

## Comparing the Incomparable World Literature from Du Fu to Mishima

David Damrosch

Delivered as a keynote address at the conference, *The Brave World Literature Revisited: Contemporary Approaches to Literary Studies*, organized by the Department of Contemporary Literary Studies, the University of Tokyo, on November 12, 2011.

In my book *What Is World Literature?*, I focused on what happens to literary works when they circulate out of their home environment, becoming something new as they are translated into the global space of world literature. Since completing that book, I have become increasingly interested in exploring how we can best discuss books within their varied settings at home. As most works never achieve any significant presence outside their home culture, do they necessarily remain purely the subject of national literary history and criticism, or are there productive ways to look at them across the borders they have never crossed themselves? Lacking any direct links of transmission and reception, can works from fundamentally different systems still illuminate one another in any way beyond very general commonalities, the “invariants” that the French comparatist René Etiemble sought fifty years ago, or the Jungian archetypes that Northrop Frye found floating free of historical contingency? Here I will argue that the disconnections we can observe between disparate traditions are not nearly so absolute as they have often been taken to be in “East/West” comparative literary studies; and conversely, I will suggest that incommensurability plays a new and newly vital role in today’s global age.

Let me begin with the nature of poetic creation as traditionally understood in East Asia and in Europe. In the Western tradition going back to Plato and Aristotle, literature is something a poet or writer *makes up* – an assumption built into our very terms “poetry” (from Greek *poiesis*, “making”) and “fiction” (from Latin *facere*, “to make”). This conception can involve celebrating the writer’s supreme creativity, but it can also place literature on a

spectrum shading over toward unreality, falsehood, and outright lying. This is why Plato wanted poetry banished from his Republic, whereas Aristotle celebrated poetry as more philosophical than historical writing, able to convey higher truths free from the accidents of everyday life. By contrast, various cultures have seen literature as deeply embedded in reality, neither above nor below the audience's own physical and moral world. Writers are regarded not as making things up but as observing and reflecting on what they see around them. Stephen Owen has emphasized this difference in discussing the poetics of the Tang Dynasty (618–907), often considered the greatest period of Chinese poetry. In his book *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics*, Owen quotes a poem by the eighth-century poet Du Fu:

Slender grasses, breeze faint on the shore,  
 Here, the looming mast, the lone night boat.  
 Stars hang down on the breadth of the plain,  
 The moon gushes in the great river's current.  
 My name shall not be known from my writing;  
 Sick, growing old, I must yield up my post.  
 Wind-tossed, fluttering – what is my likeness?  
 In Heaven and Earth, a single gull of the sands.

(Owen 12)

Du Fu's lyric presents the soliloquy of a solitary observer, and in this respect it resembles many Western poems. Yet the speaker is part of the natural world around him; far from fading away before the poet's interior drama of illness, aging, and political regrets, the landscape is shown in detail, its physical features corresponding to the poet's private concerns and memories. As Owen comments, Du Fu's lines "might be a special kind of diary entry, differing from common diary in their intensity and immediacy, in their presentation of an experience occurring at that very moment" (13). Responding to this immediacy of observation, the poem's readers would have taken the speaker to be Du Fu himself, not an unknown, invented persona. Tang Dynasty poets understood their task as conveying to their readers their personal experiences and reflections, artistically shaped and given permanent value through the resources of the poetic tradition.

Poetic diaries could embody these assumptions directly, as when Matsuo Bashō wrote his great travelogues, presenting his poetic compositions as spontaneous, on-the-spot expressions of his direct experience. A good example of his creative process can be seen after

he passes through the Shirakawa Barrier marking the entry into “the Deep North” of his most famous journey. As Bashō reports,

At the Sukagawa post station, we visited a man named Tōkyū. He insisted that we stay for four or five days and asked me how I had found the Shirakawa Barrier. I replied, “My body and spirit were tired from the pain of the long journey; my heart was overwhelmed by the landscape. The thoughts of the distant past tore through me, and I couldn’t think straight.” But feeling it would be a pity to cross the barrier without producing a single verse, I wrote:

<i>fūryū no</i>	Beginnings of poetry –
<i>hajime ya oku no</i>	rice-planting songs
<i>taue uta</i>	of the Deep North!

This opening verse was followed by a second verse and then a third; before we knew it, three sequences. (Bashō 417)

Bashō presents the creation of this poem not only as a deeply personal response to the landscape but also as a fundamentally social response as well. It is his host’s friendly inquiry that spurs the poet to overcome his weariness and gather his scattered thoughts into a poem, and this poem in turn sets off a round of poetry composition in collaboration with his companions.

Very differently, Western writers have often asserted their artistic independence from the natural and social world around them. They have regularly insisted that their works do not make declarative statements, sometimes even claiming that they don’t say anything at all: “A poem should not mean / But be,” as Archibald MacLeish declared in his “Ars Poetica” in 1926 (MacLeish 847). Three and a half centuries earlier, Sir Philip Sidney expressed a similar view in his *Defense of Poesy*: “Now, for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth” (Sidney 517). By contrast, readers of Du Fu and of Bashō were sure that the poet was affirming the truth of his experience: Bashō had indeed taken the journey and had enjoyed the evening of poetic composition that he describes, much as, a millennium before him, Du Fu had indeed written his poem late in life, in exile, on a night when he observed slender grasses swaying and a single gull on the sand, lit by the light of the moon. In his *Apology*, Sidney speaks of the poet’s task as “counterfeiting,” whereas Du Fu’s contemporaries saw him as perceiving the deep correspondences linking heaven, earth, grasses, seagull, and poet.

