation turns to its clearest triangulation, *Kantan* and its adaptations by Mishima Yukio and Paul Claudel. The way in which both twentieth-century playwrights reinterpret *Kantan* in their attempts to make a unified East-West ontology will be considered; but the problem of translating *within* a single tradition across time, as in the case of Mishima and the medieval Nō to which he was responding, will become more evident.

Chapter III: What We Disagree About When We Disagree About Nō

「能楽の自由な空間と時間の処理や、
露わな形而上学的主題などを、
そのまま現代に生かすために、
シチュエーションのほうを現代化したのである」
(Mishima Yukio, qtd. in Keene, “Kaisetsu” 230)⁷⁹

« C’est la vie telle que, ramenée du pays des ombres,
elle se peint à nous dans le regard de la méditation ;
nous nous dressons devant nous-mêmes, dans
l’amer monument de notre désir, de notre douleur
et de notre folie. »
(Claudel, *Pr.* 1171)⁸⁰

Nō fascinated several writers through the early and mid-twentieth century, but for Paul Claudel (1868-1955) and Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925-1970) the “exposed metaphysical themes” that are “brought back from the land of shadows” were the chief fascination of the Japanese theatrical genre. The focus on the spiritual or metaphysical aspects of Nō provides an interesting point of contact between Claudel’s and Mishima’s drama, a point of contact especially fascinating to find between two writers separated by time, religion, ethnicity, and language. This chapter will consider how these points of divergence between Claudel and Mishima affect the use of their shared concern for the spiritual as a *tertium comparationis* between the two modern writers and classical Nō.

⁷⁹ “To use classical Nō’s free use of time and space and take the exposed metaphysical themes while modernizing the situations.” In this afterword to the *Kindai Nōgakushū* from which this quote of Mishima’s comes, Donald Keene contrasts Mishima’s “modern” Nō with the “modern” Nō of Meiji-era writer Kōri Torahiko 郡虎彦. According to Keene, while Kōri dispenses with the medieval worldview of the Nō, he keeps the Medieval setting, which results in Nō like Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé*. Mishima’s Nō have the opposite intention (“Kaisetsu” 229).

⁸⁰ “It is life such that, brought back from the land of shadows, it reveals itself before us in the vision of meditation; we stand before ourselves in the bitter monument to our desire, our sadness, and our folly.”

To tighten the scope of comparison, and to make for a clean triangulation, I will focus on Claudel's and Mishima's adaptations of one classical Nō, *Kantan* 邯鄲. I begin with an overview of *Kantan* and Nō theater. I then compare Claudel's and Mishima's critical reflections on Nō: Claudel's famous essay "Nô" and his impressions recorded in his journal of the Nō he saw in Japan, and Mishima's comments on Nō and Japanese literature in various essays, letters, and interviews. With this background in place, I set Mishima's *Kantan* 邯鄲 against the "Guardian Angel" scene of Claudel's *Le Soulier de Satin*, which Ayako Nishino has shown is likely inspired by *Kantan*,⁸¹ a classic Nō piece by an unknown author, sometimes purported to be Zeami, the greatest author of classical Nō. My attention here will not only be on how Claudel and Mishima treat the same source material, but also on how Claudel, Mishima, and the original Nō author relate to one another in their use of what Mishima calls the "exposed metaphysical elements" of Nō.

I am concerned with the identity relations between these three plays. Throughout this dissertation, I have been looking to what happens to literature as it travels through time and space and across conceptual schemes. Here, I want to see whether there is a critical metalanguage that allows us to treat objectively Claudel, Mishima, and the original Nō author's conceptions of Nō theater. It will be my contention that each writer's conception of Nō is part of a particular ontology, and that we encounter the same problems when trying to speak from an

⁸¹ Nishino notes that the influence is most acute in the 1943 version thanks to stage directions that recall the Nō *Kantan*. Yet Nishino notes that the affinities between *Soulier* and *Kantan* are restricted by the fact that in the original "la rêve s'avère une expérience philosophique qui mène à l'éveil bouddhiste" ["the dream reveals a philosophical experience that leads to Buddhist enlightenment"] (*Synthèse* 519). It is uncertain how much the stage directions owe to Claudel's collaborator Jean-Louis Barrault, whom Nishino also concludes likely knew of *Kantan* ahead of the 1943 version of *Soulier* (*Synthèse* 521-522). Although the dialogue is slightly different in the 1942 version, and the fact that Doña Prouhèze sees her life pass before her in a dream is more evident, the significance of the action is the same as in the original Claudel wrote in Japan.

objective critical standpoint of these different ideas of Nō theater as we do when we try to translate different ontologies such as Universalism and Nihilism into a metalanguage that preserves the truth values of each individual conceptual scheme.⁸²

A sustained comparison of Claudel and Mishima's adaptations of Nō theater has never appeared. Though the two playwrights feature in mentions of the reception of Nō in the twentieth century, their views and uses of classical Nō have not been put into sustained dialogue. Certainly, there is reason for this oversight. Claudel and Mishima were from different parts of the world, born nearly sixty years apart, wrote in different languages, and had different aesthetic concerns. A comparison between the two might seem, at first blush, to uncover far more differences than similarities and thus not be worth the trouble. Yet despite the many personal differences between them, Claudel and Mishima's relationships to the Nō theater resemble one another strikingly. Though Claudel, staunch Catholic, would not mention Buddhism by name in his reception of the Nō theater, we can show that the "metaphysics" that he valued in Nō appear close to those dear to Mishima. And while Claudel died before he could become aware of Mishima, Mishima was aware of Claudel. In an English-language speech, Mishima mentions Claudel's essay on the Nō:

When the French poet Paul Claudel came to Japan, he was deeply moved by the Noh and wrote a beautiful essay. For a foreigner to appreciate the Noh, I imagine Claudel must have been a very unusual person. Even for a Japanese, if for example, a young man were to invite his girl friend to see the Noh, I would imagine that nine out of 10 would refuse to go. Not only does Noh last for a couple of hours, but also there is hardly any

⁸² See Cian Dorr's discussion of the problem as summarized in 1.4.

movement on the stage, which results in many of the spectators falling fast asleep.
(“Influences” 22)

For his part, Mishima believed that “Noh has a wonderful characteristic that cannot be found in any other of the forms of dramatic art,” that of opposing on stage “the conscious and the unconscious in the individual” (“Influences” 23). Mishima’s opinion of Nō brings him in turn close to Claudel, his fellow “strange” admirer of traditional Japanese theater. The resemblance between the two is perhaps less surprising when we recall that, though Mishima and Claudel were born far apart, Claudel did not come to Japan and encounter the Nō until later in his life, only two years before Mishima was born. And though Claudel began work on *Soulier* in the 1920s, the gap between the first performance of *Soulier* in 1942 and Mishima’s *Kantan* is only eight years. In the history of the reception of Nō in the twentieth century, Claudel and Mishima’s interpretations of Nō are close not only aesthetically but temporally.

3.1 Three *Kantans*

Kantan 邯鄲 is based on the famous Chinese story of the pillow of Kantan that allows someone who rests on it to see her entire life pass in the duration of one sleep. In the Nō, a traveler who professes to have wasted his life so far, Rosei, the *shite*, comes to an inn in the Chinese region of Kantan. As the female innkeeper, the *waki*, prepares him a bowl of millet, the Rosei sleeps on the pillow. Rosei dreams that he rises to become the King of Chu and reigns gloriously for five decades. On the fiftieth anniversary of his reign, Rosei is feted with dancers and a feast. His minister offers Rosei a cup made by an ascetic that will allow Rosei to live for a thousand years. Here the dream ends. As the mistress wakes him, Rosei realizes that his reign of fifty years lasted

only the time it takes to cook a bowl of millet. With this insight into the brief and illusory nature of life, Rosei achieves enlightenment and returns home. This Nō belongs, according to the traditional classification of the theater, to the third category of “miscellaneous Nō.” According to the modern classification it is a “*mugen* Nō” 夢幻能 or “dream Nō,” as opposed “*genzai* Nō” 現在能 or “present-time Nō.”

Though Claudel did not see a performance of *Kantan*, Ayako Nishino has shown that Claudel probably knew the piece thanks to English translations by Basil Hall Chamberlain (1880) and a more faithful version by Arthur Waley (1921) (517-518).⁸³ Moreover, *Kantan* was in vogue among “intellectuals and people involved in theater in the West in the 1920s” [“parmi les intellectuels et les hommes de théâtre du monde occidental”], and in 1924 Jacques Copeau planned to bring Waley’s version to the stage, a failed attempt but one of which Claudel was aware (Nishino, *Synthèse* 518). As for Mishima, in 1950 a version of *Kantan* was his first attempt at modern Nō or *shinksakunō* (新作能). Because it takes place within a dream, with a rapid succession of characters and locations, Mishima’s *Kantan* is more surreal, and, with its masks and chorus, retains more elements of Nō than his later attempts at the genre. Of course, the chief difference between Claudel and Mishima’s reception of *Kantan* is that Mishima could understand the Japanese of the original *Kantan* whereas Claudel, ignorant of Japanese, had to rely on translations. The translation on which he relied came in two forms. Firstly, he read translations of Nō into English and French, mostly those of Chamberlain and Waley, and, in French, of Noël Péri, Michel Révon, and Georges Renondeau.⁸⁴ Secondly, he viewed several Nō

⁸³ Chamberlain titled his translation “Life is But a Dream,” which, as Nishino indicates, recalls Calderon’s 1635 *Life is a Dream* (*Synthèse* 517). Waley’s translation is titled *Kantan*.

⁸⁴ For an in-depth discussion of Claudel’s literary sources, see Milet-Gérard (2015), pp. 125-140. The most thorough treatment is found in Ayako Nishino (2013), and the most in-depth comparison of Claudel’s reception of Nō relative to other Westerners is in Ayako Nishino (2015).

during his time as ambassador to Japan, for which his assistants provided notes explaining the significance of the action on stage. As a major non-Japanese writer in the early twentieth century, Claudel occupied a rare position insofar as he saw authentic Nō performances yet still needed to have recourse to translation: he gained far greater familiarity with the form than, say, W.B. Yeats, but never achieved the proximity that Mishima enjoyed.

3.2 Nō Background

Medieval Japan saw the development of the concept of *mappō*, “the latter days of the Buddhist Law,” according to which “after the death of Gautama, some five centuries B.C., Buddhism would pass through three great ages: an age of the flourish of the law, of its decline, and finally of its disappearance in the degenerate days of *mappō*,” thought to commence “by Japanese calculations” in 1052 (Varley 70). *Mappō* expressed the pessimism of the war-torn era. With the decline of the royal court, different shogunates competed for supremacy. Among them were, of course, Zeami’s first patron, the shogun Ashikage Yoshimitsu, and Yoshimitsu’s son and successor, Ashikage Yoshimochi, who exiled Zeami in the artist’s declining years. Not until the Tokugawa shogunate brought all of the competing dynamos under its rule in 1603 did over four-hundred years of turmoil end.

During the middle ages, new Buddhist sects emerged, including Pure Land Buddhism and Zen. These sects had different ideas of salvation, but they generally agreed in their mistrust of worldly phenomena and in their occasionally apocalyptic visions (Varley 101-104). The mountain hut and the recluse became important tropes in Japanese art and, in effect, became “medieval ideals,” acting as “[metaphors] for the Buddhist idea of impermanence” (Varley 92). The simple rustic life, connected to the *yamabushi* 山伏, an itinerant Buddhist monk who lived

an ascetic lifestyle alone in the mountains to achieve enlightenment, was a source of refuge in a country torn by war. From this desire for simplicity arose the modern version of the tea ceremony or *chanoyu* 茶の湯. Varley writes: “even when the teahouse was situated in a city, such as Kyoto or Nara, it was styled as though—and provided with natural surroundings to give the impression that—it was in a remote ‘mountain village’ (*yamazato* [山里])” (93). The teahouse bore rush matting or *tatami* 畳 and strove in every respect to fulfill the ideal of “deprived beauty” (Varley 93). Meanwhile, iconographic sculpture met with disapproval from some Buddhist sects and declined (Varley 94).⁸⁵ The trope of the traveler in art gained ground, since “[to] the medieval Japanese, traveling symbolized the Buddhist sense of impermanence (*miyo* [妙法 *myōhō*]) that was felt so deeply during this age; and travelers, conceived of as men who leave society behind to wander to distant, lonely places, were thought to experience more fully the nature of life itself” (Varley 96). Finally, in this environment the concept of *aware* (or *monoaware* 物の哀れ) appeared. The concept casts the “human condition [as] essentially one of loneliness [*sabi*],” but provides “some consolation” in the beauty of the evanescence of things, as might be seen in “such things as a desolate field or a monochromatic, withered marsh” as depicted in the monochromatic painting that dominated the age (Varley 96).

What can we identify as crucial to medieval *Nō*? We can identify historical, religious, and stylistic elements. I will focus on the role of religion. As J. Thomas Rimer tells us, Zeami’s plays and his critical writings owe a great deal to Buddhism. The metaphysical underpinnings of Zeami’s *Nō* works are often Buddhist (Rimer xxi), and his insistence on the need for “intuitive understanding on the part of the actor” corresponds to Buddhist ideas of the transmission of

⁸⁵ For Claudel’s response to Japanese Buddhist sculpture, see 4.2.

knowledge (Rimer xxii). Though Nō has origins in Shintō ritual, especially harvest ritual, the material and philosophy of Nō are overwhelmingly Buddhist. But we must be precise about what we mean when we talk about Buddhism in the Japanese context.

Buddhism divides into a variety of sects in Japan. The influence of Buddhism upon Zeami and Nō varies with the sect. Zen interested Zeami the most, as Ayako Nishino shows. A characteristic feature of Zen is “son refus d’expliquer la réalité ou l’essentiel par un système scientifique” [“its refusal to use a scientific system to explicate reality or the essential”] (Nishino, *Synthèse* 354). Zeami was a practitioner of Sōtō Zen, a belief system marked by paradoxical reasoning and Taoist elements, particularly the idea of yin and yang, or of complimentary opposites that become harmonious in a “superior synthesis” (Nishino, *Synthèse* 355-356). Zen’s presence is felt in one of Zeami’s critical pieces, *The Mirror and the Flower* or *Kakyō* 花鏡. According to Nishino, *Kakyō*, stressing paradox, the ineffable, “non-interpretation,” and the “nonconscious” [“*non-conscience*”] is “somewhat foreign” to European thinking that “privileges clairvoyant logic” (*Synthèse* 357). The Zen concept *kyakurai* 却来 epitomizes this way of thinking. *Kyakurai* “exprime le retour au point de départ après avoir atteint un certain niveau de conscience” [“expresses the return to the point of departure after having obtained a certain level of consciousness”] (Nishino, *Synthèse* 359). Nishino hears echoes of *kyakurai* in one of Zeami’s famous maxims from *Kakyō*: “Forgetting the result, regard the Nō; forgetting the Nō, regard the actor; forgetting the actor, regard the spirit; forgetting the spirit, understand the Nō” (358). We will shortly see the influence of this maxim on Claudel. For the moment, we agree with Nishino that Zeami’s adage displays paradoxical Zen thinking. To understand Nō, the spectator must first forget Nō and look at the actor’s technique and intention. Forgetting these in turn, the spectator comes to understand Nō. This “affirmation in negation” that Zeami espouses

indicates the influence of the Zen upon Zeami's approach (Nishino, *Synthèse* 358). Nishino concludes:

Contrairement au théâtre occidental fondé sur la tradition aristotélicienne qui offre au spectateur « la délectation logique », assurée par l'agencement raisonné de l'action, le nô propose au spectateur le plaisir émotionnel créé par l'accomplissement le plus parfait de la technique. S'absorber dans la beauté onirique, tel est l'état idéal pour le public du nô. (358)⁸⁶

As Haruo Nishino informs us, one of Zeami's contributions to the formation of Nō theater was “établi[ant] un type de Nō onirique, centré sur le récit retrospectif d'un héros unique” [“establishing a sort of dreamlike Nō, centered on the retrospective narrative of a single hero”] (12). However, Zeami's texts are not the *sine qua non* of Nō theater: the actor has an equal, if not greater, significance. For the Nō actor, in Haruo Nishino's estimation, the stage and life itself are one and the same:

Son but est de rendre une scène constamment attrayante. Sa plus grande joie est de parvenir, par l'excellence de son jeu, à toucher le cœur des spectateurs. Le succès dépend

⁸⁶ “Contrary to Western theater founded on the Aristotelian tradition that offers to the spectator [according to Claudel] “delectation in logic,” assured by the rational development of the action, Nō proposes to the spectator the pleasure of perfect technical accomplishment. Absorption in a beautiful dreamlike atmosphere, such is the ideal state of the Nō audience.” Shinbo Satoru advances a similar interpretation of Zeami's thought. See Shinbo (1989), pp. 162-178.

à la fois de la perfection de l'œuvre et de la perfection de l'interprétation, et le problème majeur est de savoir comment étreindre le cœur des spectateurs. (13)⁸⁷

Zeami himself states that a Nō performance requires the “concordance” of the author, the actor, and the audience (Haruo Nishino 13). To describe this concordance and the way in which the actor can attain it, Zeami uses the metaphor of the flower. The flower “désigne l'état dans lequel l'acteur et le jeu suscitent l'émotion du spectateur” [“designates the state in which the actor and his performance elicit the spectator's emotion”] (Haruo Nishino 14). Here, Zen once again inspires Zeami. Especially important are the concepts of absence and *yūgen* 幽玄, or profundity in simplicity (Haruo Nishino 14-15). An actor who has grasped the “flower” of Nō has entered into the emotion of the performance. He is not an actor imitating the passions of another person, nor is he himself seized by emotion. Rather, he embodies the emotion; and the disappearance of the actor allows for the triangulation of the text, the performance, and the audience. Taking the Nō *Kinuta* as an example, Nishino writes that the epitome of Zeami's style is the “[transmission d'] un sentiment de profonde tristesse qui franchit le temps et l'espace” [“[transmission] of a profound sadness that goes beyond time and space”] (Haruo Nishino 20).

Though Zen was crucial to Zeami's criticism of Nō theater, in Nō itself Zen seldom makes its presence felt. Instead, the Tendai 天台, Shingon 真言, and Hokke 法華 sects are the most prevalent. Tendai and Shingon began in the Heian era. Tendai is a “secte ésotérique de la Sutra du Lotus, prêchant la possibilité de salut universel” [an “esoteric sect based on the Lotus

⁸⁷ “His aim is to render the scene constantly attractive. His greatest joy is to succeed, through the excellence of his acting, in touching the hearts of his spectators. The success [of a performance] depends on the perfection of the text and the perfection of the interpretation, and the principal problem is to know how to seize the hearts of the audience.”

Sutra, preaching the possibility of universal salvation”] while Shingon is a “secte ésotérique de la Vraie Parole, respectant le symbolisme et la magie, caractérisée par le panthéisme et polythéisme” [an “esoteric sect of the True Word, valuing symbolism and magic, characterized by pantheism and polytheism”] (Nishino, *Synthèse* 267). Around the turn of the twelfth century, Amadism, a movement proclaiming salvation for all those who simply call the name of Amida, quickly gained followers. In 1253, to counter Amadism, Nichiren, a Tendai adept, established the Hokke school, which “insiste sur la retour respectif au Sûtra du Lotus” [“insists on a return to the Lotus Sutra”] (Nishino, *Synthèse* 267). The presence of these three sects in Nō is a consequence of the preoccupations of writers like Zeami. Writing Nō was not simply an expression of the playwright’s ideas. On the contrary: “Les auteurs du nô traitent simplement de sujets en vogue, et par conséquent, le contenu et la forme du nô se colorent de bouddhisme” [“The writers of Nō simply treated subjects in vogue, and consequently the content and the form of Nō took on the color of Buddhism”] (Nishino, *Synthèse* 266).

There is a modern form of classification that divides Nō plays according to their treatment of Buddhist themes. In 1942, Masaharu Anesaki combed through two-hundred Nō plays and grouped them according to whether they touched on Buddhist ideas. Thirty-nine do not treat Buddhism at all, forty-one delve briefly into Buddhist themes, and one-hundred and twenty directly “reflect” Buddhist ideas (Nishino, *Synthèse* 267-268). The one-hundred and twenty pieces divide further into ones that reveal with general Buddhist themes and ones that concern one of the Buddhist sects that flourished during the era. Fifty-one fall in the former camp, sixty-nine in the latter. Regarding the sixty-nine pieces indebted to particular Nō sects, Anesaki attempted to disentangle Hokke, Amadism, and Shingon by having recourse:

à une comparaison en rapport avec les saisons : des pièces imprégnées de la pensée de l'école de Sûtra (*Hokke*) sont comparées au paysage gracieux du printemps et au point cardinal de l'est où se lève le soleil, puisque la secte *Hokke* promet le salut à tous les êtres animés ou inanimés ; des pièces d'intérêt amidiste sont assimilées à la tristesse de l'automne et au point cardinal de l'ouest, puisque cette école console le défunt par l'invocation de prières silencieuses ; à propos des pièces reflétant le bouddhisme ésotérique de *Shingon* est invoquée la foudre de l'été, puisque la secte livre un combat implacable contre l'esprit maléfique. D'après Anesaki, c'est cette dernière secte, le bouddhisme ésotérique de *Shingon*, qui caractérise le plus la vision bouddhiste du nô. En fait les pièces imprégnées de la pensée Zen sont peu nombreuses, malgré la domination de la secte à l'époque de la constitution du nô. C'est sous la forme du spectacle et dans la philosophie fondatrice de l'art que l'on peut trouver des reflets directs du Zen plutôt que dans le récit raconté : le Zen exerce une influence sur la théorie de Zeami concernant la technique du nô (la Forme), alors que la Fable des pièces est imprégnée de la pensée bouddhique d'autres sectes, telles que le *Hokke*, l'amidisme ou le *Shingon*. (Nishino, *Synthèse* 268)⁸⁸

⁸⁸ “recourse to a comparison concerning the seasons: pieces impregnated with the thought of the Sûtra School (*Hokke*) are compared to the graceful countryside of springtime and to the cardinal point of the East where the sun rises, since the *Hokke* sect promises salvation to all beings living or inanimate; pieces connected to Amadism are assimilated to the sadness of autumn and to the cardinal point of the West, since this school consoles the deceased through the invocation of silent prayer; as for those pieces reflecting the esoteric Buddhism of *Shingon* is invoked by the lightning of summer, since the sect leads an implacable fight against the spirit of evil. According to Anesaki, it is this last sect, the esoteric Buddhism of *Shingon*, that most characterizes the Buddhist vision found in *Nō*. In fact the pieces impregnated with Zen thought are few in number, despite the domination of the sect during the epoch in which *Nō* took shape. It is in the form of the spectacle and in the foundational philosophy of the art more than in the stories themselves that one can find direct reflections of Zen: Zen exercises and influence upon Zeami's theory in terms of the technique of *Nō* (the Form), while the Fable of the plays is impregnated by the Buddhist thought of other sects, such as *Hokke*, Amadism, and *Shingon*.”

A variety of Buddhist currents feed into Nō, yet Zeami's theory of Nō is indebted to a sect, Zen, that plays a marginal role in furnishing the material of Nō theater. Let us keep this tangled web of religious influence in mind as we move to Mishima and Claudel.

3.3 Mishima Yukio's Critical Background

When Mishima wrote his “modern Nō” plays in the early 1950s, he had only recently become interested in the Japanese literary tradition. Mishima had spent much of his youth fascinated by European literature. He liked romantic writers, with Yeats and Novalis being singled out specifically in his 1968 book *Sun and Steel* (太陽と鉄; *Taiyō to tetsu*). In a vein that is, after all, thoroughly modernist, Mishima came to identify his early, sickly years with romanticism and the night and his later, vigorous years, exemplified by his muscular body and tan skin, with the sun and with Japan (*Taiyō* 517-521). This statement chimes with T.E. Hulme's distinction between the “dry hardness” of classicism and “damp” romanticism (126-127). Mishima would likely have been familiar with Hulme and modernism generally. In a letter to Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成 dated 18 July 1945, Mishima, still called Hiraoka Kimitake 平岡公威, tells the older writer: 「文学の本当の意味の新しさといふことも考へる折が多いのですが」[“Often I ask myself what it really means to ‘make it new’ in the domain of literature”] (“Correspondence” 237), suggesting a deep affinity with the modernist movements in Europe.⁸⁹ The way the Western dichotomy between classicism and romanticism differs from Mishima's opposition between the night and the sun lies in the difference between what is foreign and what is native for him. In northern Europe romanticism, grew out of a desire to return to a natural

⁸⁹ I think here of course of Ezra Pound's *The Cantos*, “Canto LIII.”

native art that southern, Latinate classicism was thought to have suppressed. This is pronounced in the German distinction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*. *Kultur* represents the local achievements and inscrutable inner life of a group of people, an ethnos, while *Zivilisation* stands for “something which is indeed useful, but nevertheless only a value of the second rank, comprising only the outer appearance of human beings, the surface of human existence” (Elias 6-7). In its concern for the local “genius,” *Kultur* is romantic. When Hulme rejects romanticism, as Goethe did before him, they ask to return to an ancient, and more foreign, pan-European tradition—the classicism of ancient Greece and Rome. To both writers, classicism is of course a part of their cultural heritage as Europeans, but it is still a more foreign heritage according to the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century division between classicism and romanticism.

For Mishima, the opposite is true. The night stands for the European. His early devotion to it was, he tells us, a contrarian rejection of Japanese nationalism during the Second World War. Indeed, in the 1940s Mishima, “while working in an aircraft factory, translated *At the Hawk’s Well* into a kind of classical Japanese and considered the project as one of his most useful during the war years” (Hart 241). It is interesting to remark that, at a time when Mishima described himself as fleeing from Japanese tradition towards Europe, he translated an English appropriation of Japanese classical literature into the very vernacular of classical Japanese. The exercise indicates not only Mishima’s familiarity with modernist experimentations, but also his early desire to reconcile his European interests with the literary tradition to which he was an heir. The sun is for Mishima specifically Japanese; it symbolizes the inscrutable life of his inner Japanese being. When Mishima appeals to the sun, he is embracing the local, particular, and quasi-mystical. Receptiveness to the sun is enshrined in Mishima’s very body in its ability to tan.

Mishima has taken the European division between classicism and romanticism and turned a crucial part of it on its head.

We need not accept Mishima's division of his life into two parts. He was writing two years before his death, looking back over the early years of his life, trying to interpret his interests and actions then in order to make them accord with his interests and action in the late 1960s. When he says that he rejected romanticism, it does not mean that he rejected European literature, or that Yeats and his early interests ceased to influence him. The act that cemented his movement towards the "sun," his taking up of bodybuilding, did not occur until after he had mostly written his Nō plays. We expect that the influence of Yeats and other European artists was yet strong when Mishima wrote his Nō, but, at the same time, we understand that his identification as a Japanese man was growing in strength.

A 10 September 1951 letter to Kawabata reveals the heterogeneous Mishima was consulting. He mentions finishing Heinrich Heine's *The Romantic School* and states his interest in Heine's assertion that Goethe's art, and all art, is essentially "sterile" or *fumō* 不毛 (84). "目下、"Mishima writes, "コルトオの「ショパン」を読んでいます、これもおもしろうございます" ["I am in the process of reading Cortot's *Chopin*, which is also a very interesting work"] (84). In the following paragraph, Mishima tells Kawabata:

舞踊劇を二つ書きました。一つは柳橋の通りのためで、「競近松娘松娘」、一つは青山圭男氏の新作日本バレエで、「姫君と鏡」で、後者は落窪物語のバレエ化です。前者は十月末明銀座で、後者は十一月末帝劇でいたします。(270)⁹⁰

⁹⁰ "I have written two pieces for dance theater: one called *Coquettish Duel between the Girls of Chikamatsu*, for the dances of Yanagibashi, the other, *The Princess and the Mirror*, for Japanese ballets

There is already a great deal of heterogeneity in these theatrical pieces Mishima was writing: using Chikamatsu to make modern dance theater, working with the materials of a modern Japanese choreographer to stage a “classical dance” piece, both works to be performed at major modern Japanese theaters. When we add to this the fact that Mishima’s personal interest still tended towards northern European Romanticism, we see that Mishima was still caught between Japan and the foreign, the new and the old, as he constructed his *shinsaku* Nō. Furthermore, in the 1950s Mishima was presented with and greatly interested in the possibility of traveling to the United States, the Caribbean, and South America.⁹¹ His interest in the foreign was in full swing as he wrote his Nō. These Nō are modern not only in updating Nō for a modern Japanese audience but also in the cosmopolitanism that we might expect in post-War Japan.

With this in mind, we ask whether Nō presented a religious or political undercurrent to Mishima as it did to Claudel and other European writers to tackle Nō including Pound and Yeats. Unlike these Western writers, Mishima was intimately acquainted with Nō from an early age (Inose 68). By his late teens Mishima had written an essay praising the literary punning device *kakekotoba*, through which famous lyrics are incorporated into Nō dialogue (Inose 2012, 121). For Mishima, since Nō appears to be embedded in a cultural framework that differs substantially from Claudel’s, a French writer who never learned Japanese and encountered Nō in his fifties, superficial similarities between any “Nō” plays written by the two men might hide deep-level differences.

by Aoyama Yoshio. In the latter case, the work is an adaptation, for classical dance, called *Tale of the Cellar*. The first piece will be performed at the Meiji Theater at the end of October, the second at the Imperial Theater at the end of November.”

⁹¹ In an 18 March 1950 letter, Mishima tells Kawabata that visiting Europe— especially Germany, Italy, and Greece before their postwar reconstruction was complete—was his dream, and that the United States held no attraction for him, though he would happily visit the U.S. if invited (266-267).

In order to flesh out this background, we can look at how Mishima viewed Nō as a part of his own tradition, and how he modified that tradition to suit his interest in foreign literature. As we did with classicism and romanticism, we are charting the opposite movement here: Nō is the native; the European is the foreign. The dynamic is similar, though, and understanding how Nō functioned for a post-war Japanese writer like Mishima could, by way of contrast, illuminate how it functioned for Claudel—and vice versa.

In the letter to Kawabata quoted earlier in which Mishima reflects on a concept similar to Pound's injunction to "make it new," Mishima imagines a literature that "transcends" ancient and modern:

言葉、文学、様式等のすべてに於て今までの概念の古さも新しさも超越した新しさ（即ち、嘗てあった、と嘗てなかった、といふことを新旧弁別の唯一の基準とする態度をこえて）も考へられるのではないかと存じます (238)⁹²

Mishima goes on to describe his desire to write stories in the "old style" that are, nonetheless, vibrant and lauded. He also details his hope for "あの古代の壮麗な大爬虫類が、峻厳な自然淘汰の手で絶滅に瀕した時代" ["a time when those great old magnificent lizards suddenly find themselves on the verge of extinction thanks to the rigors of natural selection"] (35). We could easily interpret Mishima's desire to be liberated from the tyranny of the influence of past masters and of the demand for novelty in terms of Harold Bloom's famous concept of the

⁹² "Is it not equally possible to imagine in every domain: that of words, of style, or of form, a newness that transcends the concepts of "old" and "new" as they have been used up until the present (in brief, that goes beyond the distinction between "that which existed" and "that which did not exist" previously—the only criterion used to judge the "old" and the "new")?"

“anxiety of influence.” Mishima’s wish for a trans-historical valuation of literature and his interest in foreign literature would then reveal his own neuroticism under the weight of tradition. But a more sensitive approach would be to see whether Mishima’s Nō plays put into practice this desire to escape from history.

