

JACOB EDMOND

The *Flâneur* in Exile

Knowledge production would henceforth be a matter of tracking the broken lines, shapes, and patterns that may have become occluded, gone underground, or taken flight.

—Rey Chow

All an exile can do is follow a dotted line of footprints, stopping motionless on every dot.

—Yang Lian

HOW CAN ONE acknowledge points of contact among disparate texts, times, places, languages, and cultures without doing violence to their particularity? This problem becomes especially acute when discussing modern and contemporary literature, since the ever increasing connections produced by globalization have also resulted in a plurality of cultural positions whose complex interconnections unsettle notions of commensurability and equivalence that derive from comparative literature's Eurocentric legacy. As a result, the discipline of comparative literature is in danger of becoming caught in a continuous movement of self-referential deconstruction, oscillating between the universal and the particular, between old Eurocentric practices and the possibility of resisting and subverting them.

In this essay I propose that the *flâneur* in exile addresses and offers an alternative to this endless oscillation between sameness and difference. I use the phrase *flâneur in exile* to refer to the encounter between a paradigmatic figure of European modernity, the *flâneur*, and contemporary Chinese poetry, especially the exilic writing of Yang Lian 杨炼. In its overlaying or superimposing of places, times, languages, and cultures, this encounter embodies the bewildering complexity of the present moment. It also suggests an approach to comparative literature that would address this complexity by acknowledging the constitutive role that such moments of mutually estranging encounter play in modern literature and culture. Taken as a figure for comparability, the *flâneur* in exile emphasizes collision, encounter, and touch, rather than mimetic models of comparison that claim equivalence or commensurability. While recognizing the elision of difference that occurs through the superimposition of texts, languages, cultures, times, and places, the figure also produces moments of particularity that emerge

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out of these superimpositions, moments of touch that presage the possibility of commonality in singularity, of a common strangeness.

I. *Flâneur*

Far from being the creation of an isolated European modernity, the figure of the *flâneur* was from the very beginning intertwined with Europe's others and inseparable from a global context of imperialism. The *flâneur* was a product of the nineteenth-century European imperial capital; while he was acutely self-conscious of his place at what he perceived to be the center of modernity, his sense of European particularity was nevertheless also born out of his relation to non-Europe. This dynamic is evident in the distinction Mary Gluck makes between the original *flâneur*, who assumed "that Paris, or at any rate Europe, was the center of modernity and that he could not exist anywhere else in the world," and Baudelaire's "avant-garde *flâneur*," a "man of the world and . . . a great traveler, who felt at home in all parts of the globe" (78). As a "displaced native" in a city "filled with foreigners and goods from distant lands," the latter emerges out of the experience of strangeness induced by the increasingly cosmopolitan nature of the very imperial capital (Paris) celebrated by the original *flâneur* (Shields 66). Traveling beyond European boundaries and seeing the foreign within the local, the avant-garde *flâneur* stages the interrelationship between and superimposition of different places and times. "No one," Benjamin notes, "felt less at home in Paris than Baudelaire" (*Arcades Project* 336). This "dialectic of domesticity and desire for faraway locales" is central to Baudelaire's and Benjamin's *flâneur* (Goebel 378), a figure who emerges only in relation to non-Europe and so demonstrates that modernisms and modernities were and are dynamic "relational" concepts "based in global linkages," born out of and always already in cross-cultural encounter (Friedman 426).¹

The *flâneur* also epitomizes Benjamin's "peculiar fusion of the primally old within the very heart of the most fashionably up-to-date . . . as the essence . . . of modernity itself" (Pensky 188). Benjamin associates this fusion with his concept of the "dialectical image," in which the superimposition of past on present shatters the illusion of progress, revealing the mythic and primal within modernity: "what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation" (*Arcades Project* 462). As Eli Friedlander notes, Benjamin's dialectical image rejects "the idea that conceptual work is related to the making of generalizations" and instead offers a way to recognize each phenomenon's "singularity in details" by mapping the extreme points between each phenomenon, like stars in a constellation (12). The constellation emerges out of the juxtaposition of texts from different places and times—texts that are not linked by causative relations or a single organizing logic; it thus marks a shift from the establishment of a "relation to reality by means of language to the plane of language itself" (Friedlander 7). This poetics of textual constellation is exemplified by the citational strategy of Benjamin's *Das*

¹ On Benjamin's theoretical encounters with non-Europe, see Bolle and Bush, who examines the especially critical role played by China. On modernisms and modernities see also Hayot: "every philosophical and literary modernism is itself subject to an internal, undermining comparative action, in which the 'foreign' always and in advance inhabits the 'native' national paradigm" (149).

Passagen-Werk (*The Arcades Project*) and allegorized by the movement of the *flâneur* in the text of the city.

Benjamin associates the *flâneur* with the shock encounter that produces a dialectical image most clearly in his reading of Baudelaire's "À une passante" ("To a Passerby"). As Benjamin notes, the poem ends in the failure of the visual: "Baudelaire describes eyes that could be said to have lost the ability to look." This "crisis in perception" is marked by the shift from vision to touch that is implicit in Baudelaire's "decisive . . . experience" of being "jostled by the crowd" (*Selected Writings* 4:343, 338, 343). The moment in turn figures the "immediate shock experience" through which "the sensation of modernity could be had" (*Selected Writings* 4:339, 324, 343). Through Benjamin's dialectical image, the *flâneur* becomes not only a figure for tactile, embodied encounters that superimpose disparate places, times, and texts, but also a way of acknowledging the blindness and erasures that such encounters produce, erasures that are obscured by a view of history as progress.²

Because the *flâneur* is always already hybrid, estranged, uprooted (despite its supposed European origin), the figure has an important connection with current debates on comparability. If, as Rey Chow puts it, the "grid of intelligibility . . . is that of literature as understood in Europe, and historical variations are often conceived of in terms of other cultures' welcome entries into or becoming synthesized with the European tradition" (76), how can one prevent concepts of comparative or world literature from "instrumentalizing the literatures of the world as objects of neocolonial usurpation and imperial subsumption" (Kadir 75) and so demonstrating "the arrogance of the cartographic reading of world lit" (Spivak 73)? In opposition to this kind of comparative practice, Chow, Spivak, Natalie Melas, and others have called for new modes of comparison that emphasize resistance to commensurability while retaining a desire to think on a world or planetary scale—modes of comparison that recognize, in Chow's words, that "the general post-European predicament . . . is by necessity inscribed in comparativism and must be grasped through comparativism" (85). Hence the archeological model of comparison put forward by Chow would "reach for the universal" while recognizing the problem of doing so without "compromising and erasing the particularity of [the other's] alterity" (88; cf. Apter 56, 60–61).

Emerging from the encounter between Europe and non-Europe, the *flâneur* exemplifies the need for an approach to comparative or world literature that acknowledges the essentially comparative nature of the "post-European predicament." Moreover, the non-linear, blind, tactile wandering of the *flâneur* associated with Benjamin's constellated dialectical image seems to anticipate Chow's conception of an alternative mode of comparison that, drawing on Michel Fou-

² As Gluck implies, both Benjamin and Baudelaire present the *flâneur* via negation, under erasure and in exile from the very European metropolis that is his supposed home. While Benjamin associates the *flâneur* with Baudelaire's heroic act of separating himself from the crowd, he concludes "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" with the assertion that Baudelaire was, finally, "no *flâneur*" (*Selected Writings* 4:39, 342). Similarly, Baudelaire writes of "The Painter of Modern Life" that he "has an aim loftier than that of a mere *flâneur*" (12). For Baudelaire, as for Benjamin, "modernity"—the painter of modern life's loftier aim—emerges through the negation of the *flâneur*. The *flâneur* and modernity, which Baudelaire associates with the "fugitive pleasure of circumstances" and "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent," respectively, are both figured partly through their negation in favor of "the eternal and the immutable," to which "modernity" is opposed, but with which it is also, ironically, equated as "the eternal [distilled] from the transitory" (*Painter of Modern Life* 12).

cault's archeology, would track "the broken lines, shapes, and patterns that may have become occluded, gone underground, or taken flight" (81). The comparative poetics of superimposition that I locate in the *flâneur* does not, however, necessarily lead to a collapse of difference in deconstructive play, to differences that signify only through their mutual negation. As Susan Stewart suggests, the darkness of "indefinite definition by negation" produces in response a poetics of the senses and, in particular, interpersonal acts of touch that bring "intersubjective experience and meaning" into being (3). In poetry, such sensuous moments are frequently marked by an emphasis on language's material, visual, aural, or even tactile embodiment. In what follows, I overlay the *flâneur* onto a reading of 1970s and 1980s Chinese poetry in general and Yang Lian's later exilic writing in particular. Rethinking the *flâneur* in exile—outside Europe and under various forms of contradiction and negation—points to a comparative poetics at once cognizant of the erasures of transhistorical and cross-cultural comparison and attentive to sensuous moments of textual encounter.