The difference should not be overstated, however; classical Chinese and Japanese poetry present a difference in degree rather than a difference in kind from the Western

tradition. Du Fu's readers knew that poets never simply transcribed whatever caught their eye; classical Chinese poems are elaborate constructions, in which the poet very selectively weaves elements from the world around him into poetic forms that employ long-cherished images, metaphors, and historical references. Nor is Bashō simply responding to the sight of the Shirakawa Barrier or the sound of women singing folksongs while planting their rice. As he says, he was preoccupied with “thoughts of the distant past” while at the barrier, and throughout his journals his thoughts often center on earlier poets and their prior responses to the scenes he sees, or even to loosely similar scenes elsewhere in Japan or in China. By his own account, indeed, Bashō did not write the poem quoted above while actually experiencing the scene at the Shirakawa Barrier, where he had been too overwhelmed – by the sight itself? by thoughts of past poetry and the challenge of writing something new? – to write anything there: he composed the poem some days later, reflecting in tranquility on what had overwhelmed him in person. Or so he tells us, at any rate, some five years later still, when he actually wrote *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. In an introduction to the text, Haruo Shirane has remarked that “Although *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* is often read as a faithful travel account, it is best regarded as a kind of fiction loosely based on the actual journey” (412).

Equally, despite all the emphasis on counterfeiting and artifice, Western writers have rarely gone as far as Archibald MacLeish in asserting that their works have no cognitive meaning – a paradoxical stance even for MacLeish, after all, since his poem is making a meaningful statement when it asserts that poems “should not mean but be.” There have always been poets in the Western tradition who seem to be recounting their own experiences as Du Fu and Bashō do. As early as the seventh century BCE, the great Greek poet Sappho certainly wrote as though she was describing just what she felt when she saw a woman she loved flirting with a handsome young man:

To me it seems  
 that man has the fortune of gods,  
 whoever sits beside you, and close,  
 who listens to you sweetly speaking  
 and laughing temptingly;  
 my heart flutters in my breast,  
 whenever I look quickly, for a moment –  
 I say nothing, my tongue broken,  
 a delicate fire runs under my skin,

my eyes see nothing, my ears roar,  
 cold sweat rushes down me,  
 trembling seizes me,  
 I am greener than grass,  
 to myself I seem  
 needing but little to die.  
 (Caws 304–5)

Even here, though, Sappho is mixing literal observations with artifice-laden metaphors. She may be green with envy, but surely she has not really turned greener than the grass. She has lost her voice, but her tongue isn't physically "broken"; she feels flushed and hears a ringing in her ears, but she isn't actually bursting into flames.

The contrasts between Du Fu and Sappho partly reflect differences in the way poets pursued their vocation in their respective cultures, but they are also differences in modes of reading and reception. In comparing Chinese and Western poetic assumptions, Stephen Owen contrasts Du Fu's evening scene with William Wordsworth's sonnet "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802." Like Du Fu, Wordsworth contemplates an outdoor scene:

Earth has not anything to show more fair:  
 Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
 A sight so touching in its majesty:  
 This City now doth, like a garment, wear  
 The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
 Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie  
 Open unto the fields, and to the sky;  
 All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.  
 (Wordsworth 1:460)

Despite the specificity of the poem's title, though, Owen proposes that "it does not matter whether Wordsworth saw the scene, vaguely remembered it, or constructed it from his imagination. The words of the poem are not directed to a historical London in its infinite particularity; the words lead you to something else, to some significance in which the number of vessels on the Thames is utterly irrelevant. That significance is elusive, its fullness eternally out of reach." Whether the poem concerns the force of solitary vision, or nature versus an industrial society, or some other theme, Owen says, "the text points to a plenitude

of potential significance, but it does not point to London, at dawn, September 3, 1802” (Owen 13–14).

But why *couldn't* the poem be read as pointing to London on September 3, 1802? It is true that Wordsworth isn't inviting us to count the number of masts on the Thames, but neither was Du Fu counting blades of grass. The closing lines of Wordsworth's sonnet – not quoted by Owen – insistently proclaim the uniqueness of the moment that he is recording:

Never did sun more beautifully steep  
 In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;  
 Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!  
 The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
 Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;  
 And all that mighty heart is lying still!  
 (Wordsworth 1:460)

In these lines, Wordsworth invites his reader to share the scene that lies before his eyes. While he could certainly have recorded his impressions long afterward, or even invented the scene outright, Du Fu too could have dreamed up his evening scene, or written about it days later, just as Bashō did. The difference concerns the reader's assumptions as much as the poet's own practice.

These assumptions can shift over time within a culture as well as varying between cultures. During the nineteenth century, readers regularly regarded the Romantic poets' verses as closely reflecting their personal experiences. Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," written in 1819 when "half in love with easeful Death" (Keats 97), was understood as expressing the melancholy of the consumptive poet as he sensed the approach of his early death. More recent readers have sometimes preferred to emphasize the poem's artifice – the ode closes with the speaker unsure whether he has really heard a nightingale or instead has had "a vision or a waking dream" – but Keats's contemporaries did not doubt that he was moved to reflect on beauty and mortality by the sound of a real nightingale pouring forth its soul in ecstasy in the fading light of dusk.