An English appraisal of Mishima’s Nō works is hindered by the paucity of critical work done on these plays. One of the earliest critical notices is Arthur Waley’s review of Donald Keene’s translation of *Five Modern Nō Plays*. Waley had met Mishima in London when the Japanese writer visited the city with his wife in 1958. Waley heaps praise upon the book. Waley notes the variety of sources from which Mishima has drawn; he points out that *Aoi no ue* 葵上 takes more from *The Tale of Genji*, of which Waley was the first, and in the 1950s still the only, translator into English, than from the classical Nō *Aoi*. Meanwhile, *Hanjo* 班女, Waley says, takes so little from the original Nō that the play avoids the “problem” of “the integration of the legendary and the actual.” Regardless of the extent to which Mishima relies on tradition, according to Waley the plays’ “impact is enormously increased (especially in the case of [*Sotoba*] *Komachi* and *Aoi*) by having the old stories hovering at the back of one’s mind” (487). Waley further conjectures that “these plays are undoubtedly easier to translate than the old Nō plays, in which the sharp contrast between the prose dialogue and the sung parts, which are in a totally different kind of language, is very hard to bring out in English, whereas Mishima uses the same kind of quite modern and familiar language throughout. Nor is the translator of these modern plays faced with literary allusions, plays on words, or other ornamental devices” (487). These Nō, to Waley, are radically different from “older Nō,” yet in Waley’s mind the older works are critical to the great pleasure the *Five Modern Nō Plays* can give.

A review of Marguerite Yourcenar's French translation of Mishima's *Nō*, *Cinq nō modernes*, describes the newness of Mishima's *Nō* in more detail:

They are fascinating, hypnotic, unique. Referred to as *Nō*, they do not, however, retain the ritual quality of this composite art form, which dates back to fourteenth-century Japan. There are no painted pine trees or bamboo accessories, nor are there five musicians seated on the stage, sung recitatives, gestural language or hieratic stances. Moreover, both women and men perform in these plays; and out of forty characters featured in his stage pieces, only five wear traditional Japanese clothes. (Knapp 1984, 666)

We might wonder what makes these pieces *Nō* plays, bereft as they are of the most readily identifiable signs of the Theater. Mishima's "plays deal with everyday situations," writes Knapp (1984), "but their essence is *Nō*" (666). This "essence" is "beings [who] inhabit a spaceless area in a cyclical time scheme" and "a fluid, vaporous and dreamlike atmosphere"; "Dreamlike realities are transformed into tension provoking moments as past incidents are integrated into present realities, bringing into existence a whole metaphysical—sacred—climate" (Knapp 1984, 666). Like Waley, Knapp argues that this "dreamlike" and "sacred" impression relies heavily upon familiarity with the original *Nō* plays that Mishima has subtly woven into work. Still Knapp writes that "Mishima does not seek to renew but to impress fresh amalgams upon his audience," (1984, 666).

In the West, the most famous, or at least the most critically appraised, of Mishima's *Nō* is *Aoi*. Partly this fame must owe to the familiarity of the source material. As Waley pointed out,

Aoi draws both from the *Nō Aoi no Ue* and from the tale of Lady Aoi and Lady Rokujo in *The Tale of Genji*. Because the matter of *Aoi* originates in the most famed piece of Japanese literature, it is natural that Western critics would feel most comfortable when criticizing the play. Nancy J. Barnes treats the Buddhist significance of the *Aoi* tale and of Mishima's *Aoi* in particular. Barnes writes:

With a particular affinity for ghostly tales, *Nō* dramas may partly derive from ancient shamanistic rituals for summoning numinous beings and spirits of the dead. The plays unmistakably preserve elements of spiritual worship. *Nō* as a dramatic form, however, arose in a Buddhist tradition. (114)

It is no surprise then that the original *Aoi no Ue* is, in Barnes' view, "much more dogmatically Buddhist" than *Genji* (116). However "dreamlike" a reader such as Knapp may find Mishima's adaptation, if the otherworldliness of Mishima's *Aoi* is not overtly Buddhist, it deviates from its source material.

Barnes affirms that, though the play is "dramatically compressed," Mishima has "certainly preserved much of the weird, unearthly character of the original" (118). Nonetheless, Barnes writes that the Buddhist atmosphere is "excised," so "there is no healing for any of the three main characters. They remain helpless victims of their personal fantasies and supernatural forces" (1989, 119). Barnes finds Mishima's treatment of psychoanalysis "ironic," as it shows that Western medicine is unable to touch the irrational, yet in *Aoi* the salvific power of Buddhism is also "rejected" (119). According to Barnes it is not Mishima who rejects Buddhism. Rather, "Buddhism is very much at the heart of Mishima's thought," and the play's "recognition that it is

one's own mental attitudes that generate health and success or misery and failure" is, she claims, quintessentially Buddhist (120). Once more we have a critic who stresses the importance of the worlds of the source texts in framing our interpretation of Mishima's very eccentric Nō. Here, however, the implication is that in departing from the source material Mishima aims to uphold the worldview of the original texts. By showing a world without traditional spirituality, Mishima is powerfully arguing for the value of Buddhism in modern life. Yet, acute as Barnes' analysis is, the situation is less clear-cut than she presents it. If in his new Nō plays Mishima suggests that Buddhism has relevance in modern life, it is not quite Buddhism as it was in the time of Zeami. It is rather a conception Buddhism that differs from its medieval counterpart thanks to the passage of time and the necessity of contending with other ideas introduced from abroad since the Meiji era.

Anne Lande Peters compares Mishima's *Hanjo* and Henrik Ibsen's "The Lady from the Sea" with a focus on the formal and affective similarities and differences between Mishima's and Ibsen's works.⁹³ Her insightful critique aims to demonstrate how culture determines the ways a writer can construct and an audience can interpret a piece of literature, the role of culture being evident in the case of *Hanjo* and "The Lady from the Sea" because the two plays deal with the same "universal themes" in different ways (16). In contrast to Ibsen's psychological realism, Mishima's worldview is "mystical," opening onto "a beautiful, unreal world" (Peters 12). Peters asserts that even though Mishima's *Aoi* is psychologically "more realistic" than the original, the weight of tradition drives Mishima's *Aoi* towards the supernatural (13). We might worry about the determinism implicit in this argument, but Peters writes that this is not because of a necessary

⁹³ Peters highlights that Mishima is connected to Yeats through the two dramatists' shared interest in *Aoi no ue*, but does not pursue the point. Yeats' "Irish Nō" are discussed in 2.3.

Japanese drive towards the “mystical” but a reaction against the *shingeki* (新劇) or “New Theater Movement” that had arisen in the first half of the twentieth century. Originating in the 1900s, *Shingeki* tried to grow a new Japanese theater using the seeds of European realism. Mishima wrote his *Nō* at a time some years before the so-called Little Theater Movement took shape. The Little Theater Movement was among other things a re-evaluation of traditional Japanese theater and popular entertainment. In this context Mishima’s plays anticipated, if not helped to usher in, a new and original, Japanese style to the modern theater (Peters 2010, 15).

From this brief overview, the tensions inherent in Mishima’s *Nō* are clear. His theater is backward looking yet part of an exciting new trend in Japanese theater; it deals with the problems of postwar Japanese society yet attempts to retain the spiritual cast of classical *Nō*; it is at once deeply traditional and deeply inflected by Western innovations. These contradictions are not only Mishima’s; their counterparts riddle Claudel’s conception of *Nō* as well.

3.4 Paul Claudel’s Critical Background

As consul in New York in the 1890s, Claudel became entranced by the performances of the city’s Chinese Opera House, Bernard Hue tells us, and came to believe “qu’ on ne pouvait rien voir de plus beau que le théâtre chinois” [“nothing could be as beautiful as Chinese theater”] (307). Yet the theater he found as ambassador in Tokyo captivated him even more. Japanese theater appeared to him to contain “formes dramatiques foncièrement originales, alliant, outre les mérites du théâtre grec, les qualités de la poésie, de la musique et de la danse” [“profoundly original dramatic forms, allying, aside from the merits of Greek theater, the qualities of poetry, music, and dance”] (Hue 307). For Claudel, acolyte of Stéphane Mallarmé and admirer of Richard Wagner, the union of word and music, of drama and music, was one of the objectives of

his theater; and it was in the theater of Japan, in Nō, kabuki, and bunraku, that he found a way to realize his vision (Hue 334-338):

Il n'avait encore entrevu que certaines possibilités ; il avait vu dans l'opéra classique occidental un échec, dans le drame wagnérien une erreur ; il lui restait, grâce à la grande révélation japonaise, à réaliser, avec le concours d'un artiste merveilleusement fait pour comprendre, D[arius] Milhaud, le modèle même du nouveau drame, répondant à toutes les exigences que, durant quarante ans, il n'a cessé de dégager et de chercher à résoudre. Il a enfin compris que la musique dramatique est celle qu'emploie un dramaturge, non un musicien, « ayant en vue non pas la réalisation d'un tableau sonore, mais la secousse et le train à donner à notre émotion par un moyen purement rythmique ou timbré, plus direct et plus brutal que la parole ». Dans les circonstances où, en Europe, on utiliserait tout un orchestre, au Japon, un « coup unique et caverneux répété d'abord à longs intervalles, puis plus fort et plus précipité, [...] suffit sans orchestre et sans partitions à nous placer dans l'ambiance voulue ». Le musicien japonais participe à l'action avec plus liberté que son homologue européen. « Il suit le drame et l'œil et le ponctue librement au moment voulu à l'aide de l'instrument [...], ou simplement de la voix, car c'est là un élément magnifique du théâtre japonais ». (Hue 338)⁹⁴

⁹⁴ “He had but seen some possibilities in passing; he had seen an impasse in Western opera, in Wagnerian drama an error; he was left, thanks to the great Japanese revelation, to realize, with the help of an artist marvelously suited to understand, D[arius] Milhaud, the model of the new drama, responding to all of the demands that, for forty years, he had not ceased to liberate and tried to resolve. I finally understood that dramatic music is that which employs a dramaturge, not a musician, “having in view not the realization of a sonic tableau, but the agitation and the path to deliver to our emotion by a rhythmic or timbrous, more direct and more brutal than words.” In circumstances in which, in Europe, an entire orchestra would be used, in Japan, “a single and cavernous blow repeated at first at long intervals, then more strongly and more precipitously, [...] suffices without an orchestra and without a partition to place us in the desired atmosphere.” The Japanese musician participates in the action with more liberty than his European

Japanese theater allowed Claudel to pare down that which he needed for his ideal theater, to dispense with unnecessary musical accompaniment while fulfilling an aesthetic inherited from the grandiose schemes of the nineteenth century. Though throughout his career Claudel was interested in the possibility of a totalizing theater, it was in Japan, André Vachon says, that Claudel began seeking a way to show the “rapports qu’entretiennent entre eux le visible et l’invisible” [“relations that hold between the visible and the invisible”] (384).⁹⁵ But whatever inspiration Claudel drew from Japanese theater—and he drew a considerable amount—his interpretations inevitably lead back to his fundamental interests. Claudel ultimately saw *Soulier* as an exegesis of the Bible. Claudel, of course, did not hope to explain the Bible by representing its content in more lucid words. Rather, he hoped to express the “sense” of the Bible through theater (Vachon 404). Such a direct presentation of the sense of the Bible is possible because, “pour Claudel, les événements de la Bible se passent à la fois dans l’éternité et dans l’actualité de la vie humaine” [“for Claudel, the events of the Bible pass at once in eternity and in actual human life”] (Vachon 405). Furthermore, manifest in Claudel’s theater, Thomas Pavel argues, is the desire, “as [it is] for the Jesuits for whom the motto is *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, [for] the unity of the world [that will] make visible the glory of God” (“L’unité” 859). The faith in

counterpart. “He follows the drama and the eye and punctuates it freely at the desired moment with the aide of the instrument [...], or simply with the voice, for that is a magnificent element of Japanese theater.”

⁹⁵ Vachon also notes that, as he wrote *Le Repos du septième jour*, Claudel had some knowledge of Chinese cosmology and writing. But he cautions that Claudel’s understanding of Chinese writing and of Taoism was as “approximate” as his knowledge of Thomism. “Claudel would never have been faithful to anything but himself, and his “borrowings” themselves always have, let us say, something of Claudel in them” [Claudel n’aura jamais été fidèle qu’à lui-même, et ses « emprunts » eux-mêmes ont toujours, si l’on peut dire, quelque chose de claudélien] (193). Claudel’s own opinions on Chinese writing, in which he perceived a fixity and transcendence lacking in Western writing, can be found in the preface to *Cent Phrases* and in “La figure, le mouvement et le geste dans l’écriture en Chine et en Occident.” See Claudel (1967), pp. 699-701, and (1961), pp. 454-457.

progress gives Claudel's theater a marked optimism in the future and the effects of globalization (Pavel, "L'Unité" 859, 862). *Soulier*, with its figures drawn not only from the West but, as in the figure of the painter Daibutsu, from the East, might stand as an allegory for this unity, of the exciting mix of many different groups of people on the world stage. If Claudel's *Soulier* adapts Japanese theater to express a Biblical sense, with the Japanese being part of a pessimistic medieval period and the Biblical interpreted as expressing a resolutely positive message, how does the one serve as the vehicle of the other?

The question takes us to the heart of Claudel studies, in which the extent to which Claudel understood Japanese art remains a point of contention.⁹⁶ Ayako Nishino shows that Claudel, despite his original and sensitive reception of Nō theater, in his essay "Nō" cannot help but introduce concepts that are not present in the original Japanese. For instance, in his essay "Nō" Claudel describes the *shite* as "the Ambassador of the Unknown" and the *waki* a generic figure from this world—as a representative of the invisible and the visible, to parse the claim in Vachon's terms. "Or," writes Nishino regarding *mugen nō*,

d'après l'interprétation japonaise, entre ces deux délégués de deux univers différents, il n'y a ni drame intime ni opposition directe, au sens occidental du terme : le nō est concentré sur l'action du protagoniste et le drame réside dans l'histoire du passé déjà vécu par le *shite*. (86-87)⁹⁷

⁹⁶ The point will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but for the moment note that among important works not discussed in depth in this chapter considering the role of Catholicism in Claudel's interpretation of Japanese art are Pinguet (2009), pp. 79-107; Kawakami (2005); and Bush, (2010).

⁹⁷ "But according to the Japanese interpretation, between these two delegates from two different universes, there is neither intimate drama nor direct opposition, in the occidental sense of the term: Nō is concentrated on the action of the protagonist and the drama resides in the story [*histoire*] of the past that the *shite* has already lived."

Claudél's misinterpretation of Nō allows him to bring Nō within his constellation of belief. The process illuminates Hue's and Vachon's readings of Claudél's theater. If Claudél finds Nō an ideal vessel through which to communicate his aesthetic vision, it is because Nō in his mind is not quite the same as Nō as it is orthodoxly interpreted in Japan. It is a resolutely Catholic interpretation of Japanese art.

However, it would be unfair to claim that Claudél was hostile towards or simply uninterested in Japanese practices on account of his Catholic faith. His interactions with Buddhism in Japan in particular are distinct from his previous negative encounters with the religion. The reason is that Claudél found certain schools of Japanese Buddhism congenial to his own faith. In the 1920s, he came to esteem Amadism and Zen. Whereas Indian Buddhism disturbed him with what he perceived as its garish idolatry, Amadism and Zen, and much of the Buddhism he found in Japan, fitted well with his tragic conception of temporal life, of *visible* life:

Le bouddhisme en Chine ne m'a pas spécialement intéressé, je dirai. Le bouddhisme tel que je l'avais vu à Ceylan m'avait profondément répugné, ça je dois le dire. Ces énormes bouddhas étendus, couchés dans des autels obscurs, dans des temples obscurs, m'avaient répugné. Le bouddhisme chinois ne m'avait pas beaucoup plu non plus. Le bouddhisme sous sa forme japonaise m'a beaucoup plus intéressé. Dans ce bouddhisme japonais, il y a une espèce de mélancolie amère et profonde qui est vraiment intéressante. Sous sa forme

japonaise, la forme amidaïste du bouddhisme m'a plu davantage que le bouddhisme chinois. (*Mémoires* 165)⁹⁸

Claudel's apology for Japanese Buddhism recalls some of the Catholic meditations on the nature of this world found in his journal. For him, this world naturally declines. Only Armageddon may redeem what exists in this life. For instance, on 26 February 1922, he writes that the “feu dernier, solution, résolution, dissolution ineffable de tout dans le sein du Créateur. Tout lui a été rendu finalement comme au Jour de la Création il a tout donné” [“final fire, solution, resolution, ineffable dissolution of all in the breast of the Creator. Everything given up to him as at the Day of Creation everything was given by him”] (*Journal I* 541). The same day, he jots down that “[l]a nature peut aller du plus au moins, mais non du moins au plus—évo[lution]—remonter. On ne se transforme qu'en perdant q[uel]q[ue] ch[ose]” [“nature can go from more to less, but not from less to more—evol[ution]—return. Things cannot transform without losing something”] (*Journal* 541). He recorded these thoughts at the start of his time in Japan, a few years before writing *Soulier*. We can see why he felt parts of Japanese Buddhism and the medieval spirit of Nō congenial to his own philosophy. Naturally, his interpretation of Japanese art and religion was ultimately a Catholic one, and often entailed distorting Japanese ideas by wrenching them out of their original context. Yet his conviction that Japanese religion was close to his Catholicism left him more open than usual to non-Christian beliefs.

⁹⁸ “I will say that Chinese Buddhism did not particularly interest me. I must say that Buddhism as I say it in Ceylon profoundly repulsed me. These giant Buddhas stretched out, lying on dark alters, in dark temples, repulsed me. Chinese Buddhism pleased me no more. I found Buddhism in its Japanese form much more interesting. In this Japanese Buddhism, there is a type of bitter and profound melancholy that is really interesting. In its Japanese form, the Amadist form of Buddhism pleased me much more than Chinese Buddhism.”

As Nishino indicates, Claudel was hardly a blank slate when he encountered Nō as ambassador. In scenes from the *Ile Journée*, Claudel portrays certain supernatural figures such as the Double Shadow or *l'Ombre Double* that Nō also seems to have inspired. However, “ces scènes de la *Ile Journée* ont été écrites *avant* que Claudel n’assiste pour la première fois à un spectacle de nô, le 22 octobre 1922. L’auteur aurait donc pu trouver à travers le nô une confirmation de sa propre idée de mettre en scène le monde spirituel.” [“the scenes were written *before* Claudel saw a Nō performance for the first time on 22 October 1922. The author would therefore have been able to find in Nō a confirmation of his own ideas of how to put the spiritual world on stage”] (Nishino, *Synthèse* 506). However, through to the many Nō plays he saw, and the many pieces of information on Nō he read in Japan, Claudel entered into a rare conversation with the Japanese theatrical form. We can see his fascination with Nō most clearly in his essay by the same name, in which, stressing the supernatural and irrational nature of Nō, he casts Nō as a confrontation between this world and the other, symbolized by the confrontation between the *waki* and the *shite*. Claudel even paraphrases in his essay Zeami’s famous maxim: “Par un étonnant paradoxe, ce n’est plus le sentiment qui est à l’intérieur de l’acteur, c’est l’acteur qui se met à l’intérieur du sentiment” [“Through a stunning paradox, it is no longer the sentiment that is inside the actor, but the actor who is inside of the sentiment”] (*Pr.* 1170). In the final version of *Soulier*, Nishino suggests, we can see the fruits of his dialogue with Nō. The many performances he saw and translations he read tested and refined his original ideas for his long play. His labor brings his work closer to Nō, but also brings Nō closer to his original work. Nō in Claudel’s eyes is essentially a “materialized dream” [rêve matérialisé] sparked by a visitor from the other world, whom Claudel terms “l’Ambassadeur de l’Inconnu” or the “Ambassador of the Unknown” (Nishino, *Synthèse* 506, 508; Claudel, *Pr.* 1169). With his folding fan, the *shite* sweeps away

ordinary time and space places us in another dimension (C Claudel, *Pr.* 1170). The mask, “le sceau définitif de ce qui n’est plus capable de changer” [“definitive seal of he that which can no longer change”], acts as an unbroachable barrier between this world and the world of the *shite* (C Claudel, *Pr.* 1175). This view of Nō makes *mugen nō* the theater’s essential type with *genzai nō* forgotten, and gives an implicit Catholic spin to modify both the original material and Claudel’s source material, a deformation that allows both to exist harmoniously in Claudel’s constellation of beliefs.⁹⁹

The difficulty of approaching Claudel’s work goes beyond the Japanese influences. The Catholic “universe” of *Soulier* may be prohibitive for French and broader Western audiences as well. Discussing the play with Claudel, Jean Amrouche asks whether “l’intervention des Saints et des Anges devait requérir, de votre spectateur, je ne sais quelle croyance à l’existence réelle de ces personnages” [“the intervention of saints and angels should require, of your audience, some sort of belief in the real existence of these personages”] (*Mémoires* 292). Claudel responds:

Je ne demande à mon spectateur que la croyance à mon propre drame quand il le regarde, je ne sors pas de là, je ne fais pas métier d’apologiste, bien que *Le Soulier de Satin* ait joué un rôle, à ce qui paraît, pas négligeable de ce côté-là. Je cherche seulement à fournir un ensemble délectable, comme font tous les artistes quels qu’ils soient. Et si les personnages surnaturels entrent dans la composition, c’est que leur présence m’a paru artistiquement nécessaire, de même que dans *l’Iliade* l’absence des personnages représenterait quelque chose de absolument inconcevable, et sans lesquels cette

⁹⁹ Analyzing *Tête d’Or*, Dominique Millet-Gérard also discusses the superficial similarity between Claudel’s early theatrical ideas and his mature interpretation of Nō. See Millet-Gérard (2015), pp. 135-140.

magnifique épopée n'existerait pas. On ne demande pas plus à mon spectateur la croyance à mes Anges ou à mes personnages surnaturels qu'un lecteur de l'*Odyssee* ou de l'*Illiade* n'a besoin de croire à Pallas ou à Jupiter. (292)¹⁰⁰

Amrouche presses Claudel further by suggesting that, if the supernatural entities of *Soulier* can be taken in the same way as a modern reader of Homer takes Greek deities, then the dramatist seems to want his audience to interpret his Catholic figures as mythic figures. Claudel, however, disagrees. The concept of myth, he says, does not quite account for the approach the audience should have to entities in which it does not believe. In a way strikingly reminiscent of Thomas Pavel and subsequent theorists of literary worlds, Claudel continues:

Je dirai simplement qu'une œuvre d'art forme un monde à part, qui n'est pas du tout le monde de la théologie ou de l'apologétique, qui a simplement pour objet la délectation du spectateur, délectation qui est loin d'être mauvaise et d'être nuisible et qui, au contraire, peut être d'un grand profit et d'un grand avantage, même spirituel, à ceux qui le regardent. Les personnages surnaturels dont vous parlez et qui répondent, bien entendu, comme je suis chrétien, pour moi, quand je fais ma prière, à des réalités concrètes tout à fait réelles et véritables mais quand ils sont portés sur la scène c'est un monde à part qui s'adresse au public et n'interviennent plus que comme éléments de délectation, que

¹⁰⁰ "I do not ask my spectator to share my beliefs when he watches my drama; I don't go further than that; I am not about to become an apologist, even if *The Satin Slipper* played a non-negligible role in that regard. I try simply to furnish a delectable ensemble, as do all artists regardless of who they are. And if supernatural personages enter into the composition, it is because their presence seemed artistically necessary to me, just as in *The Iliad* the absence of [these kinds of] personages would be inconceivable, since without them that magnificent epic would not exist. No one asks my spectator to believe in my angles or in my supernatural personages any more than a reader of *The Odyssey* or *The Iliad* needs to believe in Pallas or in Jupiter."

comme fournissant un ensemble de beauté et de joie pour celui qui les contemple. (292-293)¹⁰¹

As the problems with conceiving of literary works as belonging to discrete worlds took up the first chapter of this thesis, I will not argue the point further here. Amrouche himself asks Claudel whether there is not “une relation entre cet élément de beauté, de délectation, de joie dont vous parlez, et la manifestation d’une vérité” [“a relation between this element of beauty, of delectation, of joy of which [Claudel] speaks, and the manifestation of a truth”] (293). Claudel demurs, and, finally, Amrouche poses the question that is at the heart of this thesis. He says that many readers feel that, if they are not Christian, they “n’entr[er] pas dans ce monde, [ils] n’entr[er] pas dans le monde qu’il a construit” [“will not enter into this world, [they] will not enter into the language of Claudel, [they] cannot enter into the world that he has constructed”] (294). He adduces the example of André Gide, Claudel’s erstwhile correspondent, who, having been interested in Claudel’s oeuvre for years, found *Soulier* impenetrable. In Amrouche’s words: “Bref, tout se passe comme si une porte qui était demeurée ouverte jusqu’à quelques années de là, s’était tout à coup fermée, et qu’il ne pouvait plus pénétrer dans cet univers” [“In short, a door that had been slightly ajar for a few years seems suddenly to have shut, and he could not longer enter into this universe”] (294). Claudel’s response? “Eh ben, c’est son affaire !” [Well, that’s his

¹⁰¹ “I would say simply that a work of art forms a world apart, which is not at all the world of theology or of apologetics, which aims simply to delight the spectator, delight which is far from being bad and being harmful, and which, on the contrary, can be very profitable and very advantageous, even spiritually, to those who watch. The supernatural personages of whom you speak and who correspond, of course, as I am a Christian, for me, when I pray, to concrete realities entirely real and true, but, when they are brought onstage, it is a world apart that addresses the public and have no role other than as objects of delight, that act as an ensemble of beauty and joy for those who contemplate them.”

problem!] (294). He stresses once more that one need not be Christians to access his dramatic world; but then he relents a bit, and concludes,

Eh ben, un homme qui regarde *Le Soulier de Satin* n'a pas besoin d'être chrétien *complètement* convaincu, mais il y a besoin certainement d'avoir un désir d'autre chose, un désir de surnaturel, d'avoir des sentiments profonds qu'il a à exprimer, et il en trouve le lieu, le paysage, si vous voulez, dans ce drame où beaucoup de choses lui échappent mais qui, cependant, lui paraît adapté comme peut être une serre, par exemple, au développement de certains sentiments inarticulés qu'il portait en lui-même. (295 (my emphasis)).¹⁰²

In a few words, Claudel's insistence that *Soulier* belongs to another world that can be contemplated disinterestedly by a non-Catholic observer gives way to the more restricted claim that the observer need not be "completely" convinced by Catholic doctrine, but must have some sort of "desire" for a "supernatural" beyond. This desire for the supernatural serves as the common ground that allows the audience to enter into the world of *Soulier*. But even this may be too much. The desire for a supernatural beyond is present in both the original *Kantan* and in Mishima's adaptation, but does this conception of a "spiritual" realm form a *tertium comparationis* connected to the spirituality of Claudel's play?

¹⁰² "Well, look, a man who watches *The Satin Slipper* does not need to be completely convinced by Christianity, but he certainly needs the desire for something else, the desire for the supernatural, to have deep emotions to express, and he finds the place, the landscape, if you'd like, in this drama in which many things elude him, but that, nonetheless, seem to him like a hothouse to develop certain inarticulate sentiments that he holds within himself."

3.5 Mishima's *Kantan*

In Mishima's *Kantan*, a young man, Jirō (次郎), returns from the city to the home of his nursemaid, Kiku (菊). Kiku's husband has long since deserted her. In the city, Jirō heard a rumor surrounding Kiku's husband's disappearance according to which the husband's personality changed after he slept on a mysterious pillow from the countryside. Upon awakening, the husband departed instantly, and the flowers in Kiku's garden have not bloomed since. Jirō is nihilistic: he is uninterested in all aspects of life, and is emblematic of the general sense of youthful angst in postwar Japan. If we think of the *Nō* upon which Mishima's *Kantan* is based, we notice that Jirō's state of mind resembles Rosei's after Rosei achieves enlightenment. But Jirō takes no solace in Buddhism or any other religious view. His disenchantment with life is purely negative, not pointing to a higher spiritual order that would give his apathy meaning. The interest of the play is both in the presence of the supernatural in modern Japan, and in the way in which supernatural or Buddhist themes take on different significance as Mishima transplants them from the Middle Ages to post-War Japan.

Once Kiku yields the pillow to Jirō and he falls asleep, the stage gives way to his dreamscape. *Kantan* is unusual among Mishima's *Nō* for its use of masks and chanting. Mishima's retention of these features of classical *Nō* may owe to this being Mishima's first take on the genre. His intention to retain only the "exposed metaphysical themes" and not the props and songs of *Nō* would, perhaps, emerge as he grew more confident in adapting the genre. But the chanting and the masks are perhaps also appropriate to a *Nō* that explicitly represents a dream. The chorus and mask mark the shift from the actual world to the world of the dream, as well as the movement between the different phases of Jirō's dream. Thus, to mark the initial shift

from dream to reality, Kiku leaves to fetch Jirō the pillow, and the chorus chants a short song.
Afterwards, a masked woman appears on stage.

(——この間、無言劇。次郎、上着を脱ぎて床に入る。菊、枕を挙げもって登場。
これを次郎の頭にあってがって退場。合唱をはる。正面より美女を登場・仮面を着
す。ロングスカートの洋装なり)

美女 次郎さん……次郎さん。。。。

合唱 起きなさい！起きなさい！

美女 次郎さん。。。。次郎さん。。。。

合唱 起きなさい！起きなさい！

次郎 (眼ざめて上半身を起す) 何だい。誰？あ、君は誰？ずいぶん美人だね。

During this time [as the chorus chants], a dumb show. Jirō takes off his coat and gets in the bed. Kiku returns onstage with the pillow. She places it under Jirō's head and exits.

The chorus ceases. A masked beauty [美人] appears. She wears a long skirt in the Western style.

Beauty: Jirō, Jirō.¹⁰³

Chorus: Awaken! Awaken!

Jirō: (Waking and rising half his body) Huh? Who's there? Ah, who're you? You're a real beauty, aren't you? (Mishima, *Kindai* 21)

¹⁰³ There's no way to preserve the softness of Beauty's speech in translation, since English does not distinguish so sharply between Jirō's rough speech and Beauty's, indeed between male and female speech patterns, as does Japanese, a difference missed by Waley in his review of the Keene's translation.

The chorus functions as a third person, but for whom is it speaking, if anyone? It may be speaking for Beauty, for the author, for the audience; or it may be another spectral entity within the pillow. That Beauty wears a mask is also significant, for, as we saw, the *shite* alone wears a mask. There are, I think, two non-exclusive ways to interpret the mask here. Since the mask breaks with the realism of the opening part, it marks a clear split between dream and reality. As such, the mask preserves a sense of realism as it keeps the dreamscape distinct from the reality of Kiku's house. However, the division further marks the division between Mishima's Nō and classical Nō, for, if we keep in mind that the "*mugen*" aspect of Nō only became important in classification in the twentieth century, the divide between dream and reality suggests a dichotomy not present in the Japanese original. Moreover, Jirō does not act like Rosei; his dream neither seduces nor impresses him. His action is purely negative, a rejection of that which passes before him. Now, by making Beauty wear a mask and be introduced and, depending on our reading, supported by a chorus, Mishima has identified her with the world of classical Nō. That is to say that by using the chorus only during the dream sequence and the mask only for a dream figure, Mishima has drawn the figures of Jirō's dream close to the world of classical Nō, whereas Jirō, with his rough modern speech and rough modern dress, and with his inability to be roused by the scene that passes before him, embodies the "modern" or *kindai* element of Mishima's Modern Nō. In no other of Mishima's Nō will this conflict between the classical and the modern form of the theater be so evident. I will return to this idea shortly.

Beauty shows Jirō their life together. They go on honeymoon, she cooks for him, and a child is born. Jirō remains detached. When offered a drink, he complains that he hates being drunk; when cooked an egg, he caustically tells Beauty that her cooking is like that of any

woman: it is either too sweet, too spicy, too raw, or overdone. When asked to kiss, he wonders how he is to breathe. When told to breathe through his nose, he fusses that he hates breathing like that (Mishima, *Kindai Nō* 24-28). Unlike Rosei, Jirō finds all of the sensual things he is offered dull.

Often, his thoughts arrive immediately at the moral of the original *Kantan*. For instance, looking into Beauty's eyes, he notices something terrifying within their comeliness:

次郎 あ、今君の目のなかをこはいものがとほりすぎた。

美女 こはいものって何が？

次郎 女の目のなかにはね、ときどき狼がとほりすぎるんだよ。

美女 おほかたシェパードのまちがひだわ。

Jirō: Ah, something terrifying just passed by in your eyes.

Beauty: Something terrifying?

Jirō: Sometimes in a woman's eyes a wolf passes by.

