

WORLD LITERATURE AND GOETHE'S CHINESE POETRY

Another winter in Weimar finds Goethe immersed again in Chinese literature. His best correspondent and friend, Friedrich Schiller, has long since died, yet the urge to hold forth on the books he has just been reading persists. On January 31, 1827, over dinner, Goethe lists them off to a new conversation partner, Johan Peter Eckermann. Among the group, a Chinese novel. In response to his companion's astonished reaction that a Chinese novel must seem very strange, Goethe offers one of the first, and best, accounts of world literature: "Not as much as one expects to believe. The people think, act and feel almost just like us and it does not take long before one feels oneself to be their equal."¹ Goethe's identification with Chinese figures does not require the emotional shock of martyr dramas or

1. Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*, ed. Christoph Michel and Hans Grütters (Berlin: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2011), January 31, 1827; hereafter cited by date of entry.

earthquake news reports; instead he focuses on the quiet particulars of scholarly retirement: gardens, poetry, wine, memories of past love. Just as he was quick to recognize correspondences between metaphysical debates in Nanjing and Weimar, he now draws parallels between Chinese and European narrative fiction: "There is a strong resemblance to my 'Hermann and Dorothea,' as well as to the English novels of Richardson." Yet similarities in plot events are less important to Goethe than the interpenetration of human and natural environments in the descriptive language: "You always hear the goldfish splashing in the pond, the birds are always singing on the bough, the day is serene and sunny, the night is always clear. There is much talk about the moon . . . and the interior of the houses is as neat and elegant as their pictures."²

If the report of Matteo Ricci's Nanjing Disputation contains augmentations and revisions, then surely Eckermann's conversations with Goethe do as well. Both present rhetorical occasions allowing their protagonists to explain their agendas. Goethe is eager to find similarities with Chinese figures, but he is confident that he will not lose his orientation in the process. While speaking with Eckermann, Goethe offers a balance. In its novels, China appears strange and curious yet not alienatingly foreign. Its otherness is heightened by the absence of any colonial or missionary connection between Weimar and China. The relationship is strictly a readerly one, mediated by a text that seems to have an autonomous existence. The genealogy of cosmopolitan reading practices and the circuitous route the novel took to arrive in Weimar are not mentioned in this conversation. In recounting the noteworthy features of the Chinese novel, Goethe cannot help but revive the fable of China's ideal character. His answer to Eckermann alternates between explaining how China is knowable, while distinctly wonderous. The notion that all people are fundamentally the same remains the starting point for his approach to Chinese literature, though in explaining himself, Goethe adds a singular quality that is perhaps supposed to motivate his interlocutor to read a Chinese novel as well. Goethe, the old raconteur, cannot resist the opportunity to bedazzle his listener: "The

2. Eckermann, January 31, 1827.

people [in Chinese novels] think, act, and feel almost just like us and one soon senses to be their equal, except that with them everything proceeds more clearly, purely, and morally.”³

As Michel Serres argues, a dialogue between two interlocutors always involves the implicit exclusion of a third person.⁴ In this case, Goethe’s advocacy for world literature establishes multiple dialogues between his own writing and foreign literature, while implicitly rejecting nationalist Romantic poetry. Because Goethe understands the logic of exclusion inherent to dialogues, he goes out of his way to tell Eckermann that just because one can find compatibility with foreign cultures does not mean that Europeans, and especially German classicists like himself, would therefore abandon Greek antiquity, which, Goethe argues, will always be the foundation from which Europe seeks dialogue with others. Rather than disavowing antiquity, Goethe prefers to reject the newly emerging nationalist literary cultures. In many forms of intercultural dialogues—accommodation and world literature—the cosmopolitan positions turn away from domestic cultural forms that are perceived as irrational, superstitious, and incapable of reaching out beyond local norms. Since cosmopolitan thought seeks to transport cultural forms beyond the site of their first articulation, its dialogues always brush aside or stamp out those aspects of indigenous culture that cannot be adapted to new settings. If Goethe has a local allegiance, it is to classical antiquity, not German nationalism.

When Goethe tells Eckermann that the Chinese are the same as we are, he is not invoking an abstract ideal so much as a pantheist eternal recurrence of common human qualities—poetry being one. Goethe’s enthusiasm for Chinese novels quickly turns into one of his earliest formulations of world literature, so that his reading serves as a paradigm for many more to follow. Contemporary scholars of world literature who seek to connect Goethe’s term with our own globalized networks often start with this important dia-

3. Eckermann, January 31, 1827.

4. Michel Serres, “Platonic Dialogue,” in *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, ed. Josué Harari and David Bell (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 67.

logue.⁵ "I see more and more," Eckermann reports Goethe as having said, "that poetry is the common good of humanity and that it appears everywhere and at all times among hundreds and hundreds of people."⁶ Goethe's appreciation for the repetition of human actions across cultures derives from his distinctive adaptation of Spinoza. To quote again the passage from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (*Poetry and Truth*) in which Goethe summarizes his understanding of Spinoza's metaphysics: "Nature operates according to eternal, necessary, and therefore divine laws, so that the Deity himself could not alter anything about it. All people are thereby unknowingly completely united."⁷ This sense of universal, unchangeable oneness allows the poet to treat subjective experiences as externally generated even though they are so often held to be uniquely individual. Sympathies can thus reflect larger unities rather than just individual passions.

As Walter Benjamin elaborated in his essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, the recognition of sudden, unexpected similarities emerges from a hidden substrate of mythical dynamics. Goethe had already expressed this archaic understanding of human existence in a letter to Zelter while working on his other great orientalist project, *West-östliche Divan* (*West-Eastern Divan*), in which he attributed his freedom to emulate and compose with Hafez to his own aged sense that all things moved in a cycle: "Meanwhile I am collecting new poems again for the Divan. The Mohammedan religion, mythology,

5. Hendrick Birus, "Goethes Idee der Weltliteratur, Eine historische Vergewärtigung," in *Weltliteratur Heute*, ed. Manfred Schmeling (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995), 1–28; Ritchie Robertson, "Weltliteratur from Voltaire to Goethe," *Comparative Critical Studies* 12.2 (2015): 163–81; David Damrosch, "Goethe Coins a Phrase," *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1–36. Damrosch emphasizes the monumentality of the concept. By approaching the topic through his biographical tale of Eckermann's humble origins, he only elevates the term. Better to see how fragile Goethe's concept is, how much it depends on translators' prefaces. For a more critical reading of this primal scene, see B. Venkat Mani, *Recoding World Literature: Libraries, Print Culture, and Germany's Pact with Books* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 53–65.

6. Eckermann, January 31, 1827.

7. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Werke*, ed. Erich Trunz (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1982), 10:79; hereafter cited as HA.

mores allow room for a poetry that suits my age. Unconditional acquiescence to the unfathomable will of God, cheerful overview of the mobile ever circling and spiraling recurrent earthly drives, love, inclinations between two floating worlds, everything real purified, dissolving into symbol. What more could a grandpapa want?"⁸ He offers a similar viewpoint in a letter to Wilhelm von Humboldt on December 1, 1831, wherein he again invokes his old age: "If I may, my revered friend, express myself in our old confidence, then I would gladly confess that, in my advanced years, everything has become more and more historical for me: whether something occurred in a past era, in a distant kingdom or whether it just happened nearby is all the same to me. In fact I appear to myself ever more and more to be historical."⁹ For Goethe, the past and the distant are grasped as moving together into an extended historical present. All things, the near and far, the immediate and the ancient, are perceived with detachment, with an observer's eye, such that any intellectual participation requires an emotional reach because there is little that comes across with urgency.

Anil Bhatti cites a letter the poet writes but does not send to his editor Cotta, wherein he spells out his intentions too clearly for his own liking. "I have quietly busied myself with *oriental literature*, and in order to understand it more deeply, composed much in the in the sense and style of the Orient. My intention is to connect, in a cheerful manner, West and East, the past and the present, Persian and German and to allow each side's mores and thinking to reach into the other."¹⁰ Goethe reads oriental literature in *secret* in part because he long had the habit of not revealing his creative intentions to others, and this explains largely why he never sent the letter—for it provides an all-too clear and confident statement of purpose. Bhatti emphasizes Goethe's desire to tie two poetic traditions together, *verknüpfen*, in a cheerful manner, *heiter*, to call attention to the *Divan's* playful-performative quality, which avoids

8. *Goethes Briefe*, ed. Karl Robert Mandelkow (Hamburg: Christian Wegner, 1965), 3:477, May 11, 1820.

9. *Goethes Werke* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1887–1919), 4.49:165; hereafter cited as WA.

10. *Goethes Briefe*, 3:306, to Cotta, May 1815 (emphasis in original).

colonial logic in its spatial (East, West), temporal (past, present) or cultural (Persian, German) structures.¹¹

World literature, as Goethe proposes it, is driven by an inclination to recognize resemblances between disparate forms of writing. The search for resemblances between literary texts and traditions guided his own interpretation of foreign cultures. He was not interested in organizing knowledge as literary historians do, so much as driving his own creative ability to write poetry. Johanna Schopenhauer provides an example of the Weimar world literature milieu in her salon in which his reading turns into poetic composition: "For the last few evenings, Goethe himself has been reading aloud for us, and to see and hear him is magnificent. Schlegel sent him a translated drama by Calderón in manuscript form; it is all a sound and light show, yet in an evening he cannot read three pages without his own poetic spirit springing to life, so that he interrupts himself with every line and a thousand wonderful ideas emerge and stream out in rampant abundance, so that one forgets everything and just listens to him."¹² More than positing an overarching concept of humanity and poetry, his readings were focused on detecting resemblances.¹³ To the extent that these similarities were then understood as belonging to a larger unity, Goethe did share in the premodern presumption of an organic wholeness to human existence. He was more concerned with how texts overlapped and intersected than in the application of a single universal concept to diverse forms of writing. Similarities could come into being without having to assert some complex causal connection between themselves, yet the act of recognition was greatly enhanced by the increased circulation of texts through expanding international media circuits.

11. Anil Bhatti, "Der Orient als Experimentierfeld. Goethes *Divan* und der Aneignungsprozess kolonialen Wissens," in *From Popular Goethe to Global Pop*, ed. Ines Detmers and Birte Heidemann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 22 (emphasis in original).

12. Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, *Geschichte der literarischen Vortragskunst* (Berlin: Metzlar, 2020), 137.

13. John Noyes distinguishes Goethe's individualistic focus on aesthetic perception from Herder's communal understanding of culture in "The World Map and the World of Goethe's *Weltliteratur*," *Acta Germanica* 38 (2010): 128–45.

Goethe apprehends foreign literature by drawing analogies with familiar writing, thus allowing for a loose encounter with the text that generates a series of further associations. While scholars usually cull Goethe's reflections on analogic thinking from his morphology, they also clearly describe his comparative reading habits as a means of inspiring his own creativity.¹⁴ The epistemological status of an analogy in Goethe's account is itself quite similar to fiction. Reading a foreign text as in Schopenhauer's salon suggests analogies, in this case between cultures. "Communicating through analogies I consider to be as useful as it is pleasant; the analogy does not want to impose itself nor prove anything; it seeks to engage with others without incorporating them. Multiple analogies do not form closed ranks; rather they are like good company that inspires more than it gives."¹⁵ Analogic thinking hovers between identity and difference; it allows for the possibility of similarity by bridging difference. Analogies posit equivalences only contingently, preventing thereby the assertion of any over-arching principle. Anyone can point in both directions without following either to a conclusion. The analogy mediates between positions, such as the individual and the universal, without insisting on a dialectical relation between them. "Every existing entity is an analogue to everything else; thus, existence appears to us as both separate and connected. If one follows an analogy too closely, then everything collapses into the identical; if one avoids analogy, then everything becomes scattered across infinity."¹⁶ Because they are open-ended and do not make absolute assertions, analogies can avoid polemics—an important goal for Goethe, who sought to elude rhetorical confrontations whenever possible. "To think according to analogies means to not scold: the analogy has the benefit that it does not close off and really does not desire anything final."¹⁷ Analogies are particu-

14. Eva Geulen, *Aus dem Leben der Form: Goethes Morphologie und die Nager* (Berlin: August, 2016), 87–98. Hermann Schmitz interprets Goethe's analogic thinking in relation to logical categories (Aristotle, Kant) and theology in *Goethes Altersdenken im problemgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1959), 245–50.

15. HA, 12:368.

16. HA, 12:368.

17. HA, 12:368.

larly suited for literary interpretation and creation, for they allow one to recognize similarities without insisting on their being subsumed under a philosophical principle.

Goethe's comparisons have an unavoidably historical and psychological origin; they are formed by an obvious subject, yet they encourage a detached examination. Within any juxtaposition there is considerable room for illusion: a reader could easily over-identify with one, so that it becomes omnipresent, creating a poetic atmosphere wherein one element flows into another, as well as errors that any knowledge-producing discipline would reject. Within the field of world literature, analogical thinking reintroduces the sympathetic relations of early modern cosmology as readerly epiphanies about intertextual affinities, rather than as universal harmonies. Thus, Goethe's identification with Chinese fiction takes a more subjective position than Leibniz's claim that fate has placed the two refined civilizations, Europe and China, at opposite ends of the same continent.¹⁸ However, this subjectivity is not just personal or psychological. Goethe's acknowledgement of Chinese characters as analogous to himself and to those found in European novels entails a philosophical transfer from the earlier, Sturm-und-Drang insistence on the speaking subject's singularity to a more general sense of ego that vacates the willfulness of the empirical self.