Chinese and Japanese poets often composed their verses for social occasions, but "occasional verses" have long been written in the West as well. Byron recorded many of his experiences in verses with titles such as "On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year: Missolonghi, Jan. 22, 1824" – a poem whose impact depends on the reader's awareness that Byron really was writing from the Greek town named in his subtitle, where he had gone to

fight in the cause of Greek independence. Even when Byron wrote about medieval knights or Spanish seducers, his “Byronic heroes” were thinly disguised versions of their creator. Childe Harold’s musings and Don Juan’s sexual escapades were seen as virtual entries from Byron’s journal, a viewpoint encouraged by many ironic asides within the poems.

For much of the twentieth century, on the other hand, Western literary critics often preferred to regard literary works as what the Yale New Critic William Wimsatt labeled “verbal icons”: self-contained artifacts whose meaning ought to be wholly expressed within the work itself, independent of biographical knowledge. Since the 1980s, however, literary studies have increasingly striven to return literary works to their original social, political, and biographical contexts, and in such readings it can once again make a difference whether Wordsworth’s sonnet was or was not truly written on September 3, 1802.

As a matter of fact, it probably wasn’t. William’s sister Dorothy accompanied him on the trip during which he was struck by the sight of early morning London from Westminster Bridge. She recorded the event in her diary for July 31, 1802, five weeks before the date given in Wordsworth’s title:

After various troubles and disasters, we left London on Saturday morning at 1/2-past 5 or 6. . . . We mounted the Dover Coach at Charing Cross. It was a beautiful morning. The City, St Pauls, with the River and a multitude of little Boats, made a most beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge. . . . there was even something like the purity of one of nature’s own grand spectacles. (Darbishire 194)

The shifting of the date suggests that the sonnet is not after all an “occasional poem” composed when Wordsworth had the perception he describes; even if the poem was first drafted in July, Wordsworth later brought its date forward in a significant way. For in late July, he was taking the Dover Coach on his way to spend a month in France, where he had lived for a year in 1791–1792 during the heady early days of the French Revolution. There he had shared the revolutionaries’ hopes for a radical remaking of society – hopes later dashed in the Reign of Terror and its imperial Napoleonic aftermath.

During his stay in revolutionary France, Wordsworth had plunged into an intense love affair with a Frenchwoman, Annette Vallon; their liaison had produced a daughter, Caroline, before Wordsworth’s family had insisted that he had to return home. In July 1802, engaged to be married in England, he was making a trip back to France to settle affairs with Annette; he would be seeing his daughter for the first time since her infancy a decade before. During this

trip he wrote a series of sonnets filled with regret about the course of the Revolution and – less obviously – about his failed romance with Annette Vallon and his brief reacquaintance with their daughter. Caroline appears, for instance, as the unidentified child in his sonnet “It Is a Beauteous Evening, Calm and Free,” set on the beach at Calais:

Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,  
 If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,  
 Thy nature is not therefore less divine:  
 Thou liest in Abraham’s bosom all the year;  
 And worshipp’st at the Temple’s inner shrine,  
 God being with thee when we know it not.  
 (Wordsworth 1:444)

Read biographically, this poem expresses Wordsworth’s ambivalent relief that Caroline is doing well without him, and if he can only visit very infrequently, she can have the patriarch Abraham holding her all year round.

The visit with Annette before his impending marriage cannot have been easy, and Wordsworth was ready to get away after a decent interval. In a sonnet “Composed by the Seaside, near Calais, August, 1802,” Wordsworth thinks longingly of returning home: “I, with many a fear / For my dear Country, many heartfelt sighs, / Among men who do not love her, linger here” (Wordsworth 2:40). A companion piece, “Composed in the Valley near Dover, on the Day of Landing,” expresses his feelings on his return to England: “Here, on our native soil, we breathe once more,” the sonnet begins. In place of the daughter left behind in France, Wordsworth comforts himself with the sight of English boys at play: “those boys who in yon meadow-ground / In white-sleeved shirts are playing; and the roar / Of the waves breaking on the chalky shore; — / All, all are English.” Home from the brief reunion with the lover of his youth, Wordsworth now experiences “one hour’s perfect bliss” with a different woman – his sister, Dorothy:

Thou art free,  
 My Country! and ’tis joy enough and pride  
 For one hour’s perfect bliss, to tread the grass  
 Of England once again, and hear and see,  
 With such a dear Companion at my side. (2:43–4)

Wordsworth, then, can be read like Du Fu as conveying his personal experiences and observations, rather than as representing the imaginary thoughts of an invented persona.



Admittedly, Wordsworth refers only very obliquely to his romantic entanglements; though he specifies dates and places, the sonnets never mention Annette, Caroline, or even his sister by name. Instead, Wordsworth develops his private drama into a contrast of English peace and freedom versus French turmoil and tyranny. Yet Du Fu also was typically indirect in alluding to his major source of unhappiness, the failure of his political ambitions and his banishment from the imperial court: he never names the Emperor or his political rivals, any more than Wordsworth is prepared to name Annette and Caroline.

The fundamental difference between the poet's role in the Chinese and English traditions, then, involves ways of reading as much as poetic practice. Yet the resulting poems do read quite differently, making different demands and assuming different habits of reading on our part. Du Fu's poems are inseparable from his life, whereas to read Wordsworth's sonnets in light of his biography is to make a choice that the poems sometimes hint at but never openly invite. In referring to a "dear Child" and a "dear Companion" in place of Caroline and Dorothy, Wordsworth may be offering an obscure half-confession, but he is also giving his readers a purposefully limited view into his life. The sonnets' themes require him to have a child and then a contrasting adult companion at his side, but the reader is not meant to be distracted by an overabundance of personal detail, which Wordsworth would have regarded as egotistical self-display.