II. Sun

While Baudelaire has held an important place within modern Chinese literature since his work was translated by leading Chinese modernists (Lu Xun 鲁迅, Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, and Dai Wangshu 戴望舒 among them), he arguably occupies an even greater symbolic position in Chinese literature of the second half of the twentieth century, one intimately connected with the figure of the *flâneur*.³ In 1972, as part of his "underground reading" during the Cultural Revolution, the poet Duoduo 多多, one of the founding and most influential figures of post-1970 experimental Chinese poetry, encountered Baudelaire's work for the first time through a selection from *Les fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*) translated by the poet Chen Jingrong 陈敬容 and published by the official People's Literature Press in 1957 (Tamburello).⁴ Because Chen was a former member of the modernist Nine Leaves group, which had been attacked for not conforming to the party line, Duoduo's discovery of her translations represents an encounter not only between contemporary China and nineteenth-century France but also between 1970s Chinese poets and a suppressed Chinese literary modernism (Tamburello; Van Crevel, *Language Shattered* 43). Chen's renditions of Baudelaire exemplify what Bei Dao 北岛, another major figure in experimental Chinese poetry of the 1970s, calls "translation style" (翻译文体), a style created by talented writers who, unable to publish their own work in the 1950s, took advantage of the fact that "in the PRC's first decade the ideological criteria for foreign literature were looser than for native Chinese works" (*Language Shattered* 36–37). Citing Chen's translations, among other works, Bei Dao argues that this style, which "exists in the strip between two languages . . . without belonging to either," represented a "quiet revolution" in Chinese literature and was crucial to the revival of modernist poetry in the 1970s

³ On Lu Xun's and Xu Zhimo's translations, see Leo Lee, *Shanghai Modern* 235–36. On Dai Wangshu's translations, see Gregory Lee, *Dai Wangshu* 82–94. On Baudelaire in China, see, among others, Bien and Chen Yongguo (82–83).

⁴ On underground reading, see Van Crevel, *Language Shattered* 35–41; Xiaomei Chen 61–62; and Song, "Glance at the Underground" and "Wenge zhong de huangpi shu."

(61, 64). Underscoring Bei Dao's point, Yang Lian has emphasized the enormous impact Chen's translation style had on his own writing when he first encountered her renditions of Baudelaire in the early 1980s (personal correspondence).

Duoduo's discovery of Baudelaire is arguably the most celebrated instance of the impact of translation style's in-between poetics of cross-cultural and cross-temporal encounter. Duoduo himself mythologizes the occasion as a crucial event in his life, and Maghiel van Crevel argues that it influenced both Duoduo's development as a poet and, more generally, his entire world view: "the one [world view] emanating from Baudelaire's poetry collided head-on with the glorification of Mao during the Cultural Revolution" (*Language Shattered* 42). Chen's translation of Baudelaire's "Le crépuscule du matin" ("Dawn") as "Menglong de liming" 朦胧的黎明 ("Shadowy Dawn") emphasizes the obscuring of the sun's light and understanding (*ming* 明), implicitly rejecting the emphasis on straightforward expression in officially prescribed literature and challenging the prevailing political ideology, since "generally in poetry and other forms of writing from the 1970s and 1980s, 'the sun' stands for Mao Zedong" (McDougall 45). In this respect, Chen anticipates the resonances of the term *menglong shi* 朦胧诗 (translated variously as "obscure poetry," "misty poetry," or "poetry of shadows"), later widely used to refer to the first generation of post-Mao modernist or experimental poets (including Duoduo, Bei Dao, and Yang Lian).⁵ It should come as no surprise, then, that Duoduo describes his encounter with Baudelaire through sun imagery—in particular the eclipse of one sun by another. He contrasts singing "Chairman Mao is like the sun" with Baudelaire's assertion in "Le soleil" ("The Sun") that "The sun is like a poet" (qtd. in Van Crevel, *Language Shattered* 43). Duoduo's account exemplifies what Xiaomei Chen calls the "counter-discourse" of Occidentalism in China, whereby writers and intellectuals import an idea from the West by productively "misunderstanding" it (6, 80). Here Duoduo produces a form of what Chen describes as "anti-official" Chinese Occidentalism, assimilating Baudelaire into the symbolic system of Maoist China in order to counter official ideology (5). One could thus also read the hazy light of the obscured sun (*menglong*) as standing for Duoduo's cross-cultural reading of the image of the sun as poet in Baudelaire's "Le soleil"—that is, as a figure for the act of productive misreading.

The obscured sun might equally stand for a comparative practice that emphasizes mutually estranging encounters among disparate cultures, languages, and literary works over mimetic models that claim equivalence or commensurability.⁶ Indeed, another variant of *menglong*, 矇眈, literally refers to the blinding of the eyes and so the erasure of vision associated with the *flâneur*. For, if "Le soleil" equates the sun with the poet, it also equates both poet and sun with the *flâneur*.

⁵ While *menglong* 朦胧 literally denotes the obstruction of the moon's light, the dawn context suggests that the light obscured is the sun's, as in the variant 矇眈. Giuseppa Tamburello has even suggested that the term *menglong shi* 朦胧诗 might derive directly from Chen Jingrong's translation of the title of Baudelaire's "Le crépuscule du matin." Although it is unlikely that Zhang Ming 章明, the orthodox critic who was the first to use the term *menglong* in relation to the new poetry, had Baudelaire in mind, the image is apposite both to *menglong* poetry's myths of origin and to its relation to the political and literary status quo in the 1970s.

⁶ Haun Saussy finds in Xu Zhimo's translation of Baudelaire's "Une charogne" half a century earlier a similar non-mimetic model of comparative literature "as a process of dissolution, of decay, of selective uptake," involving "infidelity" and "estrangement" (127–28).

Walking in the city involves “Trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés” (*Œuvres complètes* 83; “Stumbling over words as over paving stones,” *Flowers of Evil* 281) and so becomes synonymous with the writing of poetry and with the indiscriminate visitations of the sun. When the sun is finally said explicitly to be “ainsi qu’un poète” (“like a poet”), it is because “il [le soleil] descend dans les villes” (“he goes down into cities”) and participates in the wandering through the city undertaken by the poet who finds his rhymes on the streets in the first stanza.

Just as Duoduo presents reading “Le soleil” as a collision between two suns, between China and the West, light and eclipse, so Baudelaire’s poem is itself built, through the doubleness and erasures of the figure of the *flâneur*, on a poetics of collision and encounter. The poet collides with verse (“Heurtant parfois des vers”; “Colliding at times with lines”) and responds to the sun’s “frappe” (“blows”) with his own “fantasque escrime” (“fanciful fencing”). As Timothy Raser notes, it is not clear if the sun mimics the poet or vice versa, nor do we know, if they are in conflict with one another, who wins out (62–63). The poet takes on sun-like characteristics and the sun poet-like attributes, and in finding rhymes on the streets (the poet) and wandering indiscriminately (the sun) both resemble the *flâneur*. The undecidable figure of the *flâneur* as poet and sun also relates to a battle between reality and language, enacted, as Raser points out, most strikingly in the pun on *vers* (at once “verse,” “worms,” and “toward”), whose prepositional meaning allegorizes the signifying function of the sign—the movement between verse and worms. The “flickering” between language and reality that is the result of “the double allegiance of the sign to its context and something outside of that context” (Raser 64) also enacts the ceaseless movements of the *flâneur*, who similarly allegorizes the signifying function in the poem, parrying with language (rhyming “la rime” itself with “escrime”) the shocking blows of modernity that in Benjamin’s reading cause “words to collapse” (*Selected Writings* 4:320).