Goethe's appreciation for Asian literature was at odds with the dominate inclination in nineteenth-century Germany and Austria to hierarchize cultures with terms borrowed from *Weltliteratur*, such as the notion of a cultured language (*Kultursprache*), an ideology strongly reinforced by Hegel's account of the world spirit moving from Asia westward to Europe. Goethe's attempts to establish an emotional parity with Chinese figures came just a few years after Hegel depicted China as a civilization that the spirit of reason had left behind. While Hegel's position is often taken as reflecting a European sense of superiority over China and thus as a representative of racist colonialism, Goethe's sympathetic approach to Chinese literature is too often overlooked. Hegel's account is conveniently

18. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *The Preface to Leibniz' Novissima Sinica*, trans. Donald Lach (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1957), 68.

placed within the larger arc of a turn from early modern fascination with China (Sinophilia) to a nineteenth-century aspiration to force colonial concessions upon a backward empire (Sinophobia). Goethe's literary aspirations to find similarities with Chinese figures stand directly at odds with this larger narrative. We should not presume that Goethe's view balances out Hegel's, for, over the stretch of the nineteenth century, the identificatory idealism of world literature was overwhelmed, indeed subsumed, by colonialist assertions of a hierarchy of civilizations.

Goethe's final collection of poems reflects the cyclical intersection between space and time in the form of Chinese-German rotations moving through the spans of a day and a year. "Chinesisch-deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten" ("Chinese-German Book of Hours and Seasons") refers to media forms such as the daily newspaper and the annual journal, allowing thereby the mythic to acquire the connotation of information passing in and out of a temporal rotation. Media information rolls past just like the day or the seasons. An easy elision of temporal terms allows the names of newspapers and journals to blend in with pastoral seasons, as becomes apparent in Goethe's letter to Carlyle explaining the importance of media channels in connecting different national literatures together: "You will see . . . that we Germans are also busy reading foreign literature. Through express post and steam ships, the nations' daily, weekly, and monthly journals are moving closer together." Goethe declares his intention to use these communication lines as much as possible: "So long as I am capable, I will turn my attention to this reciprocal exchange." ¹⁹ "Reciprocal exchange" operates not only within the communication channels, but also across discourses, from media to poetry. By hyphenating German and Chinese in the title of his poetry cycle, Goethe also returns to the parallels he recognized between the Weimar and Nanjing disputations, for the title indicates that the rotations are much the same in both cultures. Indeed, they may well be synchronized. Astronomy, with its mythic forebear, as-

19. Goethe letter to Carlyle, August 8, 1828, WA, 4.44:257.

trology, appears as a second connotation offered by the complicated title. The seasons and times of day are measured and understood through the movement of heavenly bodies. To the extent that pre-industrial humans the world over oriented themselves according to the stars, the title suggests that astronomy can serve as an intercultural form of knowledge.

This last collection revives a model of aesthetic imagination and mediation already familiar from Goethe's youthful novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Much as Goethe characterized his sympathetic affinity as a new insight due to his advanced age, his correspondence in the last years of his life echoes an implied dialogue from his first novel, when Werther writes to his friend on May 17: "If you ask, how the people here are, I must tell you: like everywhere else! Humans are a uniform species."²⁰ Before long, of course, Werther goes on to describe his fateful encounter with the singular Charlotte. When Charlotte states that she prefers reading books in which she can discover her own world once more, where the characters behave as she would and whose fates are as sincere as her own domestic life, Werther turns the conversation to Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*.²¹ In *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, the range of identifications extended as far as the British Isles, but by the time of his work on *West-Eastern Divan*, they extended into Central Asia. Goethe's inclination to integrate foreign literature into his own writing shows itself already in *Werther*. The passages from *Ossian* sounded to German readers as a strange alternative to the canon of classical and courtly French literature. The second-to-last section of *Werther*, when the would-be lovers read aloud to each other, represents an early attempt to display the correspondences between familiar passions and a newly discovered foreign literature. If readers were willing to accept the strange names of Ossian, then old-man Goethe expects they might tolerate his Muslim and Chinese references.

Paradoxically, the notion that all people share the same traits can require the reader to become transformed into a stranger, or at the

20. HA, 6:11.

21. HA, 6:23.

very least, to learn the foreign language. In his notes to the *Divan*, Goethe instructs the reader: “If we want to join in with the productions of these most wonderful spirits, then we must orientalize ourselves because the Orient will not come over to us.” As accommodating Jesuit missionaries well understood, learning the language is central to this transformation: “And while translation is highly praiseworthy as a way of attracting and introducing us, it is evident that in this literature the language as language plays the foremost role.”²² If learning the language is the means to become like another, it also is the means by which this role of being different can be played. Far from expressing a rule for excluding difference, Charlotte’s preference for characters that are much like herself reflects Goethe’s life-long tendency to leave his own security in order to better perceive similarities with others. Underlying Goethe’s storytelling is the principle that “humans are much the same everywhere, yet the ones I am telling you about now have a special quality.” His addendum to Eckermann, that among the Chinese everything is done more clearly, cleanly, and ethically, turns back on itself to show perhaps more than just the continuing influence of the Jesuit view that China was an ordered society guided by literary administrators—an image that Eckermann’s *Conversations with Goethe* established for many in the long nineteenth century.

Three Chinese Romances

By the last decade of Goethe’s career, three novels had been translated into European languages. All evidence indicates that he had read them intensely in search of material and inspiration for his own poetic creativity. These translations appeared during two distinct phases of interest in China: *The Pleasing History* (1761), *Chinese Courtship. In Verse* (1824), and *Les deux cousines* (The two fair cousins, 1826). In between lay a string of memoirs published in the

22. This passage appears in the section “Übergang von Tropen zu Gleichnissen” in *Noten und Abhandlungen zu besserem Verständniß des West-östlichen Divans*, WA, 7:106.

1790s recounting Lord Macartney's failed embassy for the British government to Beijing. The first novel was published under the great weight of Jesuit erudition about China while the last two were offered up as autonomous works intent on conveying poetic beauty within the discourse of their own narrative. Until recently, practically no Goethe scholar has been able to lay hands on all three. Now, however, they are readily available on the internet, including many additional translations. Today it is possible to formulate close readings and comparisons of these earliest examples of world literature.

All three of the novels can be classified as "beauty-scholar" romances, which entail a young man studying and taking exams, traveling to the capital for further exams, and meeting lovely, learned women along the way with whom they develop relationships. In the case of *The Pleasing History*, the scholar and the beauty go out of their way to remain chaste even though, contrary to respectable custom, they share a household together.²³ All three novels, highlight the importance of the imperial postal system by having the plots depend upon characters who send petitions and letters to and from the court.²⁴ In the latter two romances, the scholar protagonist becomes betrothed to two different women during the course of his adventures and in the end is allowed to marry them both in such a manner that they share equal status as wives. Writing poetry and displaying learnedness are important in all the novels, but really only *The Two Fair Cousins* depicts a sophisticated poetic community. Although the second romance, *The Chinese Courtship*, is written in verse, it is only *The Two Fair Cousins* that repeatedly valorizes poetic genius—the ability to compose verse immediately when a situation requires it—a skill Wilhelm Meister displays repeatedly. The novel's atmosphere, its garden settings, and its special

23. Robert Hegel provides a comprehensive characterization of the genre in *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 48.

24. Ning Ma notes in that while Chinese romances do not adopt the first-person voice of epistolary fiction, the dramatic plot shifts brought on by the arrival of crucial news nevertheless direct attention to how much personal lives of the administrative elite were entwined with the postal system; *The Age of Silver: The Rise of the Novel East and West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 172.

attention to the connotations associated with specific types of flowers correspond closely to the mood of Goethe's "Chinesisch-deutsche Jahr- und Tageszeiten." The novel not only pairs the scholar with two beautiful, brilliant women, it also establishes an affinity between the young poet and the aged, retired mandarin, clearly marking each as standing at opposite ends of the imperial career circuit. Goethe uses temporal biographical markers in his titles—most notably *Wilhelm Meisters Apprenticeship* and then his *Journeyman'ship*. The title of his last poetry cycle again calls attention to marking the passage of time, with Goethe voicing himself from the position of an old mandarin contemplating his past life as he reviews the flowers in his garden. When Goethe's poetic cycle is read in relation to *The Two Fair Cousins*, its Chinese character becomes evident.

The first novel appeared in London 1761 with the title *Hau Kiou Chooan, or The Pleasing History. A Translation from the Chinese Language in Four Volumes with Notes*. Those footnotes will prove important for they provide the reader an abundance of encyclopedic annotations drawn from Jesuit sources, particularly Du Halde's *Lettres edifiantes et curieuses*.²⁵ This first English edition and the subsequent German translation belong to an era when novels served as the bearers of information. The original Chinese author remains unknown, though it is presumed that the book was composed during the early Qing period.²⁶ The English translation was published by the Anglican pastor Thomas Percy, who received the manuscript from the descendants of James Wilkerson, a merchant with the English East India company who resided in Canton. In its original form, the first three-quarters of the novel had been translated into English with the remainder written in Portuguese. Given the manuscript's many interlinear corrections, Percy surmises that the translation was presumably undertaken as a language-learning exercise with the guidance of a Chinese teacher. The footnotes were

25. *Hau Kiou Chooan, or The Pleasing History. A Translation from the Chinese Language in Four Volumes with Notes* (London: Dodsley, 1761).

26. Kai-chong Cheung, "The *Haoqiu zhuan*, the First Chinese Novel Translated in Europe: With Special Reference to Percy's and Davis's Renditions," in *One into Many: Translation and the Dissemination of Classical Chinese Literature*, ed. Leo Tak-hung Chan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 29–37.

not part of the original translation; they are offered, Percy explains sheepishly, so as to facilitate the English reader's understanding of Chinese society. "It remains that something be said concerning the Notes, if it be only to apologize for their frequency and length. It was at first intended to have incumbered the page with as few of these as possible: but it was soon found necessary to depart from this plan."²⁷

In his role as editor, Percy relies much on Du Halde—the title page includes a quotation in French explaining that there is no better way to learn about the Chinese (people and language) than from them directly.²⁸ Thus, from the very first page of the first translated novel, the argument is presented that Chinese texts written for domestic consumption are the most reliable source of information, thereby setting up in adumbrated form the thesis that fiction provided the clearest and least biased insight into Chinese thought and manners. This argument echoes Ricci's and Trigault's claim that the best way to reach into the private life of the Chinese was to publish books that they will read at home rather than to preach in the streets. The appeal of reading Chinese literature was precisely that it was not written for Europeans. These texts made no appeal to Western Christians, but were wholly absorbed with their own concerns. Precisely because of its monadic isolation from outsiders, Chinese literature seemed to promise insight into the authentic relations of Chinese family life. In his preface, Percy explains that while the Jesuits have summarized and translated many moral and philosophical works, they have provided only a few, short pieces of literature.²⁹ We now know that the first Jesuit to learn Chinese, Michele Ruggieri, did write Chinese poems, but these works were never published.³⁰ As scholars trained in literati culture, the missionaries would have well understood the high value placed on good poetic style. The titles of Ruggieri's first poems suggest not only that they

27. *Pleasing History*, 1:xxiv.

28. *Pleasing History*, title page: "Il n'y a pas de meilleur moyen de s'instruire de la Chine, que par la Chine même: car par la on est sûr de ne se point tromper, dans la connoissance du genie et des usages de cette nation."

29. *Pleasing History*, 1:xi.

30. Albert Chan, "Michele Ruggieri, S. J. (154–1607) and His Chinese Poems," *Monumenta Serica* 41 (1993): 129–76.

were dedicated to introducing Christianity but that they also observed the rituals of exchanging poems between scholars, traditions that all three of the translated Chinese novels affirm. The contrast between literature and ethnography will visibly consume the translation's page as a struggle between narrative and footnote. Compilations have their merit, Percy allows, but "the true character of a living people will hardly be learnt from them."³¹

The argument that novels provide foreign observers insights into the domestic morality of a culture that they would otherwise never acquire was used repeatedly by subsequent translators. Abel Rémusat extends this thesis in the preface to his 1827 translation of *The Two Fair Cousins* to assert also that Chinese and European novels share many features in common, thereby making it easy for European readers to understand. In his comments about world literature to Eckermann, Goethe is clearly reiterating Rémusat's point. Out of the claim that novels provide privileged ethnographic information about Chinese private lives, Goethe asserts further that European novel readers can recognize similarities between the two cultures, thereby allowing them to develop much the same kind of emotional bond with Chinese fictional characters as they do with those in their own literary tradition. This claim to fiction's ability to convey private information is first understood in ethnographic terms, but then in the context of Goethe's world literature discussion, translated novels become a means of expanding the reader's ability to recognize shared traits with foreigners. More than treatises and travelogues, novels encourage readers to extend their sympathies to previously unfamiliar strangers. The knowledge that novels provide is not instrumentalized. Recognizing the mimetic qualities of European novels, Goethe, Rémusat and other orientalist attributed the same function to Chinese novels: namely, that they reflect society's larger conflicts and organization within their own aesthetic order. This approach to the novel did not treat the text as a collection of facts to be explained with footnotes, but instead it presumed that social tensions appeared within the novel as formal distinctions. As the novel elucidated and resolved these con-

31. *Pleasing History*, 1:xvi.

licts, it also revealed structures inherent in the world outside fiction. In order to analyze Chinese works as if they were European novels, they obviously had to be translated in a manner that made this recognition possible. This additional form of mediation layered new European meanings onto these works. Not only were Chinese novels expected to depict the relations common to the society in which they were written, but as translated works they also had the task of mediating between cultures. Translations seek out and construct analogies between languages thereby facilitating the readers' incorporation of the strange into the already known. In performing this diplomatic transfer, translated Chinese novels allowed Goethe and other sympathetic readers to conclude that the foreign is actually quite familiar, not merely because of the translator's work, but also because of a commonality discovered through the reading process, which constantly stirs up comparisons and identifications. For Goethe, the ultimate purpose in reading Chinese novels was to write poetry, in his own Chinese manner. The slim collection of his last years, "Chinesisch-Deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeit," emerges only after he has read the available library of Jesuit treatises, merchant travelogues, translated poems, together with the three Chinese novels available in Europe.