By leaving the identities open, Wordsworth hopes to make his sonnets resonate more strongly for his readers, who can insert the faces of their own beloved children and companions in place of his. The shifting of the date of the Westminster Bridge sonnet, then, was something other than an act of autobiographical bad faith. Wordsworth's redating of the poem enabled him to place it at a time appropriate to the sonnet's poetic mood, the period of relieved return rather than the anxious day of departure. Altering the facts of his life even as he builds on them, Wordsworth is still working within the Western tradition of the poet as the maker of fictions.

Among the most famous of Du Fu's poems is the sequence of lyrics known under the overall title of "Autumn Meditations." These poems contain lines that could come from Wordsworth's sonnet cycle: "A thousand houses rimmed by the mountains are quiet in the morning light, / Day after day in the house by the river I sit in the blue of the hills. / . . . My native country, untroubled times, are always in my thoughts" (Graham 53). Closely though Du Fu and Wordsworth may converge in such observations, their methods are sharply different. Wordsworth served his poetic purposes by transposing "Westminster Bridge" from summer to autumn, but such a shift of timing would be nearly inconceivable in the Chinese

tradition. It never would have occurred to Du Fu to write an autumn sequence in midsummer, or to take a summer experience and place it in the autumn. Such a transposition would almost certainly have produced poetic absurdities if he had attempted it, as Chinese poetry is closely attuned to the passing seasons. Flowers, migrating birds, seasonal occupations, and more would have to change. Even with such changes, the very tone of a summer poem would have seemed jarring in an autumn setting, so a summer scene simply could not be passed off as an autumn event.

As different as the traditional Asian and European poetic systems were, over time their worlds came into contact. Even beyond the direct connections forged by imperial conquest, an emerging modernity affected many parts of the globe, and writers who never heard of each other could find themselves responding to broadly comparable economic and social developments. Thus, in more than one part of the world, the merchant class began to make itself heard with new force during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, decisively displacing the older aristocracy during the nineteenth century. Literary works began to treat this shift during its first phases, and fascinating comparisons can be made among works from very different cultures that were undergoing their own versions of this process.

As a case in point, I would like to look at *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1670) by the French playwright Molière, and *Love Suicides at Amijima* (1721) by Chikamatsu Mon'zaemon. These great playwrights were close contemporaries; Chikamatsu was twenty years old when Molière died. Though the French and Japanese theatrical traditions were completely independent of each other and varied in fundamental ways, in these plays both dramatists were thinking hard about the new social order that was starting to come into being around them. This common concern yields fascinating convergences – as well as equally interesting divergences – between their works.

Molière's title is intended as a paradox: a middle-class merchant was not supposed to be a gentleman. The term "gentilhomme" had originated in the Middle Ages to signify someone born within the extended circle of the nobility. Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, however, has deluded himself into thinking he can vault into the upper class by mere virtue of the wealth he has inherited from his father, a prosperous cloth merchant. He is embarrassed by his modest origins, and rejoices at the flattery of a servant who pretends that Jourdain's father had been a kind of connoisseur of cloth, not a merchant at all:

M. Jourdain: There are foolish people about who will have it that my father was in trade.

Coveille: In trade! Sheer slander! Never in his life! It was just that he was obliging, anxious to be helpful, and as he knew all about cloth he would go round and select samples, have them brought to his house and give them to his friends – for a consideration. (Molière 50)

Monsieur Jourdain knows, though, that to become a “gentilhomme” he must do more than cover up his origins: he needs education, refinement, and aristocratic tastes. So he has hired a dancing master, a music teacher, a fencing coach, and even a philosopher to give him all the cultural advantages a true gentleman should enjoy. The play opens with the music teacher and the dancing master arguing whether Jourdain’s lavish payments make up for the indignity of teaching him; though the dancing master is embarrassed to have such an uncultured client, the music teacher gladly puts up with Jourdain, for “his praise has cash value” (4).

In this world of trade and exchange, Jourdain isn’t content to trade up only in matters of taste. He insists that his daughter must marry a nobleman, and he personally hopes to enjoy the sexual license for which the French aristocracy was notorious. Though he has a wife of his own modest background, he is deeply in love – or so he claims – with Countess Dorimène, a woman so far above his station in life that he’s never managed to have a conversation with her. He does, however, enjoy the friendship of a dissolute nobleman named Dorante, whose name means “Golden” or “Glittering.” Dorante continually bleeds Jourdain for money to pay off tradesmen and to advance his own romance with Dorimène herself: he has been pretending to plead Jourdain’s case with her, but in reality he has been passing along Jourdain’s lavish presents as though they were his own.

A world away, Chikamatsu explored similar social tensions in *Love Suicides at Amijima*. His hero, Jihei, is a paper merchant; as the chanter who narrates the action says approvingly, “The paper is honestly sold, and the shop is well situated; it is a long-established firm, and the customers come thick as raindrops” (Chikamatsu 403). Like Jourdain, Jihei is married to a woman from his own walk of life, but he has fallen in love with someone above his means: Koharu, a high-class geisha, whose clients include samurai and other members of the nobility. Koharu has returned his love, and Jihei is desperate to buy her out of her brothel, but he has nothing like the money needed for the purpose. His romantic rival, a wealthy merchant named Tahei, is sure that money is all he needs to win Koharu: “when it comes to money, I’m an easy winner. If I pushed with all the strength of my money, who knows what I might conquer?” He believes that commerce has supplanted age-old social relations: “A customer’s a customer,” he says, “whether he’s a samurai or a townsman. The only difference is that one wears swords and the other doesn’t” (392).