Benjamin further complicates the flickering double movements of the walker in “Le soleil” by reading him as a *flâneur* under erasure. The protagonist of “Le soleil” “traverse[s] the city absently.” His “fantastical fencing” embodies “anything but the condition of the observer” (*Selected Writings* 4:41). Echoing, as Benjamin points out, Baudelaire’s description of Constantin Guys, the painter of modern life who “stabs away with his pencil, his pen, his brush,” “parrying his own blows” (*Selected Writings* 4:319; Benjamin’s emphasis), the protagonist’s stabbing pen implicitly marks the shift from vision to language and touch. For Benjamin, the poetics of collision in “Le soleil” figures “the subterranean shocks by which Baudelaire’s poetry is shaken” and so the “shock experience” of modernity that Baudelaire places “at the very centre of his art” and that is critical to Benjamin’s identification of a dialectical image in his poetry (*Selected Writings* 4:319–20).

Through the figure of the *flâneur*, sun and poet, reality and language, sight and touch are superimposed, merging and erasing each other, just as Duoduo’s poet as sun simultaneously eclipses Maoist ideology while conforming to its symbolic structure—and even to its literal meaning (Mao, after all, was also a poet). Enacting the double movement of language toward and beyond its context and the shift from a poetics of generalizing vision to one of blind touch, the *flâneur* becomes a figure both for the specific cross-cultural encounter between Duoduo and “Le soleil” and for my act of comparison that produces further collisions on the basis of their implicitly comparative poetics.

Also critical to the *flâneur*'s flickering double movement is the antithesis and interconnection between town and country that is announced in the opening stanza of "Le soleil" by the line "Sur la ville et les champs, sur les toits et les blés" ("The city, the country, the roofs, and the wheat fields") and reinforced by the division of the remaining two stanzas into the country (stanza 2) and the city (stanza 3). Walking becomes an act of writing, and the city a text in which one finds "verse" (*vers*), but this city-text is intimately connected with a country-text that might at any moment bloom forth "like roses" in the "country" or "fields" ("Éveille dans les champs les vers comme les roses"; "Makes verses bloom in the fields like roses"). Just as the city-text is hidden in corners ("Flairant dans tous les coins les hasards de la rime"; "Scenting in every corner the chance of a rhyme"), the country-text is hidden in a subterranean place associated with writhing worms through the pun on *vers* (as both "worms" and "verse"). By equating both sun and poet with the *flâneur*, and uniting rural and traditional symbols of death (worms) and beauty (roses) with their modern, urban, and transient counterparts—"les hôpitaux et . . . les palais" (the hospitals and . . . palaces)—the poem enacts Baudelaire's vision of the painter of modern life as an artist who combines the modern and the ancient, the "fleeting" and the "eternal." In doing so, it typifies as well the frequent staging of this connection as the interplay between, and conflation of, city and country, as, for example, in Benjamin's description of the *flâneur* "botanizing on the asphalt" in a city that, in Baudelaire's words, resembles "the forest and the prairie" (Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 4:19, 21).

Duoduo's poetry similarly stages the interplay between country and city. Just as the sun signified differently to Duoduo than to Baudelaire, so the city-country divide reflects a very different political and historical context. Written the year Duoduo encountered Baudelaire's poetry, "Gaobie" 告别 ("Farewell" [1972]) addresses the Cultural Revolution's rustication campaign, which sent thousands of urban youths, including Duoduo himself, into the countryside. The "city lights" (万家灯火), which "stretch out in loneliness" (一片孤寂), contrast with the "dark night" (黑夜) of the countryside.⁷ As Van Crevel suggests, the "herdsman" (牧羊人) who "guards the dark night" (守卫黑夜) apparently stands for the Communist or Red power that bars the protagonist from returning to his urban home and relieving the city's loneliness (*Language Shattered* 132). Yet this exile to the countryside is treated metaphorically through the figure of a walker, who moves through streets, taking "an unfamiliar turn / in the side lane leading toward maturity" (陌生的分路 / 在走向成长的那条僻巷). Negotiating a flickering path between country darkness and city lights, the walker occupies the city imaginatively, through its lonely lights and the ambiguously located "side lane," even as he is barred from it physically. His "unfamiliar turn" (becoming a poet) thus allows him to undercut the official opposition of country to city.

Duoduo's poems of the 1980s, such as "Wo yifu" 我姨夫 ("My Uncle" [1988]) and "Beifang de ye" 北方的夜 ("Night of the North" [1985]), also address the relationship between city and country (*Duoduo shi xuan* 143–44, 117–18). "Night of the North" blurs the two so as to uncover the primal beneath the modern, as in the

⁷ Translations for Duoduo's "Farewell" and "Night of the North" are taken from Van Crevel, *Language Shattered* 131 and 203–04 respectively.

lines “inside our brains, shining like lamps / stretch wild forests, to this day” (在我们灯一样亮着的脑子里/至今仍是一片野蛮的森林). The location of the “pre-historic” (史前) within the present and the country’s wild forest among the lights of the city reflects a general trend in Chinese literature of the 1980s that parallels the “botanizing on the asphalt” in the literature of the *flâneur*. During this decade, many writers sought to confront modernity by staging an “imagined return to the country” in a movement known as *xungen* 寻根 or “root seeking,” a literary tendency that, like Baudelaire’s sun, provided a counter-discourse to “urban centers of political power” (Yingjin Zhang 263–64; Leo Lee, “On the Margins” 221). The *xungen* movement took place in the context of an ideological debate in the official media over both the relationship between tradition and modernity and the place of modernist literature. The more sophisticated *xungen* writing did not simply conform to the parameters of these debates by idealizing the country, myth, and tradition as counters to modernity, modernization, and the West, but, as in the literature of the *flâneur*, extended beyond the boundaries of these debates “to question both tradition and modernity and dramatize the traumatic encounter between these two nemeses in figurative terms” (Wang 181).

Like most *menglong* poets, Yang Lian spent time in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, and his 1980s work exemplifies the complex questioning of tradition and modernity characteristic of *xungen* writing: “Banpo” 半坡 (1984), for example, explores the famous archeological site through Han creation myths, and “Nuorilang” 诺日郎 (“Norlang” [1983]) stages an encounter with an eponymous waterfall in relation to various Tibetan myths and rituals (*Dahai* [DH] 3–28, 57–68). While neither of these poems explicitly addresses country-city relations, because they mark the Beijing poet’s journeys to rural parts of China and Tibet in search of resources apparently unavailable in urban centers, the confrontation between tradition and modernity that the poems stage is implicitly a confrontation between country and city. As in “Le soleil,” they deploy the figure of the sun to dramatize the return to the countryside and the encounter between tradition and modernity.

Although Xiaomei Chen argues that Yang Lian and Jiang He 江河 use the sun positively in their *xungen* poetry to depict a collective Chinese tradition (81), Yang’s representation of the sun, like the relation between modernity and tradition, in fact remains highly ambivalent.⁸ In “Banpo,” for example, the sun becomes the locus for the superimposition of past on present and the uncertain negotiation of a path between modernity and tradition. The poem depicts the “ancestral sun” (祖先的……阳, DH 5) both as a figure for rebirth (再生, DH 7) and as an executioner: “the hangman’s noose of the midday sun’s light / was long ago pulled tight” (太阳的正午之光的绞索 / 早已勒紧, DH 10). At the conclusion of the poem’s opening section, the “setting ancestral sun” (祖先的夕阳) accompanies the rebirth

⁸ Xiaomei Chen contrasts Yang’s and Jiang He’s *xungen* poetry with *menglong* poetry’s negative depiction or negation of the sun, as in Jiang He’s earlier “black sun” and Bei Dao’s imperative to “forget even the sun” (70–71, 76). A similar negation can also be found in Duoduo’s poetry of the 1970s. See Duoduo’s untitled poem beginning “Yi ge jieji de xue liujin le” 一个阶级的血流尽了 (“There is a class whose blood has all flowed away”; published in Van Crevel, *Language Shattered* 300). Even in the early 1970s, however, Duoduo’s representation of the sun was arguably more complex, as, for example, in his Baudelaire-inspired association of the sun with the poet.

of the goddess Nüwa (女媧), a conjunction that signals both the overcoming and renewal of tradition (Yang, *DH* 8; Edmond, “Beyond Binaries” 165, and “Locating Global Resistance” 75). Through an address to a sun that figures both the past and renewal, both oppression and possibility, modernity and tradition are superimposed and mutually constructed in the now of the poem.