In building a case for why Europeans should read Chinese literature, Thomas Percy commences critically by first calling attention to the smallness, the lack of innovation, and the servile genius of Chinese poems. Only after having established his own nonpartisan detachment does he praise them for not indulging in the extravagant flights of marvel and fantasy common to other Eastern nations.³² "They pay a greater regard to truth and nature in their fictitious narratives, than any other of the Asiatics."³³ If Chinese poetry does not fascinate for its literary forms, Percy offers the novel as a more accurate means of conveying information otherwise hidden to foreign observers. Positing a further intermedial relation between the arts that goes beyond his proposed competition with Jesuit ethnography, Percy asks that his work "may be considered . . . as a faithful

32. *Pleasant History*, 1:xii.

33. *Pleasant History*, 1:xiv.

picture of Chinese manners, wherein the domestic and political economy of that vast people is displayed with an exactness and accuracy to which none but a native could be capable of attaining.”³⁴ By asking that the reader “see” the novel’s narration, Percy is also implicitly acknowledging the enormous appeal of images of China in travelogues or chinoiserie commodities. The analogy to visuality extends to Percy’s critique of compilations that provide a stiff, lifeless portrait of a people compared with novels, which show “every passion in play and every part . . . in motion.”³⁵

By offering the novel, Percy extends a critique of Jesuit writing about China. Like most northern European scholars, Percy states that he cannot challenge the Jesuits’ claim to knowledge, though in his first long footnote summarizing the Rites Controversy, he notes that other Catholic missionaries have done exactly so. Without questioning the Jesuits’ language skills and their access to the highest classes, Percy suggests that “the very gravity of their character would prevent them from being ocular witnesses (not only of the idolatrous ceremonies, but) of many particulars of the interior conduct of the Chinese.”³⁶ In other words, the novel promises the reader access to domestic passions, courtship done properly and poorly. The hope is that the Chinese will no longer appear only as opaque exterior surfaces, but that novel reading will provide a route from the interiority of the European reader to the interiority of the Chinese. This readerly connection offers the aesthetic appearance of intimacy, which softens the hard shell thrown up by distance and alterity and allows for formal interconnections between Germany and China, or in the late Goethe’s case, for the poetic merging of a garden in Weimar with one outside Nanjing—a conjunction I will consider below.

Percy expects that the Chinese offer a new virtue to the European bourgeois reader: their exquisite sense of privacy and reserve. Just as the original manuscript was written as a personal exercise, so too the stories it relates were not intended for the European pub-

34. *Pleasing History*, 1:xv.

35. *Pleasing History*, 1:xvi.

36. *Pleasing History*, 1:xix.

lic. As editor, Percy mediates between the messy manuscript and the English reader, so that the public may learn about Chinese private behavior. Intimate questions drive the novel's plot in a manner that no Jesuit would ever convey: much of the story revolves around precisely the question of whether the male and female protagonists have had sex with each other. That they persistently deny having done so while living together and refuse even after formal marriage in order to preserve what they consider to be honor leads the reader on through the long story in fascinated frustration.

In 1766, Christoph Gottlieb von Murr published a German rendition of *The Pleasing History* based on the English translation.³⁷ In reworking his source, Murr immediately points out that the English translator mistook "Hao Kiu Tschuan" as the work's title, when it is actually the author's name. Faced with an English text that offered the curious reader an overwhelming array of citations to Jesuit authorities, Murr rose to the pedantic challenge by offering his own additional emendations to these notes, placing them at the bottom of the page, so that the German reader was often faced with a slim line of narration at the top of the page while a three-page footnote took up the remainder. In addition to the Jesuit sources, which he knew thoroughly, Murr added references to the work of Étienne Fourmont, a professor of Arabic at the College de France, who had studied Chinese for thirty years and worked so closely with Arcade Huang, a Chinese Catholic convert living in Paris, in cataloguing the Chinese books in the royal collection that he was later accused of plagiarism. In his preface, Murr also provides an overview of Chinese grammars and dictionaries available in Europe. Furthermore, he makes a point of writing Chinese names in a German spelling, so that Germans can pronounce them, rather than relying on French.³⁸ Murr asserts that "after Portuguese, I consider the German language in most cases as the most adept among

37. Christoph Gottlieb von Murr, *Haoh Kjöb Tschwen, d.i. Die angenehme Geschichte des Haoh Kjöb, Ein chinesischer Roman in vier Büchern, Aus dem Chinesischen in das Englische, und aus diesem in das Deutsche übersetzt* (Leipzig: Johann Friedrich Junius, 1766).

38. Murr, *Angenehme Geschichte*, xvii.

the European languages for expressing Chinese words.”³⁹ Echoing the English preface, Murr agrees that the missionaries provided too few examples of Chinese literature. This absence of Chinese literature thus justifies multiple translations of the same novel.⁴⁰

As Goethe and Schiller were corresponding about Matteo Ricci’s Nanjing Disputation, they were also discussing Murr’s Chinese novel. Their conversations would have a long after effect. Günther Debon has shown that Goethe continued his Chinese studies years after Schiller died.⁴¹ Three years after the two poets first corresponded about it, Schiller started urging Jacob Friedrich Unger to publish a new version, focused on the protagonists’ drive for justice. Schiller sensed a much more dramatic story underneath the ethnographic details of the first translations. He concentrated on the story as an aesthetic process to be rescued from its scholarly exegesis. Rather than peppering the narrative with footnotes to historical sources to demonstrate its accuracy, classical aesthetics presumed that knowledge constituted within the totality of the work reflected social reality. To be certain, Schiller intended to reinterpret the earlier translation by concentrating on what he understood to be its aesthetic core as opposed to its many ethnographic details: “There exists a Chinese novel under the name of Hao Kioh Tschuen, or *The Pleasing History* that was translated in 1766 from the English by Mr. von Murr of Nuremberg. The translation is, as you can imagine, outdated and the book forgotten. However, it has many excellent qualities and is such a singular product of its age, that it deserves to be revived. I would venture to condense the spirit of the work to 15 folio volumes and to raise a higher degree of interest with this practical abbreviation, for at times the story is too drawn out.”⁴² Schiller clearly felt that the earlier translations were both too literal and over-freighted with commentary. Murr had been the per-

39. Murr, *Angenehme Geschichte*, xviii.

40. Murr, *Angenehme Geschichte*, xx.

41. Günther Debon, “Goethe erklärt in Heidelberg einen chinesischen Roman,” in *Goethe und China—China und Goethe*, ed. Günther Debon and Adrian Hsia (Bern: Peter Lang, 1985), 51–62.

42. Schiller to J. F. Unger, August 29, 1800, Friedrich Schiller, *Geschäftsbriefe Schillers*, ed. Karl Goedeke (Leipzig: Veit and Co. 1875).

fect German scholar to deliver a massive editorial apparatus, for he belonged to the same class of Nuremberg polymath historians as Erasmus Francisci and was completely familiar with Jesuit writings.⁴³ Yuan Tan speculates that Schiller's attention turned to the novel because of the appearance of many books related to the Macartney embassy of 1792–1794. The official account was published in London in 1797 with at least five German versions hitting the market thereafter.⁴⁴ Unlike Goethe, Schiller depended on selling books in order to earn his living. He left only a fragment at the time of his death, yet it shows how he intended to distill a plot driven by the urge to defend the weak through revenge and the imposition of justice. His opening lines echo the Sturm-und-Drang of *Die Räuber* (The Robbers): “Near Tahmin, a large city in the Chinese empire, there lived a noble young man, named Tiebtschongu, dedicated to learning. His figure was beautiful, his soul magnanimous and noble. He loved justice with a passion and his joy was to fight for the oppressed. In such cases, he was bold and daring and shied away from nothing; nothing could cool his ardor when he was avenging a crime.”⁴⁵ Within two pages, Schiller's protagonist has found a helpless villager in need of defending against a corrupt mandarin, who has kidnapped his fiancée. Schiller died before he finished his revision, and as the peculiarities of the publishing world would have it, the novel was retranslated in 1829 from the Chinese by John Francis Davis as *The Fortunate Union*.⁴⁶ Clearly writers and translators sensed a potential in the story that had not been rendered in the first attempt. Nevertheless, one anonymous reviewer in the *Asiatic Journal* noted in 1830: “I regret that Mr. Davis, amongst so many

43. Peter Wolf, “Protestantischer ‘Jesuitismus’ im Zeitalter der Aufklärung: Christoph Gottlieb Murr (1733–1811) und die Jesuiten,” *Zeitschrift für bayerische Landesgeschichte* 62 (1999): 99–137.

44. Yuan Tan, *Der Chinese in der deutschen Literatur, Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung chinesischer Figuren in den Werken von Schiller, Döblin und Brecht* (Göttingen: Cuvier, 2007), 47–48.

45. Friedrich Schiller, *Werke: Nationalausgabe* (Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1943ff.), 16:361; hereafter referred to as NA.

46. *The Fortunate Union*, trans. John Francis Davis (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1829).

novels as are contained in the literature of China, did not choose one which had not been before translated.”⁴⁷

As the title of the second Chinese literary work translated into English makes clear, *Chinese Courtship. In Verse* was really a poetic narrative, not a novel in the strict sense, although Abel Rémusat refers to it repeatedly as such. In his notes, Goethe refers to it as “a long poem” but it clearly enters into his conversation with Eckermann about the Chinese novel, as does Goethe’s own idyll, “Hermann and Dorothea.”⁴⁸ The translator, Peter Perring Thoms (1790–1855), a printer employed by the East India Company, published the work 1824 in Macao.⁴⁹ We have a record of Goethe checking it out from the Grand Ducal Library on January 29, 1827—two days before Eckermann’s date for his conversation about Chinese novels.⁵⁰ The *Chinese Courtship* was notable immediately because it offered a bilingual text. A glance at almost any page finds three distinct print blocks: Chinese script, alphabetic script, explanatory English footnote. Each page contains one complete poem: twelve lines of Chinese characters, above twelve lines of English translation. In his preface, Thoms tries to present a general description of Chinese poetry, again because very little has been translated, leaving Europeans unaware of its excellent qualities. Thoms acknowledges that the original is unusual because most Chinese poems are very short; they do not depict epic stories. He comes around to the question of idol worship indirectly when he states that unlike the Greeks and Romans, the Chinese do not

47. “On Translation of Chinese Poetry,” *Asiatic Journal* 2 (May 1830): 37.

48. Patricia Sieber, “Location, Location, Location: Peter Perring Thoms (1790–1855), Cantonese Localism, and the Genesis of Literary Translation from the Chinese,” in *Sinologists as Translators in the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Lawrence Wang-chi Wong and Bernhard Fuehrer (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2015), 148n63; Eric Blackall, “Goethe and the Chinese Novel,” in *The Discontinuous Tradition: Studies in German Literature in Honour of Ernest Ludwig Stahl*, ed. P. F. Ganz (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 51.

49. *Chinese Courtship. In Verse. To Which Is Added an Appendix, Treating the Revenue in China*, trans. Peter Perring Thoms (Macao: East India Company and London: Parbury, Allen, and Kingsbury, 1824).

50. Günther Debon, “Goethes Berührung mit China,” *Goethe Jahrbuch* 117 (2000): 48.

have a pantheon of gods racing about on adventures. Hence, the absence of an epic form. What speaks for the *Chinese Courtship*, Thoms argues, is its popularity among domestic readers. Like most early translators, Thoms takes a modest stance, apologizing in advance for mistakes by explaining that the language is very difficult.⁵¹ In the same manner as Percy, he begins by explaining why English readers might not find Chinese poetry appealing. Like Percy sixty-nine years earlier, Thoms cites Du Halde as the most important European commentator on Chinese literature available, but he does so only to replace his judgments with those of Chinese editors and critics. Thoms's preface stands out because he translates Chinese assessments of poetry into English; he is one of the first Europeans to do so. Overall, the degree to which Thoms relies on Jesuit sources has diminished enormously compared with his predecessors. Most of his explanations of Chinese poetry arrive without footnotes, as if he were writing based on his own familiarity with the genres. Indeed, Thoms is mocked for having studied Chinese languages too long. In response to his mistakes in the English text, reviewers suggested that he had immersed himself so thoroughly into Chinese that he had gone over. "Mr Thoms, from his long residence in China, seems to have forgotten somewhat of the construction and orthography of his native tongue."⁵² A second review confirmed the impression that novels provided more complete insights into Chinese society than travelogues: "It places us on very familiar terms with the Mandarins and their wives; and, by describing the offices and occupations, the friendships and social intercourse, of the persons whose story is related, conveys a clearer notion of what Chinese society really is, than all the descriptions we have ever seen of the Celestial Empire."⁵³ If the Jesuit's claim to legitimacy lay in their ability to have integrated into literati society, then the translated Chinese novels provided Europeans an alternative entry.

51. For a modern enumeration of Thoms's translation mistakes, see K. C. Leung, "Chinese Courtship: The Huajian Ji in English Translation," *CHINOP-ERL: Journal of Chinese Oral and Performing Literature* 20.1 (1997): 269–88.

52. Review of *A Chinese Courtship*, *Monthly Review* 1 (1826): 544.

53. *Oriental Herald* 9 (April–June 1826).