In Japan as in France, clothing was a powerful marker of social status, and both Molière and Chikamatsu portray characters who try to adopt a new social role by donning a new costume. Monsieur Jourdain is obsessed with the extravagant, ill-fitting clothes his tailor foists off on him as the latest fashion among the nobility; he is discomfited that his wife and her maid can't stop laughing when they see him in his ridiculous plumes and ruffles. In *Love Suicides at Amijima*, Jihei dresses up to impress the proprietress of the brothel when he goes to buy Koharu's freedom, but on his way he is confronted by his angry father-in-law, who accuses Jihei of seeking to disguise his humble origins: "My esteemed son-in-law," he says sarcastically, "what a rare pleasure to see you dressed in your finest attire, with a dirk and a silken cloak! Ahhh – that's how a gentleman of means spends his money! No one would take you for a paper dealer" (411).

Both plays include speeches describing the act of dressing up as a form of play-acting. Molière's Monsieur Jourdain has refused to allow his daughter to marry her true love, Cléonte, because he isn't a nobleman, but the clever servant Coveille solves the problem by proposing "an idea I got from a play I saw some time ago" (42). He dresses Cléonte as a Turkish prince, and Jourdain is only too happy to accept this exotic nobleman as his son-in-law. The disguised Cléonte bestows upon Jourdain a fake title, "Mamamouchi" (vaguely derived from "Mameluke," an Ottoman military caste). Cléonte then costumes Jourdain in Turkish finery, prompting Jourdain's astonished daughter to exclaim: "Is this a play?"

Far more seriously, in *Love Suicides at Amijima* Jihei and Koharu have realized that they can never be free in their love, and they are planning to commit suicide. Desperately trying to prevent some such rash act, Jihei's brother Magoemon dresses up as a samurai and comes to Koharu in the guise of a customer, using the authority of his assumed upper-class rank to add weight to his words as he tries to dissuade her from throwing her life away. Magoemon feels like an actor in his samurai outfit: "Here I am," he grumbles, "dressed up like a masquerader at a festival or maybe a lunatic! I put on swords for the first time in my life and announced myself, like a bit player in a costume piece" (401).

In both plays, traditional social norms assert themselves beneath the new roles. The vulgar Tahei claims that samurai and commoners are all just customers, yet he retreats from the brothel in awe when confronted with a genuine samurai – in actual fact, Jihei's brother in samurai disguise (393). Monsieur Jourdain believes that clothes make the nobleman, but he can never fool anyone, partly because he hasn't even inherited enough skill from his cloth merchant father to know what an upper-class outfit should look like. Both Jihei and Jourdain find their love lives sharply constrained by their wives' refusal to play along. Jihei's wife,

Osan, is counseled by her aunt, who declares that “A man’s dissipation can always be traced to his wife’s carelessness. . . . You’d do well to take notice of what’s going on and assert yourself a bit more” (405). Osan confronts Jihei and even writes a letter of appeal to Koharu, puncturing their dream of simple togetherness. As the play proceeds, though, Osan comes to a deeper understanding of her husband’s bond with Koharu, and in an exceptional gesture of solidarity with both of them, Osan pawns her own clothing to help Jihei scrape together the money to buy Koharu’s freedom. Jihei then dresses in his finest clothing to go and ransom Koharu, only to have his disastrous encounter with his father-in-law, who refuses to accept any understanding between Jihei, Osan, and Koharu. The lovers choose suicide as their only way out of their unbearable situation.

In Molière’s comedy, society’s norms are asserted far more positively against the protagonist’s wishes, and this is a happy result even for Monsieur Jourdain, who never had any chance with Dorimène to begin with. Jourdain’s wife breaks up a dinner party he has arranged for Dorimène and Dorante; “I stand for my rights,” she tells her husband, “and every wife will be on my side” (49). Like Jihei’s wife, she confronts her rival directly: “as for you, madam, it ill becomes a fine lady to be causing trouble in a decent family and letting my husband think he’s in love with you” (48). This charge puzzles Dorimène, who has only just met Jourdain and believes that he is merely providing a convenient place for her to meet her suitor Dorante. She no more approves of crossing class boundaries than does Jourdain’s wife, who asserts that “marrying above one’s station always brings trouble” (41).

Molière and Chikamatsu both explored the stirrings of a new class mobility, using their own profession of acting as a powerful metaphor for life in a world of unstable social identities. Yet the differences between their plays are considerable as well, not only because of broad cultural differences but equally as a result of the personal choices the two playwrights had made in their own lives. Molière had come from the very merchant class he satirizes in his play. His father had been a wealthy upholsterer who had built on his connections to his noble clientele to promote himself and his family into a tenuous position within court circles – just the ambition of the cloth dealer’s son Jourdain, whom Molière actually played in the play’s premiere. Distancing himself from his roots even as he drew on them, Molière wrote *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* as a farce to entertain the court of Louis XIV; the serious tensions of class upheaval motivate the drama but are cast in a ridiculous light.