Beauty: Surely it's really a large sheepdog. (Mishima, *Kindai* 23)

Unlike Rosei, Jirō sees hollowness in beauty immediately. Admiring Beauty's face, he decides to kiss her. Just as quickly, his thoughts turn morbid:

次郎 君、きれいだね。

美女 やっと目がさめたわね。

次郎 僕、お面にキッスされたやうな気がした。

美女 女のキッスってみんなそんなものよ。

次郎 君ってほんとにきれいだ。でも皮をむけば、やっぱり骸骨なんだ。

美女 え？

次郎 皮をむけば、やっぱり骸骨なんだよ。

美女 あらいやだ、あたくしそんなこと考へてみたこともないわ。(思はず顔にさはってみる)

次郎 骸骨に美人なんてあるかい

美女 そりやあ、あるでせうよ、きっと。

次郎 すごい自信だな。でも今キッスされたときね、君の頬っぺたの下でね、君の骨が笑ってゐるのが、僕にはわかったわよ。

美女 顔が笑へば、骨も笑ふわよ。

次郎 ふん、あんなことを言ってる。かう言はなくちゃいけないよ。顔が笑ふとき、骨は笑ってゐるんだ、それはたしかさ。しかし、顔が泣いてゐるときも顔の骨は笑ってゐるんだ。骨はかう言ってるんだよ、笑はば笑へ、泣けば泣け、今に俺の天下が来るんだ、ってね。

Jirō: You really are beautiful.

Beauty: Your eyes have finally opened, huh?

Jirō: It feels as if I was kissed by a mask.

Beauty: Everyone feels that way about a woman's kiss.

Jirō: You're really, really beautiful. But peel off your skin, and you're just a skeleton.

Beauty: Eh?

Jirō: Peel off your skin, and you're just a skeleton.

Beauty: How coarse! I've never thought of such a thing. (Unconsciously she strokes her face).

Jirō: Don't beautiful people also have skeletons?

Beauty: Well, of course, yes.

Jirō: What confidence! But when I gave you a kiss just now, there underneath your cheek your bones were laughing—I know it.

Beauty: If the face laughs, then the bones laugh.

Jirō: Ah, of course you say that. You have to say that. Naturally, when the face laughs the bones laugh. But when the face cries, even then the bones are still laughing. (Mishima, *Kindai* 25-26)

The mask (お面) is mentioned in passing, but plays an interesting role as mediatory between the face and the skeleton (骸骨). Though the mask is something durable, that can be passed from person to person and serve the same function, it does not suggest that the mask, or, by extension, art and Nō theater itself, belongs to a world that transcends death. Rather, the hardness and impersonality of the mask connects to the skeleton, and so to a transcendent world of death. We might think of this as a difference with Claudel; Claudel's characters exist against the backdrop of an eternal Christian world of life after death. Mishima suggests no such world in this scene: quite the opposite. Trying to divert Jirō's ideas, Beauty keeps flattering him and introducing new aspects of their life together. Yet even the revelation of their child displeases Jirō. Desperate,

Beauty even suggests killing the child to make Jirō happy. Of course, this does not bring him happiness either. Eventually, Beauty relents, and rather than seducing Jirō is subdued by him.

Beauty retires to the side of the stage, the chorus resumes, and three masked dancing girls appear. The interaction between the chorus and the dancing girls is the same as the between the chorus and Beauty.

踊子一 次郎さん・・・・次郎さん・・・・

合唱 踊れ！踊れ！踊れ！

踊子二 次郎さん・・・・次郎さん・・・・

合唱 踊れ！踊れ！踊れ！

踊子三 次郎さん・・・・次郎さん・・・・

合唱 踊れ！踊れ！踊れ！

(三人次郎を踊り誘はんとして果さず。次郎床に肘枕をせしままこれを眺める。

トド、三人の踊子は次郎を擁して座る)

First Dancing Girl: Jirō...Jirō...

Chorus: Dance! Dance! Dance!

Second Dancing Girl: Jirō...Jirō...

Chorus: Dance! Dance! Dance!

Third Dancing Girl : Jirō...Jirō...

Chorus: Dance! Dance! Dance!

The three beckon Jirō to dance without success. Jirō watches as he props himself up on his elbows. The three, captivating Jirō, sit down. (Mishima, Kindai 31)

The interaction between Jirō and the three is much the same as with Beauty. Their attempts to flatter and seduce Jirō are unsuccessful. Having failed to ignite Jirō's lust, the dancing girls and Beauty exit. Without choral accompaniment, a secretary enters. This begins the attempt to incite Jirō's greed. The secretary informs Jirō that he is the head of a large company. The phone rings. Jirō, with his usual equanimity, is unperturbed by a long conversation with the caller, whose identity and words stay concealed:

秘書 は。

(秘書眼鏡をかける。電話鳴る。秘書とりつぐ)

はあ、はあ、社長はおいでになります。(電話器を手で押へて) 例の大阪の浪花産業でございます。例の.....

次郎 (うるささうに) うん、うん、(電話器をとりあげて) はあ、私です.....はあ.....うん.....うん.....どうも.....いや.....はあ.....うん.....えへへ.....いや.....うん.....うん.....いや.....はあ.....はあ.....いや.....うん.....うん.....いや.....さよなら。(電話器をかける)

Secretary: Yes.

(The secretary puts his glasses on. The phone rings. The secretary answers.

Yes, yes. The Director is here. *(Covering the receiver with her hand)* It's from Naniwa Industries in Osaka. He...

Jirō: Uh huh, uh huh *(Taking the phone from the secretary)* Yes, it's me...yes...uh huh...uh...huh...sure...no...yes...uh huh...ahaha...no...uh huh...uh huh...no...yes...no...uh huh...uh huh...no...goodbye. *(He hangs up the phone)*

(Mishima, Kindai 35)

The secretary goes over Jirō's assets, expenses, and obligations. Halfway through their conversation, the chorus begins chanting, not a word, but a groan: *uoo* うおお. This time, Jirō notices the noise, but his secretary turns his attention back to his finances. As one would expect, Jirō has no interest in his business; he eventually decides to donate his fortune.

The final dream sequence features three “gentlemen,” doctors, and, intermittently, the chorus. Jirō had become a dictator, and he has now been deposed in a coup d'état. The group of gentlemen and doctors, led by a mask-wearing senior doctor, tries to get Jirō, lying on his deathbed, to drink poison and end his life. Jirō will not:

次郎 何だい、何だい、何ごとがはじまったの？おぢいさん。

老国手 われが元首の御臨終です。側近の方々の御参入を許可します。

(美女、三人の踊子、黒紗を被いでうつむきがちに登場。秘書登場。一同床のまはりに神妙に坐る)

次郎 をかしなあ。みんなどうしたの。なんだって急に黙っちやったんだらう。

おい。（踊子の一人をつづく）やあ、泣いてるね。何が悲しいんだい。へんなやつだなあ。

老国手 元首にさよならを申しませう。（一同平伏する）

次郎 またばかりにおとなしくなっちゃったもんだね。おい、僕の奥さん、百合の花はどうしたい。赤ん坊を殺してすまなかったな。

老国手 コップに水を

医師一 は。

老国手 このお薬をのみ下さい

次郎 なんだい、これは。

老国手 いさぎよく、ぐっと乾し下さい、みんなが御最期をおりさまを見ております。

次郎 いやだ、冗談ぢやないよ。僕、まだ一向に死にたくねえよ。

老国手 我儘を仰言らず、いさぎよく御最期をお逐げ下さい。

次郎 しつこいやつだな。死にたくないんたって云ったら。

Jirō: What on earth, what on earth, just what's going on, old man?

Senior Doctor: Our leader is in his final hours. Close ones are permitted to gather around.

Beauty and the three dancing girls, wearing black veils, appear. The secretary appears.

All meekly sit around the bed.

Jirō: Strange. What are you all doing? Why has everyone suddenly gone quiet. Oi!
(*Poking one of the dancing girls*) Hey, you're crying, aren't you? What's so sad? Weird people!

Senior Doctor: Let us all bid farewell to our leader. (*They all fall prostrate*)

Jirō: Gah, more meek stupidity. Oi, my wife and lily blossom? I'm sorry I killed our child.

Senior Doctor: A cup of water.

First Doctor: Right away.

Senior Doctor: Please drink this medicine.

Jirō: What the hell?

Senior Doctor: Graciously drain this cup as everyone watches you in your final state.

Jirō: No way, this isn't a joke! I don't want to die yet!

Senior Doctor: Without selfish complaints, come to your last moments.

Jirō: Persistent fool! I said I don't want to die! (Mishima, *Kindai* 46-47)

Even in the English translation, we note the difference in register between that of Jirō's speech and that of the spirits. This is not a difference between modern speech and classical Nō speech. The distinction is purely that between respectful speech (*keigo*) and rude speech. We could say that Mishima is merely transferring the denouement of the classical Nō to modern times, and the comedy of the piece is Jirō's inability to assume the dignity befitting a dying statesman. Yet all of the action within the dream assumes a different significance after Jirō refuses suicide. Everyone exits. Only Jirō and the senior doctor remain. The doctor reveals the origin of Jirō's visions:

老国手 いいかね、次郎、わしはあなたに納得させるよ。しづかにおきき。わしらは邯鄲の里の精霊だ。な、それはあんたも多分御承知だ。この枕で寝たものは、悟りをひらかねばならぬ定めになってをる。むかしは粟のおだいの炊けるあひだに一生の夢を見て、現世のはかなさを悟ったわけだ。今もさうだ。夢を見てゐるあひだ、みんな徒順にすなほに生涯を生きた。本当に行きたのだよ。だから夢をさめぎにはその一生のはかさをいやさらに身にしませるためにだ。帝王となった夢のなかで不老長寿の薬をすすめたもんだ。それがわしの役目だ。それなのに、あんたは何だ。はじめからあんたは生きようとしなないぢやないか。あんたは素直さを欠いてをる。あんたは夢のなかでも、人生に全部肱鉄をくらはした。わしは一部始終を見てをつたよ。

次郎 だって、おぢいさん、夢の中でだって僕たちは自由です。生きようとしたって生きまいとしたって、あなたの知ったことぢやないか。

Senior Doctor: Well now, Jirō, I'm going to make you understand. Listen well. I am a spirit from the village of Kantan. You probably already know that. When you sleep on this pillow, you must necessarily achieve enlightenment. Long ago, during the time it takes to cook millet, one man saw all of his life flash by in a dream. This was done to enlighten him of the truth of this world. Even now the same [event] happens. While dreaming, everyone passively and meekly lives an entire life. They really live. To make the experience truly impressive, right before they wake, we have them become the ruler of a country and drink medicine to give them eternal life. My role is to carry that out. But

what exactly are you? Did you not want to live from the start? You lack obedience. Even though you're in the middle of a dream, you rebuff everything. I've been watching the whole time.

Jirō: So what, old man? If we're in the middle of a dream then we're free to do whatever we want, aren't we? What do you know about living and not living? (Mishima, *Kindai* 47-48)

After reiterating that, however uninterested he is in life, he wishes to live, Jirō wakes. Kiku enters. Worried that he will desert her as did her husband, she grows anxious. Jirō tells her to abandon all hope that her husband will return. At the same time, he assures her that he will stay with her. The two look out at the garden, where the flowers bloom for the first time since Kiku's husband departed.

3.6 Claudel's *Le Soulier de Satin*

Claudel's *Soulier* is not an adaptation of *Kantan*. Only one scene develops the themes and techniques Claudel discovered in the original *Nō*. Nonetheless, the scene provides several points of comparison with Mishima's *Kantan*.

Divided into four "days" or *journées* after the fashion of Spanish *autos*, *Soulier* shows the impossible love of Dona Prouhèze and Don Rodrigue. After falling in love at first sight, the two are separated for more than ten years by a series of unfortunate circumstances. Rodrigue is in Panama, Prouhèze in Northern Africa. Despairing, in *Journée III, Scene VIII* Prouhèze receives a visit in her sleep from her guardian angel. The scene commences with Prouhèze watching "the blue image of the terrestrial globe" revolve behind her. The image is projected on a screen placed

on the bottom of the stage. The globe keeps turning until “on the horizon of the extreme curve begins to appear the long sinuous line of the Isthmus of Panama behind which starts to shimmer the waters of another ocean” (Claudel, *Soulier* 183). Quickly, the image of Panama passes from the screen, and boundless ocean returns. From behind the screen, Rodrigue calls Prouhèze’s name twice. Twice she responds but receives no other reply. Continuing to call after Rodrigue, Prouhèze expresses her wish to become pure spirit and fuse with Rodrigue. Still, no response comes from behind the screen.

The globe on the screen turns again, and the Japanese archipelago appears. Prouhèze, who has never seen the islands, is taken aback:

DONA PROUHÈZE.— [...] Quelles sont ces Iles là-bas pareilles à des nuages immobiles et que leur forme, leurs clefs, leurs entailles, leurs gorges, rendent pareilles à des instruments de musique pour un mystérieux concert à la fois assemblés et disjoints ? J’entends la mer sans fin qui brise sur ces rivages éternels ! Près d’un poteau planté dans la grève je vois un escalier de pierre qui monte.

Les nuages lents à s’écarter, le rideau des pluies,
Permettent à peine de distinguer de temps en temps des montagnes atramenteuses, une cascade aux arbres mélancoliques, le repli de noires forêts sur lesquelles tout à coup s’arrête un rayon accusateur !

A la torche de la lune répond le reflet des feux souterrains et le tambour sous un toit de paille s’unit à la flûte perçante.

Que signifient aussi par moments ces nuages de fleurs où tout disparaît ? l’or inouï de cette consommation annuelle avant que la neige descende ?

Par-dessus les montagnes et les forêts il y a un grand Ange blanc qui regarde la mer.

La grande Ile du Japon peu à peu s'anime et prend la forme d'un de ces Gardiens en armure sombre que l'on voit à Nara.

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Ne me reconnais-tu pas ?

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Je ne sais. Je ne vois qu'une forme incertaine comme une ombre dans le brouillard.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—What are these islands like immobile clouds, the form, the cliffs, the gashes, and the gorges of which rend them like musical instruments for a mysterious concert at once cohesive and disjointed?

I hear the illimitable sea that breaks against these eternal banks!

Close to a post planted in the shore I see a stone staircase that rises.

Clouds slow to separate, the curtain of rain,

Permitting to barely distinguish from time to time atramental mountains, a cascade of melancholy trees, the fold of black forests on which all of a sudden stops an accusatory ray of sunlight.

To the torch of the moon responds the reflection of underground fires and the drum on a roof of straw unifies with the piercing flute.

What signify these clouds of flowers where at times everything disappears? The unheard gold of this annual consummation before the snow descends?

Above the mountains and the forests, there is a great white angel who watches the sea.

The great Island of Japan little by little becomes alive and takes the form of one of these Guardians equipped with dark armor that one sees at Nara.

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL: Do you not recognize me?

DONA PROUHÈZE: I don't know. I see nothing but an uncertain form like a shadow in fog. (Claudel, *Th.* 184-185)

We find little here that overlaps with Mishima. Among the similarities, we note the dream-vision in which both Prouhèze and Jirō come across spectral beings. The appearance of the guardian angel does resemble the formalized masked figures that we encounter in Mishima's *Kantan*. Yet, crucially, the angel does not wear a mask, which, in the context of a Nō adaptation, is a greater departure than Mishima has made. On the other hand, the angel and Prouhèze engage in a dialogue on the meaning of Prouhèze's life and life in general. Though Prouhèze and Jirō are distinct in their opinions on life, like Mishima Claudel takes this theme directly from the original *Kantan*.

Among the distinctions between Claudel and Mishima's adaptations, the ways in which the human and the spiritual interact is notable. Whereas the spirits are subservient towards Jirō, the guardian angel has clear authority over Prouhèze:

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Il est donc vrai que je vais mourir ?

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Et qui sait si tu n'es pas morte déjà ? D'où te viendraient autrement cette indifférence au lieu, cette impuissance au poids ?

Si près de la frontière, qui sait de quel côté il est en mon pouvoir de te faire à mon gré par jeu passer et repasser ?

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Où suis-je et où-es tu ?

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Ensemble et séparés. Loin de toi et avec toi.

Mais pour te faire pénétrer cette union du temps avec ce qui n'est pas le temps, de la distance avec ce qui n'est pas l'espace, d'un mouvement avec un autre mouvement, il me faudrait cette musique que tes oreilles encore ne sont pas capables de supporter.

Où dis-tu qu'est le parfum ? *où* diras-tu qu'est le son ? Entre le parfum et le son quelle est la frontière commune ? Ils existent en même temps. Et moi j'existe avec toi.

Écoute-moi qui existe. Laisse-toi persuader par ces eaux peu à peu qui te délient.

Abandonne cette terre que tu crois solide et qui n'est que captive.

Un mélange fragile à chaque seconde palpitée de l'être avec le néant.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Ah ! quand tu parles, de nouveau je ressens au fond de moi le fil ! la traction de ce désir rectiligne au rebours du flot dont j'ai tant de fois éprouvé la reprise et la détente.

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Le pêcheur amène sa prise du fleuve vers la terre. Mais moi, c'est vers ces eaux que j'habite que métier m'est de ramener ce poisson qui leur appartient.

DONA PROUHÈZE: Is it true that I am going to die?

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Who knows whether you are not dead already? From where else would come this indifference to place, this impotence of body?

So close to the frontier, who knows from which side I take my power to make you pass and pass again [over the frontier] as I like?

DONA PROUHÈZE: Where am I and where are you?

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Together and separate. Far from you and with you.

But in order to make this union of time and not-time, of distance and not-space, of one movement and another movement penetrate you, I have need of this music of which your ears are not yet capable of supporting.

Where would you say is fragrance? *Where* would you say is sound? Between fragrance and sound what is the common frontier? They exist in the same moment. And I exist with you.

Listen to me who exists. Allow yourself to be persuaded by these waters that little by little unbind you. Abandon this earth that you believe solid and that is no more than captive.

A fragile mélange of being and nothingness that every second palpitates.

DONA PROUHÈZE: Ah! When you speak, I once again feel the string at the bottom of myself! The traction of this rectilinear desire that going against the waves that I have so many times tested the flow and the ebb.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: The fisherman leads his catch from the river to the land. But I, I take back towards the water in which I inhabit this fish that belongs there. (C Claudel, *Th.* 186).

We notice that Prouhèze and her guardian angel speak in the same register. The gap between formal and informal speech we find in Mishima's play is absent. Both the angel and Prouhèze use the familiar second person 'tu' to address one another. In one sense, the two are close. But in another sense, like a fisherman with a hooked fish the angel is only toying with Prouhèze.

Yet the scene is concerned with the idea of difference, the difference between proximity and distance, perfume and sound, being and nothingness, and the “frontier” between all of these things. Even though the intervention of the guardian angel suggests a mingling of this world and the spiritual world, the dialogue throws into relief the gaps between the two: the power of the scene comes from the fact that the spiritual world, the world of being and eternal life, is not the world that Prouhèze and Rodrigue currently inhabit. The frontiers or gray areas between opposites, of which the dream is one such area between this world and the next, exist to make the oppositional categories more strongly felt. This introduces a way of conceiving the relations between the mundane and the spiritual that is not present in the original *Kantan* or in Mishima’s *Kantan*. I will develop this further in the next section.

Divergences further appear in the characterization of the protagonists. Whereas Jirō is apathetic towards everything, Prouhèze is capable of great passion for Rodrigue. Her passion in turn fuels her desire to die in order to overcome the physical and temporal distance keeping her and Rodrigue apart. Because life holds no mystique for Jirō, he finds no attraction in death, either; because Prouhèze has a great desire to live, she also has a desire to die. To ensure Prouhèze accepts death, the angel taunts her with glimpses of Rodrigue. To use Claudel’s metaphor, the angel allows his fishing line to slacken and Prouhèze to return to the shore. Prouhèze shouts after him again, “Rodrigue, I am yours!” The angel allows Rodrigue to hear the semblance of Prouhèze’s voice, but the voice is indistinct and communication between the two cannot be established (Claudel, *Soulier* 187-188). The angel likens Rodrigue to an animal pacing in a cage, his enclosure being the walls of the Panamian city from which he cannot depart, and he continues to insinuate that Prouhèze is the cause of Rodrigue’s suffering.

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Mais quoi, ce Rodrigue, mon ennemi, qui me retient que je ne le frappe ? Ce n'est point le fil seulement que ma main sait manier, mais le trident.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Et moi je le cacherai, si fort entre mes bras que tu ne le verras plus.

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Tu ne lui fais que du mal.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Mais lui me dit chaque nuit autre chose.

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Qu'est-ce qu'il dit ?

DONA PROUHÈZE.—C'est un secret entre nous.

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Tes larmes suffisent à le révéler.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Je suis Agar dans le désert ! Sans mains, sans yeux, il y a quelqu'un qui m'a rejointe amèrement dans le désert !

C'est le désir qui étreint le désespoir ! C'est l'Afrique par-dessus la mer qui épouse les terres empoisonnées du Mexique !

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Sœur, il nous faut apprendre passage vers des climats plus heureux.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: But what is stopping me from striking him, this Rodrigue, my enemy? My hands are adept at wielding not only the line, but also the trident.

DONA PROUHÈZE: I would hide him so tightly between my arms that you would not see him anymore.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: You cause him nothing but pain.

DONA PROUHÈZE: But every night he tells me something else.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: What does he say?

DONA PROUHÈZE: It's a secret between us.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Your tears suffice to reveal it.

DONA PROUHÈZE: I am Agar in the desert! Without hands, without eyes, is there someone who will join me bitterly in the desert?

Desire leads to despair! Africa beyond the sea marries the poisoned lands of Mexico!

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Sister, we must learn of a passage to happier climates. (C Claudel, *Th.* 189)

The anguish this causes her pulls her back towards the guardian angel—towards the desire to die. Notably, her acceptance of death stems from the angel's presentation of death as achievement of a perfect state. The soul, the angel asserts, breaks free from the finitude and inevitable corruption of the body. Thus, whereas in the original *Kantan* success, pleasure, and human life reveal themselves as hollow, Claudel's *Soulier* suggests that death is but the attainment of that which cannot be achieved in life.

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—C'est en lui que tu étais nécessaire.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—O parole bien douce à entendre ! laisse-moi la répéter après toi !
eh quoi ! je lui étais nécessaire ?

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Non point cette vilaine et disgracieuse créature au bout de ma
ligne, non point ce triste poisson.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Laquelle alors ?

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Prouhèze, ma sœur, cette enfant de Dieu dans la lumière que je
salue.

Cette Prouhèze que voient les Anges, c'est celle-là sans le savoir qu'il regarde, c'est celle-là qu tu as à faire afin de la lui donner.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Et ce sera la même Prouhèze ?

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Une Prouhèze pour toujours belle que ne détruit pas la mort.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Toujours belle ?

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Une Prouhèze toujours belle.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Il m'aimera toujours ?

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Ce qui te rend si belle ne peut mourir

Ce qui fait qu'il t'aime ne peut mourir.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Je serai à lui pour toujours dans mon âme et dans mon corps ?

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Il nous faut laisser le corps en arrière quelque peu.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Eh quoi ! il ne connaîtra point ce goût que j'ai ?

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—C'est l'âme qui fait le corps.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Comment donc l'a-t-elle fait mortel ?

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—C'est le péché qui l'a fait mortel.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—C'était beau d'être pour lui une femme.

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Et moi je ferai de toi une étoile.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Une étoile ! c'est le nom dont il m'appelle toujours dans la nuit.

Et mon cœur tressaillait profondément de l'entendre.

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—N'as-tu donc pas toujours été comme une étoile pour lui ?

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Séparée !

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Conductrice.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—La voice qui s'éteint sur terre.

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—je rallumerai dans le ciel.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Comment brilleraï-je qui suis aveugle.

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Dieu soufflera sur toi.

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Je ne suis qu'un tison sous la cendre.

L'ANGE GARDIEN.—Mais moi je ferai de toi une étoile flamboyante dans le souffle du Saint-Esprit !

DONA PROUHÈZE.—Adieu donc ici-bas ! adieu, adieu, mon bien-aimé ! Rodrigue, Rodrigue là-bas, adieu pour toujours !

GUARDIAN ANGEL: It's in him that you were necessary.

DONA PROUHÈZE: O, word so sweet to hear! Let me repeat it after you! So! I was necessary to him?

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Not this ugly and disgraceful creature at the end of my line, not this sad fish.

DONA PROUHÈZE: Which, then?

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Prouhèze, my sister, this child in the light of God whom I hail. This Prouhèze who sees the angels, it's her whom he watches without knowing, and it's her whom you have to end up giving him.

DONA PROUHÈZE: And this will be the same Prouhèze?

GUARDIAN ANGEL: A Prouhèze forever whom death cannot destroy.

DONA PROUHÈZE: Forever beautiful?

GUARDIAN ANGEL: A Prouhèze forever beautiful.

DONA PROUHÈZE: He will love me forever?

GUARDIAN ANGEL: That which rends you so beautiful cannot die. That which makes him love you cannot die.

DONA PROUHÈZE: I will be his forever in my soul and in my body?

GUARDIAN ANGEL: We need to leave the body behind a little.

DONA PROUHÈZE: What! He will not know this delight [*goût*] that I am?

GUARDIAN ANGEL: It is the soul that makes the body.

DONA PROUHÈZE: How did it make the body mortal?

GUARDIAN ANGEL: It is sin that made it mortal.

DONA PROUHÈZE: How good it was to be for him a woman.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: And I will make of you a star.

DONA PROUHÈZE: A star! That's the name by which he always calls me at night.

And my heart shivers profoundly when I hear it.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Have you therefore not always been like a star for him.

DONA PROUHÈZE: Separated!

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Conductor.

DONA PROUHÈZE: That which is extinguished on earth.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: I re-illuminate in the sky.

DONA PROUHÈZE: How will I shine if I am blind?

GUARDIAN ANGEL: God will breathe on you.

DONA PROUHÈZE: I am no more than a brand under the ashes.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: But I will make of you a flaming star in the breath of the Holy Spirit!

DONA PROUHÈZE: Goodbye therefore to this down here! Goodbye, goodbye, my beloved! Rodrigue, Rodrigue down here, goodbye forever! (Claudel, *Th.* 191-192)

As I will discuss in detail in the next section, there is deep-level dissimilarity between Claudel's *Soulier* and the original *Kantan*, for even though both conclude with the rejection of the earthly, the payoff for Rosei is different from the benefit Prouhèze receives.¹⁰⁴ The angel convinces Prouhèze that, in death, she can achieve the union with Rodrigue that currently eludes her. Death is a means for her to achieve eternal beauty, satisfaction, and life. There is, certainly, the idea of enlightenment present in Claudel's drama: Prouhèze asks how she can shine when she is blind, and the angel suggests that God's breath will grant her spiritual vision. But it is necessary for Prouhèze to quit "ici-bas" and Rodrigue "là-bas" and enter into the other world, the "other side of the veil" as the angel calls it (192), in order to achieve enlightenment. This is quite different from Rosei who returns enlightened from his dream and remains indefinitely in the mundane world in which he went to sleep. Because Claudel has translated the scenario of *Kantan* into his own constellation of belief, the significance of the notion of the ephemerality of life and of the spirit that intervenes in the plot are quite different in his adaptation.

3.7 Ontology and the Plays

Having given a detailed overview of Claudel and Mishima's adaptations of *Kantan*, I will now compare them according to the ontologies according to which they are structured. My point will

¹⁰⁴ Thus Nishino: "Ainsi les deux rêves sont divergents: l'un débouche sur une perspective bouddhique de ce monde terrestre, alors que l'autre touche à la théologie chrétienne du salut après la mort" [Therefore, the two dreams diverge: the one takes a Buddhist perspective of this terrestrial world, while the other follows the belief of Christian theology in salvation after death] (*Synthèse* 520). In the next section, I will be going beyond Nishino by considering how these two fundamentally different visions can intersect.

be that in order to make comparison between the two plays, we need to draw on some aspects of the plays while ignoring others. There is nothing *prima facie* surprising about this. Were we able to show total correspondence between two things, we would have identity not similarity. We also must remember that we can have two different descriptions of the same thing without having two competing descriptions. But my point is somewhat different. I mean to show that we need to suppress deep-level differences between the two plays in order to make a convincing argument for their similarity. The superficial correspondences *supervene* on the deep differences; that means we cannot deal with the one without accounting for the other.

I will focus one category: that of ghost or spirit. I will show that although Claudel, Mishima, and the author of the original *Kantan* bear superficial similarities to one another in the way they treat the category, they differ at a deep ontological level. Concomitantly, occasionally the three differ at a superficial level but agree at a deeper one. Understanding the ways in which these surface and deep strata interact across the three plays will in turn allow us better to map the connections between the plays, and to reveal what we assert when we assert ‘closeness’ between literary works from different times and languages.

3.8 Fundamental Structure of Reality in the Plays

Each of the critics discussed focus on Mishima’s departure from and inevitable return to the Japanese tradition. It is worth noting that regarding Mishima’s work as a whole the prevailing critical paradigm in Japan and in the West is “to interpret Mishima’s works in light of Western aesthetics, specifically Western modernist influences” (Endo 2). Endo divides the critical corpus into three categories. Aside from this “dominant” critical approach, there is an approach that “read[s] Mishima’s works in the context of Japanese and Chinese classical literature (Donald

Keene, David Pollack),” which Endo argues “has served to neutralize the political nature of [Mishima’s] works” (2). Endo says that the “third approach employs a comparative study between Mishima’s controversial activities and his literary works in order to dig out the ‘real’ meaning of his works and death (Henry Scott-Stokes; John Nathan)” (2).

Ultimately, the best indicator of Mishima’s worldview at the time of his experiments with Nō is the original afterword to *Kindai nogaku*. Critics such as Masaki Dōmoto have noted the paradox of a “modern Nō,” with Dōmoto suggesting that Mishima must have been “smirking” [笑み] as he took up the project (165). Yet the notion of a modern Nō is not necessarily paradoxical. In the afterword to *Kindai nōgaku*, Donald Keene discusses that Mishima’s intention was to take the “exposed metaphysical themes” of classical Nō and apply them to modern situations (257). The problem that Mishima had to overcome, writes Keene, is the different beliefs of modern audiences and the medieval audiences of classical Nō. For the medieval spectator, ghosts [幽霊 *yurei*] were as real as the actors of the Nō performance; in other words, ghosts and living people were both part of the folk ontology of the average medieval Japanese person (Keene 255). The modern viewer, however, does not believe in ghosts, and the dramatist who presents a specter onstage cannot dupe the twentieth-century audience into believing in the reality of ghosts (Keene 256), for in modern folk ontology ghosts simply do not exist, at least not at the actual world. If Mishima wants to preserve the “metaphysical” structure of classical Nō, he needs to accommodate those entities that are no longer present in his modern folk ontology. Keene notes that Mishima drew “inspiration” from Greek theater. Just as European writers since at least the Renaissance have drawn upon Greek theater without necessarily sharing the world view of Sophocles and Euripides, so Mishima could adapt Nō for modern Japanese audiences without possessing the ontology of Zeami (Keene 256). So Keene

asserts that both Mishima and whoever views the modern Nō plays can entertain medieval ideas without actually believing in them. We could say, then, that the haunting and often pessimistic ideas that run through classical Nō appealed to Mishima. But we cannot say that Mishima held the exact same ideas.

This gives us a tripartite division. Spirits appear in each play. The obvious difference between them is that the spirits of *Kantan*, both the original and Mishima's, are Japanese Buddhist whereas the angel of Claudel's *Soulier* is Christian. This is a trivial difference. The more pressing concern is finding that which allows us to state that all of these things, the specters contained within the Pillow of *Kantan* and the guardian angel, all belong to the same meta-category of 'spirit.' By meta-category, I mean a critical category part of a higher-level ontology that encompasses both Claudel's Christian ontology and the Buddhist ontologies of Mishima and the medieval author of *Kantan*, or rather the Buddhist ontology of the medieval Nō and Mishima's pseudo-Buddhist ontology. In using this meta-category, we have a good idea of what we are talking about—we know we are dealing with some sort of immaterial being that is not alive but that is real, if only as a possible figure—but we need to be wary of the deep divisions between each conceptualization of this category.