Chinese Courtship has only a few scenes in which poetic talent determines the protagonist's advancement, though one early exchange of odes in a garden is vital to establishing the lead male character's romantic desire for his beloved. When the novel's protagonist, Leang, moves into his new mansion, he is told not only that his uncle, General Yang, is his neighbor, but that his library is separated from his uncle's by only a thin wall.⁵⁴ Leang takes his cousin Heaou along to visit his uncle, where he learns that he once had had an intimate bond with his father: "While young, the friendship that existed between us, was that of brothers."⁵⁵ Yang failed his exams and threw his books into the river before starting on a military career, while Leang's father became an important magistrate. While not a scholar, the uncle still understands the importance of poetic composition as a test for a potential suitor's worthiness. The general's garden offers Leang a beautiful landscape with a corresponding poem:

While looking at the fishpond and gallery, which had a splendid appearance,
They saw, in the Hopeful-spring summer house, some lines of poetry.
The verses, it appears, had just been written and pasted against the wall.⁵⁶

This scene in *Chinese Courtship* provides evidence for Goethe's remark to Eckermann about the familiar tropes of Chinese poetry involving goldfish, birds, and the moon. Goethe's larger point here is not to reiterated chinoiserie conventions, but to show that the vision of the garden pond corresponds to the ode hung on the wall. Leang's visit to his uncle's garden in *Chinese Courtship* is one probable source for Goethe's observation.⁵⁷ The uncle's pond and the ode on

54. *Chinese Courtship*, 43.

55. *Chinese Courtship*, 44.

56. *Chinese Courtship*, 46.

57. Woldemar von Biedermann relies on similar plot moments to argue that *Chinese Courtship* was Goethe's source for his poetry cycle, though Biedermann gives no indication of being familiar with Rémusat's publication of *Les deux cousines*. See his "Chinesisch-Deutsche Jahres- und Tages-zeiten," in *Goethe Forschungen*, ed. Woldemar von Biedermann (Leipzig: Metzger and Wittig, 1886), 426–46. This discrepancy once again shows the advantage of internet research in which

the wall are aligned: "As the elegant pencil had been used in praise of the fish pond and willows, / The two youths approached to examine it more minutely."⁵⁸ The parallel between the willow beside the pond and the poem hung on the garden wall is underscored by the question of who is responsible for both compositions (garden scene, poem). The first two lines of the poem ask: "Who could it be that planted the drooping willow within the pond, / For the spring breeze, causes its delicate branches to agitate the water's bosom."

While the gardener's name is never revealed, the uncle explains: "Those lines are the composition of my little daughter." The general then invites Leang to compose some lines on the garden's flowers, thereby expanding the correspondence between landscape and poetry:

What a happy occurrence, that a person of talent has entered my garden,
For all the flowers and shrubs are now in full bloom,
May I request, that your elegant pencil will leave a bewitching stanza.⁵⁹

Precisely just such an invitation stirs Goethe to write the "Chinese-German" cycle. As with Goethe, the garden in *Chinese Courtship* provides codes for expressing desire. "In this ode," Leang announces, "I will detail the anguish I feel on being separated, / And thus excite the sympathy of the beautiful maid."⁶⁰ His reply intensifies the erotic connotation of the willow hanging over the fish pond:

I have heard that the spring breeze causes a ripple in the green pond,
And that the slender and pendant branches dance in the pure stream.
Having been informed, that within this garden, grows a tree of that
description.
Can it be insensible to the distress and feelings of those who are deserted?⁶¹

copies of all three translated Chinese romances are available, whereas earlier scholars struggled to find copies of the novels Goethe read.

58. *Chinese Courtship*, 46.

59. *Chinese Courtship*, 47.

60. *Chinese Courtship*, 48.

61. *Chinese Courtship*, 48.

With Leang unable to speak directly with his uncle's daughter and having only a fleeting vision of her in the garden, the two poems form the only means for conversing—a ritual the old general well understands, for he has Leang's poem pasted on the garden wall, next to his daughter's.

These scenes refer to earlier poems that are even more famous. Through these allusions, the translations allow for an entry into the history of Chinese literature more vivid than the encyclopedic essays that list off the lineages of poets. By comparing a character or a poem to the classics, these stories show how vitally present the ancient works are in the minds of literary Chinese. The frequent references to earlier poets, many of them wholly unfamiliar to the European reader, provide a sense of historical depth to Chinese literature even if particulars remain mysterious. In *Chinese Courtship*, the ancients are invoked more as rhetorical gestures as characters maneuver through potential marriage proposals, whereas in *The Two Fair Cousins* they embody the ideal of poetry to which the protagonists aspire. The challenge of understanding and translating Chinese poetry could become an argument for its similarity to Western traditions. Precisely because of the poems' complexity, they seem as sophisticated as anything written in Europe.⁶² Although the *Chinese Courtship* is written in verse, it does not celebrate the culture of poetry: the favored father-in-law is a general, and the father is a scholar, whose retirement leads to the lovers' separation. Eventually, Leang also wants to throw his books into the river—the same phrase the general used to describe his reaction to failing his exams.⁶³

62. Thoms quotes George Staunton, secretary to Macartney on the ill-fated British embassy: "The great difficulty of Chinese poetry has not been over-rated, though it seems to have been imputed to wrong causes. The structure of their poetry is on fact much the same in principle as that of ours. Their stanzas are measured as with us, and the order of the characters, that is of the words, is regulated by what we term their accent or intonation, just as our syllables and words when monosyllabical are chosen and placed according to quantity. The beauty as well as difficulty, arising likewise from much the same causes—namely, the use of images, metaphors and allusions, and sometimes of individual words, which though not trite or universally obvious, at once strike the intelligent reader as happy and appropriate" (*Chinese Courtship*, xi–xii).

63. *Chinese Courtship*, 129.

The third Chinese novel to be translated into a European language was Abel Rémusat's French rendition, *Iu-Kiao-Li, ou Les deux cousines* (1826). German and English translations followed immediately, in Vienna as *Die beyden Basen*, in London as *The Two Fair Cousins*.⁶⁴ Not only did the novel provide scenarios of literary composition strikingly similar to Goethe's early lyric poetry, but Rémusat's preface expounded a comparative analysis that placed his translation in relation to the newly established lineage of European novels. Rémusat's theoretical reflections encourage Goethe's thoughts on world literature.

As he was chatting with Eckermann, Goethe probably had Thoms's *Chinese Courtship* nearby, but his musings on the similarities between European and Chinese novels reflect Rémusat's long preface to *The Two Fair Cousins*. Even though Goethe does not mention Rémusat's work in his diaries until May of the same year, he would have been familiar with the translator's claims to its importance, for he was a careful reader of Parisian literary journals. Rémusat's translation had just been reviewed in *Le Globe, Journal Philosophique et Littéraire*, an auspicious title.⁶⁵ Goethe received a copy of *Le Globe* with every postal day (*posttäglich*) in Weimar.⁶⁶ He described himself as almost having become a slave to reading the journal.⁶⁷ The review of Rémusat's translation begins by declaring with amazement that novels exist in China and that they parallel those in Europe. "Il y a donc des romans à la Chine, et des romans qui peuvent soutenir le parallèle avec de l'Europe!"⁶⁸

64. *Iu-Kiao-Li: or, the Two Fair Cousins, from the French version of M. Abel-Remusat* (London: Hunt and Clark, 1827); *Ju-Kiao-Li, oder die beyden Basen, Ein Chinesischer Roman übersetzt von Abel Rémusat* (Vienna: Schade, 1827).

65. Eric Blackall, "Goethe and the Chinese Novel," concludes that in his statements to Eckermann Goethe is speaking primarily about the *Chinese Courtship* but also recalling *The Pleasing History* as well as the review he read in *Le Globe* about Rémusat's translation, *Les deux cousines*. Blackall follows the editors of the Weimar edition (WA, 42:232) in maintaining that Goethe was familiar with this review.

66. WA, 9:232–33.

67. David Barry, "Faustian Pursuits: The Political-Cultural Dimension of Goethe's Weltliteratur and the Tragedy of Translation," *German Quarterly* 74.2 (2001): 171.

68. *Le Globe, Journal Philosophique et Littéraire*, 4.57 (December 23, 1826): 299.

The marginal marking on Goethe's personal copy of the journal shows his attention to this passage.⁶⁹ The reviewer goes on to make the same basic claims about the abundance and antiquity of Chinese literature that Goethe provides Eckermann. They used printing presses five centuries before Gutenberg and the emperor's collection of noteworthy books contains more than 180,000 books. For too long Europeans have been forced to rely on the incomplete and contradictory accounts of travelers, whose information leaves readers filled with doubt and confusion. The review enthusiastically recapitulates the arguments Rémusat offers in his preface to *The Two Fair Cousins* that novels are far more effective in revealing the foibles of Chinese society in much the same manner as Fielding and Burney have done in England. It is of course fitting that in formulating his paradigmatic statement about world literature, Goethe would receive his inspiration from a foreign journal sent through the mail. The fleeting, incomplete, discontinuous appearances of Goethe's world literature statements reflect their origins in newspapers, journals, paratexts, and before dinner conversations with friends. The dispersed and irregular arrival of news that Goethe patches together into statements demonstrates that his happenstance utterances on world literature are not just a failure to deliver a systematic formulation; they are the preferred formats of the information circuits he credits with reviving international literary relations. We should not bemoan that Goethe did not get around to writing a fully composed essay on the subject, but instead appreciate that he was participating in the diffuse, new media forms he admired when he made his comments. The study of Asian literature did not belong to a new aesthetic agenda that he sought to impart to the German public, like his classicist aspirations with Schiller. His remarks were somewhere between a trade secret and a hope that the nationalism enflamed by the French Revolution was now over. His comments to Eckermann are half revelations of an esoteric poetics

69. Heinz Hamm provides a thorough investigation of Goethe's private edition of *Le Globe*, particularly the articles that he marked up, in *Goethe und die französische Zeitschrift Le Globe: Eine Lektüre im Zeichen der Weltliteratur* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1998), 376–77. Hamm's introduction establishes the journal's importance for Goethe's interest in French literary culture.

to guide sympathetic readers. If it were not for the posthumous, best-selling success of *Conversations*, the idea might have remained an arcane scholarly observation, rather than becoming a cosmopolitan agenda.

Far from being an obscure work in China, as Goethe and most German researchers since have assumed, *Yu Jiao Li* was the second most printed work of fiction during the early Qing era, running through fifty-three editions.⁷⁰ Considered a clear example of the “scholar-beauty” genre of novels, *Yu Jiao Li* was included one of the ten “books of genius”—an alternative canon to the classical one.⁷¹ Chinese novels did not date back nearly as far as Goethe imagined. The Ming-Qing period brought about new genres, such as romances, that had previously not been held in esteem. In her model of a horizontal, transcultural literary history, Ning Ma suggests that Chinese beauty-scholars romances emerged parallel to European sentimental novels.⁷² Both genres suggest that protagonists can advance themselves to self-authenticity by going around the established rules.⁷³

Rémusat was not the first person in Paris to work on a translation of *Yu Jiao Li*. The Chinese Christian from Xinghua, Huang Jialüe (1679–1716), who became known in salons by his European name, Arcade Houange, had attempted to translate the novel. His fragment remained in the royal library, along with copies of the original novel.⁷⁴ Houange was said to have spoken often about the novel.⁷⁵ While much of commentary on the novel focuses on the

70. Robert Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 65.

71. Patricia Sieber, “Translation as Self-Invention: Jin Shengtan (1608–1661), Arcade Houange (1679–1716), and the Fashioning of a Transcultural Discourse of Scholar-Beauty Ideals,” in *Towards a History of Translating: In Celebration of the Fortieth Anniversary of the Research Centre for Translation*, ed. Lawrence Wang-chi Wong (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2013), 13.

72. Ning Ma, *The Age of Silver*, 13.

73. For the Chinese side of this comparison, see Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 229.

74. Sieber, “Translation as Self-Invention,” 39.

75. Sieber, “Translation as Self-Invention,” 50; Jonathan Spence, “The Paris Years of Arcadio Huang,” *Granta* 32 (1992): 123–32.

plot as it leads to the double marriage, the novel is also important for its depiction of poetic scenes and its insertions of poetry in the narration. For Goethe seeking to adopt a new poetic idiom, these scenes of composition in gardens, with accompanying texts, would have been most inspirational. Keith McMahon focuses on the types of characters and plots in scholar-beauty novels, particularly as they lead to a happy polygamous conclusion.⁷⁶ Without a doubt, European translators and readers were curious about understanding how polygamy was structured in China. Ever since Leibniz, readers of Jesuit histories had understood that the major obstacle to converting the mandarin elite was the Christian demand that they disavow their multiple wives. *The Two Fair Cousins* and the *Chinese Courtship* both end with a double marriage, in which the male protagonist harmoniously marries two women at the same time. Rémusat draws comparison between his Chinese translation and European works, such as Goethe's *Stella*, that also hint at polygamy or bigamy. European readers' evident fascination with polygamous Chinese romances went beyond the characters' demonstrations of their Confucian virtue, much like the heroines in sentimental novels, to focus on the larger question of how a stable, civilized society could organize complex sexual relationships without immorality and the destabilization of authority. Beauty-scholar romances such as *The Two Fair Cousins* lend explicit approval to gender fluidity and multiple sexual partners within marriage, while Romantic literature was confined to offered veiled allusions to acknowledging such relationships.

Much as Goethe appreciated the similarities between *The Two Fair Cousins* and his own early, scandalous fiction, plot analogies alone would not have been the most important catalyst for Goethe's late Chinese poems. Rather, the convergence of desire with landscape as an atmosphere wherein learned mandarins retire to the garden to write and drink provided a much more important motivation to emulate Chinese aesthetics. When he remarks to Eckermann that the Chinese differ from Europeans because "with them external nature is always associated with the human figures," he is

76. Keith McMahon, "The Institution of Polygamy in the Chinese Imperial Palace," *Journal of Asian Studies* 72.4 (2013): 917–36.

identifying the rare quality that attracts him to read so that he may write in a similar manner. Chinese novels offer Goethe distinct atmospheres, *Stimmungen*, that his own nature poems often embody.