By contrast, *Love Suicides at Amijima* is a heart-rending tragedy, one of two dozen plays that Chikamatsu wrote about commoner life. Throughout the play, the middle-class

characters reveal depths of emotion and painful sensitivity that bourgeois characters rarely exhibit in Molière or indeed in most European drama of the day. The intense emotionality of Chikamatsu's characters is particularly impressive as they aren't embodied by human actors at all, since *Love Suicides at Amijima* is a puppet play. Chikamatsu had moved in the opposite social direction from Molière in establishing himself as his century's greatest master of the puppet theater. Born into a wealthy family of the samurai class, he had served in aristocratic households as a youth, but then had left the capital of Kyoto and moved to Osaka, center of the growing class of commoner merchants. There he became involved in the popular entertainment form of the puppet theater, full of colorful incidents and rollicking action. Chikamatsu helped develop puppetry into a remarkably fluid and intense form of art, with the puppets brought to life by solemn puppeteers as a narrator describes their fleeting joys and lasting grief, endowing the puppets with all the nuances of human emotion.

Watching Koharu through her latticed window as she entertains a customer, Jihei "beckons to her with his heart, his spirit flies to her," the narrator says; "but his body, like a cicada's cast-off shell, clings to the latticework. He weeps with impatience" (396). As Jihei helps Koharu slip away from the brothel to consummate their suicide pact, the simple opening of the door becomes a scene of agonizing suspense:

She is all impatience, but the more quickly they open the door, the more likely people will be to hear the casters turning. They lift the door; it makes a moaning sound that thunders in their ears and in their hearts. Jihei lends a hand from the outside, but his fingertips tremble with the trembling of his heart. The door opens a quarter of an inch, a half, an inch – an inch ahead are the tortures of hell, but more than hell itself they fear the guardian-demon's eyes. (418)

Finally they make their escape, and the narrator sorrowfully chants their progress toward their chosen place of death: "The frost now falling will melt by dawn, but even more quickly than this symbol of human frailty, the lovers themselves will melt away. What will become of the fragrance that lingered when he held her tenderly at night in their bedchamber?" (418).

Chikamatsu's world is both intensely realistic and freighted with poetic symbolism. In the play's final act, the doomed lovers cross a series of bridges with names such as Onari, "Becoming a Buddha." Whereas in a European play we would expect religious symbolism to stand on the side of the sacrament of marriage, Chikamatsu shows his hero and heroine progressing together to spiritual enlightenment at the play's end. Just before committing suicide, they cut off their hair, renouncing the world as if they are a monk and a nun; but they

look forward to being reborn together in the future. As Koharu says, “What have we to grieve about? Although in this world we could not stay together, in the next and through each successive world to come until the end of time we shall be husband and wife.” Koharu has made this expectation a centerpiece of her religious practice: “Every summer for my devotions I have copied the All Compassionate and All Merciful Chapter of the Lotus Sutra, in the hope that we may be reborn on one lotus” (420).

By infusing his play with such deep poetic and philosophical elements, Chikamatsu built a bridge of his own: between the rough-and-tumble world of the puppet play and the meditative, refined aristocratic art with which he had grown up. Like Chikamatsu, Molière made his mark by revolutionizing what had been a simpler, popular dramatic form: stage comedy up to his day had consisted largely of buffoonery, with stock characters played for broad humor by actors in colorful masks – human puppets, we might say. If Chikamatsu brought an aristocratic sensibility to the world of popular entertainment, Molière brought a down-to-earth realism to his portrayal of the aristocratic world. Though he wrote his play for the court, his portrayal of courtly life is hardly flattering: Dorimène is a cynic, and Dorante is a lying, manipulative creep. There can be little doubt that their marriage will be an endless series of infidelities and bad debts. The characters who are destined for happiness at the play’s end are the plain-spoken Cléonte and Jourdain’s lively, loving daughter Lucile – played by Molière’s wife at the play’s premiere. The future belongs to them, rather than to the aristocracy that Jourdain impossibly hopes to join.

Today’s literary cultures are far more closely intertwined than ever before, and it would now be an exceptional situation for a leading Japanese or French writer to know nothing of each other. Yet the question of incomparability persists today, taking new forms and requiring new methods of analysis. It may be that today’s writers are all more or less global citizens, and the worldwide spread of formerly regional forms such as the novel and the screenplay reinforce the global connectedness of much contemporary literature. Even formerly nation-specific poetic forms such as the haiku can be found widely around the world; the American poet James Merrill’s deeply moving haiku-filled travelogue “Prose of Departure” is only one of many contemporary responses to the legacy of Bashō.

I would like to suggest that for many writers today, the truly foreign literatures are not so much the works of their contemporaries elsewhere, but rather the classical works of their own tradition. As the British novelist L. P. Hartley memorably remarked at the outset of his 1953 novel *The Go-Between*, “The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.”

Increasingly, we find contemporary writers – often quite at home on the global stage – reflecting on the fundamental foreignness of their own national literary history. The foreignness of the past is particularly pronounced when a nation’s modernization entailed a wholesale social and literary restructuring, as when Kemal Atatürk shifted Turkish away from the Arabic alphabet and the older Ottoman traditions; Orhan Pamuk’s novel *My Name Is Red* is centrally concerned with the loss of a cultural history entailed in the shift from eastern to Western artistic values.