In “Richao” 日潮 (“Suntide”), the first part of “Norlang,” the sun plays a similarly critical role in staging the interaction between tradition and modernity (*DH* 59–60). Because the poem’s “reply to the sun” inheres in the literal meaning of the Chinese transliteration of the Tibetan waterfall Norlang, the cross-cultural encounter between a Tibetan word and its Chinese rendition suggests the flickering double movement that the poem performs. Signaled in the title “Norlang” and the subtitle “Suntide,” the interplay between sun and water embodies the poem’s opposing forces (Edmond, “Locating Global Resistance” 77). Like these titles, the poem’s address to the sun and Tibetan tradition is open to multiple interpretations. It has been read both as an expression of a Han masculine desire to dominate nature and other cultures and as a counter-discourse to official ideology (see Lo 113; Barmé 275; Lee, *Troubadours* 117–18; and my own “Beyond Binaries” and “Locating Global Resistance” 73–79). The poem both connects and opposes the sun to the poet, recalling the simultaneous opposition and conflation of the two in “Le soleil” and in Duoduo’s encounter with Baudelaire’s poem. The reply to the sun also recalls and responds to Mao and the heroic rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution. Equally, the poem draws on tradition while appropriating this tradition for modernist ends. Like “Banpo,” then, “Norlang” overlays tradition and modernity, Maoist and post-Maoist ideologies, the countryside and the modern urban poet, through an appeal to the sun. As in Duoduo’s reading of “Le soleil,” the sun takes on multiple eclipsing and reinforcing figurations, enacted through the double movement of signification toward and beyond its context.

The ambivalence and “shifting critique of tradition and modernity” in *xungen* writing, including Yang’s, reflected and unsettled the ideological structures of post-Mao China at a time when a renewed emphasis on notions of tradition was accompanied by a rhetoric of progress that would lead to modernization, industrialization, and urbanization on a perhaps globally unprecedented scale (Wang 217). During this decade, writers experienced new opportunities for publication and intellectual debate, on the one hand, and repression and political intolerance, on the other—notably the 1983 Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, during which Yang’s “Norlang” was harshly criticized, the 1987 Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization campaign, and, of course, the response to the protests in the spring of 1989. Yang’s *xungen* writing implicitly critiques the combination of this renewed emphasis on tradition and rapid economic development. By superimposing the mythic on modernity and emphasizing a repetitious and entrapping intertwining of the two through the figure of the sun, Yang’s *xungen* poetry implies that the rapid changes of the 1980s hid continued political repression and locates this sense of entrapment within the Chinese tradition. In doing so it reflects a growing sensitivity among *xungen* writers to the “paralysis that a total immersion in culture dictates” (Wang 215). It also resembles Benjamin’s admonition to explore the “primal” in modernity in order to apprehend the perpetual (and hellish) recurrence of the new (*Arcades Project* 10–11).

III. Exile

For Yang, June Fourth 1989 confirmed his sense of the sameness beneath the semblance of change that forms an undercurrent in his *xungen* poetry; it also marked a shift in his life and writing. Yang was in Auckland, New Zealand, in the run up to June Fourth. His protests against the Chinese government at that time made returning to China seem ill-advised, and he consequently spent the subsequent three years based mainly in Auckland (Edmond and Chung 3–6). The writing he produced over this period develops the disenchantment and de-centering impulses of *menglong* and *xungen* poetics into a confrontation with exile (cf. Van Crevel, *Chinese Poetry* 162–63 and Leo Lee, “On the Margins” 225).

Yang’s Auckland poetry and prose negotiate the temporal and physical disjunction of exile through the figure of the walker in the city. In the prose, or *sanwen* 散文, cycle “Guihua” 鬼话 (“Ghost Speech/Lies”; *Guihua* [GH] 1–86) and the poetic cycle “Huanxiang zhong de chengshi” 幻象中的城市 (“City in a Day Dream”; *DH* 335–93), Yang’s walker dramatizes the superimposition of two cities—Beijing and Auckland—and two moments—June Fourth and the aftermath of exile—thereby enacting the dislocation between the here and now of exile and his past in China, between the strange language that surrounds him in exile and the language in which he writes.

Just as I superimposed Baudelaire and Benjamin onto Chinese poetry of the 1970s and 1980s, so I read Yang’s exiled walker in relation to the figure of the *flâneur*. In doing so, I redouble the superimposition of times and places found in the figure, which occurs both in Yang’s texts and in Baudelaire’s mythologized position at the origins of post-Mao Chinese poetry. The collisions that result, like that between Baudelaire and Duoduo, reveal as much through non-correspondences as through points of contact, enacting the double movement of a text toward and beyond its context, toward and beyond its engagement with the particularities of its own space and time. Read through the lens provided by the *flâneur*, Yang’s exile writing suggests the possibility of an alternative approach to comparative literature and modernism that negates commensurability in favor of superimposition, encounter, and touch.

The protagonist of Yang’s Auckland writings is almost always depicted as an exile “walking alone in the city” (*Unreal City* [UC] 89; 一个人在城里走, *GH* 29). This depiction combines characteristics of the *flâneur* with contrasting elements that signify an exilic sense of alienation from the city, its language, and its people. Yang’s alienated walker is a fugitive “on the run in this strange city” (*UC* 75; 在这座陌生的城市里逃, *GH* 16), a status that recalls Benjamin’s association of the *flâneur* with the criminal and the detective story—Benjamin notes that Baudelaire frequently changed his dwelling place in order to circumvent the regulation of the city (*Selected Writings* 4:26)—and Yang’s work repeatedly invokes this same theme. In “Lao gushi” 老故事 (“Old Story”), “time and again the escaped convict changes addresses” (*UC* 34; 逃犯一再更换地址, *DH* 333). In “Yi ge ren de chengshi” 一个人的城市 (“City of One Person”), the protagonist reflects that “Your whole life has changed behind your back, blurring your address so it appears to be a place you have never been before” (*UC* 91; 在你自己背后, 整整一生变得地址模糊, 像从未去过的地方, *GH* 32). Moreover, this constant movement is once again associated with criminality linked, as in classic detective fiction, to the

capacity of the city to provide anonymity: “all you do is conscientiously record the number of times you move house, like a criminal clearly counting the number of times he has been cut on the head by the back of a knife blade” (*UC* 88; 你只认真记下每一次搬家的数字, 像一个罪犯, 清清楚楚地数着刀背砍到头上的次数, *GH* 29).

Yet if Benjamin, following Poe, locates anonymity in the crowd (Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 4:23–24), Yang’s walker is explicitly alone. Like the *flâneur*, he occupies an urban environment both modern and decaying, containing towers and skyscrapers, a hospital, a museum, a prison, a motorway, streetlamps, shops and shop windows, public toilets, rumbling traffic, a tumbledown house, a dilapidated graveyard, and indifferent and impoverished inhabitants. Yang’s walker, however, moves through a city in which people are largely absent and which is in this sense antithetical to the city of teeming crowds that has typically been the terrain of the *flâneur*. (In “Le soleil” the streets are likewise deserted, but Benjamin argues that the poem contains a “phantom crowd” from which the embattled “poet, in the deserted streets, wrests poetic booty” [*Selected Writings* 4:321].) The title “City of One Person” not only conveys the alienation of both *flâneur* and exile (the title is a play on words that could also be rendered as “Lonely City”), but also points to a crucial difference between Yang’s exile and the *flâneur*: “In this city there is only you” (*UC* 87; 这城里只有你, *GH* 27). If this depiction can be explained in part by Auckland’s relatively sparsely populated urban environment in comparison to China’s cities, it also—and more importantly—signifies the exile’s sense of alienation and difference from his environment—the qualities of physical and linguistic displacement that for John Glad help define “literature in exile,” narrowly understood (ix–x). That the protagonist is frequently referred to in the second person in Yang’s exilic writing expands this sense of alienation to include an alienation from the self that makes it impossible to enunciate in the first person “wo” 我 or “I” (see Van Crevel, *Chinese Poetry* 147).