This means that we need to have a way of conceptualizing degrees of closeness within the category of 'spirit.' I want to suggest that we should understand 'spirit' as a vague predicate. How does that work? Let's go back to Smith's way of dealing with vague predicates. Smith promotes using "a three-place relation $x \overset{F}{\underset{z}{\leq}} y$: 'x is at least as close to z as y is, in F-relevant respects'" (143). This is "relative closeness," which helps us conceive of relations among different entities that instantiate a vague predicate without asserting sharp cut-offs between each entity. That helps us to prevent offending our sense of psychological reality, e.g. by saying that a

small difference in color shade or in height is the difference between a blue shade and a green one or between a short man and a tall one. In terms of our three different plays, we can simply assign each a variable, say by making *Soulier* *x*, *Kantan* *z*, and Mishima's *Kantan* *y*.¹⁰⁵ What is our '*F*'? It is simply that concept of *spirit*. But, of course, it cannot be the spirit of our meta-category. Rather, *F* here is that conception of 'spirit' that we find in the original *Kantan*. How we then define that concept is itself up for grabs, as it depends on our interests. I have been suggesting that we should consider concepts like this in terms of the deep-level historical grounding of the original *Kantan*—the Buddhist substructure of the play. That means that how we conceive of 'spirit' would depend both on the representation of ghosts in *Kantan* and in the Buddhist (and perhaps Shinto) ideas that define the era in which the *Nō* was produced, though how much we take into consideration depends upon how well the play evinces such influence. And that would allow us to consider how 'close' Claudel's and Mishima's takes on the notion of 'spirit' in their adaptations of *Kantan* are to that of the original.

The obstacle to surmount is how we *weigh* each component that makes up the different concepts of 'spirit.' Surely some are more important and thus have more weight. For example, Claudel's notion of the spiritual world bears some similarity to that of the original *Kantan* since both *Soulier* and the classical *Nō* promote the idea that this world is somehow lacking, or that there is a grander scheme of things in which this world is an insignificant part. Surely this differs considerably from the concept we find in Mishima's more nihilistic take. But Claudel's notion of 'spirit' is irreducibly Christian, whereas Mishima's is ostensibly Buddhist, even *if* Mishima himself does not believe in the reality of what he is representing! If we take the Christian aspect of Claudel's play seriously, then we bring in a great deal of ontological baggage that removes

¹⁰⁵ Our '*y*' here could also be an unrelated play that serves to ground the comparison, i.e. a non-*Nō* play that brings forth the similarities between the *Nō* cohort.

Soulier from the world-view of both *Kantans*. Whatever we do, taking seriously the notion of a ternary relation and degrees of closeness [on the interval [0,1]] helps to clarify what we are doing in making comparisons and how our comparands relate to one another. More than that, it helps us to break free from the simplistic assertion that everything is translatable or nothing is translatable, two things are either identical or non-identical. It helps us, that is to say, grasp not only the grand but also minute differences that exist between different literary works, and that determine the relations between the various pieces of comparative and world literature.

That sounds compelling, but what happens once we try to map degrees? Let us continue to say that the term we are dealing with is “supernatural” or “ghostly.” I have already detailed some of the ways in which the supernatural figures differ between the three versions. But might the fact that they are there at all be significant? I will focus only on the effect the supernatural realm has on the actual world. I mentioned that in Mishima the flowers withered after the departure of Kiku’s husband and bloomed again sometime during Jirō’s dream or his awakening. This suggests that the supernatural world is not separate in this *Kantan* from the 1950s Tokyo in which Kiku and Jirō live. Even if Jirō remained apathetic throughout the dream, his desire to live, his rejection of the poison offered to him by the ghosts, appears to have had some effect on the actual world. Therefore, we can say that spirits are actual in the world of Mishima’s *Kantan*, much as they are in the original.

The same is true, I think, in Claudel, but with important differences that cast the comparison into doubt. Of course, the obvious effect of the angel’s apparition in Prouhèze’s dream is her death. But the choice is Prouhèze’s: Prouhèze is convinced to end her life, and she herself takes it. This is not quite the manipulation of the non-human in the actual world by a supernatural party we find in Mishima. Indeed, the effect is a Christian one: Prouhèze, in

accepting death, ‘saves’ Rodrigue and becomes an ‘eternal star’ for him, a guiding force in imitation of Christ. It is here that Claudel’s Catholic vision becomes especially important; our only indication that the angel is real is the Catholic ontology to which Claudel subscribes. Everything is linked, everything has a purpose, even hardship and death, in the grand plan of God. Claudel’s adaptation of Nō transfers the significance of the action into his own constellation of Catholic beliefs, and he demands that we entertain his vision of the world in order to make ‘real’ the spiritual elements of his drama in a way that Mishima, with that final and stark blossoming of the flowers in Kiku’s garden, does not.

A final consideration: I have been talking about the supernatural in relation only to Claudel and Mishima, but it is worth passing by the classical Nō again. I can do justice neither to the complexity of medieval Buddhism in Japan nor the influence of the various schools on Nō theater and the critical writings of Zeami. But we can say that the supernatural elements fit differently into the ontology of medieval Japan in a way foreign to either of our modern versions. This is perhaps the reason for which the mūgen Nō classification is a modern one; the presence or absence of the supernatural takes on an exaggerated importance in the modern era after that original medieval understanding of the world was lost.

We might then map degrees between the two adaptations, considering how they relate to one another in terms of their conception of the supernatural. Whether we consider Claudel’s Catholic ontology mutually intelligible with Mishima’s indeterminate one is another matter. I have suggested elsewhere that such different ontologies do not access one another. But it seems like this might be a viable option. However, the very concept of the supernatural has a different place in the medieval Buddhist ontology of the original *Kantan*. Thus it seems that, as in the case of the various props mentioned earlier, degrees might suggest a similarity or even identity

between the world of the original *Kantan*, its constellation of beliefs, and those of the twentieth-century adaptation. That, I think, would obscure rather than illuminate the texts.

Unfortunately, then, a literal application of degrees might not be helpful for East-West comparison; we need first to fix the constellation of belief, and then determine whether there is mutual intelligibility between these constellations. But whatever the case, perhaps if philosophical approaches to vagueness can teach us anything, and I would like to think they have much to teach us, it is just that idea that the components of a literary work in translation exist in a larger constellation. In comparing plays East and West, we should, I think, always consider how the significance of all that passes in the text supervenes on deep-level ontological differences; we can heuristically borrow from philosophical approaches to vagueness to help us to understand just what happens to literary works in their translation across time, space, and into new constellations of belief.

Of particular importance is the gap that exists not only between “East” and “West” but “East” and “East.” There is nothing shocking in finding that Claudel, a French Catholic writing in the early twentieth century, deformed Japanese ideas in order to make them fit in his constellation of belief. From Pinguet and Bush to Milet-Gérard and Nishino, Claudel scholars have remarked this deformation so often that it is almost a cliché. Yet Mishima is a more interesting case, for, being himself Japanese, and having been exposed since childhood to traditional Japanese arts including Nō, he should be as well placed as anyone to understand Nō on its own terms; and he did understand Nō well, but that does not stop his *Kantan* from belonging to a different ontology from that of the original. I have suggested that the reason for Mishima’s distance from the original *Kantan* is both his time of writing and his range of interests. Even were he, like the writer or the audience members of the original *Kantan*, a

Buddhist with a medieval world view, capable of believing in ghosts and other supernatural entities as actual, the significance of his beliefs would differ from those of the medieval cohort simply by virtue of him believing in all of these things *despite* living in the mid-twentieth century. That is not to make a value judgment about the correctness or otherwise of medieval Japanese beliefs. It is only to say that the field, or to use the standard metaphor, constellation, in which those beliefs appeared in the Muromachi period necessarily cannot be replicated in the Shōwa as a subset of possible beliefs of the totality of beliefs of that era, whatever such a totality might look like. No more am I claiming that every person in the Muromachi or the Shōwa period held the same beliefs; differences in class, education, and experience, among other things, would affect what is believed and what is thought possible. What I am claiming is that the range of possibilities is different, and unequivocally so. The oppositional categories of, say, realism, scientific rationality, or Christianity, did not exist for the Muromachi person as they did for Mishima in 1950. We could say the same about Claudel; “Japan” and all of the senses that that noun held for Claudel did not exist in the constellation of belief of anyone writing centuries before him in France, much less for Zeami and other writers of classical Nō.

If a play like *Kantan* is intelligible across time and space but changes in aspect, what are we to understand it as? I suggested at the outset that entities in East-West literature are often images of the originals formed in the process of comparison between “East” and “West.” This definition, I think, works well for *Soulier* and the *shinsaku nō Kantan*. But what if Mishima and Claudel were put into dialogue in 1951 and began speaking about *Kantan*? What makes it so that both of them are speaking about the same thing, if their comprehension of it is different, and Claudel is speaking of something he might have witnessed but only could have read in translation? Are we to say that what Claudel means by ‘*Kantan*’ is something different from

what Mishima means? Or, more importantly, that what we as critics mean is something different from what is meant, in this case or in a multitude of others, by the writers we study?

The difficulty arises because *Kantan* seems to be both modally plastic and temporally plastic. The truth value of a modally plastic assertion varies depending on small changes in the situation in which it is uttered; that of a temporally plastic one varies across time.¹⁰⁶ For instance, ‘spirit’ is modally plastic since the properties and relations it expresses, in our critical metalanguage, change depending on the context in which we embed the term, be that context Claudel’s, Mishima’s, or Zeami’s. We map it to different admissible sets of possible worlds in each case. But our own metalanguage is not itself outside of time. Were we to get a new set of information telling us that, in fact, Zeami and other writers of classical Nō were in fact familiar with Christianity and Aristotle’s *Poetics*, our use of the word ‘spirit’ would change. This is because we would embed it in a new context, the updated constellation of belief for the writer of Nō plays in Muromachi Japan. The same is true not just in the critical metalanguage but in the “regular” languages themselves. Mishima’s *yūrei* 幽霊 means something different for him than it would have meant for an earlier writer, say one from the Tokugawa whose only knowledge of Western ideas could have come through the Dutch materials that made their way into Japan during its period of isolation. Temporal plasticity seems to present us with an altogether more difficult situation than modal plasticity, since it is easy to imagine lines between the ontologies of different cultures existing in different spaces of the globe but more difficult to imagine competing ontologies springing up in the same space at different times. The reason is that we are inclined to believe that there was a precise moment at which one ontology (a medieval one)

¹⁰⁶ This discussion of modally and temporally plastic terms and assertions and the subsequent consideration of how to deal with them relies on the work of Cian Dorr and John Hawthorne. See Dorr and Hawthorne (2014).

ceases and another (a modern one) begins. But that also sounds strange, as we generally think of cultural change as something gradual, even in remarkable cases like the Japanese one of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And if two competing ontologies exist in a single culture, we begin to wonder what “culture” could mean. It begins to look like dangerously opaque.

There is no easy way out of this impasse. At least there is no way that I can see to get rid of the imprecision surrounding our terms, be they modally or temporally plastic. Terms like ‘spirit’ will shift in meaning depending on the contrast class that we use to fix them; Claudel’s *Soulier* is not only a Christian vision of a Japanese scenario but also a Christian vision in spite of a Japanese scenario. This sounds evident enough, but the significance of that assertion becomes clearer once we use Mishima’s *Kantan* to fix the boundaries of Claudel’s work, as Mishima’s interpretation shows the possibilities that are absent from Claudel’s rendering and vice-versa. The contrast shows that Mishima’s version, strange as it may be to the medieval vision of the original, occupies a space that is more indeterminate than is Claudel’s. This shows that Mishima’s *Kantan* is *relatively close* to the classical *Kantan*, but not absolutely. Relative closeness, as the result of our ternary relation, arises in contrast, and therefore cannot be deemed an intrinsic property of Mishima’s play. Claudel’s interpretation could itself be relatively close depending on the contrast used to fix it. What we deal with in East-West literature are these entities that emerge in comparison—these images.

Since there is no fact of the matter according to which plays like *Kantan* and *Soulier* are definitely classifiable as certain entities, they are vague. Certainly, some comparisons, some contrast classes, some terms of comparison are better than others. The three *Kantans*, as we might call them, work in this case, as does the category of ‘spirit’ as the shared term of

comparison. However, another comparison focusing on masks might work just as well. We might then compare one of Yeats' "Irish Noh" plays with Mishima's *Kantan*, and perhaps triangulate them with another classical Nō that we think uses masks in a similar—or interestingly dissimilar—way. What is salient in the comparison depends on the contrast class with which we have to work.

So ends the neatest triangulation of this dissertation. In the next chapter, the comparison will fan out to encompass entire countries—France and Japan—as we look at the poetry of Kuki Shūzō and Paul Claudel written in the 1920s as each writer sojourned in the other's homeland. If Mishima's ontology was indeterminate, Kuki's is fully formed and markedly in opposition to Claudel's. How these competing ontologies affect the presentation of France and Japan and French and Japanese literature will be the subject of discussion, and how we are to understand comparisons separated by language but occurring at the same time and on the same themes will become this thesis' chief interest.

Chapter IV: Paul Claudel and Kuki Shūzō in the 1920s: France, Japan, and the World

In 1929 the Japanese philosopher and poet Kuki Shūzō (1888-1941) travelled to Washington D.C. to pay a visit to the French Ambassador to the United States, the dramatist and poet Paul Claudel. After eight years of study in France and Germany, during which time he befriended the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and took as his language instructor the young French thinker Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Kuki was returning to Japan to take up a position at the Imperial University of Kyoto at the behest of the eminent founder of the so-called Kyoto School of philosophy, Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945). Claudel himself had only been appointed ambassador to the United States in 1927. For six years before that, he had served as ambassador to Japan, and had arrived in Tokyo the very year that Kuki departed for Europe. Though we do not know what caused Kuki to go out of his way to see Claudel in Washington, the meeting marks a fitting end to the 1920s for both men; for each man had spent the better part of the decade working in the other's homeland, and each had labored arduously to make ideas from the other's tradition fit with his deeply held native beliefs.

I will compare works written by Claudel and Kuki in the 1920s that attempt to fuse Japanese and European thought. I will go through the ways that both men framed one another's traditions, with particular reference to how each writer related the foreign culture he encountered to parts of his native philosophical and religious ideas—Catholicism for Claudel, Buddhism, the moral code of Bushidō, and Shintoism for Kuki. Blending Japanese and European aesthetics, philosophy, and moral precepts allowed the poets to create a space of indeterminacy between Europe and the Far East, a space in which they could work, as writers cast between native

traditions to which they were deeply committed and foreign cultures by which they were enamored but of which they could never fully be a part.

Claudél and Kuki have encountered similar criticisms of their work. Kuki was accused by some of his peers of being a “traditionalist” phobic of modern thought and, on account of his nationalism, Kuki dropped out of favor following Japan’s defeat in the Pacific War (Marra, “Words” xvii). More recently, Ryosuke Okahashi has questioned whether Kuki was cognizant enough of his own cultural biases in trying to interpret Japanese things by way of Western philosophy (36). Meanwhile, Claudél caught the ire of fellow *japoniste* Andre Malraux (1901-1976), who found Claudél’s understanding of Japan “idiotic” (Takemoto 12), a view echoed, though much moderated, by Akane Kawakami when she says that at first Claudél took an authoritarian and a partial view of Japan and Japanese culture (“Co-naissance” 177). Yet according to Shigemi Inaga Kuki felt ill at ease at the Imperial University of Kyoto and dreamed of being back in “the European world of philosophers”; indeed, Inaga says that Kuki even felt *maladroit* when writing philosophy in Japanese, so fully had he given his mind over to European thought (121). Claudél’s lifelong admiration for Japan and interest in various aspects of Japanese culture have been well documented by, among others, Jacques Petit (1974), Michel Wasserman (2006), Bei Huang (2007), and Pamela Genova (2016); even Kawakami, despite her reservations about Claudél’s attitude to Japan, commends the Frenchman’s attempt in *Cent Phrases pour Eventails* [One Hundred Movements for Japanese Fans] (1942), in which Claudél’s poems on Japanese themes sit beside kanji that Claudél could not read chosen by a calligrapher, to enter sincerely into a language and tradition he did not fully understand (“Co-naissance” 186).

We see that two problems are identified in the works of both Claudél and Kuki: a way of thinking subordinated to narrow nationalism and an occasionally naïve engagement with foreign

thought. Concomitantly, we find that critics have remarked that Claudel and Kuki alike held the foreign in high esteem and were willing to experiment with ideas not connected to their native countries.

Now, there are important differences between Claudel and Kuki. While Claudel never learned to speak Japanese, Kuki was proficient in French and German. For the Catholic Claudel, all men were essentially equal as creatures of God, and any differences between people could be resolved by acceptance of the Catholic faith. On the other hand, Kuki's unique blend of Japanese and East Asian philosophical concepts led him to believe that each locality has its own being, its own unique character, and he "appeals to the idea of tension between two entities whose individuality and specificity should not be offered as victims to the god of harmony" (Marra, Words 3).¹⁰⁷ There was an imbalance of power between the French Claudel and the Japanese Kuki: though by the 1920s Japan had become a world power and League of Nations member, Kuki, like so many other intellectuals of his era, felt that he had to travel to and study in Europe to become a true philosopher. The same could not be said of Claudel or indeed of any other major French thinker of the interwar era, which is why Kawakami argues that Claudel's play on Japanese art forms could be seen as an abuse of his status as "honored Westerner" ("Co-nnaissance" 179), and why Marra and Pincus dwell on Kuki's nationality and race when analyzing his work.

Simon Ebersolt argues that this imbalance continues in the philosophy in Japan, where "Japanese philosophy" seems a less natural term than "Japanese literature" or "Japanese art" (*Contingence* 9). Philosophy, he says, whether in Japan, Europe, or elsewhere, is "considered

¹⁰⁷ We might recall here the tension, mentioned in Chapter I, that Damrosch says characterizes a piece of world literature, or the feeling that translation produces, according to Saussy, of being "at odds with—askance from—our former selves" (*Translation as Citation* 22).

fundamentally occidental” (*Contingence* 10). Here a contradiction becomes apparent: philosophy is supposed to be a universal exercise, but also seems anchored in Europe. At the same time, talk of a “Japanese philosophy” sounds illegitimate because it infringes upon that desire for universal application (Ebersolt, *Contingence* 11-13). Shōichiro Sakurai suggests that Kuki’s efforts to find peculiarly Japanese personality traits are not reducible to the imperialist ideas that dominated 1930s Japan, but rather are responses to globalization. If Western ideas were pushing into Japan, Kuki wanted Japanese ideas to push into the West and the entire world (Sakurai 329-331), although, as Masakatsu Fujita reminds us, Kuki believed that each country possessed a particular cultural essence (177-178). Naturally, this sounds imperialistic, but, as Sakurai points out, we can see it as a more benign form of global cross fertilization than the more nationalistic ideas that Kuki might have advanced closer to the end of his life (331). This is the very problem that we addressed at the start of this dissertation when we considered the incompatibility of different logical and ontological schemes and their implications for comparative literature. As we will see, both Claudel and Kuki were preoccupied with this apparent contradiction, and their work in the 1920s and 1930s are contemporaneous attempts to resolve it.

4.1 Historical Conditions in Paris and Tokyo and Critical Background

The 1920s were a time of great upheaval in Paris and Tokyo alike. Paris was a hub of modernism in the arts. James F. English affirms that Paris was “the great-power center of literary modernity” (364). Paris not only attracted many of the most famous Modernist artists but also was home to critics, publishers, and translators, so that it was “virtually impossible for a writer to achieve world-recognition, that is, a reputation extending beyond her own national and linguistic field, without the intercession of these symbolic underwriters (English 373). Living in Paris in the

1920s, Kuki was at ground zero of the revolutions occurring in the arts in the interwar period. He was deeply interested in the philosophy of Henri Bergson (1859-1941), whom he met in the autumn of 1928 (Ebersolt, “Le Japon” 378). That same year, Kuki even took part in the *Décades de Pontigny*, an annual gathering of critics and intellectuals in a former Cistercian abbey in Pontigny, France. The year that Kuki spoke saw in attendance none other than the eminent novelist André Gide, and André Malraux (Hokensen 337).¹⁰⁸ We will have more to say later on Kuki’s speech at the *Décades*, but for now suffice it to say that Kuki was admitted to the inner circle of French intellectual life, and most certainly would have had knowledge of the movements and ideas swirling around the artistic world of 1920s Paris, and, moreover, that many of his aesthetic and philosophical preoccupations overlapped with those of famous western modernists.

Claudel, meanwhile, lived through a time in which Tokyo was undergoing sweeping cultural change.¹⁰⁹ Despite the modernization occurring around him, Claudel was ultimately not interested in modern Japan, at least not as an object for art. Claudel was rather concerned with images and ideas that originated before the end of the Tokugawa era. The Japan that appears in his essays and poetry is pre-modern and gives little indication of the sweeping changes affecting the Japan in which he lived. When he depicts Japan, he is mostly concerned with non-urban scenes. Claudel was also not taken by images and theories of the Far East that were current among many modernists. In *Ideographic Modernisms*, Christopher Bush discloses the disparity between the theories of the Anglo-American Imagists led by Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and informed by Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908) and Claudel’s personal approach to East Asian art.

¹⁰⁸ Hokkensen claims that Claudel himself was in the audience, but I have not been able to confirm this elsewhere.

¹⁰⁹ The Introduction contains Seiji M. Lippit’s, Paul Varley’s, and Leslie Pincus’ descriptions of Tokyo in the 1920s.

Thanks to a misreading of the features of Chinese characters and the Chinese language, the Imagists celebrated the Chinese character for its pictorial quality, insofar as the character or “ideogram” was thought to image primitive sketches of phenomena, and for its privileging of the verb over the noun, insofar as ideograms were thought not to denote concepts but to depict events (Bush 37). Claudel, conversely, found the allegorical potential of the ideogram enticing (Bush 41). In the French Symbolist tradition of Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898)—and to this we should add, as Bei Huang does, Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), famous for his ideas of identity and alterity, the state of becoming estranged from oneself in poetry, and for his notion of the poet as a seer deciphering the signs of nature (153)—Claudel was preoccupied by metaphor and absence. As Bush puts it, “the complexities of Imagist poetics emerge from its approach to the instant, [while] those of Claudel emerge from its relationship to the eternal” (41). The Imagists saw in the Chinese sign a way to elude the abstraction of the European alphabet and to enter into the dynamism of the present, whereas Claudel believed the Chinese sign could remove phenomena from the confusion and flux of time and fix them forever in poetry (Bush 42).

We see that Kuki and Claudel differed in their approaches to the modernity changing the foreign lands in which they were working. Kuki took a great deal of pleasure in modern Paris, from which he took inspiration for numerous essays and poems. Claudel, however, appears to have found modern Japan of little aesthetic interest and turned his eyes towards a premodern, or pre-Meiji, rural Japan of which he could never have had direct experience. Yet for Kuki modernization was enjoyable so long as it was happening elsewhere. Though he enjoyed Paris and Europe, he did not wish to see Tokyo become culturally colonized by the West. As did Claudel, he turned his eyes to the past to find the essence of Japanese identity, and in the 1930s

worked to safeguard what he believed to be real Japanese life against the encroaching influence of America and Europe. For both men Japan was essentially pre-Meiji.

Let us look in more detail at the ways Claudel and Kuki understood the art and philosophy of Japan and Europe. In “La Poésie française et l’Extrême-Orient” [“French Poetry and the Far East”] Claudel tries to discern the foundations of intercultural communication:

Je veux dire qu’entre les divers peuples, entre les diverses civilisations, il y a un contact psychologique plus ou moins avoué, un commerce plus ou moins actif, un rapport comme de poids et de tensions diverses qui se traduit par des courants et par des échanges, par cet intérêt qui ne naît seulement de la sympathie, mais de la réalisation d’un article idéal, dont la conscience d’une certaine insuffisance en nous fait naître le besoin, un besoin qui essaye plus ou moins gauchement de se traduire par l’imitation. Tantôt la balance dont je viens de vous parler se traduit par un actif et tantôt par un passif. Tantôt un peuple éprouve la nécessité de se faire entendre, et tantôt—et pourquoi pas en même temps ?— celle de se faire écouter, celle d’apprendre et de comprendre. (*Pr.* 1036)¹¹⁰

Claudel refers to this “psychological contact” as “interpsychic” (*Pr.* 1037). But it is not exactly clear how a writer can comprehend foreign and deeply heterogenous cultures. Claudel takes China as an example. We speak as if there were one China, but in fact there are several,

¹¹⁰ “I want to say that between the diverse peoples, between the diverse civilizations, there is a psychological contact more or less avowed, a commerce more or less active, a rapport like diverse weights and tensions translated by currents and by exchanges, by this interest that is not born only from sympathy, but that is the realization of an ideal item, of which the consciousness of a certain insufficiency gives rise in us to the need, a need that tries more or less maladroitly to be translated by imitation. Sometimes the balance of which I have just spoken to you is translated actively, sometimes passively. Sometimes a people feels the necessity to make itself heard, and sometime—and why not at the same time? — to listen, to learn and to understand.”

including a “Regence China, a *boucher* China, a China of Saxe, a Silk China, one of porcelain [...]” (*Pr.* 1038-1039). Each of these “Chinas” is a version of the actual ‘China’ viewed from a different aspect, with each one possessing its own internal coherence and relations with other constellations of belief such as Claudel’s constellation of French poetry. It is the same, let us say, for “Japan” and Claudel’s poetry, as well as for “Japan” and Kuki’s. We are not dealing with a single Japan, but with a vision of Japan, a *possible* Japan that is in fact a constellation. And within this possible Japan is a set of possible worlds that make up Japanese poetry. Each of these sets is composed of different elements, but elements may appear across different sets. Let us call these for the moment the Japanese constellation of Kuki and the Japanese constellation of Claudel. How is each of these constellations logically coherent?

According to Kuki in his speech at Pontigny, the “most eminent characteristic” of Japanese art is “the expression of the infinite” (Zs. 269). This “expression” is an attempt to recuperate finite time by trying to “break through time, to live in the eternity that is the beautiful” (Zs. 268). Time here is a time that repeats, a circular time, that runs its course in a universe with “bottomless metaphysical chasms” (Zs. 268). It opposes the linear time of Christianity and takes as its foundation “pantheistic mysticism” (Zs. 269), be it that of Bushidō, Indian mysticism, or Zen (Zs. 282). The eternity of which Kuki speaks does not possess a reality of its own for everything in Kuki’s conceptual universe hovers above nothingness or “le vide,” in contrast to strands of Western and Christian thought such as Claudel’s that take presence or the Holy Spirit as the origin of all things. As for *tanka* and *haiku*, the two poets give explications that sometimes align, sometimes separate. In Kuki’s estimation, tension between harmony and dissonance is the essence of *tanka* and *haiku*:

Cette suite de cinq, sept, cinq syllabes d'un *Haikai*, ainsi que le tercet initial du *Tanka*, trouve sa beauté originale dans la possibilité de différentes combinaisons subjectives, à la fois en cinq-sept et en sept-cinq. L'union trop harmonieuse des cinq-sept est troublée par la présence d'un troisième terme. Le heptasyllabe du milieu, tout en gardant la fonction de suivre le pentasyllabe du début, a acquis, en même temps, celle de précéder le pentasyllabe qui la précède et, en se retournant, elle se hâte d'une marche sautillante vers celui qui suit. La beauté irrésistible de la mélodie rythmique du *Haikai* consiste précisément dans cette fluidité changeante, dans cette coquetterie enchanteresse. Et par cette forme asymétrique et fluide, l'idée de l'affranchissement du temps mesurable s'est réalisée. (Zs. 276)¹¹¹

Like Kuki, Claudel highlights the differences between Japanese and French poetry. In “A Travers la littérature japonaise” [“Across Japanese Literature”], he cites at length extracts from the preface to the *Kokinshū* to make his readers “comprendre comment les gens là-bas entendent la poésie” [“understand how the people over there comprehend [*entendent*] poetry”] (Pr. 1161). The extract tells his readers that:

La poésie du Yamato a pour semence le cœur humain, d'où elle se développe en une myriade de feuilles de parole [...] Sans effort, la poésie émeut le ciel et la terre, touche de

¹¹¹ “This succession of five, seven, five syllables of *haiku*, as well as the initial tercet of *tanka*, finds its original beauty in the combination of different subjective combinations, at once five-seven and seven-five. The too harmonious union of the five-seven is troubled by the presence of a third term. The medial heptasyllable, as it retains its function as follower of the initial pentasyllable, has acquired, at the same time, that of preceding the pentasyllable that precedes it and, as it returns, hastens with a bouncy walk towards that which follows. The irresistible beauty of the rhythmic melody of *haiku* consists precisely in this changing fluidity, in this enchanting coquetry. And by way of this fluid and asymmetric form the idea of breaking through measurable time is realized.”

pitié les dieux et les démons invisibles ; elle sait rapprocher l'homme de la femme, et elle apaise le cœur des farouches guerriers. Cette poésie existe depuis l'ouverture du ciel et de la terre. (*Pr.* 1161-162)¹¹²

The passage highlights the role of human emotion in creating poetry and, in turn, affecting the sentiment of humans, deities, and spirits alike. Claudel, however, does not devote much attention to the pantheistic origin of the *Kokinshū*'s emotive theory of poetry affect. Having provided his readers with this insight into the Japanese aesthetic mind, he declares:

Les japonais apportent dans la poésie comme dans l'art une idée très différente de la nôtre. La nôtre est de tout dire, de tout exprimer. Le cadre est complètement rempli et la beauté résulte de l'ordre que nous établissons entre les différents objets qui le remplissent, de la composition des lignes et des couleurs. Au Japon au contraire sur la page, écrite ou dessinée, la part la plus importante est toujours laissée au vide. Cet oiseau, cette branche d'arbre, ce poisson, ne servent qu'à historier, qu'à localiser une absence où se contemplant l'imagination. (*Pr.* 1162)¹¹³

¹¹² “The seed of Yamato poetry is the human heart, from which it develops into a million leaves of words. [...] Without effort, poetry moves the sky and the earth, touches the pity of gods and invisible demons; it knows how to reconcile man and woman, and to calm the heart of savage warriors. This poetry has existed since the opening of the sky and the earth.”

¹¹³ “The Japanese have in their poetry as in their art an idea very different from ours. Ours is to say everything, to express everything. The beauty results from the composition of lines and colors, from the order that we establish between the different objects that make up the completely filled cadre. In Japan, on the contrary, on the page, in writing or in drawing, the most important part is always left empty. This bird, this tree branch, this fish, serve only to describe, to localize an absence where the imagination contemplates itself.”

If French literature, motivated by “le désir passionné de l’exactitude” [“the passionate desire for exactitude”] (Pr. 1121), aims to illuminate everything, “la révérence, le respect, l’acceptation spontanée d’une supériorité d’un intelligence inaccessible à l’intellect” [“reverence, respect, the spontaneous acceptance of a superiority inaccessible to the intellect”], which is nothing other than “notre existence personnelle en présence du mystère qui nous entoure, la sensation d’une présence autour de nous qui exige la cérémonie et la précaution” [“our personal existence in presence of a mystery that encircles us, the sensation of a presence all around us that demands ceremony and precaution”], impregnates Japanese literature (Pr. 1123). Despite the fact that Claudel thinks that the origin of this “reverence” is in Shinto, he believes that “pour le Japonais traditionnel la Création est avant tout l’œuvre de Dieu, encore toute pénétrée d’influences divines” [“for the traditional Japanese, Creation is before all the work of God, still completely penetrated by divine influences”], in contrast to the modern European who is interested only in “un domaine destiné à son agrément ou à son profit” [“that which pleases or profits him”] (Pr. 1125). And the (translated) *Kokinshū*’s emphasis on poetry that can move gods and spirits is lost. The “seed” mentioned in the “Preface” becomes “une touche sur l’eau déserte destinée à propager d’immenses cercles concentriques” [“a touch on still water destined to produce immense concentric circles”], “une semence d’émotion” [“a seed of emotion”], and “la corde où le musicien avec le doigt fait vibrer une seule note qui peu à peu envahit le cœur et la pensée” [“the cord on which a musician with his finger makes vibrate a single note that little by little invades the heart and the mind”] (*Op.* 1162).¹¹⁴ The shift in intention from that of the original under Claudel’s pen is slight but perceptible.