China, Korea, and Japan have all had notable experiences of dramatic social reform and attendant literary transformations. In both Korea and Japan, modernization included a turn toward Western technology and culture and away from the older close links to Chinese literature that writers such as Bashō had still experienced. Few Japanese readers of *the Tale of Genji* will know the many Chinese poems she alludes to, unless perhaps through translation, and they are likely to read the *Genji* itself in a modern translation – if not in manga form. In China and Korea as in Turkey, language reform has meant that most people today cannot read classical works without special training that few people acquire. Though some eighty percent of surviving classical Korean literature is written in Chinese, these are texts that few Koreans can read today.

A vivid expression of the sense of foreignness of earlier Korean writing can be seen in a poem by Pak Tujin (1916-1998), entitled “Inscription Etched by Water”:

One stroke at a time, now and then in spare moments  
 retracing the strokes with water  
 during ten times a hundred thousand years  
 I wrote  
 one word.  
 After a time, later again  
 quietly searching out the place, then  
 my hand’s touch exploring gently,  
 retracing each of the strokes,  
 after passing yet again ten times a hundred thousand years,  
 I wrote one word.  
 In the etched form of each stroke gleamed  
 a gorgeous rainbow,  
 in the sun’s rays lighting the water



a rainbow of the currents.  
 There were the times once when I listened,  
 inclined my ear to the messages, but  
 having heard  
 then afterward, and afterward  
 recorded the inner sense of those words,  
 now I find that  
 after carving a few ancient characters  
 year upon year, for too long,  
 I have completely forgotten  
 what words I wrote.  
 (Pak 126-27)

In Japan, perhaps no modern writer was more concerned – even obsessed – with the lost premodern past than Yukio Mishima. His most ambitious work, the pre-suicidal *Sea of Fertility* tetralogy, is almost an encyclopedia of strategies for interweaving a premodern Asian past and a global modernity. In the first volume, *Spring Snow*, Mishima satirizes both the old and the new orders of Japanese life. The classical literary and social heritage of the Heian period is embodied in the passive, decaying aristocracy of the Ayakura family of the book's heroine Satoko, while the progressive, Westernizing post-Meiji era is satirized in the figure of the crass Marquis Matsugae, ineffectual father to the book's alienated anti-hero Kiyooki.

Mishima was of course fatally invested in the idea that some version of a glorious pre-Meiji past should be revived, but his portrayal of the Ayakuras indicates that no direct recourse to past tradition is really possible. In the 1890s, Higuchi Ichiyo could see herself as a new Murasaki Shikibu, infusing a Heian sensibility with the commercial realism of Ihara Saikaku, but for Mishima in the 1960s the time had passed for any direct cultural or literary revival. What his novels suggest, though, are possibilities for more complex interanimations of Asian and European traditions. Thus the tetralogy's observer figure, Honda Shigekuni, struggles as a law student to make sense of the imported legal codes he is assigned to study, based in Roman law as adapted in the Meiji era. He corrects Roman law's artificial assumptions of rational order by recourse to "the broader and more ancient legal traditions of Asia" – specifically, the Laws of Manu. Significantly, however, he has no access to the Laws

of Manu in Japanese, much less in the original Sanskrit; instead, he reads them in “a French translation by Delongchamps” (*Spring Snow* 57).

Cut off from the classical training that would formerly have brought Indian learning to Japan in Chinese translation, Honda thus finds in French culture a means of connection to his lost Asian past. In the tetralogy as a whole, Mishima conducts a similar triangulation between ancient Asia and modern European culture, a complex process of interchange involving elements both of mutual support and mutual deconstruction, that takes him far beyond the Ayakura’s nostalgia or the Marquis Matsugae’s schizophrenic efforts to combine viewing of the moonlight with watching the latest five-reeler movie imported from Paris or Hollywood. Mishima’s anti-hero Kiyooki is a Genji with no purpose in life. Though Kiyooki is moved like the young Genji by an early glimpse of an unattainable princess, and actually first makes love with Satoko behind a Genji screen (187-91), he cannot bring himself to feel anything for her until he has an elaborate moment of recollection. Learning that Satoko (whom he has earlier rejected) has become engaged to a son of the Emperor, Kiyooki retires to his room, filled with an obscure satisfaction. He picks up a scroll that he and Satoko had used, years before, for writing exercises from the Hundred Poets, and as he bends over the scroll, a whiff of incense brings back “a powerful nostalgia” for their childhood days when they would study poetry together and play the traditional Heian game of *sugoroku* (178). In itself, this Heian-flavored nostalgia would likely be as ineffectual and evanescent as the Ayakuras’ dwelling in the past, but the scent of incense leads Kiyooki into a strikingly modernist, even Proustian moment of active recollection:

Each piece of the Empress’s confection, the prize for winning at *sugoroku*, had been molded in the form of the imperial crest. Whenever his small teeth had bitten into a crimson chrysanthemum, the color of its petals had intensified before melting away, and at the touch of his tongue, the delicately etched lines of a cool white chrysanthemum had blurred and dissolved into a sweet liquid. Everything came back to him – the dark rooms of the Ayakura mansion, the court screens brought from Kyoto with their pattern of autumn flowers, the solemn stillness of the nights, Satoko’s mouth opening in a slight yawn half-hidden behind her sweep of black hair – everything came back just as he had experienced it then, in all its lonely elegance. But he realized that he was now slowly admitting an idea that he had never dared entertain before.