The novel is set in the early crisis years of the Ming dynasty, when the emperor Yingzong was being held hostage by the Mongols after the disastrous military defeat in the Battle of Timu. The first scene is set in the garden of a high official in the imperial court, named Pe Thaihouan.⁷⁷ He is regarded as both a moral and learned scholar. His respected position at court stems from the fact that during the earlier corrupt regime of the eunuch Wang chin, Pe had given up his political position so that he might retire to his estate in the south, near a small village outside Nanjing. One twenty-first-century historian of China referred to the “toxic court life and corrupt eunuch-dominated politics” that alienated late Ming elites from the state bureaucracy.⁷⁸ Now that the earlier emperor has been captured by the Mongols and his corrupt advisors dispersed, Pe has been recalled to Beijing as a trusted magistrate. While living in retirement, Pe enjoyed a quiet life as a man of letters and local official. He embodies the virtues of a Confucian scholar; the one thing that troubles him is that at the age of forty he has not yet produced a son. Here the complexity of marriage rituals emerges, and Western readers receive a first explanation for polygamy among the Chinese elite. Pe has several wives of the second rank in his household, yet he is disappointed in establishing an heir. At last, his first wife, who has been dutifully praying and carrying out fertility rites, gives birth to a daughter when she is forty-four. Husband and wife are delighted by the beauty and intelligence of their child, yet when the daughter is eleven, the mother dies prematurely, leaving Pe to educate his daughter in his own scholarly tradition. The young daughter, Houn-giu, grows up to learn from her father the nuances of classical Chinese literature. After the death of his first wife, Pe retires from sexual relations and dismisses his second ranked wives, who go on

77. My references are to the English translation: *Iu-Kiao-Li: or, The Two Fair Cousins, from the French Version of M. Abel-Remusat* (London: Hunt and Clark, 1827).

78. Yulian Wu, *Luxurious Networks: Salt Merchants, Status, and Statecraft in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 19.

to bear children in other marriages. Henceforth, he devotes himself to poetry and drinking—though the translation is very intent on explaining that the literati drank from very small cups that held only a spoonful or two.

In the first chapter, Pe and two friends, all mandarins, gather one spring day in a garden to drink wine and write poetry about the flowers just beginning to bloom there. Pe serves as host to old classmates: Sse, who is referred to as an inspector general in the English translation, and Gou, the brother of his deceased wife, a doctor in the imperial academy. Their entertainments are interrupted by the arrival of Yang, another inspector general. Yang appears to disturb the poetic moment, but he also enters to acknowledge his gratitude to Gou for helping him revise a poem that he then presented to the imperial viceroy. Yang's urgent need for editorial advice on a poem makes clear that the exchange between court officials went beyond simple pleasantries, but instead served as an offering that reaffirmed the hierarchies of their offices. Yang explains his position in presenting a poem to the viceroy: "This composition was rather a tribute due from my office, than a simple offering of courtesy."⁷⁹ He thanks Gou for having improved his writing so much so that the viceroy was enchanted by his lines, telling him "You have, I must say, converted 'iron into gold.'"⁸⁰

In Europe, the novel was read with curiosity and attention to those details that would have seemed obvious to its original audience in early Ming China, but which to Europeans were revelations. It was precisely the sense that the novel shows what every member of the Chinese elite already knew that made *The Two Fair Cousins* so fascinating to Western readers. This impression of entering China's forbidden places was reinforced by the novel's own construction of space. The events take place in exclusive locations that only very select personages are permitted to enter. Mandarin society was walled off from the outside world already within China, and even more so for Westerners. The narration seemed to reveal what happened within the seclusion of literati's walled enclosures—their gar-

79. *Two Fair Cousins*, 1:13.

80. *Two Fair Cousins*, 1:13.

dens, libraries, inner and outer apartments. Moreover, the way that *The Two Fair Cousins* organizes space coincided with bourgeois notions of inward subjectivity and privacy.⁸¹

The novel provides a micro-economy of poetry composition and the political implications of their exchange between courtiers. The European reader thereby receives a glimpse into the literary interchange among imperial administrators, the exclusive milieu into which Matteo Ricci ingratiated himself. As settings, the garden and the library become microcosms of retirement; each allows court administrators to remove themselves from their political offices; each space has implicit rules about how to behave and which topics may be discussed. For Pe and his friends, an invitation into the garden brings with it an obligation not to act or speak about politics or careers.

Nevertheless, Yang's visit to the friends soon shows itself to have a political motive: he asks Sse to help him suppress a lawsuit in which local officials are defending their lands from a rising courtier intent on seizing them. Yang explains that as a court appointee, one is occasionally obliged to perform such underhanded deeds for politically connected members of the imperial court. The friends chide Yang for participating in a political maneuver that ought to be denounced.⁸² They then decide that everyone should return to drinking and refrain from any further mention of court politics in order to draft poems about the garden's blooming marguerites. Yang, who has already acknowledged his colleagues' superior lyrical grace, tries to beg off. Furthermore, in violation of good manners and the rules of the poetic game, Yang repeatedly returns to political topics, mention of which is punished in this company by requiring the speaker to drink a cup of wine. Drinking here to the

81. European languages readily incorporated Asian spatial terms, as with the modern English "compound," derived from the Malay word "kampong," which generated the Dutch "kampong" and the Portuguese "campon"; Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson, A Glossary of Anglo-Indian Colloquial Words and Phrases and of Kindred Terms* (London: John Murray, 1903), 240–42.

82. Such illicit appropriations of property were one of the major accusations made against the court eunuch, Wang Chin, mentioned as the reason why Pe retired from the court; L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368–1644* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 2:1363–64.

point of becoming drunk is a punishment for it prevents one from composing elegantly. Yang never ceases speaking of politics, yet after several rounds of drinking penalties, it is the host, Pe, who becomes so drunk that he crawls behind a flowering shrub to sleep off his stupor. At this point, when he is at risk of losing face, while his friends are busy writing poetry, Pe's daughter, the young, clever, and beautiful HOUNGIU, comes to her father's rescue by writing an ode to the daisies, which a loyal servant then places beside his passed-out master. The friends presume the verses were composed by Pe even though he was delirious. "You have effected a miracle," cries Sse. "Not only have you written with wonderful dispatch, but your phrases are so well selected; they are marked by care, purity, elegance, and strength. It is certainly a most brilliant effusion; how different from what we are in the habit of reading daily! This is admirably perfect, and should make us blush to take a pen again in our hands."⁸³ Yang, the careerist, grows suspicious, so that when Gou rereads the poem, he recognizes that his niece, HOUNGIU, must have written the verses. At this point the old men learn that the sixteen-year old daughter is so skilled in poetry that she could marry into the court's highest class, a prediction that immediately sets Yang to arranging her marriage to his son.

While the first chapter distinguishes between careerist magistrates who maneuver in the imperial court and those who eschew politics in favor of literary studies, the second chapter introduces a dubious character, who gains his position within administrative circles through underhanded tricks. Mandarin culture had a clear sense of such imposters, who dress in the proscribed style but who lack composure: "He had on a square cap, and affected the deportment of a man of letters; but there was something rustic in his attire. He might have been taken for a hermit issuing from his cell. His beard and mustaches were short, but thick and disordered; his eyes, wild and startling, almost resembling a pair of bouncing balls. . . . When he commenced speaking, he turned his head one way; and his eyes were directed in another. . . . He pretended to be an astrologer, but in fact

83. *Two Fair Cousins*, 1:5.

his real character was that of a parasite.”⁸⁴ An outsider who was such an imposter would not find acceptance among the literati. Matteo Ricci helped establish his legitimacy among his Confucian dinner companions by painting Sanhoi in the style of just such a comical and fraudulent rustic. The novel also takes a skeptical stance vis-à-vis superstitious practices, as shown by the astrologer's constant need to demonstrate that he is not an imposter by accurately predicting other people's future. Literary taste and expertise are thus juxtaposed with astrology. As the astrologer maneuvers Yang's son into Pe's good graces, he concedes: “Why, as to literature, I confess I do not pretend to any great judgment respecting it; but if I may believe his horoscope and the aspect of the stars, I should say that he possesses a degree of merit not very common amongst scholars.”⁸⁵ The astrologer's goal is to supplant Pe's literary judgment of Yang's son with his own fraudulent fortune telling. The clearest sign that a character fails to live up to literary standards is his or her own inability to recognize the mistakes he or she has made in understanding a text. Any number of failed literary scholars are revealed by the narration, but the other characters refrain from pointing out these errors. The novel leaves it to the reader to recognize what the pretend scholar has misunderstood. Occasionally the translation will provide a footnote to explain a character's error as one based on Chinese pronunciation or character drawing, but often enough the translation replicates the practice of letting the reader figure out for themselves the mistakes that go uncorrected in the narration. Pe and his two friends are shown as ideal readers who recognize the failings of outsiders and draw the necessary conclusions about their suitability as a potential husband for Houngiu. Literati in the know share their nodding agreement and pleasure in not revealing to the pretender that they have seen through his guise.

In effect, the novel explains distinctions within literati society that would not have been available to traveling merchants. Aside from accommodationist Jesuits, no Europeans had gained entry to these imperial circles. Matteo Ricci described the disdain directed at him

84. *Two Fair Cousins*, 1:31–32.

85. *Two Fair Cousins*, 1:40.

as an outsider: “The Chinese look upon all foreigners as illiterate and barbarous, and refer to them in just these terms. They even disdain to learn anything from the books of outsiders because they believe that all true science and knowledge belongs to them alone. . . . Even the written characters by which they express the word foreigner are those that are applied to beasts.”⁸⁶ Most every Dutch and English embassy to Beijing reported the same cold treatment from high administrators that Ricci first recounted: “One would scarcely believe how suspicious they are of a legate or an ambassador of a neighboring country. . . . The fact that China may have been on friendly terms with the kingdom of the visiting legates, from time immemorial, does not exempt the visiting dignitaries from being conducted along their entire route within the realm as captives or prisoners and permitted to see nothing in the course of their journey.”⁸⁷

Novels written expressly for a Chinese literary audience related all those social practices, knowledge unavailable from first-hand travel accounts. Translated in the nineteenth century, the novel turned the European audience back to the environment described by the first Jesuit missionaries, but without the Jesuits’ religious apparatus. Goethe and the novel’s many other nineteenth-century readers were fascinated by the narration’s apparently unmediated access into elite Chinese classes. Readers could observe the literati rule of politeness: when to speak and what to say; how to greet and how to chide; how filial piety is observed properly and when it is used as a guise; what topics remain unspoken; how to drink and how to address the host. The translated novels provided detailed illustrations of that fine points of etiquette that guided Matteo Ricci’s conversations but that the Jesuits kept hidden in the folds of their gowns. The Jesuits leveraged their understanding of Chinese social conventions so as to have the rituals of friendship extended to a handful of learned Westerners such as themselves. Ricci de-

86. Matteo Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci (1583–1610)*, trans Louis J. Gallagher (New York: Random House, 1953), 88–89.

87. Ricci, *Journals*, 89.

scribes just such distinctions in a recently uncovered 1595 letter written in Chinese:

It was my good fortune that the Prince, instead of disdaining me, received me with appropriate guest ritual, permitting me to greet him with a deep bow. He served wine, over which we chatted happily. In the midst of our conversation, the Prince drew his chair close to mine and, while holding my hands, said to me: "I never failed to befriend, and show my respect to, gentlemen of virtue and merits whenever they honor my fief with their visit. Since the West is a place of righteousness and morality, I would like to know how people there think of friendship." On my return, I wrote down what I had learned in the past and my writing forms a volume of *A Treatise on Friendship* that follows [in a later letter].⁸⁸

As he explains, Ricci composed an anthology of European aphorisms on friendship after having been accepted into literati society by early converts. If translating Latin sayings on friendship into Chinese helped Matteo Ricci gain entrée into literati society, translating these same conventions through novels allowed Western audiences to identify with Chinese manners. The feelings and expectations of friendship, particularly among male scholars and administrators, were a familiar concern for Goethe and most any other writer in Romantic era.

From the vantage point of autonomy aesthetics, *The Two Fair Cousins* offers an extended justification for privileging literature above and apart from other goal-oriented discourses. The literati gather over meals and wine to play complex games composing verse while passing a cup between themselves. In sociable terms, the aim is not just to establish a hierarchy of poetic skill, but also to sort out the literary imposters. The system of poetic composition runs parallel with but apart from the court's political network; not all careerists compose well. The limits of Rémusat's translation emerge as the literary games turn on the multiple connotations and pronunciations of Chinese figures. Rémusat provides footnotes to explain a pun or a faux pas by drawing analogies to Latin classics. So

88. Dongfeng Xu, "The Concept of Friendship and the Culture of Hospitality: The Encounter between the Jesuits and Late Ming China," PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2011, 109.

that when old Yang's son stumbles in a word game, the translations notes: "The ignorance of Yang Fang on this occasion, is as bad as that of an under-graduate would be, who, if called on to read a quotation from Horace or Vergil, should in the first place be unable to tell the author, and next should perpetrate a false quantity."⁸⁹ That the European bourgeoisie played literary games very similar to those depicted in *The Two Fair Cousins* is shown by the Viennese dinner party in Heimito von Doderer's *Die Studelhofstiege* (The Strudelhof Steps), where the guests are asked to translate a Latin verse on the spot and explain whether it was taken from a Classical or medieval source.⁹⁰

If the Jesuits latinized the mandarin's philosophical canon, Rémusat rendered their social life into the familiar relations of the European novel. The Jesuits were concerned to show the compatibility of early Confucian ethics and metaphysics with Christianity, while later bourgeois readers of Chinese novels sought to understand the literati's family romances and class politics. Both translation projects created two new sets of linguists who sought to comprehend the Chinese language. The fluency of the missionaries was replaced by the linguistic systems of the first Sinologists.