¹¹⁴ In *Connaissance de l’est*, Claudel uses a similar metaphor to explain his theory of mind in “Sur la cervelle”: “La sensation n’est point un phénomène passif ; c’est un état spécial d’activité. Je le compare à une corde en vibration sur laquelle la note est formée par la juste position du doigt. Par la sensation, je constate le fait, et je contrôle, par le mouvement, l’acte. Mais la vibration est constante” [“Sensation is not

This deviation from the spirit of the *Kokinshū* aside, the intersections between Claudel's and Kuki's conceptions of French and Japanese literature are clear. Both see a gap between the French mindset and the Japanese mindset and the arts that they produce. Both think that the thought and the arts of modern France are rational and mechanic while those of "traditional" Japan, to borrow Claudel's terminology, are full of mysticism and demand an appreciation beyond words and beyond thought. Both underscore the importance of nothingness or "le vide" in interpreting Japanese poetry. Yet despite these agreements a gulf opens between the two concerning the relation between Christianity and the indigenous religion of Japan, Shintoism.

In effect, Claudel thinks that Shintoism makes the Japanese peculiarly sensible to Christian doctrine, while Kuki declares that Europeans can never understand traditional Japanese thought nourished by Shintoism so long as they rest under the influence of Christian metaphysics. As we have seen, in his paper at Pontigny, Kuki forms an alliance between Japanese thought and the philosophy of "pagan" and pre-Socratic Greece. Thus, both writers try to establish mutual intelligibility between the thought, the art, and especially the poetry of Europe and Japan, but the categories they use to link these various traditions differ. Consequently, the signification of their aesthetics differs, because the entirety of their conceptual universes differs. In the next passage, I will examine the different ontological structures that we find in the poetry of Claudel and of Kuki. I will try to see what relations hold between the poetry of a Christian with faith in the linear teleology of the Catholic church and that of a "pagan" with a vision of the world founded on nothingness and circular time.

at all a passive phenomenon ; it is a special state of activity. I compare it to a vibrating cord on which the note is formed by the correct positioning of the finger. Through sensation, I test that which is before me, and I control, by movement, the action. But the vibration is constant"] (*Po.* 105).

4.2 Claudel, French Ambassador-Poet in Japan

Claudel made his first trip to Japan in 1898 when he was French consul in Shanghai. The voyage inspired conflicting emotions in the French poet. In “Ça et Là” [“Here and There”], he describes visiting a Buddhist temple. He ruminates on the “Satanic” features of Buddhism. He castigates the Buddha for refusing “à reconnaître l’être inconditionnel” [“to recognize the unconditional being”] and in the place of God making “le Néant” or “the Void” the absolute substratum of human existence. Without an Absolute Being to guide its faithful, Buddhism, Claudel continues, encourages its practitioners to become nihilistic and to engage in self-gratification or “jouissance” (*Po.* 90).

Bush sums up Claudel’s feelings: “The Buddha is ‘satanic’ because not only does he not strive for the beyond but his immobility is a mocking imitation of God’s, the temporal imitating the eternal: he confounds Nothingness and being” (Bush 43). Because Claudel felt that the *telos* of human existence was union with God in the afterlife, he was scandalized by Buddhism’s rejection of an Absolute Being. As Bush writes, Claudel, in the tradition of Saint Augustine, saw nature as God’s handiwork, as valuable in signifying the glory of God; but to Claudel Buddhism seemed to take nature itself as divinity and was locked in self-satisfaction or “jouissance” (Bush 43). Claudel concludes that the Buddha is emblematic of “le silence de la créature retranchée dans son refus intégral, la quiétude incestueuse de l’âme assise sur sa différence essentielle” [“the silence of a creature trapped in its integral refusal [to join with a higher being], the incestuous quietude of a soul seated on its essential difference”] (*Po.* 90). Bush’s analysis of the religious dimension of Claudel’s engagement with Buddhist art is perceptive. Still, as I will show, his critique would benefit from increased attention to the aspects of Japanese spirituality, especially of Shintoism, that Claudel strove to incorporate into his Catholic aesthetic.

If Claudel disliked Buddhism, he loved, according to Pamela Genova, Japan and its landscapes and art (104). Genova states that “Claudel plunged into Asia with a gusto rarely witnessed in other European envoys” as he “sought every opportunity to discover new cultural (and natural) landscapes, exploring many cities independently of his diplomatic duties” (104). He went on walking tours, partook in “touristic activities, tried new foods, and explored other unfamiliar cultural traditions relating to religions, philosophies, and general culture” (Genova 105). Though Claudel’s inability to speak Japanese would certainly have affected his understanding of Japanese art and culture, Genova posits that the language barrier may actually have been a boon to Claudel, since it would have forced him to learn of Japan “through his own direct experiences” rather than through literature alone (105). Not that Claudel enjoyed every aspect of Japanese life: both Genova and Jacques Besineau describe Claudel’s disdain for the niceties of Japanese customs. And, like Kawakami, Genova mentions that Claudel’s “brusqueness” could be interpreted as “a dominating orientalist stance, thus casting Claudel’s involvement with Far-Eastern culture in ambivalent terms” (107). But, according to Besineau, “le conquérant fut conquis. Le repos, l’immobilité, le silence aussi telle est la grande leçon que Claudel sut retirer de son séjour en Extrême-Orient” [in effect, the conqueror was conquered. [The importance of r]est, immobility, and silence as well: this is the grand lesson that Claudel took from his sojourn in the Far East”] (345).

Bush’s theory is that Claudel approached Japan as he would an exegesis of the Bible: he emptied Japanese culture and language of its content and made it so that what he encountered in Japan would be read as signs pointing to eternity and to God (48). He writes: “Just as Moses might be a figure of Christ but never the other way around, so too East Asian writing and thinking are redeemed from Satanic self-satisfaction only by being emptied of their original

historical content in order to signify a truth that is universal and eternal—for Claudel” (53). This is largely just. As we will see in relation to *Cent phrases*, Claudel’s major collection of Japanese-inspired poetry, Claudel use Japanese aesthetics as a vehicle for his own Catholic ideas.

However, to say that Claudel “emptied” Japanese aesthetic forms and ideas of their content and filled them with a Christian message goes too far. On the contrary, Claudel combines Japanese ideas with Catholic ones, and this tension allows him to reconcile his love of Japan with his faith.¹¹⁵

Other critics, mainly French and Japanese, have noted such a tendency in Claudel’s writing. Michel Wasserman remarks that Claudel’s sensibility is Shintoist in his “amour de la nature, sens du génie et de la spiritualité du lieu, bref cet animisme qui est au fond de la mentalité shintoïste” [“love of nature, sense of the genius and the spirituality of the spot, in brief the animism that is at the bottom of Shintō mentality”], even though Claudel rarely uses the word ‘Shintō’ (“Claudel et le shintoïsme”). Regarding Claudel’s collaboration with the painter Tomita Keisen (1879-1936) on *Cent phrases* and other poetic projects, Bei Huang remarks that, while the two artists shared an interest in an aesthetic realm in which calligraphic ink highlights an artistic “sensibility for nature,” it would be too much to say that the Catholic Claudel and the Buddhist and Taoist Keisen have the same vision of nature (131). The two men, Huang says, were able to rally around evocative images and themes common to both of their spiritual backgrounds, such as water, an image of transcendence for Claudel, but of the eternal spontaneity of life for Keisen (132). But even if Keisen drew from Buddhist and Taoist images of water, according to Machiko Kadota, Claudel’s association of water with transcendence is ultimately Shintoist (205). It seems likely that Claudel was more accepting of Shinto not only

¹¹⁵ We saw in 3.4 that Claudel’s disdain for Buddhism weakened in Japan as he came to appreciate the somber and austere aspects of the religion there.

because it echoed his own love of nature and had employed similar images in its texts but also because, unlike Buddhism, Shinto is not a universal religion but a folk religion without a central deity like the Buddha. Indeed, as Sakehiro Hirakawa has shown, early British visitors to Japan, remarking Shinto's lack of scripture and a clear moral code, did not consider Shinto to be a religion at all; before 1945 the Japanese government held the same opinion (14-15).

Criticism of Claudel's Japanese work often remarks the same difficulty of intercultural interaction, but the Claudelien attitude, with Christianity as its motor, is more positive and integrationist than Kuki's. Michel Truffet observes that in *Cent phrases*, the "format, la mise en pages, l'architecture et le graphisme des textes, tout est "autre". Étrange ou, plus simplement, étrangère?" ["format, the *mise en page*, the architecture and the graphism of the text, everything is 'other'. Strange or, more simply, foreign?"] (*Cent phrases* 16). Yet the Claudel of *Cent phrases* is not content to let Japan rest purely "strange" or "foreign." While Dominique Millet-Gérard, like Genova, points out the conflict between Claudel's brusque temperament and the refined manners that he encountered in his diplomatic work in Japan, she asserts that, in *Cent phrases*:

Claudel reste fidèle à ses inspirations antérieures, à ce don d'observation qui est le sien, mais il montre aussi l'extraordinaire capacité d'assimilation dont son intelligence est capable, plus par intuition que par compréhension logique. ("Un grand Ange" 36)¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ "Claudel remains faithful to his former inspirations, to this gift of observation that he possesses, but he shows as well the extraordinary capacity of assimilation of which his intelligence is capable, one more intuitive than logical."

The attempt at integration characterizes Claudel's attitude towards the art and culture of Japan. Even if, unlike Kuki, speaking French, German, and the antique languages of Europe, Claudel did not speak any Japanese, he attempts to fuse that which pleases him in Japan with his own aesthetic. In the poems of *Cent phrases*, short and often enigmatic, Claudel adds his Christian belief in the "essential failure of all human words" to the "Japanese" silence and the absence that can nonetheless signal, *via negativa*, the presence of the divine. The tension between two opposites, the "paradox," that the reader of *Cent phrases* finds everywhere, opens the mind to a more profound presence (Millet-Gérard, "Un grand Ange," 52-53). The religions that Claudel found in East Asia undergoes the same treatment. François Lachaud demonstrates that Claudel reinterprets the religions of China and Japan by transforming them into avatars of Catholicism. The Dao becomes Jesus, and the teachings of Zen on the importance of silence are brought under the umbrella of the ineffability of the Christian divine (Lachaud 74-93). With this *rapprochement* in mind, Lachaud concludes that "Claudel ne pouvait pas entrer en conversation avec le bouddhisme" ["Claudel could not enter into conversation with Buddhism"], for he was not capable of having an encounter with "the Other," only a "mis-encounter" (*mérencontre*) (92).

Four years after his first trip to Japan and his condemnation of Buddhism, Claudel translated into French the myth of the sun goddess Amaterasu. Moriaki Watanabe describes how Claudel adheres closely to multiple translations of the Japanese source texts, indicating a close study of the legend (76-7). This is evident in Claudel's accurate description of the items of the Shinto ceremony and their relation to the Amaterasu myth: the *gohei*, the *sakaki*, the *shimenawa*, and the mirror (Watanabe 148-9). Watanabe points out that Claudel sometimes keeps the original Japanese word when describing the Shinto relics to his readers, as he does with the *gohei*, but at other times translates the items into something easier for his European audience to understand, as

he does when he transforms the *sakaki* into a tree “un autre arbre, plus familier aux Occidentaux, et après tout lié étroitement à l'imagerie shintoïste, «le pin »” [“more familiar to Westerners, and after all closely related to Shinto imagery, ‘the pine’”] (84). Elsewhere, Watanabe says, Claudel diverges from the original narrative as he multiplies descriptions and makes the original conflict of the narrative, that between Amaterasu and her brother, the storm god Susanō, into a conflict between Amaterasu and human beings who have turned their backs on the sun deity (86). In this last modification we might see the influence of Claudel’s Catholicism and his critique of Buddhism, with humans who, forgetting a higher power and focusing on their own pleasure, dismay a deity.

Watanabe explains Claudel’s modification of the Amaterasu myth as the poet using raw Japanese materials to create a “personal myth” in which dichotomies of darkness and light, night and day, connect with Claudel’s aesthetic and religious ideals (86). Watanabe also notes that, in *Partage de Midi* (1906), a play Claudel wrote later in China, Claudel joins the Amaterasu story, particularly the location in which the myth is said to take place, Ise Shrine, with the figure of Isolde (or Yseult) from Richard Wagner’s opera *Tristan and Isolde* (1859), to create the figure of Ysé (75). The Germanic legend of Tristan and Isolde, set in a Europe transitioning from paganism to early Christianity, and the Japanese Shintō myth of Amaterasu, fuse in Claudel’s mind to create a new narrative. In part this validates Bush’s claim that Claudel empties Japanese ideas and fills them with his own meaning. However, Claudel has not so much emptied the Amaterasu myth as fused parts of it with his own ideas. It is in this sense that his narrative, like his play, is a “personal myth”: indeterminate, the narrative is somewhere between the original Japanese and Claudel’s European tradition.

We can see this indeterminacy more clearly in *Cent phrases*. There is a poem that could bolster Bush's argument:

<i>Une</i>		<i>A</i>	
<i>belle journée</i>		<i>beautiful day</i>	
<i>d'automne</i>	<i>est comme la</i>	<i>in autumn</i>	<i>is like the</i>
	<i>vision</i>		<i>vision</i>
	<i>de la justice</i>		<i>of justice</i>
	<i>(Po. 727)¹¹⁷</i>		

Donald Keene mentions that autumn holds a special place in Japanese poetry, because Japanese poets are peculiarly sensitive to the “brevity of beautiful things” (“Poetry” 188). Yet rationalizing autumn as a “vision of justice” has a didactic element that is out of place in the Japanese poetry Claudel knew. Huang remarks Claudel’s interest in the teachings the German mystic Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) according to which beings or creatures of God exist thanks to a loan of life force, meaning that all that exists on earth is negative, a privation of God’s power (185). With this in mind, we can see that for Claudel autumn is like “a vision of justice” because it represents the decline of that which is necessarily against God. The moral judgment that the decline of nature is “just” dampens the poem’s pathos, for it suggests that the observer

¹¹⁷ Michel Truffet’s note to this poem in his critical edition of *Cent phrases* suggests that Claudel alludes here to Rimbaud’s *Une saison en enfer*: “L’automne déjà ! [...] Le combat spirituel est aussi brutal que la bataille d’hommes ; mais la vision de la justice est le plaisir de Dieu seul” [“Autumn already ! [...] Spiritual combat is as brutal as battle between men; but the vision of justice is God’s pleasure alone”] See Truffet (1985), pp. 108-109.

should not be saddened by the passing of the finite in the scheme of Christian cosmology. The poem fills a Japanese vessel with a non-Japanese message, and even though there is no “I” (“*je*”) explicitly organizing the poem and drawing a link between autumn and Claudel’s Catholic worldview, the introduction of Claudel’s personal philosophy into this “Japanese” poem, and the use of simile to link the two halves of the poem together, signals the strong presence of a European subject and limits the meaning that the reader can find in the piece.

Claudel’s approach is subtler elsewhere, especially in those poems that are hybrid artworks composed of Claudel’s calligraphy and Tomita Keisen’s paintings. A few of the *cent phrases* were released to the public in a different fashion from those found in the complete French version. Unlike the hundred collected in the 1942 edition, the early poems were actually written on Japanese folding fans or *éventails* and distributed as *Le Souffle des quatre souffles* [*The Breath of the Four Breaths* or *The Breath of the Four Winds*]. Each poem took one of the four Japanese seasons as its subject. On one half of each fan is Claudel’s poem drawn by the ambassador himself with a calligraphic brush, while on the other half is a calligraphic drawing by Keisen. Bei Huang writes that in creating with Keisen these hybrid artworks in which calligraphy and painting are joined, Claudel was trying to bring forth a “new poetic form,” the “painted word” (129).¹¹⁸ Even more interestingly, Huang remarks that the inspiration for *Cent phrases* came from a long French poem, *Saint Geneviève*, extolling French women during the First World War and embellished with illustrations by Audrey Parr, which Claudel completed shortly before assuming his post in Japan. Claudel’s first advances towards the “painted word” came in the poem *La muraille intérieure de Tokyo* [*The Inner Wall of Tokyo*], which, again featuring Keisen’s art, served as the *verso* to the Japanese edition of *Saint Geneviève*. Huang

¹¹⁸ “*Une nouvelle forme poétique est née: la <<parole peinte>>.*”

notes that whereas the paintings that accompany *Saint Geneviève* are secondary to the poem, the calligraphic painting for *La muraille intérieure de Tokyo* is as of as much importance as Claudel's words. The painting and the verses fuse together to form a multidimensional poem. From a specifically French Catholic starting point, *Saint Geneviève*, Claudel wound up creating with Keisen an experimental half-French and half-Japanese artwork. Let us take one of the *quatre souffles*, a poem evoking spring:



(Claudel and Keisen)

In the 1942 edition of *Cent phrases* the poem is rendered thus:

<i>Dans</i>	<i>mêlé de</i>	In	
<i>le</i>	<i>pailletes d'argent</i>	the	silver sequins
<i>brouillard</i>	<i>l'ombre de la prêtresse</i>	fog	the shadow of the priestess
	<i>secouant son goupillon</i>		shaking her aspergillum

<i>de</i>	of
<i>g</i>	ca
<i>relots et le semoir de son</i>	scabels and the seeder of sound
<i>s (Po. 717)</i>	s

As with the Amaterasu narrative, in describing a Shintō ceremony, Claudel has made a few key changes. Recall that Watanabe argued that Claudel’s knowledge of the Amaterasu myth and of Shintō was quite accurate. Claudel’s more intensive study of Japanese culture and visits to Japanese cultural sites while ambassador would have deepened his knowledge of Shinto even further. Nonetheless, here Claudel does not use any Japanese words. He calls the *miko*, the Shinto shrine maiden, a “priestess” and her instrument, the *kagura suzu*, an “aspergillum.” In the Catholic Church, an aspergillum contains holy water and is associated with purification during mass. A closer object to the aspergillum would be another purification device, the *gohei* that Claudel described in his Amaterasu. Yet Claudel has chosen to make the *kagura suzu* an aspergillum, and thereby to make the sound emitted by the bells the Shinto equivalent of holy water. Truffet writes that in a diary entry from 1924 Claudel employs similar language in describing a No performance, where he sees “[un] esprit noir avec un sistre d’or qui est un goupillon et un semoir, les gouttes d’eau q[ui] se détachent remplacées par le son ” “[a] black spirit with a golden rattle that is an aspergillum and a seeder, the drops of water that fly off replaced by sounds”] (93). It appears then that the use of bells in the Shintō ceremony was bound up in Claudel’s mind with the use of bells in Nō. He believes the ancient Japanese religion connects with the medieval Japanese art, and translates the two together into the religious language of the Catholic Church. In other words, Shintō becomes a vehicle for Claudel the

Catholic poet as he tries out a Japanese aesthetic in *Le Souffle* and in *Cent phrases*; he does, as Bush says, empty out aspects of Japanese culture and fills them with his own European ideas, but only does so by remarking a similarity between religious ritual and dramatic art that is lacking in his native country. Claudel's Japan cannot be evacuated of its original significance; rather the Japanese and the European must sit in tension, with the boundary between them ill defined. Of course, Nō is far more connected to Buddhism than to Shintō, but whether Claudel was aware of this matters little here. What matters is that Claudel views the scene as “Japanese,” and tries to reconcile this Japanese scene with Catholic ceremony.

The final gesture to reconcile East and West is Keisen's painting. The poem describes a Frenchman's idea of a Shintō ceremony. The painting is a Japanese man's response to the Frenchman's poem. If Claudel takes the idea of Japan and draws it towards his native mindset, tying East and West together in a poem, Keisen takes Claudel's union and draws it back towards Japan. The painting gives Claudel's poem an air of authenticity, suggesting that that which Claudel depicts in the poem is as concrete and real as the calligraphic work painted next to it. We might also say it makes the foreignness of Claudel's poem stand out, since Keisen has painted only a Shintō shrine. There are no priestesses, no subtle blending of Catholicism and Shintoism. Keisen's painting is “authentic”—it is a Japanese painting of a Japanese subject by a Japanese man. Compared to it, Claudel's poem, with its experimental form and allusions to European religion, appears more eccentric. Because the poem and the painting form a single artwork, one *éventail*, we find the entire piece hard to classify. It is a French poem on a Japanese theme, and it is a Japanese painting inspired by that very Franco-Japanese poem. Kawakami writes that the presence of kanji next to each poem in *Cent phrases* signals Claudel's “invitation to the reader to enter, in ignorance if need be, into the linguistic system of the Other” (“Co-naissance” 183).

Looking at this *éventail*, we see an attempt to enter not only into the language of the Japanese “Other” but into a web of Japanese aesthetics and religion. Huang reminds us that the calligraphy, painting, and poetry were all done with a brush in Japan, just as are Claudel’s poem and Keisen’s painting here, and so may be traced back to a single art (103). The single origin further urges us to unify the two pieces of the *éventail*. We are encouraged both to distinguish between the French and the Japanese parts of the fan, and to unite them as two variations on the same theme, both crafted with a brush, both part of a single Japanese tradition. The twin claims of identity and difference leave us once again in a state of indeterminacy.

4.3 Kuki, Japanese Philosopher-Poet in Paris

In 1930, Kuki published his best-known work, *The Structure of Iki* (*Iki no kōzō*). Started in Paris in 1925, *Iki* attempts to find in the Japanese language a word that expresses the Japanese ethical experience. His assumption is that “一の意味または言語は、一民族の過去および現在の存在様態の自己表明、歴史を有する特殊の文化の自己開示に外ならない” [a meaning or a language reveals none other than the manifestation of an ethnic group’s past and present modes of being and, hence, is self-revealing of a particular historical culture (Mikkelsen et al. 14)] (Zs. 8). Kuki seeks a word that has no correlate in any European language and finds it in “*iki*,” a word associated with Edo during the Tokugawa epoch and which Kuki ties to the geisha and the samurai of the pleasure quarters. He says “*iki*” may be understood as “chic,” “refined,” or “coquettish,” but all of its connotations elude encapsulation in a single European word (Zs. 11-12). Kuki asserts: “従って「いき」とは東洋文化の、否、大和民族の特殊の存在様態の顕著な自己表明の一つであると考へて差支ない” [It then follows that *iki* can be safely considered to be a distinct self-expression of an oriental culture, or, no, more precisely, a specific

mode of being of the Yamato people (Mikkelsen et al. 17)] (*Zs.* 12). Kuki further argues that *iki* reveals itself in heterosexual desire: in coquetry (媚態, *bitai*), born from the tensions between oneself and the opposite sex; in chic (意気地, *ikiji*), or resistance to the charms of the opposite sex; and in resignation (諦め, *akirame*), or the giving up of worldly desire following disappointment in the floating world of Edo. If desire is consummated, it ceases. Therefore, *iki* requires that the desirer not give into his attraction and be restrained by *ikiji* that is based on the idealism (理想主義) of *Bushidō* (*Zs.* 19). This “idealism” is in turn tempered by *akirame* that has “Buddhist a-realism as its background” [仏教の非現実性を背景とする「諦め」] (*Zs.* 22). Kuki’s idea of *iki* thus depends on tension between two aspects of Japanese tradition, *Bushidō* and Buddhism, as manifested in the pleasure quarters of Edo.

Kuki’s attempt to unearth the “specific mode of being” of the Japanese people has attracted much criticism. Ryosuke Ohashi points out that the examples of Japanese culture Kuki presents in *Iki* come from a narrow range of Japanese history, namely the Bunka-Bunsei period (1804-1829), and questions whether this “decadent” period well represents Japan as a whole.¹¹⁹ After asserting that Kuki’s thought was founded on “European conceptual systems” (30), Ohashi mentions that *Iki* “had occurred to [Kuki] during his study in Europe simply as a favorable example, through which he could explain Japanese culture to a Western audience” (34). Considering these cultural biases latent in *Iki*, Ohashi asks whether Kuki could have achieved the

¹¹⁹ There is a fascinating overlap with Claudel here that goes beyond the limits of this chapter. In the 1940s, Claudel referred to French and English translations of *dodoitsu* 都々逸 to create his own versions of the Japanese poems. *Dodoitsu* refers to popular poetry that flourished between 1804-1852 and was especially current among women working in pleasure quarters. Claudel’s collection of this poetry, *Dodoitsu*, highlights different features of the poetry from those which Kuki might have selected. Notably, he explains *dodoitsu* as “rustic” poetry (*Po.* 755), and a note to the collection in the *Oeuvre poétique* informs us that Claudel “a préféré d’ailleurs le dodoitsu paysan à sa forme plus élaboré” [preferred the peasant *dodoitsu* to its more elaborate form] (1154).

definitive study of the Japanese character at which he aimed. Leslie Pincus develops this line of reasoning and concludes that Kuki was coaxed into “insular” European philosophy and, after he realized he was “trapped” in a foreign conceptual system, had no choice but to “[construct] and imaginary place called Japan” (156)—a rather extreme view that robs Kuki of his agency and presupposes an inseparable line between European and Japanese thought. To these critiques we could add Roy Starrs’ observation that Bushidō is largely a modern construction, insofar as it was a term not familiar to the majority of Japanese people before the Meiji era (56).

But the validity of Kuki’s thesis is not at issue here. Rather, we are focusing on the role Buddhism and Bushidō play in his attempt to rally European philosophy to interpret Japanese culture. The lecture Kuki delivered in 1928 at Pontigny expands on his ideas on Buddhism and Bushidō. Yasunari Takada analyzes Kuki’s dichotomy between linear Christian time on the one side and circular ancient Greek and Buddhist time on the other. In the lecture, Kuki charges that the majority of Western philosophy presupposes a unitary self whose experience constitutes an orderly, irreversible horizontal time. Through consciousness as “will” or *volonté*, the subject is able to distinguish between varying moments and order them as past, present, and future (*Zs.* 295). The assumption is that the ordering subject is the same at every instance of time. Against this linear model, Kuki places the cyclical model of Ancient Greece and Buddhism; in particular Kuki focuses on the latter’s notion of the transmigration of the soul, where the same soul is reborn continuously in a variety of bodies (*Zs.* 294, 293). If time is cyclical, and if the same soul inhabits different bodies, then the logic of identity is disrupted, since the subject who creates time through her consciousness is constantly changing her physical identity and having her sense of past, present, and future reset. Takada writes that Kuki here presents a concept of time “through which the human existence has the theoretical possibility of opening itself to self-same

but plural identities” (290). Despite Kuki’s references to antiquity, and despite the notion of cyclical time having obvious links to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (Zs. 291), Takada argues that “Kuki’s strategy at the Pontigny lecture was to place the eternal-return type in the Oriental camp while leaving the linear type in the opposite camp of Europe” (289). Of course, Takada ignores that Kuki aims to show that this “peculiar” logic is actually more logical than that which could be found in twentieth-century Europe, and that it is in fact subject to the principle of identity, “A est A” (Zs. 293). But Takada is correct insofar as Kuki’s reference to the logic of identity is an attempt to claim Ancient Greek thought for “oriental” and Japanese, and that his notion of circularity through rebirth is one that would have been foreign to many of his French contemporaries, among them Claudel in his search for a “nouvelle Logique” of a different kind.¹²⁰

As we saw in *Iki*, Kuki believed that Buddhist resignation needed to be checked by the willpower of Bushidō. In his Pontigny lecture, Kuki argues that Buddhist “pessimism” wants liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth and aims to achieve this by denying human will and human desire (Zs. 287). Contrarily, Bushidō affirms the will and denies liberation from the torments of earthly life (Zs. 287). Thus, Bushidō, Kuki says, inculcates “[une] bonne volonté infinie, qui jamais ne peut se réaliser entièrement, et qui est destinée à être toujours ‘déçue,’ doit toujours se renouveler sans effort” [[an] infinite good will, which can never be fully realized, and which is destined always to be frustrated, must always renew its effort] and which encourages adherents to face “la transmigration sans peur, vaillamment” [transmigration without fear, valiantly] (Zs. 286). He sees this “idéal moral du Japon” in the reconstruction following natural disasters such as the Great Kanto Earthquake. The new constructions will themselves be

¹²⁰ See Introduction for more on Claudel and logic.

destroyed only to be rebuilt again, and it is this perseverance in the face of a cycle of growth and destruction that Kuki finds ethical (Zs. 284-185). Buddhism and Ancient Greek thought join together to form an alternative to a European conception of time, but it is the specifically Japanese code that makes Kuki's formulation moral.

Takada states that Kuki's Bushidō "is a form of moral idealism which draws for support on no transcendental, absolute divinity but on one's inner god, a divinity of relativity." Consequently, without a transcendent divinity like Claudel's Catholic God, there is nothing to secure "all phenomena on the underlying principle of identity and necessity" (Takada 290). Using "European conceptual systems" to build a philosophy that joins Ancient Greek and Buddhist thought, of which a Japanese moral code is the ethical engine: is this not a way for Kuki to reconcile his Japanese and Far Eastern identity with the European "world of philosophers" that, according to Shigemi Inaga, Kuki felt more at home in than when he was among his compatriots? Takada seems to have this in mind when he says that Kuki was "in-between" Europe and the "peculiarities of his own culture" (294). The idea chimes with Graham Mayeda's (2012) statement that Kuki valued Bushidō more than Buddhism in order to have a "subjective point of view—a point of view of control" when dealing with the cultural other (115). Undoubtedly this vague position of Japanese identity and culture relative to Far Eastern and European thought owes to "Kuki's desire, as a young student from the 'Far East,' to explain to Europeans the soul and culture of Japan" (Ohashi 30).

The tension between Japan and France is evident in the poetry Kuki wrote in Paris. Marra contends that these poems show that "a meeting with the Other for Kuki was utterly impossible" ("On Japanese" 59). But the situation is more complicated than Marra suggests. The main schism between Kuki and Parisian life is that between Kuki, particularly his decadent lifestyle, and

Christianity. We find an example of this just under halfway through Kuki's Paris *tanka* sequence, first in poem in poems 62 and 63: “焼栗が巴里の辻にかをる宵立ちて栗食むイヴオンヌ、スザンヌ” [“An evening when roasted chestnuts perfume the street corners of Paris—eating chestnuts stand Yvonne, Suzanne” (Marra 62)] (Zs. 181); 秋の街ものほしげなるまじめになる顔を上げゆく加特力の僧 [“The town in autumn—raising his craving, serious-looking face, a Catholic priest” (Marra 62)¹²¹] (Zs. 181). Yvonne and Suzanne, as Marra tells us, are two of the “demimondaines or women of pleasure (*asobi onna*)” who abound in Kuki's *tanka*. The memory of these women would haunt Kuki later in Kyoto, where he would spend his “evenings in Gion, the district populated by clubs, parlors, coffee shops, and teahouses where Geisha performed their arts” (Marra, “Words” 26). Kuki looks upon the prostitutes as they eat chestnuts, attractive in his eyes. But the next poem replaces the poet's gaze with that of the Catholic priest, whose “craving” is tempered by his seriousness. The priest desires but he restrains himself; he is the opposite of Kuki and serves to demarcate the boundaries of Kuki's world.

The divide between these “women of pleasure” and Catholicism is deepened in *tanka* 150 and 151. Let us start with 150: “鐘の音は聖心寺かさびしくも巴里の春の終わらんとする” [“Is the sound of bells coming from Sacré-Coeur? How lonesome! Spring in Paris is going to end” (Marra 64)] (Zs. 192). The passing of spring is the passing of Kuki's time in Paris, but what significance do the bells of Sacré-Coeur hold, and what is lonesome? Naturally, we must keep in mind that the emotions present in these poems are not necessarily identical with Kuki's own. Thoroughly knowledgeable of modern French poetry, especially that of Charles Baudelaire

¹²¹ The translations of Kuki's *tanka* in this section come from Marra, *Kuki* (2004). I have modified Marra's translation better to fit the original Japanese syntax, and have dispensed with the line divisions Marra adds that are not present in Kuki's originals.

(1821-1867), whose decadent approach to modern life Kuki remarks is similar to the concept of *iki* (Zs. 79), it is possible that Kuki is here simply adopting the persona of a world-weary modern man in Paris, cut off from tradition. In that case, Kuki's poems would not be confessions but literary experiments by a young philosopher-poet, and the bells would perhaps only signal a more common division between the sacred and the profane.