These particular and generalized conceptions of exile are superimposed upon one another in Yang’s writing. Yang describes the exile’s experience as that of a “living ghost” (活的鬼魂) for whom speech is all but impossible (*UC* 67, 75; *GH* 4, 15). But he also argues that exile provides a powerful—indeed the only true—basis for writing (“To Touch the Border”; “Zhuixun”). Exile in this sense is “not just a misfortune” but “also a cultural luxury” (Boym 528). This generalized notion of exile is of course pervasive in modernism. In Baudelaire’s “Le cygne” (“The Swan”), for example, exile not only refers specifically to the poem’s dedicatee, Hugo, but also stands more generally for the allegorical (“tout pour moi devient allégorie”; everything becomes allegory for me) superimposition of peoples, places, and times (Andromache, Ovid, Hugo, the swan, and the “négresse”), enabling the rapidly shifting spatial and temporal movements of the text from Troy to Paris, from “ruisseau sans eau” (“dry gutter”) to “boue” (mud), from old demolished shops to new monuments (*Œuvres complètes* 85–87; *Flowers of Evil* 289–93)—what Benjamin calls the “rocking back and forth between modernity and antiquity” (*Arcades Project* 356; cf. also Baudelaire’s “L’albatros” in which exile is the condition of the poet on earth). Exilic dislocation and alienation are also products of the movements of the urban walker, of what Benjamin calls “the gaze of the allegorist” and the “gaze of the *flâneur*” (*Selected Writings* 3:39). As a

result, exile in “Le cygne” becomes both the condition of modernity (“mon esprit s’exile”; my spirit goes into exile) and the walker’s means of allegorical poetic expression. Yang conveys a similarly double sense of exile by producing work that is both “abstractly dislocated” and “concretely located in Auckland landscapes” and the autobiographical details of his post-June Fourth exile, during which the poet, as he describes it, “walked alone in Auckland city,” a *flâneur* with “no English,” able only to talk to himself (Edmond and Chung 12; Yang, “To Touch the Border”).

If both exile and *flâneur* have become so generalized as to signify all modernist forms of alienation, estrangement, and wandering urban consciousness from *The Waste Land* to *Ulysses*, from Dos Passos to Frank O’Hara (see Brooker), their superimposition onto each other and onto different places and times also produces instances of singularity—what Michel de Certeau, writing of walking in the city, calls “spaces that cannot be seen” and paths that “elude legibility” (93), the moments of blind touch that inform Benjamin’s presentation of the *flâneur* in *Das Passagen-Werk*. Yang’s protagonist recalls Benjamin’s conception of the *flâneur* in his ability to access the city’s hidden depths through the displacement of vision by touch. “City of One Person” begins with the ascent of a volcano: “You climb; you feel a stone in the thick grass with the sole of your foot; you step on it firmly and take another step. You feel the height of the mountain gradually increase through the quickened pace of your breathing. On top of the extinct volcano you are a wild animal, able to feel the fire trembling faintly in the deep layers of the earth” (UC 87; 你爬, 用一只脚掌在草丛里摸索石头, 踩稳了, 再换一只。用越来越急促的呼吸, 感到山的渐渐升起的高度。在死火山, 你是一只野兽, 能够感到地层深处, 火在微微震动, GH 27–28). The volcano, one of many that dot the Auckland isthmus, connotes hidden depths, a geological expanse of time (“deep layers of the earth”) that exceeds the rational order of the city, and primal forces that might at any minute burst forth to shatter the illusion of progress. The protagonist imagines how “fire once oozed from the stones on the mountains, a golden underground current gasping for breath in the silence” (UC 89; 山上的石头曾经渗出火来, 金色的潜流, 在寂静中喘息, GH 29), at once emphasizing the volcano’s ancient subterranean power and echoing Benjamin’s description of the walker’s exploration of the city’s hidden past as a descent into subterranean depths: “The street conducts the *flâneur* into a vanished time. For him, every street is precipitous. It leads downward” (*Arcades Project* 416). Yang’s walker accesses this subterranean world through touch—by feeling “a stone,” “height,” “fire trembling.”

Yang repeats this description of walking as an act of touch rather than vision in the cycle’s title piece “Ghost Speech/Lies,” in which the subterranean depths become the old tumbledown house in which the protagonist lives: “Your toes lead you. . . . Never mind that the light is broken, you can feel your way, feel it through the soles of your feet, but you cannot speak it. As soon as you speak it’s just words” (UC 75; 脚趾带着你 灯坏了没关系, 你能摸, 用脚掌摸, 可不能说, 一说, 就是辞, GH 15). Benjamin describes the sensuous interaction between the city and *flâneur* similarly: “At the approach of his footsteps, the place has roused; speechlessly, mindlessly, its mere intimate nearness gives him hints and instructions.” As the *flâneur* touches the place, “his soles remember” (*Arcades Project* 416). The touch that provides Yang’s walker and Benjamin’s *flâneur* with access to the irrational

depths of the city's past itself constitutes a point of contact between the two writers and an apt figure for cross-cultural encounter and comparison. In both cases, touch involves the unsettling of rational notions of history and temporality and the negation of speech, while walking, as a tactile and communicative act, becomes a way of negotiating—or failing to negotiate—temporal and spatial displacement. In “Ghost Speech/Lies,” the protagonist attempts to—but cannot—speak his way through the dark. Instead, walking produces a painfully acute awareness and conflation of space, time, and language. “[E]very step” and “every moment” are felt and literalized in the laborious account of the ascent of the staircase, an account that is at the same time “just words” on the page or, elsewhere, “a day inside a sentence” (UC 68; 一个句子中的日子, GH 5).

The shift to prose in Yang's exilic writing goes hand in hand with these experiences. Yang associates his poetic prose, or *sānwén* 散文, with the walker in the city (GH 5; UC 69), an association already implied by the character *sanwen* shares with *sānbù* 散步 (strolling), where *san* 散 in both cases, despite divergent pronunciations, suggests leisurely, scattered indirection.⁹ Just as for Baudelaire “the miracle of a poetic prose” is a dream that “is born, above all, from the experience of giant cities, from the intersecting of their myriad relations” (qtd. in Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 4:41), so for Yang exile demands a “dense and convulsive” (密集的, 抽搐的) language for which “anything that is not prose is totally insufficient” (UC 69; 散文之外的远远不够, GH 5–6). If the “fencing” rhyme (“escrime”/“rime”) marks the poet's embattled response to the blows of the great cities of modernity in Baudelaire's “Le soleil” (Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 4:40–41), Yang's shift to prose further underscores the insufficiency of a conventional poetic response to the experience of the urban walker and the shock of exile.