Pe's virtue as a magistrate has earned him a high office but it also allows others, in particular the resentful Yang, to manipulate him. Yang recommends that Pe be sent to negotiate with the Mongols for the kidnapped emperor's release. Clearly, he hopes that the venerable old father will never return from his mission, thereby allowing Yang to force Pe's daughter to marry his son. Pe does not want Yang's son to marry his daughter because the son has weak skills as a poet and scholar. Pe holds to his position even though Yang demonstrates, through a series of threats, that he has long political connections that would make the match politically successful. Yang's attempts to compel a marriage would remind European readers of Richardson's novels, as well as the pressure felt by the heroine in Sophie Laroche's *Fräulein von Sternheim*. Before leaving for Mongolian territory, Pe entrusts his daughter's future to her uncle, Gou, who secretly leaves the capital for Nanjing with his niece to search

89. *Two Fair Cousins*, 1:52.

90. Heimito von Doderer, *Die Studlhofstiege* (Munich: DTV, 1951), 140–44.

for a true poet worthy of marrying Houngiu. The answer is found relatively quickly. As Gou walks through a Nanjing park admiring the plum trees, he discovers lines of verse written in chalk that were obviously produced by a poet of some distinction, named Sse Yeoupe. The uncle sends intermediaries to the young scholar, who needless to say rejects the marriage broker because he is busy studying. Soon the suitor is called away by an uncle, but as he sets off on his journey, he of course encounters Houngiu. Poetic challenges are made, and Sse Yeoupe demonstrates his dexterity by composing brilliant extemporaneous poems. Houngliu requires Sse Yeoupe to compose a poem on the spot drawing together two specific themes in the mandarin's garden: "the first is the *Farewell to the crane*, and the second, the *Welcoming of the swallow*. The farewell to the crane must rhyme with the word *nothing* and the welcoming of the swallow with the word *nest*. Each stanza must be written in verses of seven syllables."⁹¹ Sse Yeoupe recognizes the allegory implied by the test: namely, that Houngliu desires to dismiss another suitor and welcome him, a man with nothing to his name, so that they might establish a household together—a nest. Of course, the novel preserves its ironic suspense. Sse Yeoupe does not realize that Houngliu is the very same woman who was offered to him in marriage earlier.

Sse Yeoupe impresses Houngliu that he is the right husband for her, but is obliged to continue his journey, where, along the way, he meets other would-be suitors of Houngiu, who plagiarize his poetry as their own. For much of the story, Sse Yeoupe is challenged to preserve the connection between his poetry and his authorship—to not have the poems stolen, used by anyone else, to not have them alienated or estranged. The story provides glimpses into an economy of poetry, wherein the poems that circulate are accredited to other people and have no link with their original author.

As Sse Yeoupe's obligatory travels make clear, administrative advancement in China required an itinerate life. The Chinese empire required an administration in constant motion. Eventually the old officials retire to be replaced by younger travelers, as the inspector Sse tells his nephew: "I am old; I have no children; besides, I am

91. *Two Fair Cousins*, 2: 227–28.

tired of travelling; the career which I pursue must have a termination. I see in you, my dear nephew, a young man in the flower of his age, and fitted for anything. You are one of those couriers who go a hundred leagues a day.”⁹²

In the course of his journey, Sse Yeoupe meets a delicate young man, Mengli, who in reality is a girl in disguise.⁹³ They become close friends, and promises are made that Sse Yeoupe will marry his new friend’s sister, who of course will turn out to be his friend without masquerade. All along, the poet protagonist is being pursued as the only suitable husband for Houngiu. The introduction of androgyny and queer sexual attractions complicates the plot in a manner reminiscent of Goethe’s *Bildungsroman*. By the fifteenth chapter, the reader senses that a hidden hand has been guiding Sse Yeoupe’s travels and romances, while his poetic compositions look very similar to the relationship between Wilhelm Meister and the *Turmgesellschaft* (Society of the tower).

The novel shows the family and academic connections that bind the literati together. As with many romances, it is revealed over time that the various characters, and lovers, have complex genealogical relations with each other. While this makes for an intriguing romance, it also shows the continuity of elite classes as they reproduce themselves. “Networking was intertwined with the career of literati at various stages. It was essential when preparing and sitting examinations, when seeking appointment and reappointment, or when obtaining patronage for other types of employments. Networking involved literati in political coalitions.”⁹⁴ To tie the knot together neatly, the two women are revealed to be cousins. As the plot steers toward a resolution in which Sse Yeoupe will marry the ideal beauty, Houngiu, along with the clever Mengli, queer desire becomes entwined with heterosexuality, friendship, and family obligations in an equal romance between two women and one man.

92. *Two Fair Cousins*, 2:106.

93. *Two Fair Cousins*, 2:80.

94. Hilde De Weerd, Chu Ming-Kin, and Ho Hou-leong, “Chinese Empires in Comparative Perspective: A Digital Approach,” *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 2.2 (Fall 2016): 64–65.

Mengli is a sexually ambiguous figure who first establishes a male-male friendship with Sse Yeoupe by dressing up as a boy, though retaining feminine features.⁹⁵ Later, when Mengli joins Houngliu in her father's household, she speaks of her affection for her cousin even as she explains how she developed the plan for all three to marry. Mengli evokes desire both by cross-dressing as a man and by insisting on her femininity. If the text goes out of its way to explain how Sse Yeoupe could fall in love with two women at the same time, it also provides Mengli with two separate scenes when she elaborates her very distinct desires for both Houngliu and Sse Yeoupe. In this configuration Houngliu consistently appears as the supreme beauty, the goal of all desire, while all three characters share profound admiration of each other's poetic talents. The two women become close after they have both completed one of the many poetry composition challenges that Pe assigns his guests. In the competition, the two women are shown to have identical abilities: "Both young girls finished their pieces of verse exactly at the same moment, and presented them simultaneously to Pe, who was a little surprised at observing that Miss Lo had written without the slightest hesitation, and finished as soon as Miss Pe."⁹⁶ The poetry competition in which both women excelled "increased the esteem and affection which these two young girls felt for each other as relations."⁹⁷ The text offers a poem to announce that, compared with their familial connection, shared poetic understanding was the more important bond:

When talent meets with talent,
 Friendship soon springs up between them.
 Deep as may be the attachment of relatives,
 It is at bottom only relationship.⁹⁸

95. Menjun Li discusses homoerotic qualities in these relationships in "Master of Heavenly Flowers Scripture—Three Personae as Publisher, Commentator, and Writer of Scholar-Beauty Fiction," MA thesis, Ohio State University, 2009, 103.

96. *Two Fair Cousins*, 2:138.

97. *Two Fair Cousins*, 2:141.

98. *Two Fair Cousins*, 2:142.

Such poems are constantly interrupting the prose narrative as they are read aloud after having been composed within the diegesis. Other times short couplets are inserted as commentary offered by some minor character in the novel. Mengli's amorous inclination toward her cousin reemerges through another poetic situation. Mengli walks in on Houngliu as she is completing her morning toilette, "dressed in a simple robe, whose colour corresponded with the tints of the spring."⁹⁹ Mengli immediately recognizes that the sight of her cousin is itself an object worthy of poetry: "This very spectacle itself would furnish a fine subject." Mengli places herself as the poet watching the beautiful woman dress. Striking the pose of an amorous suitor, Mengli dares not write her verse, for it would draw her eyes from the beautiful woman who inspires her, namely, her half-dressed cousin. Houngliu remains the most beautiful figure in this triad of beauty. But then Mengli of course grabs paper and pen to compose a poem entitled "Upon a Beautiful Woman." Houngliu senses the role she has been assigned, and answers Mengli, "Sister, if you were a young man, I should wish to have you, all my life, as near as my cap and my comb." Chloe Starr explains that the idiom in the original translates as "to hold his towel and comb," which is to say become his concubine.¹⁰⁰ Here it becomes clear that *The Two Fair Cousins* is not presenting a simple heterosexual arrangement of a man with two wives, but a triad in which desire flows in a circuit between the members. Still, the relations between the women grow more complex. Mengli fears that Houngliu holds her at a distance when she compares her to a boy, for although Mengli dressed as one when she approached Sse Yeoupe, in front of her beautiful cousin Houngliu, she wants to be clear that she is not one. Mengli complains, "Then because I am not a young man, you wish me far away from you. This expression announces on your part an affection of little depth." In response to this charge that she does not have deep affection for Mengli, the ever-confident Houngliu responds by saying that she hardly would want Mengli to become a boy and that perhaps it is Mengli herself who is afraid of such de-

99. *Two Fair Cousins*, 2:143.

100. Chloe Starr, *Red-Light Novels in the Late Qing* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 42.

sires. The two women resolve to let their feelings decide how their double marriage should be configured. Mengli declares heroically: "It entirely depends upon ourselves to pass our lives together. . . . It must be our own wishes that will decide it. If we both desire it, who can prevent us? What makes you suppose it impossible?"¹⁰¹

As Keith McMahon notes, all polygamous marriages require an extra degree of legitimation to justify their social acceptance,¹⁰² yet it is the polyamorous Mengli who quietly consolidates these pretensions to mandarin virtue with her very intimate, multivalent emotions. Without her puckish attachments, the novel's double marriage would never have seemed desirable to the three participants. The consolidation of family alliances through marriage is certainly an explicit justification for the double marriage, but Mengli's circuit of desire provides its emotional urgency. First, as a crossed-dressed boy, she draws out such a warm response from Sse Yeoupe that he quickly agrees to the homosocial arrangement of marrying his new best friend's (imaginary) twin sister, only to discover at the end of the novel that she is Mengli herself. Then sometime later in the whirl of emotions brought on by a poetry competition with her cousin, Mengli begins to write about Houngliu's beauty, allowing desire to manifest itself as a poetic trope that begs for fulfillment. If poetic genius is judged in terms of the speed with which elegant verses are put down on ink and paper, Mengli's artistry includes the ability to express amorous desire suddenly and with unexpected turns. On the wedding day, Sse Yeoupe has still not been told that his second bride is in fact the cross-dressing Mengli. During the middle of the ceremony, he stares at her marveling at how much she resembles his friend. Only after the ceremony, on the night when they first sleep together, are the details revealed to the husband: "It was in the apartment of Miss Lo [Mengli] that Sse Yeoupe passed the second night. It was upon the pillow that she related to him the particulars of her adventure, when she had quitted the dress of her sex. This account augmented still more Sse Yeoupe's tenderness."¹⁰³

101. *Two Fair Cousins*, 2: 145.

102. McMahon, "The Institution of Polygamy."

103. *Two Fair Cousins*, 2:279.

The decision, early on in the novel, to arrange a marriage between Sse Yeoupe and Houngliu based a single reading of poems the young man had chalked on a garden wall is affirmed by the novel's end, demonstrating the wisdom of fathers, uncles, and virtuous magistrates. The imperial administrative system of examinations and imperial appointments is affirmed as a meritocracy in which excellence overcomes corruption, ignorance, and sloth. Pe summarizes this conclusion to his daughter as he prepares to announce her betrothal to young Sse Yeoupe, who has passed all his exams and received a high office: "Your uncle made no mistake in becoming his go-between; nor was your father mistaken in the choice he made of a son-in-law. There was no error when he was put at the head of the list, when he was distinguished at the examination, and when he was appointed to an office. You see that upon all occasions they who have real merit receive recompense."¹⁰⁴ What surprises the paternal mandarins most is that two young women would have quickly come to the same conclusion about the merits of their future husband.

The novel incorporates formal networks and personal communications into the plot. It depicts the same administrative literary channels that Matteo Ricci hoped would spread Christianity. If the missionaries perceived these imperial and intimate linkages from the outside, the novel shows how they integrate themselves into the most intimate relations. Rather than speculating in sweeping terms about the administrative operations of the empire, the novel draws out the emotional implications of a missed delivery, a letter gone astray. Marco Polo and the Jesuits perceived the large-scale implications of the Chinese postal system, while the Chinese romance writer, along with Kafka, settle into micro-analysis. As the romance unfolds, the elder Pe remains fully informed on the lists of candidates for examination in both the north and the south because they are published in the gazettes issued by the imperial court. At key moments, conversations are interrupted by the arrival of the latest gazette, which brings crucial news. The magistrates themselves go on inspection tours wherein they collect and distribute orders, mandates, laws, administrative news, thereby extending the operation of the empire into the

104. *Two Fair Cousins*, 2:269.

distant provinces. More than once the characters find themselves in far-off rural settings with no hope of connecting with a higher literary and administrative society, when one of the novel's main magistrates happens to be passing along the road or down the river—a circumstance that makes it clear that their circuits were vital to providing updates from the capital. Hung-tai Wang argues that in the Ming-Qing period, the novel could serve as an elaboration of the gazette, in which the relatively succinct bulletin from the capital was filled in through a novel's more elaborate explanation of behind-the-scenes motives and actors.¹⁰⁵

Recent digital network analysis reinforces the impression that European and Chinese scholars relied upon similar letter-writing networks to develop intellectual and political alliances beyond their immediate locality.¹⁰⁶ The networks of Han literati under Mongol rule appear to be quite similar to the republic of letters, particularly when they are mapped according to the exchange of letters. The digital methods in this essay produce graphic images that suggest a clear parallel to the epistolary networks that have been traced for Jesuit missionaries or Enlightenment *philosophes*.

By comparing Chinese novels with European, Rémusat and Goethe treated the genre as self-evident and completed. The novel serves a representative function for both Europe and China, for it allows for hermeneutic entry into the other's consciousness. It is a pathway to seeing the world as others do—a fantasy already proposed in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*. In Goethe's writing, the Chinese novel becomes a means to another end, poetry, by portraying the spatial setting and subjective desires that constitute an atmosphere or mood (*Stimmung*). *The Two Fair Cousins* repeatedly describes when, where, and why poetry was being written, for noble and base aims. Through its shifting plots and many tests, the novel establishes a Chinese standard for poetic genius. Although Goethe could never learn the language well enough to read Chinese poets

105. Hung-tai Wang, "Information Media, Social Imagination, and Public Society during the Ming and Qing Dynasties," *Frontiers of History in China* 5.2 (2010): 189.