However, the next poem develops this dichotomy in a way that recalls that which we found in poems 62 and 64: “加特力の尼となりにし戀人も年へだたりぬ今いかならん” [“Today I wonder, after so many years, how my lover who became a Catholic nun is doing” (Marra 64)] (Zs. 192). Though there is no indication how Kuki lost contact with this “lover,” her conversion to Catholicism and her entrance to a monastery has severed all contact between them. Both Marra and Mayeda point out that the “Other” for Kuki is essentially feminine (“On Japanese” 73; 108). Marra ties this desire for the feminine Other more broadly to Kuki's desire for the West (“Words” 71). As we saw in the exposition of *Iki*, for Kuki heterosexual desire must always be subdued by “brave composure” in order to keep self and other distinct. Keeping in mind that tanka 151 comes right after the sensation of loneliness induced by the bells of Sacré-Cœur in tanka 150, we can surmise that Catholicism had become for Kuki a symbol of the antithesis of the floating world he occupied in Paris. The Catholic priest's worldview negates Kuki's, while the nunnery cuts ties between Kuki and one of the demimondaines with whom he had consorted. Kuki's inability to meet with the Other is thus in part an inability to reconcile his desire with the “seriousness” of the Catholic world from which he felt culturally and philosophically alien. The *ikiji* that he valued in Bushidō, could it not be a response to this unbridgeable gap that he felt between these two aspects of Parisian life? Kuki does not say so directly. Regardless, we can see that, as Catholicism was a stumbling block for Claudel in his

relationship with the traditions of Japan and East Asia, it was an impediment for Kuki, a sign of a mysterious world he could not or would not enter into.

4.4 Claudel's and Kuki's Poetry on Autumn and Spring

So much for the general orientation of Claudel's and Kuki's poetry. I will now turn to their seasonal poetry. Both composed poems on the four seasons; both with an idea of traditional Japanese poetry in mind. I will begin with autumn, the season concerning which Kuki and Claudel diverge the most.

Claudel tries to eliminate from autumn the sense of sadness, even though in Japanese literature this season is most representative of doleful emotion. Certainly, some of the poems of *Cent phrases* express sadness. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Claudel was sensible to Japanese Buddhism because of its "bitter and profound melancholy." But behind the waning nature of autumn he glimpses the hand of God and the eternal. He writes: "L'automne aussi / est une chose / qui commence" ["Autumn too is something that commences"] (*Po.* 723). We have already seen that Claudel thinks of autumn as "justice" because it suggests the ultimate power of God over the temporal realm. Combining that poem with the one cited above, we can imagine that because the end of *this* life is the commencement of the life eternal for the Catholic Claudel, and because all that passes on Earth leads to God's final judgment, Claudel sees in autumn the machinations of the Christian divine. Observing the Japanese countryside, Claudel feels moved by the fragile beauty of the changing seasons, but he refuses to allow this pleasurable melancholy to destabilize his positive Christian vision. Consequently, he cannot view autumn as a season of

sadness as the writers of the *Kokinshu* could, for such an emotion would evince a lack of respect towards God.¹²²

In contrast, for Kuki, autumn is the season *par excellence* of *kanashisa* and *sabishisa*. Throughout *Parī Shinkei*, Kuki takes pleasure in expressing his sorrow of autumn, and fall is the vehicle by which Kuki expresses his sentiment of melancholy and isolation in Paris where even his happy moments promise rupture, particularly between Kuki and a love interest. The following poem evinces this tendency: “初夏に君と踏みつる並木道おち葉する日にただ一人ゆく” [“At the start of summer I walked with you along the tree-lined path; now as the leaves fall I walk alone”] (*Zs.* 176).¹²³ Just as the green leaves of early summer must fall, so must Kuki and his beloved separate. If Claudel substitutes the stabilizing presence of God for the sadness of autumn in Japan, Kuki sees even in the happy loving moments of the prime of the year the melancholic sentiment of autumn. The subject matter is the same, but the message is the inverse.

The treatment of autumn here reminds of the poetry of Paul Verlaine as captured in poems such as “Chanson d’automne,” in which autumn expresses the poet’s feelings of loss and isolation.¹²⁴ But he does not simply imitate Verlaine, for Kuki’s treatment of fall refers back to the interpretation of the “Japanese spirit” laid out in *Iki*. Since consummation always leads to the end of love and even attraction, Kuki recommends the stoic resistance of Bushido and the

¹²² To explain *Soulier de Satin*, Claudel paraphrases Saint Augustine to claim that all things, including dissatisfaction and suffering, conspire for goodness. See *Mémoires Improvisés* 283.

¹²³ The translations of Kuki’s poems in this section are my own, based on the translations from Japanese to French used in Johnson, “La Poésie” (2018), which was the foundation of this chapter.

¹²⁴ Early in his career, Claudel wrote his own poem entitled “Chanson d’automne” and sent it to Mallarmé. The poem makes its symbolist influences palpable as nature evokes parting and fracture (“L’appel sombre du cor inconsolable / A cause du temps qui n’est plus, / Qui n’est plu à cause de ce seul jour admirable / Par qui la chose n’est plus”) (*Po.* 433-434). But even in this poem Claudel’s focus rests not on himself but on the natural world, and the allusions to gold and votive candles move Claudel’s thoughts from the human to the divine and place Claudel’s somber poem firmly within his Catholic universe.

pessimistic resignation of Buddhism as bulwarks against desire. But resistance and resignation themselves guarantee isolation, for Kuki's philosophy prohibits him from indulging in pleasure whenever it finds him. Thus, contra Verlaine, Kuki is not simply mourning lost youth and love but expressing a worldview that sees even in youth and love a bottomless emptiness. For this reason, aspects in his poetry that might recall Claudel—for instance, Kuki's apparent silent meditation on the natural world—are loaded with senses that recall *Iki*. Silence for Kuki is not a way of indicating the ineffable divine, but rather his self-respect and Buddhist-influenced fortitude before the pleasures of Paris: “言はざるを掟としたる僧のごと巴里の秋に黙すひねもす” [“An autumn day in Paris I keep silent like a monk”] (Zs. 179). This monk (僧) is the Buddhist monk of *Iki*,¹²⁵ and his silence is a tool for resisting abandonment to love, not for comprehending God, or for purely expressing the sadness of autumn.

In the poems that treat spring we find the same tendency. Let us consider once more the poem of spring from *Souffle des quatre souffles*:

<i>Une</i>		<i>A</i>	
<i>belle journée</i>		<i>beautiful day</i>	
<i>d'automne</i>	<i>est comme la</i>	<i>in autumn</i>	<i>is like the</i>
	<i>vision</i>		<i>vision</i>
	<i>de la justice</i>		<i>of justice</i>
	(Po. 727)		

¹²⁵ It is important to stress that 僧 (*sou*) indicates a Buddhist monk not a Christian one, so he could not have in mind, say, a Trappist.

Expanding on Truffet's analysis, Ayako Nishino explains that this poem stems from the "memory of the sacred agrarian dance" found in the Noh *Okina*, and that it is "probably an amalgam of other memories of a Shinto ceremony" that Claudel saw performed (*Synthèse* 97). She says that in his notes Claudel mentions "a golden sistrum that is a goupillon and a seeder"; this seeder "likely corresponds to the bellflower used specially for *Okina*," while the goupillon is, of course, the instrument of the Christian liturgy: all of these terms suggests a confusion through which "the poet attributes to this Japanese object liturgical and / or agrarian significances" (*Synthèse* 96-97). Nishino's argument supports that which I have been arguing throughout this dissertation: that Claudel's Catholicism transforms not only the Japanese countryside but also its indigenous theater and religion. Once more to return to Bush, then, we see that Claudel does fill Japan and Japanese things with his Christian vision. However, it is more exact to say that Claudel *adds* a new sense to Japanese objects, a Christian sense that permits him to integrate elements of Japanese art in his own aesthetic universe without disturbing the internal coherence of this universe.

For Kuki, springtime, to which he devotes the most energy in *Parī Shōkyoku*, is sometimes happier than autumn. Kuki warmly welcomes spring: "春の朝おとぎばなしの世にいきん願もてきぬプロオニユの森" ["A spring morning—to Bois de Boulogne I carry with me the wish to live in a world of fairy tales"] (*Zs.* 183). There are also tranquil poems that resemble the poetry of *Cent phrases*, such as 66: "マグダレナ御寺の柱やはらかにほのぼのとして春の雨ふる" ["The spring rain falls softly on the columns of the church of Saint Magdalena"], or 67: "ドビュシイが夢みるごととき音色より巴里の空の春ひろがる" [To the resonance of the music of which Debussy dreamed listens the sky of springtime Paris"] (*Zs.* 182). His vision is less pessimistic here. He conveys his perceptions of France without explicit

dolor. He is still alone, but the world of Paris enchants him, the church emits a tranquil ambiance, the music of Debussy joins with the sky to form a dreamlike image. As such, the Paris of Kuki in spring draws close to Claudel's magical Japan. All the same, the promise of spring is like a fairytale (おとぎばなし) : it concerns another world (世), that of fiction, not the world in which Kuki actually lives. Indeed, the suggestion is that the happy moments of spring are only a dream, one from which Kuki must inevitably awake. Only by emphasizing the transience of spring joy can Kuki make his happy moments in Paris accessible to his poetic universe.

A final remark on the interesting rapport between spring and autumn: in Claudel's poems of spring, we find that which Truffet calls the "accord of different senses" (*Cent phrases* 99). This accord is found in the following poem: "A l'un des bouts de ce segment de cercle le printemps qui commence poursuit à l'autre bout l'automne également qui commence" ["At one of the ends of the segment of this circle spring is commencing and pursuing to the other side the equally commencing autumn"] (*Po.* 740). The poem indicates that Claudel too links spring to autumn, but that he does not suggest the circularity in which Kuki believes. The two seasons are for him points from which something can commence. His vision goes towards the future, and therefore, even as Claudel speaks of circularity, he emphasizes a starting point and the notion of progression rather than repetition. By stressing the commencement of both seasons, Claudel avoids the notion of decline dear to Kuki and inserts in his poems *à la japonaise* a positive Christian notion: the Buddhist concept of circularity is evoked to be undermined, for even autumn is a season of progress in Claudel's Christian universe running on teleological time.¹²⁶ This, it seems, is why Truffet speaks of tension between the world of Japanese aesthetics as

¹²⁶ One of Claudel's negative evaluations of East Asian ("orientales") civilizations charged that, in opposition to Christian societies that move towards the future, East Asian civilizations run in cycles and, consequently, never improve. See Claudel and Amrouche (1969), p. 280.

Claudel understands them and the world of his Catholic faith. It is the tension between the Japanese countryside and seasons, long described by Japanese poets such as those of the *Kokinshū*, and the new Catholic interpretation that Claudel proffers. The tension here shows the difficulty of integrating elements drawn from diverse worlds into a coherent poetic constellation. Even if there are superficial similarities between Claudel's and Kuki's poems of spring, the metaphysical differences are profound.

4.5 Worlds, Constellations, and Universes of Belief

Paying special attention to seasonal poems influenced by the *Kokinshū*, I have described the differences between Claudel's poetry *à la japonaise* and Kuki's Parisian poetry. Claudel's vision is optimistic while Kuki's is pessimistic. This divide owes to each writer's philosophy, more precisely each's constellation of beliefs. The Catholic Claudel cannot doubt God's designs, and therefore cannot permit himself to indulge in feelings of sadness as he looks at nature waning in autumn. That which matters for him is the ultimate victory of the eternal soul. For this reason, he inserts in his poetry on autumn elements that indicate the omnipresence of God, and the ultimate redemption of corruptible matter in the incorruptible body of God. The emotions of *kanashisa* and *sabishisa* are foreign to his poetry *à la japonaise*. Moreover, because he directs his thoughts towards God, he does not pay attention to Japanese *people* in his poetry on the seasons. Nature personified becomes his companion all throughout *Cent phrases*. In contrast, that which is important for Kuki is contingency and the tension latent in desire between the sexes. He rejects metaphysical necessity and the existence of a supreme being. His rejection of linear time that leads to eternal life after a final judgment bends to his pessimistic vision of the world, in which each being only declines towards death. And since he believes that desire disappears as soon as it

is consummated, he underlines the necessity of self-restraint and resignation in amorous relations. Consequently, his *tanka* overflow with the sensation of solitude and heartbreak, a dignified sadness that recalls more fully the aesthetic effects of the *Kokinshū* and Kuki's interpretation of life in the pleasure quarters of late-Edo Japan.

The process of constructing a coherent poetic world demands this divergence between Claudel's and Kuki's poetry. Claudel, avid reader of the *Kokinshū* in translation, in contact with the traditional arts of Japan during his time in the country, subsequent "translator" of *dodoitsu* into French, had at his disposal models of Japanese poetry that would not have been dissimilar in theme to Kuki's poignant verse. Yet, for Claudel, God is a necessary being. A world in which God does not exist is for Claudel an impossible world. He can imagine such a world, but he places this world outside of his constellation of possible worlds. Thus for Claudel the worlds of traditional Japanese art are also impossible worlds, for the notion of God, the Catholic God, is not present. But since he ascertains certain elements of Japanese art and philosophy resembling that which is familiar to him in Catholic art and thought, he is able to translate these elements into his constellation of possible worlds by reinterpreting them according to his Catholic beliefs. Certainly, this translation is also a deformation, but it opens up to him versions of the worlds of Japanese art and allows to pass between the two a communion of ideas.

The world of Kuki, the poetic world, is structured according to his conception of the Japanese spirit limned in *Iki* and in his speech at Pontigny. He is more open than Claudel to foreign elements thanks to his understanding of metaphysical contingency. According to him, he may very well have been born a French Catholic like Claudel. Being Japanese is not necessary to his being. Superficially, the Christian world is more intelligible to him than the worlds of Japanese Buddhism and Shinto are to Claudel. All the same, in his poetry and philosophy the

positive vision *à la Claudel* is absent. He cannot accept the Claudelian faith in an eternal kingdom that will redeem all of the contingent and corruptible things of the actual world. As such, Claudel's poetic world, his entire poetic and philosophical universe, is impossible for Kuki. In place of a rational and reassuring divinity, Kuki perceives in all possible worlds contingency and the breaking up of that which seems complete and stable. This is the reason that Kuki tries to link the philosophy of Japan to that of ancient Greece. In order for the world of Europe to be intelligible to him, it is necessary for him to translate Europe's foundational civilization, as a fellow "pagan" civilization, into the ontology that structures his constellation of possible worlds. That translation too is a deformation, for it erects a strong barrier between East and West that, by distancing Kuki from a part of the European experience, further contributes to his sense of isolation in Paris.

Does that mean that the worlds of Kuki and Claudel are impossible relative to one another? Not exactly. Different ontologies do structure the two. All the same, it is in this process of comprehending another world while being caught between two distinct cultures that we discover an accessibility relation between the two. In one of the poems of *Parī Shinkei*, Kuki catches the scent of the fragrant olive, which reminds him of his hometown: “木犀のほのぼの匂ふ故郷を秋の晴るれば戀しとぞ思ふ” [“The scent of the fragrant olive makes me yearn for my hometown”] (Zs. 64). Thanks to the presence of this same tree in France and in Japan, Kuki is able, if only for an instant, to break the barrier between the worlds of France and Japan: he can be in France yet feel as if he were in Japan. In this confused state, mentally in one place yet physically in another. Like Claudel, poet of the “accord of different senses,” Kuki tries to find an accord between the world of Paris and the world of Japan, despite their senses in friction, and to form a new literary world in which his visions of France and Japan, Orient and Occident, can

coexist. The latent idea in this, that a poet comes vested with a literary tradition, or a set of worlds, and a nationality, or a constellation of belief, takes this thesis to its final triangulation, featuring the multidimensional traditions envisioned by Bei Dao and Ted Hughes.

Chapter V: Tradition East and West, English and Chinese: The Cross-Cultural Poetry of Bei Dao and Ted Hughes

In the last few years, there's been a certain rediscovery of tradition outside of China. It's like blood calling to blood: at a certain moment you're suddenly aware of it. Compared to an individual's poor powers and scanty accomplishments, the breadth and beauty of the tradition [are] like a huge wind pressing down on a tiny sail, a sailor has to know how to use the wind if the boat is going to go far. And the problem is that the tradition arises from causes as complex as those that produce the wind—you can seek them but you won't find them, you can feel them but not know them. The emphasis Chinese traditional poetry lays on imagery and poetic space is in the end our own wealth (sometimes it comes to us by twisted paths, as when we get it by way of the American Imagist school). When I do readings abroad, I sometimes feel that Li Bai, Du Fu, and Li Yu are standing right behind me. When I hear Gennadi Aygi speak, I seem to sense Pasternak and Mandelstam standing behind him, not to mention Pushkin and Lermontov, even though the differences among them are very great. That's what tradition means. If we have the capability, we can enter into this tradition and enrich it; otherwise we're just failures. (Tang, "An Interview with Bei Dao" 28)

I have been concerned with the problem of communication between East Asian and Western European traditions, namely, of what it entails for poets to draw upon foreign traditions, and how critics can make sense of the resultant literary works. In this chapter, I will focus on how interacting with foreign literature can affect the poet's conception of his or her native tradition. But some themes persist. I will again here be concerned with the problem of identity, not the identity of a literary work or a genre, but of an entire tradition. It has become increasingly common to "problematize" identity and to conceive of identity as fluid. In place of the Aristotelian logic of identity we find hybridity. I have been arguing throughout that the identity of a literary work supervenes on the ontology and social network in which it is placed and from which (in the case of the reader or the critic, if the two do not coincide with the original author) it is interpreted. I will continue with this argument here. But my focus will fan out from a single text or manageable set of texts to the very concept of tradition itself. It should be understood that I am not trying to define a literary tradition, Chinese, English, or other. My concern is for tradition as Bei Dao 北岛 (1949-) and Ted Hughes have viewed it in relation to their work and identity.

My discussion delves into what has been called the "intellectual divide between East and West" (Gu and Guo 2016). According to one theory, there is no essential difference between Eastern and Western thought, or rather between Eastern and Western thinkers, insofar as these differences can be traced to actual structural differences between "Eastern" and "Western" minds. But there is a real divide between Eastern and Western ways of thinking that owes to a difference in metaphysics.¹²⁷ Thus any explanation of the current differences between Eastern

¹²⁷ Among the most astute, and persuasive, arguments in this vein is Zhang (1992).

and Western ways of thought are explained by examining historical metaphysical ideas, those of Confucius and Lao Zi or Aristotle and Augustine, and then comparing traditional Eastern and Western metaphysics to show how the assumptions of past thinkers persist in the modern East and West. This theory is often not only descriptive but also normative: it suggests, as Gu and Guo suggest, that bridging the gap between East and West is not only possible but desirable (313).

Beneficial as this approach is, it implies that a state of critical impartiality can be reached. Fan Meijun and Wang Zhihe state that “[i]n place of either/or West- or East-consciousness binary thinking, it is time to develop a ‘we consciousness’” (291). But even if we presume that such integration could take place, how could we carry it out? As Gu and Guo put it: “For East and West to meet intellectually, it is certainly necessary for Western thinkers and scholars to relinquish their (un)conscious sense of superiority and adherence to Western-centrism; so also is it necessary for Eastern thinkers and scholars to reject Eastern-centrism and their (un)conscious sense of intellectual inferiority” (312). In the concept of “-centrism,” it seems that two notions are confounded: chauvinism and inclination. Critics can be inclined towards a particular set of values without being chauvinistic. They would not be very good critics if they were unable to discern literary value, and such discernment requires a set of aesthetic criteria, even if those criteria are unconscious, and even if those criteria demand disinterestedness. Yet Gu and Guo seem to suggest that being inclined towards an intellectual tradition necessitates intolerance towards other traditions. Accordingly, the only way they see for East and West to “meet” is for both to become decentralized. However, this does not mean that there is no longer a center, only that the center is not located in either the East or the West but in a “world philosophical system”

(Gu and Guo 313). According to the approach I have been developing throughout this thesis, texts and literary traditions are nestled in sets and constellations of belief; this nestling is not necessarily a bad thing—if I am correct, it is a neutral fact of literary production—but it does ask us to attend more to the vantage from which we view literature. As intriguing as Gu and Guo’s article is, it would benefit from accounting for the relations between a literary text, the actual world, and the set and constellation in which it is placed.

Gu and Guo’s prescriptions appear to imply that dialogue between Eastern and Western scholars can lead to a weakening of the very idea of an East and a West. East and West are only oppositional terms; certainly, each contains distinct cultures, and even though there is perhaps no clear boundary between the two we can refer to “Eastern ideas” and “Western ideas” and find real discrepancies between the two. But a world philosophical system, in the sense of a single, unified world, would require the melting away of the oppositional terms East and West. Yet this is not what Gu and Guo have in mind. They ask for “a variation neither of cultural relativism nor of cultural hybridity” that asks Chinese scholars to “creatively synthesize ideas from these cross-cultural texts into new forms of intellectual thought” (312). Throughout this dissertation, we have been tracking the problem of this fusion. Whenever writers attempt to “fuse” East and West, the structure of a literary constellation determines how a literary world coheres, which in turn leads to a unique fusion of ideas and scraps from various texts in a new literary world. If these worlds are not hybrids, what are they?

In asking this question, the problem of identity itself reemerges. In the Romantic era, as we saw in this Chapter I, and as I will readdress here, the idea of a world community dependent on the perfection of smaller national identities began to develop. For Herder, while there is one human species, there are many types of humans. Each type of human belongs to a nation, and

each nation has its own spirit (Herder 98-99). It is not a question of superiority or inferiority between nations, for each nation strives through “human reason” towards order and wholeness (Herder 99). Thus, every human work, every national work, is relative to any other, because all arise from the same cause. Since there is no pure expression of human reason but only many particular national expressions, humans can only realize the principle of human reason by participating in the life of their nations; so for Herder individual identity is inseparable from national identity. Between the particular (person) and the universal (humanity) is the specific identity of the nation. The nation, then, is the mediator of human identity.

It appears that Gu and Guo have this romantic train of thought in mind when they advocate equality between East and West through Chinese critics fusing Western ideas with Eastern ones. The nation is indispensable to their conception of world philosophy. “Empowering” Chinese critics necessitates that the Chinese come into contact with traditional Chinese and Eastern philosophy. The nation is not done away with but rather entrenched by the idea of a world philosophy.

Haun Saussy writes that saying “Western philosophy” or “Western civilization” rather than just “philosophy” or “civilization” is “a step towards self knowledge (knowledge of oneself *as a self*)” (*Problem 6*). Again this is an intuitive idea, that the self comes to knowledge—comes into existence—through contact with other selves. And China is the ultimate other self because its civilization and philosophy developed independently of the West and “the Indo-European subject.” China becomes “a way of learning about the relations of necessity and contingency, nature and culture, genus and example, sign and meaning” (Saussy, *Problem 7*). The “problem of a Chinese aesthetic” is ultimately the pervasive otherness of Chinese thought for many Western scholars since at least Niccolò Longobardi (1559-1654) during the Chinese Rites controversy, a

debate over the fit of Chinese Confucian practices and the Chinese language for an understanding of Catholic doctrine, and the inevitable role of allegory in these European interpretations of China (Saussy, *Problem* 38-46).

However different China and Europe are, the extent of that difference depends upon our frame of reference. G.E.R Lloyd mentions that Aristotelian substance, which clashes with parts of modern physics, is in discord with aspects of Classical Chinese metaphysics that focuses on processes (“Notes” 43). If we take Heraclitus, however, as our referent, the differences between Eastern and Western classical thought diminishes. In the end, the differences between East and West, or at least China and ancient Greece, are less significant than the fact that “both Chinese and Greek philosophers manifest an acute interest in what we may call cosmological questions, in the origin of things and in the world in general, in the current disposition of the earth on which we live, in change and coming to be” (Lloyd, “Notes” 42). This common ground, these “common, possibly universal, human concerns,” furnishes the possibility of comparison between East and West (Lloyd, “Notes” 45).

What I will be looking at now is how Bei Dao and Hughes conceive of their literary contexts, and how they imagine links forming between their literary traditions and what I have been calling their sets of possible worlds and constellations of belief and those of other writers. I will then look at some poetry from each that calls in to question the situatedness of a literary work in each’s “native” tradition. Working through these questions leads to the most grandiose questions of this thesis but ones that have been latent from the very beginning: what can East and West mean, and how could they possibly interact while retaining distinct identities?

5.1 Tradition According to Bei Dao and Ted Hughes

But, as I say, one has only to look at our vocabulary to see where our real mental life has its roots, where the paths to and from our genuine imaginations run, clearly enough. It is false to say these gods and heroes are obsolete: they are the better part of our patrimony still locked up. (Hughes, *Winter* 41)

So says Ted Hughes in a 1964 review of E.O.G. Turville-Petre's *Myth and Religion of the North*. In this brief extract are two concepts to which we should attend. The first is that of the community implied by Hughes' use of the first-person plural. Who is this "we"? It is the people living in the Britain of the 1960s. But these people of Britain are united not by residency or even citizenship alone but at a much deeper level by kinship. They are an "Anglo-Saxon-Norse-Celtic" people who share one "blood" yet who are heir to a heterogeneous culture (Hughes, *Winter* 41). This is the second concept to which we pay attention. Hughes laments that only a small portion of Nordic and Northern European myths are available in English, which is:

a pity, because this particular mythology is much deeper in us, and truer to us, than the Greek-Roman pantheons that came in with Christianity, and again with the Renaissance, severing us with the completeness of a political interdict from those other deities of our instinct and ancestral memory. It is as if we were to lose *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, and have to live on *Timon* and *Coriolanus*; or as if the vocabulary drawn wholly from the Greek-Roman branch were to take over from our Anglo-Saxon-Norse-Celtic: there's no doubt which of these alternatives belong to our blood. (*Winter* 40-41)

In Hughes' implied community, there is a "genuine" culture, one that spontaneously arises from the "blood" of the people of Britain, and there is an imposed Latinate culture. The Latinate strain in Britain, be it in "blood" or language, may be two millennia old by the time Hughes writes, but it remains in Hughes' opinion an addition to the British self, being that it is not Angle, Saxon, Norman, Celtic, or any of the strains he singles out as fundamental to British identity. And this appears to create multiple personae within the individual British person as embodied by the fused Latinate and Anglo-Saxon plays of Shakespeare. Here, Hughes posits a dichotomy between a genuine culture and an imposed culture that, it seems, cannot be overcome, for if after all this time the Latinate remains foreign to Great Britain, then there is good reason to believe that the two will never be unified, with Greco-Roman culture being merely an additive to the "Anglo-Saxon-Norse-Celtic" blood of Hughes and his readers.

What is intriguing about Hughes' statements is that they appeared after his involvement in the *Bardo Thödol* project with Chou Wen-chung, after his intense study of comparative myth and his interest in the psychic unity of humankind. That is, even after his fierce inclination towards what we would now call world literature, towards, to paraphrase Goethe, the best literature written by the best minds all over the world, Hughes was insisting on the ethnic and historical particularity of himself and his immediate British audience. The guiding fiction of his imagined community remained strong despite his contact with literature and religion from around the world and his collaboration with the Chinese-American composer Chou.

Towards the end of his life, Hughes would write *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* in which he would try to bridge the gap between the Latinate and the northern European aspects of British history. I will return to this later. For the moment, let us remark that Hughes not only places himself within a clear line of descent, a clear tradition, that is not simply

cultural but inherent within his very body and blood, but he places his audience, the British public, within this tradition. This tradition is total, as is the imagined community of which it is the corollary, encompassing genetics, literature, and language. As such, it prohibits a full meeting between British culture, literature, and people and anything from outside. The one will always be innate and natural, the other always something strange.

“Blood” and tradition are also mixed in Bei Dao’s mind. However, his use of the term “blood” is more complex than is Hughes’ use. Bei Dao tells us that his awakening to his “Chineseness” came whilst he was abroad. He felt “blood calling to blood” and the weight of Li Bai, Du Fu, and Li Yu behind him (“An Interview” 28). Each of these poets flourished during the Tang Dynasty. Bei Dao’s mixing of “blood” and tradition places him in a political line (Tang as ancestor to the modern Chinese state) and a racial line (Han Chinese).¹²⁸ What complicates Bei Dao’s use of the term blood is his reference to the Russian-Chuvash poet Gennadi Aygi. Just as Bei Dao feels the three Tang poets present in his psyche, so he sees “Pasternak and Mandelstam standing behind [Aygi], not to mention Pushkin and Lermontov” (“An Interview” 28). While Pasternak, Mandelstam, Pushkin, and Lermontov all wrote in Russian and were citizens of a Russian state, each belonged to a community ethnically distinct from Aygi’s. Mandelstam and Pasternak were Jewish, Pushkin part African, and Lermontov a Russian noble. None of them was of Chuvash ancestry or wrote in Chuvash. The sense in which Aygi shares “blood” with these four writers is less clear than it is in the case of Bei Dao and the Tang poets, or than in the case

¹²⁸ Of course, just what counts as “Han” is not clear-cut. The use of the term now hides the ethnic diversity within China, both historically and actually, and owes in part to long-standing imperial ideology. For an overview of how ethnicity and identity worked in Han China itself, see Chun-shu Chang (2007), pp. 249-256. For a consideration of how the process worked during the Tang, consult Abramson (2008), pp. 150-163.

of Hughes and his “Anglo-Saxon-Norse-Celtic” brethren. Bei Dao’s understanding of blood and tradition is considerably looser when he talks about Aygi than when he talks about himself.

When Hughes elaborated on the genealogy of the English tradition in the 1990s, he took into account the tension between communal and national meaning in “modern multi-cultural societies” (*Winter* 311). In “primitive groups, or in small nations that are still little more than tribal assemblies of ancient, inter-related families, where the blood link can still be felt, the conditions” for “shared group understanding” persist (Hughes, *Winter* 310-311). Hughes defines shared group understanding as “deeper shared understandings, [which emerge] through the tokens of the mythology that represents them, [and which when communicated to an audience strengthen] the unified inner life of the group” (*Winter* 310). In a society in which shared understandings are universal, Hughes says, such as they are among the remnants of the Hopi tribe, people “know so thoroughly the mythology of [their] system of shared understanding, which is the life of [the people],” that “nothing needs to be explained” (*Winter* 311).

In a “modern multi-cultural society,” these groups with shared understandings become “sub-groups.” The sub-group retains its language and myths, but it takes on a “second language,” the language of the entire state, which “must by definition exclude the idiosyncratic shared understandings and mythologies of any of the federation’s incorporated sub-groups, since it tolerates only what all can share” (Hughes, *Winter* 311). The tension between the state and the sub-group language causes problems for the poet. The mythology of the poet’s subgroup may mean nothing to a reader from a different subgroup, even though poet and reader alike speak the same language. Hughes gives the example of an American “urban poet”¹²⁹ who could not

¹²⁹ Hughes does not specify the writer’s subgroup, but from the paragraph we can infer that the urban poet was Jewish-American: “In Hebrew, I’m told, pretty well all birds are lumped together in one word: bird. In any case the wren was certainly no part of his mythos” (*Winter* 313).

understand one of Hughes' poems because the poem focused on a wren. In the English poetic tradition, the wren is rich with connotations thanks to the fact that the wren is native to England and has featured in poems by renowned poets such as John Keats and Thomas Hardy. But to the "urban poet" in America, the wren is not familiar. Hughes' poem failed to refer to anything familiar in the mythology of the urban poet's subgroup, so to the American the poem seemed senseless (Hughes, *Winter* 313-314). Were we to translate Hughes' argument into more familiar terms, we would say that, in a society with many sub-groups, a person from one group may understand the reference of a word but not the sense attached to the word by the people of another group. We might say that this urban poet had no epistemic access to the literary universe in which Hughes' poem is situated.