In prose pieces such as “Weishenme yiding shi sanwen” 为什么一定是散文 (“Why There Has to Be Prose”), Yang engages with another theme associated with the *flâneur*—perpetual recurrence beneath the illusion of novelty:

同样的姿势,脚步,走进这一天,又走出这一天。岁月,压抑在字里行间,是不是总共只有一天?一天中就发生了五年(道路的日子),五千年(陶罐上粗陋符号的日子)?言辞,狂暴地展示着一个被无数街道,城市和国度折磨的经历,高达彻底的沉寂。(GH 5)

Walk into this day with the same stride and posture as you walk out of it. All in all, isn't time, shut up in lines of words, just one day? Don't five years (days on the road) or five thousand years (days in the crude symbols on an earthenware jar) all take place in just one day? Words, violently displaying an experience of being tormented by innumerable streets, cities and nations, climax in total stillness. (modified from UC 69)

Here the walker uncovers the hell of repetition not only by means of Yang's earlier *xungen* themes (entrapment by tradition—“five thousand years”—and the written Chinese language—prefigured by “crude symbols on an earthenware jar”), but also through the experience of exile, which produces a similar repetition across

⁹ *Sanwen* is a traditional Chinese genre describing a “relaxed, irregular, and independent style, thus ‘free prose,’ or even ‘essay’” (Nienhauser 94). While initially used to designate a wide range of classical Chinese nonfiction prose, in the twentieth century the term became more closely identified with works akin to the English *essay* (Pollard 11). It retains, however, associations with the broader classical understanding of the genre and the traditional emphasis on lyricism in Chinese prose. Consequently, even modern *sanwen* texts (Zhou Zuoren's, for example) cannot always be categorized as essays and sometimes have closer affiliations with other Western genres (see Daruvala 171). Because Yang's *sanwen* texts reflect this legacy, they might be characterized as *poetic prose*, or even *prose poetry*.

an equally vast geographical expanse (“innumerable . . . cities and nations”).¹⁰ The comparative force of these lines equates the temporal and linguistic entrapment of tradition with the temporal, geographical, and linguistic entrapment of exile. It also suggests an engagement with a more generalized notion of the temporality of modernity as a condition in which the apparent escape from tradition, here through exile and travel, ironically only reinforces the experience of entrapment and repetition beneath what appears to be “new.” The temporality of Yang’s walker is presented as a particular effect of exile and as the general condition of modernity, which exile merely highlights; as such, it both recalls and inverts the way Baudelaire’s “Le cygne” deploys the trope of exile to figure the alienation and temporal entrapment engendered by the modernization of Paris—or what Benjamin calls the poem’s “days of recurrence” (*Arcades Project* 356).

The temporal, geographical, and linguistic estrangement of exile also explains why, as is often the case in literature of the *flâneur*, Yang’s walker experiences the city as a text, but not as “a book of consecutive pages through which one can ‘browse,’” as in some representations of the figure (Gleber 11). Rather, Yang’s city-text is almost always strange, literally and metaphorically shrouded in darkness, and devoid of the crowds typically associated with the *flâneur*. “Ghost Speech/Lies” equates the recitation of a poem with the ghostly sound of “footsteps echo[ing] in an unoccupied room” (*UC* 80; 没有人的房间里, 脚步咚咚响, *GH* 20), while in “Dongri huayuan” 冬日花园 (“Winter Garden”), the “empty peopleless street” (空无一人的街) walked at night (“under the lamps”; 灯下) becomes a “hoarse throat / reciting” (沙哑的喉咙 / 朗诵着) what seems to be a muffled text, the aural concomitant of the visual occlusion of night (*UC* 37; *DH* 338). In “Ghost Speech/Lies,” the city-text is wholly illegible:

从一个路口到另一个路口, 那些同样读不懂的街名, 与你有什么关系? 从一只手到另一只手, 你读一部上千页的书, 与把仅有的一页翻动上千次, 有什么区别? 流亡者, 无非沿着一条足迹的虚线, 在每一个点上一动不动. . . . 活埋进每天重复的日子, 像你的诗, 一个关于真实的谎言。从什么时候起, 辞像陈年的漆皮一样, 酥了, 碎了, 掉下来。你不说, 才听清那个恐怖的声音——又过了一天! (*GH* 16)

From one intersection to the next, what have all those incomprehensible street names got to do with you? What’s the difference between you reading a book of more than a thousand pages and turning the only page you have from one hand to the other a thousand times? All an exile can do is follow a dotted line of footprints, stopping motionless on every dot. . . . Every day you are buried alive in days that keep repeating themselves—it’s like your poetry, a lie about reality. At some point, words have become brittle and cracked and have flaked off, like a time-worn coat of paint. Only when you say nothing do you hear that terrifying voice—*another day has passed!* (modified from *UC* 75–76)

“Incomprehensible” streets that reflect at a literal level the exile’s experience of linguistic foreignness are linked once again to the temporal entrapment of modernity. The words (“dotted line of footprints”) on the page mark days that are indistinguishable, while the unfolding, progressive book of the city hides a perpetual sameness revealed in the city’s ancient depths and hidden decay, here represented by the peeling paint of the exile’s house. (As in Benjamin’s reading of “Le soleil,” “Le crépuscule du matin,” and “Le cygne,” the city’s “decrepitude constitutes the closest link between modernity and antiquity” [*Selected Writings* 4:50].) By superimposing the trope of the *flâneur* as reader of the city-text onto both the exile and

¹⁰ The “crude symbols” probably refer to the markings found on Banpo culture earthenware, which some have claimed prefigure Chinese writing. Yang elsewhere explicitly associates the history and language of China with “the pain of timelessness”: “The ‘history’ of China is just like a square black Chinese character, which, time or tense notwithstanding, never changes” (*Concentric Circles* 12).

the root-seeking investigator of Chinese tradition, Yang produces a poetics of palimpsest that confronts the problem of modernity as the unresolved relationship between different times and places. In Benjamin's words, Yang's alienated walker's "perception of time is supernaturally keen." The passing days bury him, just as in Baudelaire's "Spleen" "the minutes cover a man like snowflakes" (*Selected Writings* 4:335–36). Here, language is similarly materialized as flaking paint, and time, language, and walking simultaneously embodied and erased through the figure of ellipsis, the "dotted line" that the exile must trace.

But Yang's walker, of course, writes as well as follows this broken line, producing a "lie about reality" that exemplifies what Rachel Bowlby, writing of Virginia Woolf, calls the "complications about the claims of documentary writing and the claims or place of the documentary observer" engendered through the transformation of walking in everyday life into words on the page and vice versa (19). Like Woolf, Yang documents autobiographical fact—in his case, his exile and its cause, the June Fourth massacre—while highlighting the fictionality of writing. This fictionality is underscored by the title "Guihua" 鬼话—"lies," but literally "the speech of ghosts." Language's unreliability both enables the erasure of June Fourth through Chinese government misinformation and suggests the possibility of different ghost-like readings within the same text. These possible phantasmal readings demand that the reader play an active role in order to allow literature to achieve the "precarious and temporary transfer of agency, earned through imaginative attention" that Spivak finds in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (42). Because, like Woolf, Yang deploys the liar's paradox, his text transfers agency to the reader who is attentive to language—and especially to its spatial and temporal dimensions, which shift uneasily between the words on the page and the scenes they describe. The reader's tracing of the page embodies the exile's movement along a dotted line, enacting this transfer in a moment of touch. This touch in turn figures the problem and possibility of connection across the disparate spaces and times that exile, reader, and comparatist confront. In this way, language's disembodied resistance to a single position (its "lies") allows the reader to give life to the text's ghostly voices.

IV. Eclipse

Among Yang's exilic prose, "Rishi" 日蚀 ("Eclipse") perhaps most clearly dramatizes the experience of the *flâneur* in exile I have been tracing above, while simultaneously implying a deconstructive comparative practice that recalls the radically non-logical constellations of Benjamin's dialectical image:

到那座桥上，站着。桥下绿阴阴的一大片，是墓地。来来往往的人看你，你什么也看不见。日子，从那时才露出真面目了。一张曝光的底片，灰蒙蒙的空白。站了多久，才回来。(GH 22–23)

You reach that bridge and stand there. Beneath the bridge is a dark, sinister expanse of green—it is the graveyard. The people coming and going see you but you don't see anything. From that moment the days reveal their true complexion. A photographic negative exposed to light, an overcast blank space. After standing there for a time, you return. (UC 82)

Recalling De Certeau's distinction between a rational overview of the city and the blind experience of the walker, Yang's protagonist discovers Auckland's Symonds St. Cemetery without the aid of sight ("you don't see anything"), once again displaying a *flâneur*-like hypersensitivity that sets him apart from "people coming and

going” who “see you” but appear oblivious to what is beneath their feet. Lying, easily overlooked, beneath Symonds St. and Grafton Bridge, Auckland’s first major non-Māori graveyard is a particularly apt example of the city’s forgotten depths. Resistant to—but marked by—the rationalizing forces of progress, the graveyard’s overexposed layers of history negate the “light” of its visual appearance: the graveyard contains the city’s buried past (bodies) and present (the homeless people and drunks who frequent it), and some of the graves have been exhumed and moved more than once to make way first for the bridge and later for the motorway that now passes beneath the bridge, running alongside what remains of the cemetery.