106. De Weerd, Ming-Kin, and Hou-leong, "Chinese Empires," 58–69.

in the original, Rémusat's translation allows him to recognize his own imaginary Chinese scene, a garden to which one retires in order to write poems on the theme of flowers. The perception of atmospheres or moods emerges from a particular kind of aesthetic education that Goethe recognizes he shares with Chinese poets. The "Chinese" quality in Goethe's last poems lies not in any specific allusions or phrases, so much in the overlapping understanding of poetic moods, which have the effect of demonstrating that modes of perception can themselves be forms of intercultural exchange.

In explaining what he finds so strangely interesting about Chinese literature, Goethe does not just talk about humanity and sympathy, but also isolates a distinct aesthetic feature in reading the texts he has available. In the Chinese novels he has read, external nature appears in conjunction with the experiences of novel's protagonists. The novel distinguishes itself again in that for them external nature always lives together with the human figures. Within the German context, the passage from Eckermann's *Conversations* discussed at the start of this chapter provides a definition of *Stimmung*, or mood, a term that later critics such as Emil Staiger elaborate upon as the lyric poem's integration of interior feeling and external nature into a totalized whole that joins self and world together in an suspended unity.¹⁰⁷ The voice of lyric poetry hovers between the perceiving subject and its natural surroundings, creating a convergence between the two, so that any opposition between subject and objects is suspended within the experience of reading the poem. The *Stimmung* of a lyric poem supersedes the presumption that emotions are housed within an imagined interior of the subject by representing moods as a spatial reality passing through the subject from the exterior. Charles Taylor argues that the localization of mental states within the subject "is a function of a historically limited mode of self-interpretation, one which has become dominant in the modern West and which may indeed spread thence to other parts of the globe, but which had a begin-

107. Emil Staiger, *Basic Concepts of Poetics*, trans. Janette C. Hudson and Luanne T. Frank (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 81.

ning in time and space and may have an end.”¹⁰⁸ To the extent that poetic *Stimmung* suspends the modern distinction between subject and object, culture and nature, it offers an unnerving turn to a mythic state in which the human does not stand above or apart from the world.

Romanticism is most often credited with expanding the discourse of interiority, yet the poetics of *Stimmung* around 1800 make clear that this attribution requires some inattentive revisions of literary history. Specifically, Hegel's critique of Romantic lyric poetry insisted that Romantic lyricism was “merely” an interior state projected outward. Chinese poetics lays great value on a poem's ability to portray the interpenetration of the material landscape and subjective feeling through a detached and contemplative voice. Within traditional poetics, the harmonious interactions and cross-references between subject and object are gathered under the concept of *yijing*, which “refers to an ineffable and meaning-laden artistic space that the poet constructs through a combination of his thoughts and feelings with the objects of scene he depicts in his poem.”¹⁰⁹ *Yijing* constitutes the terrain of poetry, a space in which transcendence seems possible as perception and things reinforce each other's meanings.¹¹⁰ Classical Chinese nature poems consolidate around specific images, laden with portent.

Chinese poems rely on familiar figures that repeat themselves in variations. Thoms's translation, *Chinese Courtship. In Verse*, provides a lengthy scene in which the young Leang, having caught a first glimpse of his beloved, leaves an evening garden to dream restlessly. Such familiar motifs can appear as universal references providing readily accessible metaphysical depth, or they can come across as unreflective stereotypes. Clearly drawn by their harmonious potential, Goethe offers Eckermann a list of such images teasingly, aware that outside of the text they may sound like chinoiserie.

108. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 111.

109. Yanfang Tang, “Translating across Cultures: *Yi Jing* and Understanding Chinese Poetry,” *Intercultural Communication Studies* 23.1 (2014): 188.

110. Bai Li-bing, “On *Yijing* in Chinese and English Nature Poetry: The Case Study of Wordsworth and Wang Wei,” *US-China Foreign Language* 12.5 (2014): 416.

In recounting these literary features, Goethe recreates the utopian fable of China, so that with a few lines Eckermann has Goethe telling us how extraordinary the country is.

Goethe's interest in how Chinese texts create a mood of lyrical retreat has little to do with acquiring scientific knowledge about the place but everything to do with Goethe's own writing. From the opening chapter on, *The Two Fair Cousins* depicts many scenes of poetry writing, which, of course, allow readers to draw analogies to their own desire to escape political intrigue and oppression by withdrawing into a quiet, safe haven, but which also provide an impetus for writing poetry. Between the novel's many garden scenes and its repeated challenge to enter into writing contests, *The Two Fair Cousins* offered the aging, isolated Goethe a new impetus and literary form within which to compose. In *The Two Fair Cousins* and in Goethe's Chinese poems, the atmosphere depends on the cloistered space of a garden. Atmospheres occur across cultures: it matters little that the particular flowers in Nanjing and Weimar are different; the similarity lies in the intersubjective quality instilled by both sets of writing. Because the poems' Asian-German identity rest on the shared sense of atmosphere, they can never have a clear determinate code that allows us to map China onto Weimar. They construct a symbolic, nonrepresentational space. Critics who worry about the absence of overt Asian references in Goethe's Chinese-German poems are overlooking the gardens' shared aesthetic conditions. Atmospheres help inspire poetic production. In turn, the circular relations between reading translations, composing poetry, and contemplating a garden enact an imaginative Chinese-German space, which is not yet transnational, because of the limited physical mobility between the cultures, but which does assert a parallel identity.

Every text that describes the sacred places where the poet discovers the harmony between feeling and nature also includes an implicit contrast to sites where such experiences cannot be found. Like the young poet, the retired mandarin, and his daughter in *The Two Fair Cousins*, the aged Goethe favors his own country garden over cities and palaces. Already in his first writing about poetic atmosphere, Goethe insists that it cannot be found in and around aris-

tocratic palaces.¹¹¹ Not only do the machinations of state power vitiate poetic insight, but the interpenetration of personal vision and natural environment is quite distinct from the pleasure-seeking drive of urban readers and theater audiences.¹¹² During a visit to his native Frankfurt, Goethe wrote to Schiller about the complete absence of poetic mood among the urban populace.¹¹³ Unsettled by the shock and sensory overload of the walking through a busy urban market, Goethe perceived a nervous energy that produces a disharmonious integration of space and subjects. Modernist poets might easily recognize Goethe's perception of commercial cities, though without seeking a rural respite to restore a lost symbolic unity. By referring to "that which we call 'Stimmung,'" Goethe makes clear that he and Schiller shared a common understanding of the term as an aesthetic effect.¹¹⁴ Given how much of their correspondence focused on the craft of writing, Goethe makes clear that in his trip to Frankfurt he is looking for objects that induce a symbolic *Stimmung* that he can then describe in his own writing. Goethe often sought a symbolic person, text, or setting that then became the basis for his poetic description. Find the right object and the poem can be written. Traveling through Italy provided just such an abundance of symbolic objects, which Goethe gathered up to preserve in memory, or what the Roman rhetorical tradition would have called the treasure house of the mind.¹¹⁵ The hassle of travel went by unnoticed

111. "Ach dieser Zauber ist's, der aus den Sälen der Großen und aus ihren Gärten flieht, die nur zum Durchstreifen, nur zum Schauplatz der aneinander hinwischenden Eitelkeit ausstaffiert und beschnitten sind" (HA, 12:25).

112. Modernist poets have of course written extensively about urban *Stimmung*. See Burkhard Meyer-Sickendiek, "Die Stimmung einer Stadt. Urbane Atmosphären in der Lyrik des 20. Jahrhunderts," *Weimarer Beiträge* 59.4 (2013): 558–79.

113. Goethe to Schiller, August 8, 1797, Siegfried Seidel, ed., *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe* (Leipzig: Insel, 1984), 1:376.

114. David Wellbery notes that in his earliest formulations of the term, Goethe did not have a readily available aesthetic definition within eighteenth-century discourse; see his, "Stimmung," in *Historisches Wörterbuch Ästhetischer Grundbegriffe*, ed. Karlheinz Barck, Martin Fontius, Dieter Schlenstedt, Burkhard Steinwachs, and Friedrich Wolfzettel (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2003), 5:706.

115. WA, 31:202.

because he experienced Italy in a state of attunement with his surroundings, which thereby allowed him gather up the individual moments in order to preserve them as memory objects for later writing. The trouble was that as he grew older, Goethe felt he had emptied his store house of symbolic experiences and therefore needed to search out for new moments. Precisely for this reason, he found Persian and Chinese literature so fulfilling.

In his remarks to Eckermann, Goethe does not rely on the metaphorical shorthand for poetic creation that he used when writing Schiller, but instead described in very simple terms the correlation between subject and natural objects, reinforcing the impression that he was thinking functionally as a writer trying to produce an effect in the reader. In writing about *Stimmung*, Goethe was not just concerned with his own symbolic experiences; he was more concerned with replicating the poetic maneuver that produced the mood. The Chinese novels he described to Eckermann offered a schema for writing that Goethe sought to elucidate in order to compose his own poetry. The list of chinoiserie effects in Chinese novels that Goethe provides Eckermann reflects the craftsmanship of writing rather than an historical-critical analysis.

A poem's *Stimmung* does not itself depict a subject in search of an object to satisfy its desires, but rather a suspension of this dualism within a unity that maintains both. In such a poetic space, the subject does not seek to possess or overcome the other through struggle, acquisition, or seduction, but rather is portrayed as having joined together in a balance that grants neither extreme supremacy over the other. Desire within such a poem does not consume the otherness of the other; rather, it is held in suspense with the strange. If poetry does entail the spontaneous outpouring of feeling and thoughts, it does so only after the proper object for concentrated writing has been found. Goethe as artist did not invent poetic objects out of thin air; he encountered them before he wrote. In his *Italian Journey*, he underscores how important remains for the poet to first discover a person, story, or thing worth creating. The primacy of the found object was an old theme for him: "I always come back to my old principle. If the artist is presented with an authentic object,

then he can accomplish something real.”¹¹⁶ If it cannot be perceived directly, that symbolic object may be found in the images created by reading, which in the case of *The Two Fair Cousins* includes the figure of the poet. Just as Goethe stumbled across the Nanjing Disputation in search of poetic booty, he consumes Rémusat's translation.

In finding a foreign source, Goethe transforms it into his own idiom. His Persian and Chinese poems do not imitate foreign meter and rhyme or ventriloquize another voice; instead they recognize their own affinity with the distant companion. The poetics of *Stimmung* enable intercultural commingling; the mood of the poem makes it possible for two antithetical or simply unrelated symbols to coexist within aesthetic experience. As many critics point out, the poetics of *Stimmung* are very different from what Hegel took to be Romanticism's projecting its own confused interior feelings out on to the world. Even though Romantic writers such as E. T. A. Hoffmann ironically show how emotionally young men often project their desires onto others, the poetics of *Stimmung*, in the mature Goethe particularly, are not always just the expansive residue of an emotional subject, but rather the expression of a point of union with nature and the foreign.

As the many writing scenes in *The Two Fair Cousins* show, the invention of a poem is itself filled with social tensions. The expectations and consequences for the poet after delivering his or her verse drive the Chinese novel's plot. Given the importance that understanding and composing classical poetry has for the Chinese novel's administrators, the idyllic garden where becomes the stage on which the drama of composition—the ability to write beautiful poetry on the spot—unfolds.

Chinese-German Atmosphere

Goethe was reading Rémusat's *The Two Fair Cousins* in May 1827, when he retreated to his garden house to escape into the beautiful

116. Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, October 5, 1786, HA, 11:80.

spring weather, so that he could work on his most important poetic engagement with Chinese literature, “Chinesisch-deutschen Jahres- und Tageszeiten,” a work very much in the synthetic, cross-cultural mode of *West-Eastern Divan*.¹¹⁷ Organized into fourteen short poems that do not reflect any particularly Chinese lyrical structure, the “Chinesisch-deutschen Jahres- und Tageszeiten” presents a two-sided temporal awareness of the beautiful day in the moment and at the end of a long lifetime.¹¹⁸ Although the confusing title sounds as if it could have been yet another result of the nineteenth century’s many quickly printed journals and almanacs, it also concentrates the poem’s temporal sense on the present in order to contemplate the duration of a biological lifespan. Goethe used a similar clunky construction when he began in 1816 to organize his recollections in a chronology he called *Tag- und Jahres Hefte als Ergänzung meiner sonstigen Bekenntnisse* (Daily and annual notebooks as a supplement to my other confessions).¹¹⁹ The title of the poems suggests an administrative, secretarial archiving of events, while the poems themselves speak with the diffuse immediacy of first-person recollection.

The poetry cycle enacts precisely that interdependence of inner thoughts with natural description that he ascribes to Chinese poetry in his chat with Eckermann.¹²⁰ The Chinese quality in these last poems shows itself very differently than the Persian does in *West-Eastern Divan*: the Chinese-German relation is announced in the title, but not performed lyrically. After identifying himself as belonging to the class of mandarins, Goethe does not adopt Chinese costume or the language as the Jesuit missionaries did. Rather, his poems challenge us to recognize the affinities between the poetic traditions without overtly emulating one another. Recent scholars,

117. On the place of Chinese gardens in Goethe’s work, see Ingrid Schuster, *Vorbilder und Zerrbilder: China und Japan im Spiegel der deutschen Literatur, 1773–1890* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1988), 143–61.

118. Meredith Lee, “Goethes Chinesisch-Deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten,” in *Goethe und China—China und Goethe*, ed. Günther Debon and Adrian Hsia (Bern: Peter Lang, 1985), 37–50.