In this late essay, Hughes has also moved away from his vision of a single English heritage. We might think that, because of his talk of modern multiculturalism, Hughes places the native English in one group and recent immigrants in other groups. In fact, Hughes says that his subgroup is that of Yorkshire. He is no longer claiming shared understanding based on the "blood" of the "Anglo-Saxon-Norse-Celtic" people. Now, his community is limited to a small region of Northern England. It follows that Hughes conceives of his communal "mythology" as more particular than in the 1964 essay. Consequently, problems of communication and shared understanding are not new to England or Britain but are in Hughes' opinion quite old, stretching back at least to the Norman invasion: "The technical form [of early English or Anglo-Saxon poetry] was brought into Britain by that pre-Conquest mingling of warrior peoples originating in Germany and Scandinavia" (Hughes, *Winter* 366). For the Normans, the linguistic system was different:

The King's Court, with its baronial aristocracy, held a peculiar position in England. Even after three hundred years, it still regarded itself, to some degree, as an army of occupation, racially distinct, centred on its defensive castles, still claiming rights to its ancestral possessions in France, still maintaining primary allegiance to French and Continental culture, and still, most important of all, speaking the language of superior status, the vocal code of the social and political ascendancy. (Hughes, *Winter* 366)

To the Anglo-Saxons belongs the “two part, alliterative accentual line [that] served as a spinal column for the poetic organism that evolved among those interbreeding strains, finally emerging into the Middle English of Langland's *Piers Plowman* and *Gawain and the Green Knight*” (Hughes, *Winter* 366). To the aristocracy belong “strictly metrical, iambic, [and] rhymed” verses of Middle French and Italian (Hughes, *Winter* 367). Hughes applauds Chaucer for managing to fit the English language to these French and Italian verse forms. Chaucer was only able to accomplish this, Hughes says, because he “divined the human richness of this new double world coming to consciousness—probably because he belonged to both sides” (*Winter* 367). There is parity between the tension among subgroups in the modern multicultural society and the divide between Anglo-Saxons and Normans in the Middle Ages.

Chaucer's success did not mean the end of the divide between the two worlds of England. Hughes argues that, as the aristocracy dropped French, it made sure not to pick up “the strange Babel of English (Germanic) dialects” from the commoners; rather, the aristocracy adopted “King's English,” which “had to display, as its most pronounced and obvious characteristic, that it did not derive from any corner of Englishness” (Hughes, *Winter* 367). With the Restoration, the French model came back vigorously, and banished all remnants of the Anglo-Saxon from

genteel discourse (Hughes, *Winter* 370). Romanticism attempted to bring it back but failed. For Hughes this is the tragedy of English verse: the forgetting of one side of the English tradition.

Hughes' reconceptualization of English identity and the English tradition occurred as he was reconceptualizing his own identity. As Simon Armitage tells us, as Hughes aged he became more concerned with "mythologizing" himself as not simply a Yorkshire poet but a poet from the Calder Valley, even though Hughes spent the majority of his youth and adult life outside of the Valley (6-7). In other words, Hughes increasingly thought of himself as an outsider. The concept of "blood" in his 1964 essay guaranteed an essential sameness for all people in England. If everyone shares the same blood, then, thinks 1964 Hughes, everyone has the same underlying identity. Consequently, regional differences are secondary: distinctions between a person from Manchester and one from Cornwall are obviated because both people are of Anglo-Saxon-Norse-Celtic blood. But later Hughes came to assert his difference from his English peers. Neil Roberts, discussing Hughes' time at Cambridge, notes that critics generally assume that:

as one of a minority of working-class grammar-school boys [Hughes] was alienated from the social environment of the university; he hated the academic study of literature, which stifled his creativity, and therefore switched to Archaeology and Anthropology for the final year of his degree; despite publishing nothing under his own name while at Cambridge he had a reputation as a poet. (17)

Roberts contends that this "narrative constitutes a 'myth' of the creative individual struggling in a hostile academic environment: a romantic myth that suits Hughes' image as a poet" but which is largely exaggerated or "demonstrably untrue" (17). He finds that Hughes was admitted to

Cambridge with a prestigious scholarship, did well studying literature, had friends from public schools, appeared happy, and published poems in small literary journals. The idea of Hughes as a Byronic force “at odds with the literary establishment” emerged later in Hughes’ life and, Roberts says, is not an accurate description of Hughes’ undergraduate career (30). Over time, Hughes’ sense of his identity became increasingly narrow, just as his idea of Britain was broken down into a set of organic subgroups. And as Hughes’ belief that he had to compromise his subgroup identity to communicate with other members of his nation or of the Anglosphere took shape, he made this problem central to the entire English literary tradition. Consequently, as Hughes’ conception of a common English blood declined, his notion of conflict within the English tradition increased. He lost, that is, the sense of harmony implied by Bei Dao’s definition of tradition as “blood calling to blood.”

So far I have considered tradition in isolation, by which I mean I have discussed how Bei Dao and Hughes understood a tradition to be constituted but not how traditions interact with one another. I have touched on this with Hughes’ investigation of the role of French and Continental poetry on English literature. But in that example, tradition is identifiable with a certain group, the Normans, who had taken up residence in Britain and was subsequently absorbed into what we now call the English people. In this case, the experience of a foreign tradition is inseparable from the physical existence of a group of people; and the mingling of the French and Continental models with the Anglo-Saxon *is* the mingling of the Anglo-Saxons of England with the invading Normans. But what of the modern encounter between Western European and East Asian traditions? Certainly, these encounters were driven by imperialism and war. However, the people of East Asia were not dissolved into the people of Western Europe, or vice versa, as the Normans

were into the people of England. What does it mean, to put it in Bei Dao's terms, to "hear" blood calling to blood when dealing with a foreign tradition the "blood" is not the poet's own?

For Bei Dao, "the writer's task is to stand apart from the mainstream, and to regard it critically as well as with distrust" ("Ancient" 3). But the contemporary writer is also a "witness to or participant in public life." The writer therefore has a "dual identity" that is "detached from and yet part of society." We wonder why a writer must be part of a society yet remain skeptical of it: of what is the writer to be skeptical? Surely the writer is not to be a skeptic for the sake of skepticism whatever the conditions of society may be. In fact, the dual identity is a product of globalization:

Currently, the complicity of globalization with money and power has replaced the tensions that existed between East and West during the Cold War; now, all forms of orthodox ideology are a potential threat to living an authentic life. Today's globalized world is more labyrinthine and unpredictable, and thus much more dangerous than in past decades. As such, a writer in our hyper-commodified era must be wary of so-called popular speech expressions, which feed on vulgarization emerging from the realm of entertainment. Under the flag of "democratization," the art of writing is reduced to simply a tool for profiteering. A writer must guard his multifaceted perspective, responding through his work and beyond. (Bei Dao, "Ancient" 3)

The society Bei Dao describes privileges the present: instant gratification through the "infantilization" of the modern subject. Giving up his or her "authentic" subjectivity, the modern subject relies upon "the jargons of academia, business, politics, and such areas" and "the massive

lingual and flotsam [that comes] from entertainment, the internet, and new media” (Bei Dao, “Ancient” 3-4). Jargon acts as a substitute for independent thought. In an economy that rewards sloganeering, the poet can easily rely on platitudes and yet become successful. This is the culture towards which Bei claims the modern poet must be skeptical. What, then, is the culture to which the poet should feel connected? Considering Bei Dao’s remarks on blood calling to blood, the culture is a literary tradition that transcends history. Because of tradition, the poet can feel simultaneity with the poets of the past. Tradition acts as a referent for poet and audience alike. It allows the poet to communicate with his or her audience while remaining vigilant against the desire to be popular and wealthy at all costs. Bei Dao says that many writers of his era were unable to remain steadfast in this regard:

In other words, these artists and writers were no longer defying themselves, no longer competing against themselves. Truly, such self-defiance is the ultimate line of defense. If this defense falls, the writer simply surrenders completely to the world, follows its corrupt examples, and loses hope for salvation. (“Ancient” 4)

Tradition, then, is an ideal that guides the poet and warns against the ready-made ideals and answers provided by mass culture.

We should historicize Bei Dao’s position. The “jargon” that he rails against was an integral part of the Cultural Revolution in Mao’s China. All poetry needed to point towards the glory of Mao and the inevitable victory of the proletariat. As Bei Dao puts it:

For over three decades, since 1949, the Chinese dwelled in the dark shadow of an “official” language known as the “Maoist style.” This official language restricted the content and form of people’s thoughts and speech. It even tried to subvert the forms of love. In those years, words and their associations were tightly regulated, such that, for example, “sun” was always a reference to Mao Tse-tung, “red” meant revolution, and “mother” was homeland or the Communist Party. The means by which people resisted the prison-house of the official language— language that marched “in step with the executioners”—was precisely through underground modern poetry, which was able to transform and reinvigorate contemporary Chinese speech and writing. (“Ancient” 3)

What Bei does not mention is the role played by traditional Chinese poetry during this time. Haosheng Yang has observed the vicissitudes of traditional poetry in twentieth-century China. In 1919, the May Fourth Movement occurred. The Movement was led by Beijing intellectuals who protested the government’s inability to deal with Western and Japanese imperialism and internal strife. From this came a group of writers including Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936), Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967), Yu Dafu 郁达夫 (1896-1945), and Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978) who remonstrated against the use of Classical Chinese in literature. Classical Chinese, also known as Literary Chinese, had been the language of Chinese literature since the 5th century B.C. This was despite the fact that Literary Chinese had been distinct from vernacular Chinese since at least the 2nd century A.D. The May Fourth writers argued that Classical Chinese represented the backwards and elitist Chinese culture that had fallen to Western and Japanese colonialism. The writers advocated imitating the West and writing literature in the vernacular. However, as Yang shows, each of the May Fourth writers mentioned above continued to write poetry in Literary

Chinese. After Mao's triumph in 1949 and the crackdown on dissidents in the late 1950s, writing Classical Chinese poetry became an act of rebellion. For the later poet Nie Gannu 聂绀弩 (1903-1986), Classical poetry became a way to deal with forced labor and the nightmare of the Cultural Revolution. In the span of half a decade, Classical Chinese poetry went from being retrograde to revolutionary; continuing the tradition of writing Classical poetry meant resisting the sloganeering of Maoism.¹³⁰ The universe of Classical Chinese accrued a new significance.

Even though Bei Dao does not write Classical poetry, we can see why remaining close to tradition and distant from the official culture are important to him. Tradition is of course never a stable thing. It is constantly appropriated and redefined by various groups seeking to legitimize their rule or existence. Even as they persecuted practitioners of traditional poetry, Maoists claimed to be the champions of the Chinese people and of Chinese history in the face of Western and internal reactionary aggression. Yiching Wu notes that the Maoist government defined itself against the “imaginary universe of the old class—the bureaucratically codified class enemies defined mainly in terms prerevolutionary social positions” (48). “Invoking the traditional religious language of demonic invasion and the image of an ominous underworld populated by malevolent spirits,” Wu writes, “discourses about old and new class enemies—each with distinct historical trajectories and structures of antagonism—became fused or confused” (48). From this invocation of traditional superstition, Mao's new elite both derived its legitimacy and disguised its assumption of the very rigid class system it attacked.

¹³⁰ In the case of Guo Moruo, writing Maoist jargon and Classical poetry were not mutually exclusive. Yang points out that Guo “declared in the mid-1930s that he would like to be a “slogan man” (*biaoyu ren/kouhao ren* 標語人/口號人) of the communist revolution rather than a poet who indulged in self-expression” (148). He and Mao exchange Classical poems: “While the two authors commonly followed traditional prosody's decorum, what they expressed are the typical concerns of modern Chinese authors regarding the rapid social, political, and cultural changes of the twentieth century” (Yang 182). But under Mao's rule Guo's poetry became increasingly constrained, and his Classical Chinese poems tailored to suit the contours of Maoist propaganda.

To Maoism's version of the Chinese tradition, Bei Dao opposed his own version. Misty poetry, or *menglong shi* 朦胧诗, arose, he claims, from "translation style."

After the communist takeover of China, many very good writers and poets gave up writing and became professors, translators, and researchers of foreign literature, since some of them had a very good education and studied in foreign countries. They created a certain style—"translation form"—which was quite different from the official discourse. This translation form became mature just before the Cultural Revolution and formed a basis for the underground literature. (Featherston)

Translations of Western literature enabled Bei and other 1970s poets to escape the "dumb and wooden" official language. Eventually this influence became too pervasive, and Bei and other Chinese poets "wanted to purify Chinese and say goodbye to this sort of translations style" (Featherston). This modifies his later statement that "there has been a certain rediscovery of tradition outside of China." It is not simply that Bei and other Chinese poets have come into touch with Chinese tradition by virtue of living in foreign countries; the rediscovery of Chinese tradition was concomitantly spurred by the surfeit of foreign influence in Chinese poetry.

We saw in Chapter II that Hughes believed himself heir to a tradition of Shamanism in English poetry that extended from Shakespeare to Yeats. Christopher Trinacty expands on this to include Hughes' treatments of Seneca and Ovid. Hughes' classical "translations were as much attempts to get at the heart of his own poetry as a conduit for another's voice" (Trinacty 502). In other words, Hughes came to translate the Latinate tradition into the same mythic universe of which he felt Yeats, Shakespeare, and the northern European tradition was an inextricable part.

As his understanding of English tradition moved from the concept of England and Englishness as unified to fragmented, and his own self as bound not to England as a whole but to a small region in Yorkshire, he laid claim to the Latin tradition from which he had previously excluded himself by virtue of his Anglo-Saxon-Norse-Celtic heritage. Yet his interest in Ovid and Seneca was ultimately driven by his desire to understand Latin poetry as part of his personal mythic universe. In this sense, his retreat from the idea of a unified English nation did not mean that he was disinterestedly open to non-English poetry.

A year before his death, Hughes reflected on the changes in the English tradition occasioned by globalization:

Has it modified British tradition? Well, it must have modified it one way: at least all young British poets now know that the British tradition is not the only one among the traditions of the globe. Everything is now completely open, every approach, with infinite possibilities. Obviously the British tradition still exists as a staple of certain historically hard-earned qualities if anybody is still there who knows how to inherit them. Raleigh's qualities haven't become irrelevant. When I read Primo Levi's verse I'm reminded of Raleigh. But for young British poets it's no longer the only tradition, no longer a tradition closed in on itself and defensive. ("Interview with Drue Heinz")

We find here the opposite of Bei Dao's idea of tradition. The tradition to which Hughes thirty years earlier believed he was tied by blood is now merely secondary. It appears powerless even to propagate itself. There are inexhaustible choices that the modern British poet can make; he or she need not even identify as British, but can be a part of as many or as few poetic traditions as

desired. Even the locative identity that Hughes identified in his discussion of the genesis of the English tradition has dissolved. In this last formulation, the individual poet is in an unmediated relation with the universal.

For thirty years Hughes had worked to open English literature to foreign poetry. With Daniel Weissbort (1935-2013), he cofounded *Modern Poetry in Translation* in 1965. The journal introduced Central and Eastern European poets who were writing from the other side of The Iron Curtain including the Serbian Vasko Popa (1922-1991) and the Czech Miroslav Holub (1923-1988). It also published poets from non-Communist regimes, including Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai (1924-2000) and the French poet Yves Bonnefoy (1923-2016). The journal increasingly published poets from around the world, with several from China and East Asia. The most recent edition, Winter 2016, is devoted to Korean poetry. It is not that Hughes acquiesced to the effects of globalism on English poetry. He actively encouraged them, and perhaps did more than any other poet in the latter half of the twentieth century to allow English readers to become acquainted with a variety of contemporary foreign poets.

Though the circumstances in China and England during the twentieth century were vastly different, there were for Bei Dao and Hughes many similarities. In both countries there was a flood of foreign literature that altered how Chinese and English were seen. In China, foreign literature was vaunted during the May Fourth Movement as an enlightened alternative model to Classical Chinese poetry. But many May Fourth writers eventually returned to Classical Chinese literature after the success of the May Fourth Movement lowered the status of traditional Chinese poetry. During the crackdowns of the 1950s and 1960s, translating and imitating foreign literature was a means to evade the strictures of the Maoist government. The success of Bei Dao and other “Misty” poets in the 1970s and 1980s, and Bei Dao’s own forced exile, once again led

to the over influence of foreign literature, and a “certain rediscovery of tradition outside of China” took place. In England, the triumph of liberalism opened England to foreign influence, both in the form of literary translations and immigrants from the commonwealth. When Hughes wrote in the early 1960s, he could address his audience as if they all shared the same “blood” as him. He could also take for granted that the English tradition was self-generating, produced by the “Anglo-Saxon-Norse-Celtic” genetics of the English people. But his own work in introducing foreign literature to the English public and the increase of immigrant communities with which he was in contact caused him to rethink the nature of English tradition and its value at the end of the twentieth century. For both Bei Dao and Hughes, the concept of tradition underwent several mutations in response to each poet’s contact with foreign literature.

The question to address is, how did Bei Dao and Hughes integrate these foreign influences into their poetry? In the next section, I will examine each poet’s integration of Chinese and European sources into their poetry. I will consider how this fusion of East and West modifies both the poet’s concept of the foreign and of the native. I will attempt to show that for both poets it is not a question of either being cosmopolitan or being parochial; the native and the foreign exist in tandem, and a greater understanding of the one deepens the comprehension of the other.

5.2 A Chinese History of the Calder Valley

In the 1979 collection *Remains of Elmet*, Ted Hughes published “The Trance of Light.” The poem is standard Hughes fare. A postindustrial setting, the Calder Valley, is suddenly overwhelmed and redeemed by premodern magic.

The upturned face of this land

The mad singing in the hills

The prophetic mouth of the rain

That fell asleep

Under migraine of headscarves and clatter

Of clog-irons and looms

And gutter-water and clog-irons

And clog-irons and biblical texts

Stretches awake, out of Revelations

And returns to itself.

Chapels, chimneys, vanish in the brightening

And the hills walk out on the hills

The rain talks to its gods

The light, opening younger, fresher wings

Holds this land up again like an offering

Heavy with the dream of a people. (Hughes, *Collected* 459)

Hughes would later rewrite this poem as “Chinese History of Colden Water.” I am first going to discuss the meaning of this poem and its relation to Hughes’ idea of tradition. Then I will consider the transformations Hughes made in turning “The Trance of Light” into “Chinese History” and how the integration of China and England in the poem can deepen our understanding of East-West interactions in twentieth century poetry.

The opening stanza of “Trance” sets up the land as Anglo-Saxon. The first lines are Yeatsian, with pantheistic overtones. The land is anthropomorphized, with a “face” and a finite body that can be “held up.” The “mad singing” appears to be a direct quote from Yeats’ 1922 drama *The Player Queen*, where Decima refers to her singing as “the song of the mad singing daughter of a harlot. The only song she had” (351). Decima ends up taking the place of the chaste Queen at the end of the play, marking, as Otto Bolhmann argues, the reversal of the pure and the profane according to Yeats’ notion of gyres (184). The title *The Player Queen* is itself an allusion to “The Player Queen” of *Hamlet*, wherein the mad singing of Ophelia following her father’s murder is well known. The line may also be yet another reference to *King Lear*, particularly to the madness of Lear and the Fool upon the heath shortly before Lear’s death. In each of these cases, mad singing is associated with the unjust deposition of a monarch and the establishment of a new order.

The old, pantheistic order here merely “falls asleep.” The new order does not depose the old; it exists on top of the old. The new is a mix of technology and Christianity. Hughes signals the distance between the old and the new by breaking them into separate stanzas separated by the dependent clause “that fell asleep.” He also changes the meter and the rhetoric. The first stanza was a series of trimetric and anaphoric noun phrases. The meter in the third stanza is 4-3-4-4 with several spondees, with the last two lines again anaphoric. We note that anaphora is

especially associated with the Book of Psalms. The use of anaphora throughout suggests the presence of Christianity in England and its conflict with pre-Christian pantheism. The anaphoric lines describe the lapse of pantheism, and reinforce the notion of struggle between the premodern and the modern, the pagan and the Christian. The repetition of “clog-irons” in the last two lines is anadiplosis, the repetition of the concluding phrase of one line at the start of the next line: “And gutter-water and *clog-irons* / And *clog-irons* and biblical texts.” Anadiplosis is the first rhetorical scheme in the King James Bible: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the Earth. / And Earth was without form and void” (Genesis 1:1 and 2, KJV). The combination of anadiplosis and anaphora in stanza three mark as Christian the “migraine” that numbed the premodern elements of England. And it further encourages us to connect to Christianity the technological world that has overtaken the Calder Valley, a connection that strengthened in the sixth stanza, where “Chapels, chimneys, vanish” together “in the brightening.”

We also note the use of metonymy in both the first and third stanzas. The *face* of the land and the *mouth* of the rain indicate that all aspects of nature are parts of a larger whole. To put it differently, everything we encounter in nature is like a part of a complete anatomy. But where nature is whole, the technological world is fragmented. Headscarves, clog-irons, looms, and biblical texts are all products of technology, especially if we think of texts in the context of the printing press. The products are listed and duplicated. They are placed beside one another, yet not unified by an overarching concept as the rain and the land are by nature. Metonymy in the first stanza points towards unification, whereas in the third stanza it indicates incoherence.

Stanza five gives us, at last, the predicate we have been awaiting since the first stanza. “The upturned face of this land / The mad singing in the hills / The prophetic mouth of the rain” now “stretches awake.” The use of the third person singular for the verb tells us that the land,

singing, and rain are to be taken as one entity. The present tense of the verb also comes as a surprise; it is not that the pantheistic world is located in the past; rather, it is the “migraine” of technology that is past. The old world is in fact the world of the now. It is eternally present. That nature awakens from “Revelations / And returns to itself” shows that Hughes is recasting Christianity. Just as Revelations tells of the end of time and the return of humanity to its essence in God, so Hughes’ poem tells of a nature that exists outside of time and the return of nature to its pre-technological state. We can say that Hughes’ attack is not on Christianity per se—and Christianity has, after all, not fared well during the modern era—but on the mass production of religious verse. The religiosity that Hughes favors is revealed. The “rain talks to its gods.” This is not religion mediated by scripture disseminated *en masse*, but direct communion with the divine. Hughes thus feels enabled to mix the pantheistic with the overt Christian imagery of the “wings” of light.

The final two lines are not anaphoric but alliterative. Hughes has changed the biblical scheme for the scheme most closely identified with Anglo-Saxon and Skaldic verse. In these alliterated lines we encounter “people.” Not people in general, or “the people” of a state, but “a people.” “A people” means one amongst many, and returns to Hughes’ early declaration that the English people are a uniquely Anglo-Saxon-Norse-Celtic people. This group of people could also more narrowly be those of the Calder Valley. It is now they who sleep, “dream” of an “offering” made of the land spoiled by technology. That is, the restoration of nature in the Calder Valley appears to be the innate desire of its residents. There is a deep-rooted link between land and people.

“Trance of Light” accords with the axioms Hughes set down in 1964. People are bound by blood and by place. Blood and place are eternal, primary traits to which technology and the

emergence of Christianity are secondary. Thus, the disappearance of technology and the reconfiguration of religion do not fundamentally change the people who live in the valley. That epoch was, after all, only a moment in the life of the land. The people exist so long as the land does. In this light, nature is supreme over culture.

Given this, why would Hughes change “The Trance of Light” into “Chinese History of Colden Water”? I will present the revised poem, then consider what Hughes has changed and what he has altered.

A fallen immortal found this valley -
Leafy conch of whispers
On the shore of heaven. He brought to his ear
The mad singing in the hills,
The prophetic mouth of the rain -

These hushings lulled him. So he missed
The goblins toiling up the brook.
The clink of fairy hammers forged his slumber

To a migraine of head-scarves and clatter
Of clog-irons and looms, and gutter water
And clog-irons and biblical texts.

Till he woke in a terror, tore free, lay panting.
The dream streamed from him. He blinked away
The bloody matter of the Cross
And the death's head after-image of 'Poor'.

Chapels, chimneys, roofs in the mist - scattered.
Hills with raised wings were standing on hills.
They rode the waves of light
That rocked the conch of whispers

And washed and washed at his eye.

Washed from his ear

All but the laughter of foxes. (Hughes, *Collected* 738-739)

The word *trance* denotes a state of dread, a swoon or a cataleptic state, a state between sleeping and waking, *ecstasy* (OED). Hughes may have any or all of these meanings in mind as he wrote “The Trance of Light”; yet in the rewrite the ontology of the ecstatic vision becomes questionable. In the original, the genuineness of the vision is presumed. The rhetoric of the poem accentuates the religiosity of the scene and makes the disappearance of technology a rapturous event. Moreover, the vision appears unmediated. Yes, we are looking at the “dream of a people,” but we are given no reason to doubt the validity of that dream. Hughes, lifelong admirer of Yeats and Carl Jung, gives us direct access to the collective unconscious of the people of the Calder

Valley. In this way, Hughes presents the scene as a morally just reclamation of nature, and indeed human nature, from the ravages of postindustrial modernity.

In “Chinese History,” the dream element is amplified. We no longer find a land that falls asleep or a people who dream, but a Chinese immortal who enters a trance. Furthermore, the vision does not come from the immortal’s unconscious, as a dream does. A “leafy conch” communicates the vision to the Chinese immortal. Whereas the origins of the vision are unquestioned in trance, here they have a material origin. Additionally, only the modern aspects of the original vision appear in the immortal’s dream. The salvation of the land comes after we read that the immortal “woke in a terror, tore free, lay panting.” Everything is now narrated in the past rather than the present tense. The transcendent time, the eternal now in which the land of the original poem lives, is now historicized. We have, in other words, a magical history rather than a divine vision, and the layers of mediation—the conch shell, the Chinese immortal, the narrator—conspire to make us aware of our distance from the events in the poem.

Gone are the “gods” and the anthropomorphized land and rain. Gone too is the “mad singing in the hills.” Nothing can come back “to itself out of Revelations.” The “hills” remain from the first poem, but now they have the “wings” that previously belonged to the “waves of light,” and rather than having “hills walk out on hills” Hughes has hills “standing on hills.” Though these are still hills with human characteristics, their human qualities are less pronounced: while the idea hills walking on top of one another cannot be rationalized according to any common experience we have of hills or any other natural formation, the image of “hills standing on hills” could be a metaphor for hills rising behind hills, a commonplace image. The humanization of nature and the accentuation of a premodern, pantheistic bond between the residents of Calder Valley and the Valley itself are less pronounced in the rewrite.

Finally, we notice that Hughes has altered his attitude towards Christianity. He no longer employs anadiplosis. The three lines of anaphora that start “The Trance of Light” have disappeared, as have the final two alliterative verses. Hughes has added “the Bloody matter of the cross / And the death’s head after image of Poor.” This implies a link between the poverty of the Valley and organized religion. But, as we saw, pantheism is no longer offered as a natural alternative in “Chinese History.” In “Trance,” the residents of the Calder Valley are persecuted by technology and organized religion. The people’s salvation comes when chapels and chimneys “vanish in the brightening.” In “Chinese History,” the people appear to be part of the problem. We read, “Chapels, chimneys, roofs in the mist – scattered.” To the metonyms of religion and industry are added the generic “roofs,” which could include the homes of the residents of the Valley. The people appear complicit in the destruction of nature. This implies that the people of Calder Valley lack the essential innocent Anglo-Saxon-Norse-Celtic premodern identity that Hughes gave them in 1964 and played upon in “Trance.” Further, the chapels, chimneys, and roofs do not “vanish” but are “scattered.” The apocalyptic scene does not purify the land for eternity, but rather casts out that which is responsible for the postindustrial condition of the Valley. Once more, the finality of the vision of “Trance” is undercut in “Chinese History.” An exile can, after all, always return if there is a change in the land from which he or she was exiled.

Hughes leaves us with an enigmatic conclusion. Keith Sagar interprets “Chinese History” as the hope that modern civilization will pass as if “no more than the nightmare of a stranded immortal who will eventually wake to a world cleansed of humans” (168). Terry Gifford sees the conch as an indication of the “idyllic” preindustrial Calder Valley (27). For Gifford, the “laughter of foxes” is not to be separated from the “laughter of humans.” Hughes does not believe that all human tendencies are bad, Gifford suggests, and the laughing foxes are an

invitation to return to more harmonious relationship between man and nature, to that idyllic preindustrial valley that also contained humans (31). As cogent as both critics' observations are, they take a limited reading of the final line. In truth, there are several elements in "Chinese History" that owe to Hughes' thirty-five-year interaction with Chinese thought. Hughes owned many books on Chinese folktales, owned a copy of *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations*, a seminal textbook discussing the motifs of Chinese fiction. Surely he would have been aware when writing a poem entitled "Chinese History of Colden Water" that foxes have an important supernatural function in Chinese letters. The Chinese fox spirit is invariably a woman, part of the overarching theme of the "supernatural maiden." Joseph S. M. Lau, editor of *Traditional Chinese Stories*, instructs that the supernatural maiden is "usually an animal" that takes on "a human form after hundreds of years of self-cultivation in supernatural magic" (337). The maiden always falls in love with a young man, and this giving into her human side leads to her death. Perhaps because she is originally a part of nature, the maiden adheres much more to the moral codes of society than do normal human women. Regardless, because she is not human, she is almost always punished with death or reversion to her animal form. Only in P'u Sung-ling's *Liao Chai Chih-i* does the marriage between man and fox lead to uninterrupted conjugal bliss (Lau 337). I am suggesting that, thanks to his amateur study of Chinese literature, Hughes' familiar fox motif has been partly Sinicized. This is still the English fox that bears witness to the ravages of industry, but it has accrued additional significance to which we must attend.

But the most important text to which Hughes alludes is the *Bardo Thödol*. Even though the *Bardo* is not Chinese, the *Bardo* filters Hughes' vision of China. Take the "leafy conch." In the Evans-Wentz translation of the *Bardo*, the conch is mentioned as one of the instruments of

the Tibetan death ceremony. Referring to a Tibetan illustration of a deceased man prepared for his passage through the Bardo Thödol, Evans-Wentz writes:

Among other embellishments added by the artist are a sacred mirror (symbolizing form or body, which it reflects) near the trees on the left, and a sacred conch-shell trumpet of victory over the Sangsāra (symbolizing sound) near the tree on the right; and, between the two Buddhas at the bottom, in two caves, yogīs, or holy men, in the Tibetan wilderness. (xxix)

The “sacred conch-shell trumpet of victory” is a familiar Buddhist symbol. It is used as a musical instrument in Tibetan drama and ritual to signify “auspicious moments” (Arnold 345, 363). In Chinese Buddhism there is the “Conch of the Law” (法螺 *faluo*). This conch is “a symbol of the universality, power, or command of the Buddha’s teaching” (Soothill and Hodous 272). The conch has special significance in part because it resembles the curled or spiral-shaped hair of the Buddha in art (Soothill and Hodous 462). The auspiciousness of the conch helps the departed soul through the trials of the Bardo as it is blown at the dead person’s bedside.¹³¹ These holy properties are what Hughes has in mind.

We observe this again in the location of the leafy conch in the poem: on the “shore of heaven.” Planes of existence in Buddhism may be referred to as shores. For instance, there is the “shore of nirvana” and the “shore of mortality” (Soothill and Hodous 250). In the Chou-Hughes *Bardo* discussed in Chapter II, the Reader of the Bardo cautions Solo, the departed soul:

¹³¹ The ritual surrounding the dead and the passage through the Bardo is discussed in detail in Chapter II.