In the graveyard, the walker discovers the “true complexion” of “days” that bury the subject through the conflation and superimposition of text, space, and time. Walking repeatedly from his decrepit “old house” (UC 82; 老房子, GH 22) across the bridge to the graveyard, he overlays one day illegibly upon another, producing an image akin to a “negative exposed to light.” Like the dotted line in “Ghost Speech/Lies,” this “blank space” simultaneously marks and negates the passage of time: “Time passes day by day,” but “Nothing happens. A whole year has passed” (UC 82, 81; 日子一天天过去, 什么都没发生。周年也过了, GH 21). The tension between the passing of time and a pervasive sense of stasis is underscored through a play of words that is central to “Eclipse”: *rizi* 日子 means both “time” and “day” and contains the character for “sun,” *ri* 日. Because this character also appears in the title “Rishi” 日蚀 (“[Solar] Eclipse”), which is followed immediately by the line I have just quoted, the “eclipse” signifies not only the darkness resulting from the superimposition of the moon on the sun but also the erasure produced both by overloading a single sign, such as *ri*, with multiple meanings and by the spatial and temporal movements that the *flâneur*-like walker performs in his daily strolls through the city-text.

“Eclipse” likewise exploits the various meanings of the verb *guo* 过 (to pass). Like the English *pass*, the Chinese *guo* refers, among other things, to physical movement, temporal change, and the past: “The days are only needed for the past. The ‘passing days’ allow you inside a year to become familiar with a city step by step” (UC 82; 仅仅为了过去, 才需要日子。“过日子”, 就是让你在一年里, 一步一步熟悉一座城, GH 22). Here, the context invites one to read “passing days” as “days past” (the lack of tense in Chinese makes this wordplay clearer; cf. the announcement that “another day has passed” in “Ghost Speech/Lies”). Time is in the “past” but is also perpetually present (“days pass”) for the exile, who enacts this stasis within change “step by step,” marking the “passing days” by repeatedly passing back and forth across Grafton Bridge. Significant events happened only in the “past”—“Nothing happens” anymore—and the exile can neither return to this moment of death nor get past it. “Buried alive” under these repeating days, he remains a “living ghost whose death has taken him out of time” (UC 67; 一个死去岁月的活的鬼魂, GH 4). The two times, like the two meanings of *guo*, overlay and erase each other, threatening to leave the exile in a situation characterized by stasis, spatial entrapment, and semantic erasure—doomed endlessly to pass from point to point along a dotted line that marks the absence of meaning.

Through the wordplay on *guo*, the exile’s experience is also overlaid with a reflection on what Benjamin describes as the transformation of the structure of experience in modernity. *Guo*, like the “word *perdu*” in Baudelaire and Marcel Proust, “acknowledges that the experience he once shared is now collapsed into

itself," that now, in Proust's words, "only a very few days can appear" (Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 4:335, 332). The exile's sensitivity to his repetitive temporal and spatial movements and to the decrepit, ignored, and development-ravaged graveyard marks not only his alienation but also the general alienation of all those people and things (the graveyard, the volcano, the wino, and the tumbledown old house) in Yang's Auckland that do not conform to narratives of progress and development.

The wordplay on *ri* and *guo* also links the exiled walker's apprehension of the temporal and spatial complexity of modernity to the virtual and material configurations of language and writing in particular. By conflating the spatiotemporal dimensions of the city with the page, the wordplay underscores the textual nature of the exile's experience and so shifts attention to the plane of language, a shift also critical to Benjamin's dialectical image. A sense of temporality results from reading the spatial configuration of words on the page, just as the walker's sense of temporality is created through the spatial configuration of the old house, bridge, and graveyard, so that in the poem "Gelafudun qiao" 格拉夫顿桥 ("Grafton Bridge") "that point you walk to is also the point where you are aged" (*UC* 39; 你走去的还是你被变老的那一端, *DH* 342). The "temporalized space" of the city here results from the insertion of virtual times through the temporalized space of the page, creating what Mike Crang calls a "haunting and opening" that, although seemingly trapping Yang's protagonist, might offer "the possibility of difference rather than just repetition" (207).

That the temporalized space and spatialized time of Yang's exile writing extend beyond Auckland reminds us "that, in the course of *flânerie*, far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment" (Benjamin, *Arcades Project* 419). "Winter Garden" repeatedly refers to "snow" (雪), unknown in subtropical Auckland and least of all in the Auckland Domain hothouse to which the title refers (*UC* 36; *DH* 337). "City of One Person" explicitly superimposes Beijing on Auckland by locating the protagonist simultaneously in a city where the sea is only a "myth" (神话)—"You still live in that ancient city buried in dust and yellow earth" (你还住在那座黄土和灰尘掩埋的古城里)—and in a city where the sea is ever-present: "All you can do is live beside the sea" (*UC* 88; 你只能住在海边, *GH* 28). For "As you walk the streets, distances change. The distance from one day to another resembles the distance from shop to shop, from door to door, from bed to bed. . . . you swing each of your two hands in turn. The two days in your two hands swing you about. Which one do you belong to?" (*UC* 88; 在街上走, 距离就变了。从日子到日子的距离, 像从市场到市场, 从门到门, 床到床。 就交替地摆动两只手。两只手里两个日子, 摆动你。你属于哪一个?, *GH* 28). The two hands, places, and times merge in the generalized "time" and particular "day" of the word "rizi"—a play on words developed further in "Eclipse."

In "Eclipse," however, the superimposition of Beijing and Auckland does not lead even to the difficult reconciliation that in "City of One Person" is implied by the contrary directions of the swinging hands of the walker. The possibility of connection or touch emerges instead out of the very impossibility of such reconciliation. Temporal, spatial, and textual superimposition produces a moment of erasure that further merges the textual space of the page with the temporal and spatial movements of the walker at the point at which he witnesses the beginning of the eclipse: "You plan out a poem in the graveyard, making the poem itself

embody part of the graveyard. Generations of communal burial chambers. Walking along a line of poetry is like walking along a path, words on both sides of blank space, square open graves—they exist because of blank space” (UC 85; 在墓地构思一首诗, 就让诗本身成了一块墓地。祖祖辈辈的集体墓室。沿着诗句走[像]沿着小路走, 空白两边的字, 方方正正的墓穴, 由于空白才存在, GH 25). To trace the words on the page through the physical act of touch is to parallel the path of the walker passing between the lines of graves in the darkness of the eclipse. Just as the ellipsis marks the failure of speech in “Ghost Speech/Lies,” so here the words as grave-stones embody the erasure of signification that accompanies the failure of vision during the eclipse. But they suggest in addition that a ghostly speech (*guihua*) of stones emerges out of the erasures produced by textual, temporal, and spatial conflation and superimposition, a speech accessible only through the sensitive walker’s or reader’s touch, through a fully embodied act of reading.

Like Baudelaire’s play on the word *vers*, these superimpositions produce the double movement of words toward and beyond their context, and between embodiment and disembodiment. Recalling Baudelaire’s wordplay, the characters form lines of text while their rectangular shapes iconically represent worm-riddled graves. As highlighted by the description of the sun being “bitten away” (UC 85; 牙咬过的, GH 25), the title “Rishi” 日蚀 (“Eclipse”) itself implies a sun being eaten by a worm: *shi* 食, the left-hand component of the character *shi* 蚀, means “to eat” or “food,” while the right-hand component, *chong* 虫, signifies an insect or worm. The title thus identifies the erasure of the sun, time, and days (*ri* 日) both with the decomposition of dead bodies in the graveyard and with the idea that each character is a worm-riddled grave, a figure that marks simultaneously the success and failure of the attempt to make language embody meaning. On the one hand, words become the broken dotted lines of the graves they describe. On the other, the transformation of a body into language necessitates its disembodiment. The decaying body becomes a textual surface, “covered in green dots” (你身上到处是绿点子), which are simultaneously the dappling of the sun’s light and “mouldy spots in the flesh” (肉里……的霉斑) that suggest worms working on a decomposing body, as well as the erasure of language marked in “Ghost Speech/Lies” by the dotted line (UC 85; GH 25). The worms consume the protagonist’s decomposing body, transforming it into language: “the real you is picked out of the gaps between teeth bored by worms” (UC 82; 真的你, 一次次从虫蛀的牙缝间被剔掉, GH 22). In devouring the mouth they embody the “ghost speech” (*guihua*) of the “tongueless mouths of the dead” (UC 85; 死者那没有舌头的嘴, GH 25).