119. WA, 35:277–78.

120. Christine Wagner-Dittmar, “Goethe und die chinesischer Literatur,” in *Studien zu Goethes Alterswerken*, ed. Erich Trunz (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1971), 222.

such as Arne Klawitter, have read the cycle as a poetic actualization of Goethe's world literature paradigm insofar as the poems show how the very distant Chinese also appears as the already well-known, almost to the point of seeming conventional.¹²¹ Just about every commentator has noted how very German the poems seem—indeed, that they fit comfortably in Goethe's long oeuvre. While Goethe sought out the unfamiliar, his identification with the new poetic forms transformed them into the well-known patterns of his own writing. As Georg Simmel might argue, whereas the oriental work of art is marked as possessing a style because it appears foreign, Goethe's poetry appears to many German readers as fully identical with his person, as universal, and as in no way foreign.¹²² Of course, the fully familiar tone and themes of the poems confirm the parallel between Chinese and German gardens with their poets contemplating flowers as coded memories. As Chunjie Zhang has shown, the earlier erotic connotations of the chinoiserie garden still linger in Goethe's poems.¹²³

In the eyes of most eighteenth-century Europeans, the single most impressive feature of Chinese civilization was its antiquity. Thus, in the opening lines Goethe associates his own old age with that of a weary mandarin, for he too has become an ancient figure. In this way Goethe is also starting with the same class that attracted the Jesuits, the literati:

Say, what remains for us mandarins
finished ruling, tired of serving,
Say, what can remain for us
On such spring days
to leave the north

121. Arne Klawitter, *Ästhetische Resonanz, Zeichen und Schriftästhetik in der deutschsprachigen Literatur und Geistesgeschichte* (Göttingen: V and Runipress, 2015), 234–37.

122. Georg Simmel, "The Problem of Style," trans. Mark Ritter, *Theory, Culture, and Society* 8.3 (1991): 63–71.

123. Chunjie Zhang, "Goethe's *Chinesisch-deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeitung*: Vernacular Universal, *Erotica Sinica*, and the Temporality of *Nachträglichkeit*," in *Receptions: Reading the Past Across Space and Time*, ed. Brenda Schildgen and Ralph Hexter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 245–64.

for the water and the garden
cheerfully drinking, spiritedly writing,
bowl after bowl, line upon lines

Sag', was könnt' uns Mandarinern,
Satt zu herrschen, müd zu dienen,
Sag', was könnt' uns übrigbleiben,
Als in solchen Frühlingstagen
Uns des Nordens zu ent schlagen
Und am Wasser und in Garten
Fröhlich trinken, geistig schreiben,
Schal auf Schale, Zug in Zügen.¹²⁴

What is left to us mandarins after we are tired of ruling, tired of serving? The answer lies in writing poetry about flowers in the garden, a very specific scene common to both chinoiserie representations and the three translated novels, a feedback loop within which Goethe's Chinese-German poems appear. As John Noyes points out, these lines place Goethe's lyric voice in dialogue with other mandarins: Kant, Herder, Leibniz, and certainly the characters in the Chinese novel he was just reading, *The Two Fair Cousins*, which also opens with three learned friends retired to a garden to write and drink.¹²⁵

By identifying as a mandarin, Goethe revives the parallel between the Chinese and the Holy Roman Empire. Most certainly, the phrase "us mandarins" recalls Goethe's first reading of the Nanjing Disputation as Matteo Ricci ingratiates himself at the literati dinner party. If the Jesuits perceived a similarity between their own office and those of the literati, and Goethe then draws the connection to include the intellectual scene in Weimar, then the European sides of this constellation are drawing to a close in 1827. Only the Chinese administrators would continue. The analogies operate on the level

124. Goethe, HA, 1:387.

125. John Noyes also reads the cycle in relation to Kant in "Eradicating the Orientalist: Goethe's 'Chinesisch-deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten,'" in *China in the German Enlightenment*, ed. Bettina Brandt and Daniel L. Purdy (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2016), 146.

of textual production as well as historical institutions.¹²⁶ Goethe's 1798 letter to Schiller refers to the back-stage secrets of composition favored by poets, or "we, magicians"; then in 1827 he enacts his earlier insight in a broader invocation "us mandarins," leaving open to whom he is actually speaking. To refer to himself as a mandarin, the poet has arrived at a far extreme from his Werther—no longer the emotional outsider, Goethe acknowledges his privileged position. Yet this poetry cycle describes the inclination to abandon the position of the mandarin—the administrator and diplomat—in order to revive the memory of an earlier ease with nature and desire. By naming the mask, Goethe hopes to let it drop. This wearied stance is of course assumed many times by Chinese figures in the three translated novels, and it is one found in sentimental and ro-coco writing, figured as the desire to escape the intrigues and maneuvers of the political court in favor of an imagined rustic innocence. Exhaustion and exasperation at one's own engagement with power create yet another position from which to begin writing poetry. Andreas Angelet compares the opening to the *Divan*, where the poet seeks to flee after the collapse of empire, with the opening of the Chinese poem, where he announces himself a government official exhausted by ruling. If the *West-Eastern Divan* opens with a flight from the destruction of the Holy Roman Empire, the "Chinesisch-deutschen Jahres- und Tageszeiten" speaks of retirement from service to the state.¹²⁷ The question "was bleibt uns übrig" ("what remains for us") seeks to find what fragments of

126. Fritz K. Ringer in his influential study of the German academic elite states that the name "mandarin" has no particular importance for it draws no meaningful reference. My point here is not to disagree with his assessment of German professors, but to make the case that the German relation to the Chinese elite was indeed based on a perceived analogy, and thus the name applied to European intellectuals had a real historical basis in comparative self-justifications. See Ringer's *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 5. As a German mandarin himself, Max Weber was far more open to the similarities between the two classes. See his *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1047–51.

127. Andreas Angelet, "Die lyrische Bewegung in Goethes 'Chinesisch-Deutschen Jahres- und Tageszeiten,'" *Goethe Jahrbuch* 113 (1996): 182.

personal experience have survived being covered by the façade of officialdom. What remains after we drop the public mask? Goethe's view of the mandarin, enabled by the novels, looks beyond the idealized Confucian intellectual lauded by the Jesuits to consider hidden domesticity after all the proper ceremonies have been performed.

Most readers agree that the cycle revolves around the central, eighth poem. Meredith Lee refers to it as the collection's key.¹²⁸ Still, many find no particularly Chinese quality therein. In a volume dedicated to Emil Staiger, Wolfgang Bauer underscores how the late Goethe's interest in Chinese literature coincides with his retreat from the enthusing inwardness of his youthful, sentimental writing. Bauer finds that few poems in German come closer to a Chinese harmony between person and nature than the famous "Abendgedicht" (Evening Verse)—a poem without any overt Asian reference, or "costume."¹²⁹

Twilight descends from above
Everything close seems already far;
Though first the evening star
raises its lovely light!
Everything sways in uncertainty,
Mist creeps into the heights;
The sea quietly reflects
the gloom's deepening darkness.

Now in the eastern regions
I sense the moon's glow and glance
Slender willows' tangled hair
Frolic in the nearby stream
Through the moving shadow play
Shimmers Luna's magic glow
And through the eyes slides
the cool that calms the heart.

128. Meredith Lee, "Goethes Chinesisch-Deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten," 40.

129. Without drawing his own conclusion, Günther Debon offers a summary listing of the many critical judgements rendered by Goethe scholars to the question of how Chinese the poem is: "Die 'Chinesische-Deutschen Jahres- und Tageszeiten,'" *China zu Gast in Weimar, 18 Studien und Streiflichter* (Heidelberg: Brigitte Guderjahn, 1994), 224–29.

Dämmerung senkte sich von oben,
 Schon ist alle Nähe fern;
 Doch zuerst emporgehoben
 Holden Lichts der Abendstern!
 Alles schwankt ins Ungewisse,
 Nebel schleichen in die Höh';
 Schwarzvertiefte Finsternisse
 Widerspiegelnd ruht der See.

Nun am östlichen Bereiche
 Ahn' ich Mondenglanz und -Glut
 Schlanker Weiden Haargezweige
 Scherzen auf der nächsten Flut
 Durch bewegter Schatten Spiele
 Zittert Lunas Zauberschein
 Und durchs Auge schleicht die Kühle
 Sänftigend ins Herz hinein.¹³⁰

The verses thematize the inability to distinguish far and near distances with the arrival of nightfall—another way of alluding to his old age—such that things lying close by seem far removed: in blunt, unpoetic terms, a Weimar garden can appear Chinese. In the first verse, Western perspectivism with its delineations of distant lines disappears in the night garden, allowing another medium of lunar shadow play to replace it in the second verse. Darkness acquires an agency of its own; rather than just manifesting itself as the absence of light, it instead descends from above. Between the two modes of appearance, identities slide into a state of indeterminacy, not just for the observer, but for the cosmos as a whole. Fog rises up to the heights while the sky's darkness is reflected down onto a lake. The poem depicts the mutually mirrored relations in the landscape as harmonious, rather than in conflict. Much like Kant's confused rational subject in "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?," the second verse opens with a subject intuiting an orientation by looking toward the east even as the ability to measure space has become meaningless. The appearance of some diffuse light in the east

130. Goethe, HA, 1:389.

serves as an initial marker. If Kant's subject orients itself through the eastern rise of the sun, the poetic observer here sees the moon rising from the same direction. While Kant's subject seeks to rise out from disorientation through abstract reasoning, Goethe's lyric voice allows the subject to descend upon its prey from above. Emil Staiger described this pleasant confusion in terms of Kantian epistemology when he introduced the poems in 1949: "A tender dizziness arises, that vertigo takes over our heads, whenever, approaching the upper limits of humanity, we try to comprehend simultaneity and successiveness as one."¹³¹ In these late poems, Goethe can no longer position himself as a bird of prey looking at the earth from a height, as he did in "Harzreise im Winter." Instead, Goethe's poem sits contentedly in the condition Kant sought to overcome. Seeing the moon between the shadows cast by tall grasses or willows, the poetic subject's momentary apprehension of direction is recast into a sensory reversal in which a feeling of coldness enters the body through the eye, by mere looking alone. Goethe combines the haptic sense of sight and touch, though most importantly without any other person returning his gaze. The poem conveys isolation through the wavering recognition of the moon. By naming it "Luna," the poem places the astrological body within a Latin mythic tradition, even though the subjective state of finding the moon on a dark night is another feature of poetry shared the world over. Goethe invokes the ancient definition of sympathy as the relation between bodies on earth and in the heavens when the poem refers to the moon's magical appearance.¹³² The poem couples astronomy with sympathetic medicine when it explains that the moon's cooling effect—in contrast to the sun—enters the body through the eye. The *laterna magica* of the moon shining through the willows (*Weiden*) reveals nature to be an optical medium, known in eighteenth-century

131. Emil Staiger, "Einführung," *Johann Wolfgang Goethe Sämtliche Gedichte* (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1953), 611.

132. "Urworte. Orphisch" is the late poem that has attracted the most commentary about Goethe's lifetime interest in astrology. See Johannes Klein, *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik* (Wiesbaden: Frank Steiner, 1960), 57, and Herbert Anton, "Orakel der Existenz," in *Gedichte von Johann Wolfgang Goethe*, ed. Bernd Witte (Stuttgart: Reclam 1998), 170–85.

theater-goers as Chinese shadows, *ombres chinoise*. Without announcing the metaphor, the poem suggests that the moon's light turns the landscape into a darkened theater. Nature operates thus as a medium.

Chinese poets and many others write about the moon as much as any German. Thoms's *Chinese Courtship* abounds with references to willows in gardens, among them a comparison that links the drooping tree branches with aging: "I think mankind in general, resemble those delicate willows, / For on attaining manhood their autumn commences."¹³³ Goethe could well have published his cycle of poems without mention of any Chinese source, and they would well have been understood as his late creation. The title then is a specific gesture to draw the reader to possible Chinese comparisons: "The blighted willows will again experience the return of Spring, / But man, as yet, when old has never become young."¹³⁴ The underlying though unarticulated discrepancy is in Goethe's garden: plants will regenerate in the next year's seasons but the old poet does not know whether he will encounter another spring.

Astronomy serves as a point of orientation not only in a geographical and epistemological sense, but also as a shared motif within the eternal return of cross-cultural poetics. Bauer concludes, "There exist few poems in western literature, whose language and content come closer to the Chinese tradition than these."¹³⁵ His conclusion stands in direct opposition to Kommerell, who misses the point by claiming that "the most beautiful of all Goethe's evening verses" is "is totally unChinese."¹³⁶ Bauer goes on to cite the translator Kuo Mo-jo, who speculated that Goethe must have been familiar with a lost poem by the great Li-Po (699–762), famous for his shimmering drinking poems in nature, an impossibility given that he was not yet known in Europe.

133. *Chinese Courtship*, 78.

134. *Chinese Courtship*, 78.

135. Wolfgang Bauer, "Goethe und China: Verständnis und Misverständnis," *Goethe und die Tradition*, ed. Hans Reiss (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1972), 189.

136. Max Kommerell, *Gedanken über Gedichte*, 4th ed. (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1985), 112–13.

To the extent that critics have always wondered how Chinese these poems are, for they seem just like his other poems, the title suggests that Goethe's poems have always already had an affinity with Chinese literature. When Max Kommerell provides a list of eight nuanced answers to this challenge, the motifs and features he isolates are hardly uniquely Chinese, yet they do describe the overlapping motifs and moods that Goethe's poems share with the "scholar-beauty" romances he read.¹³⁷ Goethe's sense of human existence as an eternally recurring cycle allows him to perceive the supposedly foreign and strange qualities of Chinese literature as having been continuously present in his writing—they simply have not been called such. That which remains for exhausted mandarins is the same as that which they desired and which inspired them from the first. The temporal orientation—anticipating or recollecting—has simply shifted. The new insight offered by Goethe's last poems manifests itself as a creative recognition of the fundamental similarities between the two literary and administrative traditions, a statement made in the collection's title most explicitly. Along with the wonder of discovering Chinese culture comes the realization that it has always already been there.

137. Kommerell, *Gedanken*, 112.