Balang-chod has wealth walking as tall shining horses by water,
And their manes unfold abundance.
But be restrained:
It is a land
Without religion. (23)

In the Evans-Wentz translation of the *Bardo* from which Hughes drew material for his libretto, Balong-chod is described as ““a lake adorned with horses, male and female, [grazing on its shores]” (516). On the same page, the Evans-Wentz translation mentions “the Northern Continent of Daminyan, a lake adorned with male and female cattle, [grazing on its shores], or trees, [round about it], will be seen” (516). Given Hughes’ deep familiarity with Evans-Wentz’s translation, we conclude that Hughes knew the significance of “shore” as a metaphor in Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism.¹³²

The mention of the conch and the shore of heaven tell us that Hughes is not lightly playing on Oriental tropes. Rather, he has made the cosmology of “Chinese History” agree with that which he has learned from study of the *Bardo*, the religion of Tibetan Bon, and Chinese Buddhism. What is remarkable is that Hughes has made this foreign material central to a poem that originally took Hughes’ conception of a specifically English character and spirituality as its

¹³² In Hughes’ library is the Hawkes’ translation of arguably the most famous Chinese classical novel, the *Honglouloumeng* (紅樓夢). The novel is the story of a magical stone that has become a child of an aristocratic Chinese family. In its latest state, the stone sits on “the other shore,” the shore of the afterlife, much as Hughes’ conch lies on the “shore of heaven.” The novel mixes historical and religious genres, and is famous for its multiple comments on the inextricability of truth and untruth in fiction and in human experience broadly. Hughes acquired this book after he wrote “Trance” but before “Chinese History.” Regardless of whether the leafy conch and the shore refer to the stone and the shore of the *Honglouloumeng*, the book was yet another occasion for Hughes to become acquainted with a variety of tropes related to Buddhism and Chinese literature that are present in “Chinese History.”

spiritual compass. Not only did Hughes' study of the *Bardo* come to inform his conception of Chinese religion, that Chinese-Tibetan mix was used to sculpt an alternative history of his native Calder Valley. In this history, technology, organized religion, and indigenous folk beliefs have failed. They have been scattered, banished from the Valley. In their place arises a Buddhist cosmology. The change coincides with Hughes' changing definition of Englishness and the English tradition. When he wrote "Chinese History," he no longer believed in a coherent pan-British or pan-English identity. He began to conceive of Englishness as composed of several subgroups, of which his Calder Valley was one. Yet in "Chinese History" even the Calder Valley subgroup is impotent to redress the damage caused by industry. Therefore, Hughes calls upon Buddhism and the *Bardo*, and suggests that the Valley may be reborn, with a conch shell announcing an auspicious rebirth. Buddhism functions as a path to a new beginning that elides the categories of Englishness that Hughes had previously set. It is fitting, then, that that which announces the rebirth of the Calder Valley should be the "laughter of foxes," the laughter of an animal central to English and Chinese literature. This fusion of East and West, however, comes at the price of humanity itself. That is, only by "scattering" the particulars of religion, culture, and people themselves—"Chapels, chimneys, roofs"—can this Buddhist recasting of Calder Valley be achieved. Ultimately, "Chinese History" is not a total reconciliation of East and West; the people who embody subgroups of East and West are done away with before the reconciliation can take place.

5.3 Bei Dao, Finding China as an Exile

Bei Dao's fame originated in the late 1970s with his role in the so-called *menglongshi* (朦朧詩) or "Misty poetry" movement. A derogatory term chosen by critics of the movement, "Misty

poetry” sprung from Bei Dao’s literary journal *Jintian* (今天) or *Today*, which ran from 1978 to 1980. Aside from Bei Dao, other famous Misty poets include Shu Ting 舒婷 (1952-), Yang Lian 楊 (1955-), and Duoduo 多多 (1951-). “Emphasizing polyvalent imagery, and irregular syntax,” Chee Lay Tan explains, “Misty poetry engendered a multiplicity of meanings, often leading to interpretational indeterminacy” (2). “Indeterminacy” was important to the Misty poets because they emerged during and just after the Cultural Revolution. Rejecting the fixed literary horizons of Maoism, Bei Dao and his peers introduced into Chinese poetry a polysemy without precedent (Tan 15).

Tan has provided an excellent survey of the reception of Misty poetry. In its early years, the Misty poets provoked the ire of the Chinese establishment:

In general, the fury of orthodox critiques targeted Misty poetry’s thematic opaqueness, which was seen as an ideological challenge to the dominant Maoist obsession with clarity and simplicity of meaning. In fact, the latter’s covert motive was to limit the individual’s control over his own interiority, and to undermine the writer’s literary subjectivity, which has become a defense of both the autonomy of literature and human subjectivity against Mao’s anti-humanist injunctions an observation proposed by scholars such as Liu Zaifu. (Tan 16)

Preoccupied with the intangible and the “existential,” Misty poets were labeled as “elitist” and reactionary (Tan 17). However much the Chinese establishment disliked Misty poetry, foreign critics have also attacked Bei Dao’s work. Some, of course, have praised Bei Dao. Stephen Owen, as we saw in Chapter I, drew a line between Chinese poetry meant for consumption

abroad and that meant for appreciation in China, and favorably contrasted Bei Dao with Nobel Prize winner Gao Xingjian. But Owen's 2003 praise of Bei Dao partly reverses his earlier criticism of the Chinese poet. In his 1990 review of an English translation of *The August Sleepwalker* 八月的夢旅者, Owen charged that Bei Dao was currying favor with Western audiences "by writing a supremely translatable poetry" that uses images that have no particular attachment to China. As "international" poetry, Bei Dao's verse "achieves moments of beauty, but it does not have a history, nor is it capable of leaving a trace that might constitute a history" (Owen, "'World' Poetry" 32). This for Owen is bland literature that can fit in anywhere but be preeminent nowhere.

Tan in turn criticizes Owen. Considering that Bei Dao wrote the poems of *The August Sleepwalker* between 1970 and 1986, Tan argues that Bei Dao could not "have hoped to have [these poems] translated." He mentions that Owen's criticism aligns with W.J.F. Jenner's. Jenner too dismissed Bei Dao because Bei Dao broke with the conventions of Classical Chinese poetry and wrote in what Jenner considered degraded post-Cultural Revolution style. Tan writes,

Owen and Jenner's accusations subscribe to a Western belief in a 'monolithic China and Chinese language,' created under the imagination of exotic Chineseness that Bei Dao avoids. The greater concept of 'Chinese identity' or a totalizing supra-nationalism is so associated with the Chinese official discourse that Bei Dao has had to consciously escape its discourse. (23)

I have already pointed out Bei Dao's own opinions on his Chinese identity. Regarding Bei Dao's early poetry, Tan is correct. Bei Dao was trying to escape to dominance of Maoist poetics.

The vagueness of his early poetry is a consequence of the strictures of Maoism, which required that all poetry point to the glory of Mao and the inevitable victory of the Chinese proletariat. On the other hand, Tan overlooks the change that Bei says he underwent while in exile. Once abroad, Bei Dao's circumstances changed, and along with them changed his perception of himself and his poetry. In exile Bei Dao "rediscovered" his Chinese identity. Any appreciation of Bei Dao's poetry as a whole has to take this change into account. We must take into account not only the Bei Dao who lived under Mao or who wrote in the era of 改革開放 (*gaige kaifang*), the 1980s period of "Reform and Opening Up" in Deng Xiaoping's China, nor only the Bei Dao who lived in America and Europe and taught at American universities as, in Dian Li's words, an ostensible "citizen of the world" (115). We must also keep in mind the Bei Dao who returned to Hong Kong and spoke of "blood calling to blood."

What I want to do is see how Bei Dao's increasing awareness of his Chinese identity is manifested in his exile poetry. In doing so, I aim to see how Bei Dao's changing circumstances and places of residence affect the range of his identity. Is his identity dual? Plural? Or are all the experiences he has and materials he works with integrated into a univocal identity? In the end, I hope to see better what it means to be "Chinese" or "Western" in the era of globalization and "world literature." I will be drawing upon various previous critiques of Bei Dao, especially Owen's and Tan's, but I will distance myself from the recurrent argument that, because Bei Dao became an exile, his poetry, in Tan's phrasing, possesses "the ability to transcend cultural and national specificities" (92).

Bei Dao's poetry is hermetic. As Dian Li puts it, "The unending displays of paradoxes, whose power comes from an imaginative reordering of things and events, forms a key aspect of Bei Dao's poetic world" (116). Tan notes that Bei Dao often pairs "contradictory properties" to

create ellipses (83). For both Li and Tan, this opacity is a method by which Bei Dao attempts to express his alienation from society. Reading Bei Dao's 1983 *Notes from the City of the Sun* 太阳城札记, Tan notices the recurrence of "city-related objects such as street lights, railings, traffic lights, and nature-related images such as a valley, clouds, mist, sun, moon, stars, sea, river banks, far horizons, reefs, storms, shores, and shadow" (74-5). Each of these images is generic. There is nothing especially Chinese about the moon or shadows. Hence Owen's complaint:

Success in creating a 'world poetry' is not without its costs. Bei Dao has, by and large, written international poetry. Local color is used, but sparsely. Nor is such truly international poetry merely the achievement of the translator, skillful as she is: most of these poems translate themselves. These could just as easily be translations from a Slovak or an Estonian or a Philippine poet. It could even be a kind of American poetry, though in this final hypothesis a question arises that must trouble us. If this had been an American poet writing in English, would this book have been published, and by such a prestigious press? We must wonder if such collections of poetry in translation become publishable only because the publisher and the readership have been assured that the poetry was lost in translation. But what if the poetry wasn't lost in translation? What if this is it?

("World' Poetry" 31)

What Owen misses is that the interpretation of Bei Dao's poetry may vary between readers from Chinese and non-Chinese audiences. Dian Li suggests that paradox in Bei Dao is a direct descendent of paradox in Taoism. In Taoism, paradox points to the necessity of opposition. In the *Daodejing* 道德经, for example, we read: "When the people of the world all know beauty as

beauty, / There arises the recognition of ugliness. / When they all know the good as good, / There arises the recognition of evil” (Chan 1963, 140) [天下皆知美之為美，斯惡已。皆知善之為善，斯不善已. (Sha et al. 3)]. Identity here is necessarily oppositional. Good and evil, beauty and ugliness, “Being and non-being produce” and then “complete each other” (Chan 1963, 140). Were these oppositions to be reconciled, both sides of the antagonism would cease to exist. Good could never triumph over evil, for a good without evil would have no sense. This, as we saw in the Introduction, is a central tenet in the modern philosophy of the so-called Kyoto School. This gives rise to an intuitive philosophy. Because paradox is fundamental to human knowledge and identity, true knowledge, knowledge of the *Dao*, cannot be communicated in words. On the contrary, knowledge comes in flashes of inspiration, as in Zen (Chan) Buddhist *koans*. Li contends that we should understand Bei Dao’s poetry as a part of this tradition; Li further argues that there are many images and illusions in Bei Dao’s work that will resonate with Chinese people who are familiar with the sights and sounds of the Chinese city. Non-Chinese will not grasp these allusions purely because they have not walked repeatedly through the streets, for instance, of Beijing and seen the sites Bei Dao has in mind. According to this argument, Bei Dao’s Chinese identity reveals itself obliquely, not through citing classical Chinese literature or loudly proclaiming an interest in modern Chinese affairs, but by alluding to specific ideas and images that will resonate best with a Chinese audience. Dian Li’s theory reminds us of Hughes’ distinction between a mass audience and a particular subgroup.

Found in his most recent collection of poetry, Bei Dao's "Salt" (盐; yán) takes as its subject a poor industrial town. The poem ruminates on the photographer Chin-San Long's 郎静山 *Saltworks* 盐厂.¹³³

底片上暗夜的煤

变成人们每日的盐

一只鸟获得新高度

那些屋顶的补丁

让大地更完美

on the negative dark night's coal

turns into the people's daily salt

a bird attains new heights

patches of roofs

make the earth more perfect. (*Rose* 256-7)

We notice that, as in Hughes' "Chinese History" and "Trance of Light," there are no humans in the scene. Without the mediation of a worker, the coal "turns into the people's daily salt." The coal of course is the fuel for the factory. The couplet opposes energy to sustenance, night to day,

¹³³ The scene Bei Dao describes was captured not only in "Saltworks" but in several of Long's photos, for instance in the 1934 "Huaxi Salt Well" (華溪鹽井, *huaxi yanjing*). This Huaxi is located in Hunan province. Regardless of the photo, the following discussion of what the photograph can image versus what Bei Dao's interpretation brings to the scene would be the same.

and, in the image of the coal and the salt, black to white. The third line does not logically follow from the first two nor lead to the next couplet. It is a metaphor for the perspective of the photographer, whose picture gives a bird's-eye view of the saltwork. The "new heights" are the new relations between technology, art, and humans. Technology seems to become naturalized, and nature turned into technology. The camera becomes a bird, the factory runs autonomously. So in the final couplet "patches of roofs / make the earth more perfect." The naturalization of technology has made it so technology and nature are not in opposition. Or more precisely the opposition between technology and nature is now necessary. As in Taoism, the shabby factory roofs bring out the "perfection" (完美 *wanmei*) of the earth. The beauty of nature appears more beautiful because the roofs act as a foil. But the opposition also suggests a contrast between nature as it is and nature as it is perceived. "Perfection" is absolute; nothing can become more perfect. However, we can better perceive the perfection of nature through contrast. So to Dao the roofs make nature appear "more perfect" (更完美 *geng wanmei*).¹³⁴ This is not so much a paradox as a elliptical way of indicating a change in perspective.

The atmosphere changes slightly in the second stanza:

烟高于树

正来自根的记忆

模仿着大雪

¹³⁴ *Wanmei* literally means "fully" or "completely beautiful," but signifies the perfect or ideal. The equivalent of the verb "to perfect" is 完善 (*wanshan*). "More perfect" is thus an accurate translate of *geng wanmei*, my interpretation would be the same in either language.

时间展示它的富足

从呼喊的盲井

溢出早晨的悲哀

smoke higher than the trees

it comes from the memory of roots

imitating a heavy snow

time displays its affluence

the blind wells of calling

spill over with morning's sorrow (*Rose 256-7*)

The opposition between nature and industry has turned to competition. The smoke rises *higher* than the trees and *imitates* a heavy snow. Smoke and snow are further tied together through their placement at the beginning and ending of the sentence.¹³⁵ Yet this makes their dissimilarity more apparent. Smoke rises as the emission of a salt refinery, while snow falls as natural precipitation; the former obscures the atmosphere while the latter covers the ground; smoke is associated with waste and opacity, while snow with purity. Smoke and snow are certainly not opposites. In the context of the poem, however, they do have a tense relationship, the one attempting to usurp the place of the other. The smoke comes from “the memory of roots,” roots perhaps covered up by the snow. Taken together, the smoke and the snow form a single veil, blurring that which occurs above ground and that which is underfoot.

¹³⁵ In Chinese, “salt” (*yan*) and “smoke” (煙, *yan*) are homonyms, though the tones are different. The assonance of “smoke,” “snow” (雪, *xue*), and “sorrow” (悲哀, *bei ai*) in the English translation is not present in the original Chinese.

We cannot help but think of the massive industrialization of the Great Leap Forward, or of the “rehabilitation” of “reactionaries” during the Mao years, to accomplish which millions of Chinese citizens, including Bei Dao himself, were uprooted from their lives and sent to work on farms and industrial sites throughout the country. This massive movement of people to what were often remote locations can be thought of as severing people from their roots, or indeed of separating China from its roots during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Naturally, Chin-san Long, who fled China for Taiwan in 1949, took no photos of Mao’s China. But Bei Dao’s response to this photograph is not descriptive but emotive, and this emotional response is surely tied with his own experiences working in construction in rural China in the 1960s and 1970s. The veil of smoke and snow may be understood as hiding corruption in the present and covering up the realities of Maoist policies. But naturally the poem may simply be a comment on industrialization in general, in which case the uneasy relationship between nature and industry would point to a larger malaise of modernity.

As in the first stanza, there is a middle line that is not evidently connected to the others. “Time displays its affluence” if it is understood in the context of time determining labor and wages. Even if there are no workers, time has become reified, so that money becomes tied to time itself. As in the first stanza, the laborer has been excluded from the process. Bei Dao is dealing in abstractions, yet these abstractions, reified under the poet’s pen, refer back to their own oddity. The abstraction here, contra Owen, points to the material existence of the worker, be it the Chinese worker under Mao, be it more generally the laborer in a capitalist or communist state. We have in this line, then, two possible readings: one nebulous and applicable to any modernized country, the other specific not only to China but to the era in which Bei Dao first began to write.

The concluding stanza sees more personification, or, to use Li Zehou's terminology, humanization of nature and of material objects (66). The atmosphere becomes more sinister.

沿东到西歪的篱笆

风醉倒在路旁

那穿透迷雾的钟声——

让这纸怦然心动

along the wobbling fence

the drunk wind falls on the roadside

the bell tolling through the mist

leaves the heart of the paper pounding (*Rose* 256-7)

The “drunk wind” that “falls on the roadside” suggests a downtrodden factory worker. In the photograph, the fence could appear uneven, but the “wobbling” is Bei Dao's invention, as is the presence of wind, as these movements could not be captured by Long's still photograph. He has accentuated the instability of the factory and of nature. Both appear ready to collapse—a part of nature already has. The positive interaction between nature and technology in the first stanza gives way to competition in the second, and in the third both the natural and the industrial world are exhausted. The bell in the third line is yet another invention. A “bell tolling through the mist” could be either a temple bell or a bell signaling the beginning and end of factory shifts. In Dai

Wangshu's 戴望舒 "A Fly in Autumn" or 秋蝇 the temple bell signifies a spiritual power that exceeds the existence of a single entity:

迢遥的声音，古旧的，
大伽蓝的钟磬？天末的风？
苍蝇有点僵木，
这样沉重的翼翅啊！(Shiwenji 66)

A distant, ancient sound—

The great temple bell? Wind from the ends of the earth?

The fly feels numb,

Its wings so heavy. (Batt and Zitner 195)

The bell dwarfs the fly by magnifying the fly's small body and brief life. Were we to interpret the bell in Bei Dao's poem as a temple bell, the effect would be the same. The bell sound, which, again, could not be duplicated by Lang's photograph and is only heard from afar, would underscore the small amount of space occupied by the factory, as well as its limited existence as an entity in time. Whereas the temple bell as a concept has existed since antiquity, the factory is a new phenomenon and is already showing signs of decay, its structure "wobbling" as nature around it "falls down." And while the bell exists in a space beyond the borders of the picture, in the limitless space of the poet's imagination, the saltworks is visible, bound. Hence the "heart of the paper" palpitates as this signifier of a higher, more durable power spells out the unavoidable demise of the salt factory.

Yet if the bell belongs to the factory itself, the pounding heart might allude to the nervous worker being called to his post. Everything related to the worker has been omitted in the poem.

His despair has been sublimated into the wind, and his fear now into the paper. The paper is that upon which the poem is being written. If it is pounding, then it means the spirit of worker is a part of the poem itself, embodied in the poem's materiality.¹³⁶ In other words, the worker, who has been conspicuously hidden throughout the poem, is in the end revealed to be the very paper that contains the poem. He is, like James Joyce's artist, to use a phrase invoked already in this thesis, "everywhere felt but nowhere seen." The generality with which Bei Dao has described this Chinese scene ends up making the ending more powerful. It causes the reader to engage more deeply with the meaning of "Salt" in order to understand the odd subjectivity that permeates the poem and leads to a heartbeat contained within paper. The abstraction of Bei Dao's poem, far from being a negation of Chinese identity and history, is in fact a rhetorical strategy. It allows Dao to approach the issues of industrialization and exploitation in modern China without using the direct sloganeering language of Maoism.

The point that I wish to make is that there is nothing in "Salt" that makes it specifically Chinese, yet we can abstract "Chinese" significance from it. This is aided by the poem being explicitly dedicated to Long's *Saltworks*. However, if we did not have this dedication, would we dismiss this poem as being "vague" and "written for translation"? Would we castigate it for being apolitical and eschewing the problems of modern China? Possibly. How "Chinese" a poem is depends largely on context: our context and the context or intention of the poet. That is not to say that there is no such thing as "Chineseness" or that any significance we find in a poem is arbitrary. Rather, it is to say that meaning is always a negotiation between the author and his society, the author and his audience, and, if the work is in translation, between the author's

¹³⁶ It is important to recall here that the word for "heart" in Chinese, 心 (*xīn*), also means "mind" and "spirit," and is to be distinguished from the anatomical term for "heart," 心臟 *xīnzàng*.

native society and the audience of the language into which the poem has been translated. At the same time, we can imagine that the author has a clear meaning in mind. Because of the dedication to Long's photo, we are given rare insight into Bei Dao's motivations for writing a poem. We do not have to contend as much with the vagueness that usually characterizes our understanding of Bei Dao's poetry. Much of the contention surrounding Bei Dao's work may therefore owe not to ambiguity in the work itself but to epistemic vagueness, our own lack of knowledge of what was going on in the poet's mind as he wrote. A top-down theory of world literature will miss such nuance, for it constrains interpretation by presupposing universal "modes." What modes we identify will always be partly tied to our own determined socio-historical situation. Whatever meaning is in the poem will also be determined by the poet's intention. If we adhere to theories of world literature dogmatically, we will be less able to explain how conflicting identities can arise from poetry such as Bei Dao's, as "abstract" as it may be, as much of a "global citizen" the writer himself may be.

I am also proposing that the formal features of a work are not all that give it identity. Bei Dao's poetry is a radical break from Classical Chinese poetry. It is also, as Tan argues, a continuation of May Fourth Poetry (11-12). And we may interpret certain images in his poems to connect them to classical literary allusions. Indeed, Bei Dao's ambiguity, his "mistiness," allows us to interpret him in a variety of ways. And it may be true, as Tan says, that "such ambiguity within poetic structure is still largely unprecedented in Chinese poetic history," marking Bei Dao's work as radically modern (15). But that does not entail that his writings are without roots any more than the smoke in "Salt." Being "Chinese," or being "English," or being anything is not a conscious repetition of that which came before. According to Bei Dao himself, identity and tradition are spontaneous: "at a certain moment you're suddenly aware of it." Calling Bei Dao a

Chinese poet should not mean that from close reading alone we can connect him to Li Bai, Du Fu, and Li Yu. It should involve his presence in the “cultural sedimentation” of China, to borrow another concept from Li Zehou (152).¹³⁷ Nor should his status as an exile relegate him to the nebulous field of world literature and global citizenry as a person who belongs everywhere and nowhere. Multiple levels of identity do not, I think, suddenly become flattened; assuming that something is either traditional or modern, global, national, or local, may blind us to the polysemy, the multidimensionality, present in poetry like Bei Dao’s. In short, in approaching poetry like Hughes’ “Trance of Light” and “Chinese History or Colden Water” and Bei Dao’s “Salt,” we should aim to understand the ways in which tradition, in literature and in personal identity, persist in the modern and coexist with the modern, and how the native and personal can accommodate the foreign.

5.4 Multidimensional Traditions?

So far, so good. In lieu of single authors, I have been devoting much of my attention to the concept of tradition itself. I have been suggesting that “tradition” is multidimensional and should be disambiguated as such: a poem can be Chinese and traditional in one sense but not in another. The reason for which we have such difficulty with these terms is that we hesitate before contradiction. We do not want it to be the case that something both is and is not traditional, so we might draw arbitrary lines between the traditional and the modern, or, or perhaps *and* when such divisions are shown inadequate, contend that our terms are lacking in meaning. The latter move is, of course, that of the deconstructionist: if there are contradictions at the heart of our terms, then our terms fail to possess fully either truth or falsity. This breakdown of binary logic

¹³⁷ Dian Li references this concept as well when arguing that Bei Dao would have been familiar with and inevitably incorporated into his poetry aspects of Taoism (119).

in turn causes the deconstructionist to question whether logic and indeed the notion of truth itself are useful for literary criticism.

Yet as I have been trying to show throughout this thesis just because terms do not admit of clear-cut application does not entail that they are not meaningful and cannot provide us with rich knowledge of that which we use them to describe. Because translation from one linguistic system to another requires entering into the universe of beliefs of the society that uses that language and the constellation of the writer and his or her immediate social milieu, the aspect of familiar words and ideas changes in order to cohere into new literary worlds. Therefore, we can have the elements of other traditions—and of other constellations—present in a literary world. However, since the aspect of those elements changes during the translation, since different dimensions are highlighted or added—we are not dealing with quite the same elements in both cases. The conclusion of this dissertation will be a final consideration of what the relations between these different dimensions is. I readdress the three concerns raised in Chapter I concerning the relations between different literary worlds, trans-world identity, and the connections between our ‘world’ and the world of the texts we study. I will then try to formalize the relations between original text and translated text as we have seen them across this dissertation, and consider how this might be applicable to East-West texts more generally.

Conclusion

Concluding *Configurations of Comparative Poetics*, Zong-qi Cai revisits his earlier considerations of similarities between Chinese and Western poetics and contends that

with the ever increasing contact, interaction, and mutual influence across cultures, this area of resemblances will certainly expand substantially. In my belief, this expansion will not lead to the rise of ‘universals’ at the cost of the waning or death of different cultural traditions. Quite the contrary, it will serve only to stimulate further development and enrichment of each indigenous tradition involved. (254-255)

Cai’s hopeful message is a coda to a book dealing mostly with classical poetics. By looking at literary dialogues across East and West in the twentieth century, this dissertation has, in a sense, picked up where Cai left off. This concluding chapter returns to the core problems addressed in the Introduction and in Chapter I: how are we to understand the relations between the actual world and the world or worlds of the text, how are we to understand literary works and the entities that compose them in translation, and how are we to understand our role as critics and translators? I gave tentative answers to all of these questions in Chapter I, but, having examined four different configurations of translation across literatures East and West, it is time to see whether more precise answers are forthcoming.

Throughout this thesis I have underscored the role of impossibility and impossible worlds in the formation of East-West literature. When we think about fiction itself, impossible worlds are not static entities that exist outside of time. What makes a world impossible is its

status in what I have been calling the writer's constellation of belief, which itself interacts with the larger universe of belief of the writer's society. Françoise Lavocat has drawn attention to this by asking for a "diachronic" understanding of impossible worlds. It is not only the bizarre worlds of postmodernism that we should think of as impossible, Lavocat says; a conception of time that is not linear and that is at odds with Aristotle might seem perfectly possible to us, but it might have designated an impossible world for, say, the French *romanciers* of the seventeenth century ("L'Impossible" 125). But even then, Lavocat claims, fictional play with non-linear time is present in seventeenth-century literature, in for example Marin Le Roy de Gomberville's *La Carithée*, in which something resembling time-travel is described ("L'Impossible" 123). But how to account for an impossible world in an era in which it should not exist—an era that seems open to everything? Lavocat's answer is that fiction often dramatizes its own impossibility, and audiences often intervene to "resolve" paradoxes, "soit en les ignorant, soit en tentant de toutes les manières de les résoudre" ["either by ignoring them or by using all kinds of means to resolve them"] ("L'Impossible" 125). Lavocat's diachronic impossibility is, I think, mostly correct, but does not quite offer a full picture of how impossible worlds work in literature. The reason is that Lavocat is considering the contingency of impossibility on time but not necessarily on place and language.

The various pieces of literature examined across this dissertation have shown how East-West literature produces images that are a compromise between the original text and the language into which it is translated—what we could call the source and the target language. But when we deal with languages we are dealing not only with words as such but with entire networks of belief and context. Making the context of the original fit with the constellation of belief into which it is transported means making analogies, as we saw in Chapter II with the

Bardo project; it means simplifying both the target and the source in order to create a third thing, an image, that stands apart from both of the original domains. The process is evident in Ted Hughes and Chou Wen-chung's opera, and is almost omnipresent in Paul Claudel's poetry and drama; but it can also be seen in Mishima Yukio's "modern" *Nō*, in Kuki Shūzō's Parisian writings, and in the exile poetry of Bei Dao. The world created by these analogies is an amalgam of source and target, and possibly many other things besides, that are made to cohere under the strictures of what is possible in the target constellation. It is not a 'hybrid' so much as an independent body with a discrete identity determined by the context in which it is placed. Of course, as Lavocat points out, the status of this new world or image, its possibility, is not fixed for readers. The original *Kantan* was itself a translation of a Chinese tale into the world of Muromachi period Japanese *Nō*, and the same reinterpretation and analogy that went into to make the classical *Kantan* fit into Claudel's and Mishima's twentieth-century notions of what is possible will happen, if it has not already happened, to the two modern writers' interpretations of *Kantan*. Worlds can pass from possible to impossible and, perhaps, vice-versa, just as something can become non-actual over time. This is why East-West literature teems with new images, new worlds.

Whether there is a characterization principle that identifies entities across different worlds is a more difficult question. The spotlight in this dissertation has not been on the trans-world identity of characters and things as such. We have, however, seen that the aspect of figures can change as different sense arise or are lost in translation. This is particularly true for the "Tibetan" Buddhist figures of the *Bardo* and the characters of *Kantan*. In order to claim that these characters take on different aspects, I have to assume that their identity is constant. Yet there does not appear to be an individuation criterion of identity that would pick out, say, Rosei

and the spirits of the Pillow of Kantan and the characters based on them. Determining trans-world identity has two steps. First might come the author's intentions: Chou's and Hughes' intentions are explicit, and Mishima, even if he modernizes the classical *Nō*, intends to refer to the same spirits within the pillow. Can we say that intentionality alone is enough to ensure trans-world identity? It seems not. That would place identity entirely within the mind of the author and leave us without any way of verifying whether one fiction character is identical with another. Reference to fictional objects is a fraught matter. Some people, Russellians, would deny that fictional entities exist; others, Meinongians, would argue the contrary. But in either case we have no way to individuate fictional characters the totality of whose properties we do not know.¹³⁸ An interpretation of the Kantan specters that places them in opposition to the malaise of post-War Japan does not necessarily attribute qualities to the specters that they do not possess. As I suggested in the Introduction, the response to this wide-ranging possibility of characterization is multidimensionality: we understand characters as possessing several dimensions, and we admit that later literary works may attribute to these characters new quality dimensions. What this adds up to is multidimensional vagueness: trans-world identity can mean similarity across certain dimensions (being specters in a dream) but not others (belonging to a Buddhist ontology). Assuming that not all dimensions are equal, as we probably find some characteristics more important than others, no fact of the matter tells us which "dimensions" carry the most weight.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ See Pavel (1986), pp. 107-113.

¹³⁹ A non-literary example is "intelligent." "Intelligent" could be composed of a variety of regions (ability to think abstractly, ability to think quickly, possessing common sense, being observant; though *which* regions we think go here might be arbitrary and relative to our interests). As a thought experiment, we could imagine reducing a person's ability to think quickly until she no longer qualifies as intelligent in that domain. And we could simultaneously increase her common sense so that her "intelligence" is contradictory: She is intelligent and not intelligent, i.e., intelligent in terms of common sense but not in terms of being a quick thinker. (Verheyen and Égré (2018); Gärdenfors (2000)). We could do analogous things with the traits of literary characters, and I think that is what the writers examined across this dissertation have done, to show how characters are composed of multidimensional vague predicates.

This is where relative closeness and the ternary relation comes in: “x is at least as close to y, in *F*-relevant aspects, as it is to z” (Smith, *Vagueness* 143). The critic decides what *F* is relative to her interests, but in Chapters II through V I have continually suggested that deep-level differences, ontological gaps, may underlie superficial resemblances. Transferring a literary figure from a Christian ontology to a Buddhist one or vice-versa *may* lead to such a translation across ontologies, and it is in cases like this, as in the poetry and drama of Claudel and the poetry of Kuki Shūzō, that we ought to say that we are no longer speaking about the same entity with different characteristics but different entities altogether. Identifying literary jumps across not only worlds but ontologies is not a simple matter, and we will not always get it right or agree when we think we have, but, if my analyses have been correct, it is something to strive for.

So the final consideration: how do we account for our own position as critics? The question itself presupposes that literary criticism is made up of a homogenous “we,” which is not at all the case. There are intramural differences as much as there are international ones. A single approach to comparative literature or East-West literature will never be agreed upon, but the very nature of “our” study, “our” here designating the group of people who believe they are engaged in comparative literature, thrives on competing perspectives. In Chapter V, we saw how Ted Hughes’ and Bei Dao’s broadening horizons, their increasing knowledge of other cultures distant from their own, both increased their sense of the contingency of their own traditions and made them identify more clearly their places within them. The borders of our “native” traditions are no less blurry and multidimensional than those of the “foreign” traditions we study. Comparing across these sets of vague composition will not rid us of indeterminacy, but it can highlight aspects of both the source and the target, of our own constellations of beliefs and those of the other writers and groups of people we study, that would otherwise pass unnoticed. In G.E.R.

Lloyd's words, "to suppose that our aim should be to settle on a single definitive account is to prejudice the investigation and to ignore the possible multidimensionality of the phenomena in question" ("Fortunes" 241). As the writers we study and we ourselves forge new analogies, we will continue to find new dimensions and new worlds across literatures East and West. The proliferation of new qualities that East-West literature's vague composition makes possible will continue to encourage the development of older traditions, and, as different worlds in different constellations of belief come into being, open new universes of possibility.

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