“Eclipse” ends when the two cities and two times eclipse each other:

那里的人们, 不说你, 只说“去年”。谁都是“去年”。所有死亡都在“去年”。…… 你就会被甩下来。“去年”中没有你…… 又进不了今年。…… 这些阔叶树, 绿得发亮。不像你熟悉的松柏, 本身就很黑。…… 日蚀那天, 太阳不是太阳, 人不是人。…… 那个女孩子, 才九岁, 已经学会与石头谈话, 让石头摸她。老人瞎了, 只能摸自己儿时的照片。黑暗平坦地落下来, 黑暗中本来什么都没有。(GH 26)

People there don’t speak of you, they just say “last year.” Everyone is “last year.” All death was “last year.” . . . So you have been left behind. There is no you in “last year” . . . you cannot enter this year either. . . . These broad-leafed trees are a luminous green. They are not like the pines and cypresses you are familiar with, which are the very embodiment of darkness. . . . The sun is not the sun and people are not people on the day of the eclipse. . . . The little girl, just nine years old, has already learned how to talk with the stone, to allow the stone to stroke her. When old people go blind, they can only stroke their own childhood photographs. Darkness descends smoothly—in the darkness, of course, there is nothing. (UC 86)

Like an overexposed negative, the temporal, geographic, and symbolic superimposition of “last year” on “this year,” of the “luminous green” of Auckland’s subtropical trees on the darkness of Beijing’s “pines and cypresses”—in China traditional symbols of longevity often found in cemeteries—yields only “darkness.” The eclipse thus superimposes the generalized condition of modernity onto the exile’s experience. Just as in Benjamin’s account, Baudelaire’s “À une passante” ends in a dramatic collapse of vision for its *flâneur* protagonist, so Yang’s exiled walker “feels as though he has been dropped from the calendar.” His inability to enter “last year” or “this year” at once underscores the particular catastrophe of June Fourth and his exile and marks the loss in modernity of what Benjamin calls the “capacity for experiencing” (*Selected Writings* 4:336). The overloading of symbolic values on the word *eclipse* finally threatens to plunge language into a semantic darkness in which “the sun is not the sun . . . people are not people,” and “darkness” is layered on “nothing.” If for Benjamin Baudelaire’s defensive response to the stasis and anesthesia of modernity shifts perception from vision to touch and causes “words to collapse,” for Yang the eclipse is redoubled in the language itself, marking the shift to the linguistic plane that Benjamin associates with the dialectical image.

Here, my reading of “Eclipse” in relation to the *flâneur* and Benjamin’s dialectical image threatens the text with an additional semantic overload that might collapse it into generality. Yet the moments of particularity and touch that emerge out of the superimposition of disparate places and times in “Eclipse” suggest how particularity might be constituted through the very generalizing comparative impulse that would seem to negate it. “Eclipse” emphasizes the particular circumstances of a post-June Fourth Chinese exile even as it addresses the generalized problem of bringing places, times, and languages together, just as Benjamin’s general account of the catastrophic shock experience of modernity also addresses the specific historical situation that he faced in the late 1930s (Buck-Morss 308). Yang’s text superimposes the Symonds St. Cemetery on the graveyard on the outskirts of Beijing where Yang worked during the Cultural Revolution (*UC* 81; “A great city far away; a graveyard on the edge of the city”; 远方一座大城·墓地在城市边上, *GH* 21) and on the ghostly nonexistent graveyard for those who died on June Fourth “last year,” especially the “girl” about whom Yang wrote the poem “Gei yi ge datusha zhong siqu de jiu sui nühai” 给一个大屠杀中死去的九岁女孩 (“To a Nine-Year-Old Girl Killed in the Massacre”; *Dead in Exile* 44).¹¹ The exile experiences temporal entrapment and erasure partly because he is unable to connect directly with the event that took place in Beijing “last year.” But he cannot pass beyond it to be in Auckland “this year,” since “any realization of being ‘here’ now irrepressibly mobilizes the memory of the massacre over ‘there’” (Van Crevel, *Chinese Poetry* 164). The impossibility of being “there” or in “last year” generates the paradox that it is both impossible to write about the event and impossible not to write about it. This particular paradox in turn produces the generalized paradox that it is impossible to write history, the “speech of ghosts,” without writing “lies” (*guìhua*).

While the particularity of exile produces this generalized sense of the impossibility of reconciling language and reality and of bridging disparate places and

¹¹ In China, the poem was further erased by being retitled “Gei yi ge cusi de jiusui nühai” 给一个猝死的九岁女孩 (“To a Nine-Year-Old Girl Who Died Suddenly”; *DH* 301). See Edmond, “Dissidence” 124–26.

times, the negation of the visual in favor of touch also suggests the possibility of contact between places, times, languages, and people that would not merely reinforce the relentless process of erasure through generalization. The grave-like characters and the darkness at the conclusion of “Eclipse” reassert the particularity of touch even as they collapse difference into a generalized deconstructive breakdown of signification. The eclipse produces a moment of blindness and touch in the graveyard: “When old people go blind, they can only stroke their own childhood photographs.” Through touch, the gravestone and the dead girl with whom it communes communicate the speech of ghosts, a dream expressed in the epitaph Yang composed for the Auckland monument to those who died in the massacre: “you do not speak, but the stone has a cry” (你们已无言，而石头有了呼声). Here the unreliability of language, its capacity to tell lies (*guihua*), enables the wordplay on *shítóu* 石头 (stone) and *shétóu* 舌头 (tongue), which closely resemble one another visually and aurally, wordplay that emphasizes language’s ability both to silence and to recover the speech of ghosts (*guihua*). Similarly, the collapse of signification and vision in “Eclipse” is accompanied by the appearance of the girl and the stone’s touch, both of which reinforce the possibility of tracing the path of the gravestones as an elliptical, tactile, ghostly language of stones.

The equation of graves with characters invites the reader to stroke the page and so embody the position of both the walker-protagonist and the ghostly nine-year-old girl. But the reader’s touch also registers the impossibility of reaching across the divides of space and time that the mediation of the page viscerally marks. “Eclipse” describes and attempts to overcome this problem, deploying the word *rishi* to conflate the gaps in language with the wormholes in decomposing bodies, as in the representation of ghost speech as a tongue of worms and the depiction of words as graves on the page. The flickering double movement of signs toward and beyond their context that results enacts the superimposition of disparate places and times, just as in “Le soleil” the play on *vers* oscillates between embodiment and disembodiment through its superimposition of heaven and earth, sun and *flâneur*, country and city, worms and verse, reality and language. In “Eclipse,” the movement also involves collision and the interplay between sun and walker, though it comes less violently than in Baudelaire’s poem, taking the form of a caress. Collision or touch signals the emergence of particularity within the very erasures effected by generalizing superimposition, whether in Benjamin’s reading of Baudelaire, Duoduo’s encounter with Baudelaire, Yang’s exilic writing, or my reading of each through the *flâneur*. Touch stands as a figure for, and embodiment of, a comparative poetics that deploys a *flâneur*-like hypersensitivity to the duality of language to bring places and times into encounter, while acknowledging their mutually constituting and irreconcilable, mutually eclipsing otherness.

The *flâneur* in exile embodies a comparative poetics resistant to generalizing thinking but insistent on bringing places and times into contact and acknowledging the constitutive role that such moments of collision play in modern and contemporary literature and in modernity at large. The moments of erasure and eclipse that emerge out of reading the *flâneur* in exile recall Benjamin’s conception of the dialectical image in that they bring disparate material into a constellation without insisting on a single overarching logical form. The sun remains, even when eclipsed, but is multiplied, becoming the many stars of irreconcilably distinct positions. The constellation of these positions, places, times, and languages

does not resolve into the light of a single vision but into a darkness in which particularity is preserved in the possibility of touch, in an imagined line traced across the night.

University of Otago

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