Something sounded within Kiyooki like a trumpet call: *I love Satoko*. (178)

The chrysanthemum cookie, dissolving on Kiyooki's tongue, is his Proustian madeleine, and it does more than evoke memories of the past: it gives Kiyoo access to the world of Proustian desire. He now realizes that precisely because Satoko has become unavailable, engaged to the imperial Prince, she has finally become truly desirable to him – just the structure of triangular desire that René Girard has shown to work so pervasively in Proust's novel, from the early love affair of Swann and Odette to the tortured later relationship of his narrator and the ever-elusive Albertine. As Kiyooki realizes under the force of his cookie-induced recovery of time past, “His sexual impulses, so diffident until now, had been lacking just such a powerful impulse. It had taken so much time and effort to find his role in life” (179).

We can thus see a doubled movement across time and cultures in *Spring Snow*: the incense arising from the scroll of the Hundred Poets prompts the Proustian recollection of the chrysanthemum cookie, bringing Kiyoo to his true “role in life” as a Proustian lover. The result, though, is no simple imitation of Proust, a result that would be no better than the fatuous Westernization of Kiyoo's father the Marquis. Instead, Proust serves as a conduit to bring the story back to the world of Murasaki in a new and modernist way. Throughout the tetraology, Kiyoo has mysterious dreams, but these turn not to be a modernist means of working through remembrances of things past (as they are in Freud and in Proust). Instead, Kiyoo's dreams foreshadow his future reincarnations in the subsequent volumes of the series. Uniting his dreams and Honda's study of the Laws of Manu is the doctrine of reincarnation; what Kiyoo's dreams reveal, though he can't know this at first, can be called remembrances of things future.

It is Honda who finally discerns this pattern, and also its ultimate meaninglessness, following “the decay of the angel” and Kiyoo's definitive death in the fourth volume. Honda then makes a pilgrimage to see Satoko, who is now eighty years old and a nun, only to find that she professes no memory whatever of her epochal early love affair with Kiyoo. “Did you really know a person called Kiyooki?” she asks Honda. “And can you say definitely that the two of us have met before?” (*The Decay of the Angel*, 246). This most Proustian of Japanese novels has not brought Honda to a triumphant *temps retrouvé*, but to “a place that had no memories, nothing,” as he reflects in the final lines of the novel as “the noontide sun of summer flowed over the still garden” (247) – the words that Mishima wrote on the day he went out to commit suicide. Yet we could also say that this long Proustian detour has brought us to a rather specific literary place, novelistic equivalent of the “poetic places” that Bashō loved to visit and write poetry about. Where the novel has brought us is, in fact, to the end of *The Tale of Genji* – a *Genji* reborn under a the stark modern light of the noontide sun in place of a delicate Heian moon. Satoko's proclaimed or genuine failure to recall her love affair with

Kiyo closely mirrors the ending – or non-ending – of Murasaki’s great romance, after the death of the shining Genji, who is narratively reborn in a darker mode in the dual forms of Niou and Kaoru, anti-heros of the Uji chapters that occupy the last third of the book. At the very end of the chapters we have, the desperate Ukifune, fleeing entrapment by her unwelcome suitor Kaoru, has insisted on shaving her hair and becoming a nun, claiming amnesia so as to conceal her identity. Kaoru tracks her down and sends her a letter, using Ukifune’s young brother as a messenger. “Have you forgotten this boy?” he asks in his letter after begging to see her; “I keep him beside me in memory of someone who vanished without a trace” (Murasaki 2:1119).

Murasaki’s apparently unfinished narrative breaks off here, so that we can never know whether Ukifune will succeed in escaping from the world, but Mishima gives Satoko the success in renunciation that Ukifune may never achieve. “Memory is like a phantom mirror,” she tells Honda; “It sometimes shows things too distant to be seen, and sometimes it shows them as if they were here.” Bewildered, Honda stammers,

“But if there was no Kiyooki from the beginning . . . There was no Ying Chan, and who knows, perhaps there has been no I.”

For the first time there was strength in her eyes.

“That too is as it is in each heart.” (246)

Mishima has used Proust to reincarnate the Heian world on new terms, and he uses Murasaki to deconstruct Proust in turn. This double process frees Mishima from imitative dependence on either tradition, even as he draws deeply upon both of them. It is the incommensurability of ancient and modern eras, Asian and European traditions, that fuels Mishima’s most ambitious contribution to modern world literature, in ways that can be compared to the exploration of incommensurability in writers as various as Orhan Pamuk and Pak Tujin. Comparative incommensurability: a new dimension in the study of world literature today.

## Works Cited

- Bashō, Matsuo. *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Tr. Haruo Shirane. In Damrosch et al., eds., *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*. New York: Pearson Longman, 6 vols., 2004. D: 412ff.
- Caws, Mary Ann, et al., eds. *The HarperCollins World Reader*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.
- Chikamatsu Mon'zaemon. *Love Suicides at Amijima*. In *Major Plays of Chikamatsu*, tr. Donald Keene. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- Darbishire, Helen, ed. *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Hartley, L. P. *The Go-Between*. London: Hamilton, 1953.
- Keats, John. Keats, ed. *Howard Moss*. New York: Dell, 1959.
- MacLeish, Archibald. "Ars Poetica." In Robert Hass et al., eds., *American Poetry: The Twentieth Century*. New York: Library of America, 1:846–7.
- Mishima Yukio, Spring Snow, tr. Michael Gallagher. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Decay of the Angel*, tr. Edward G. Seidensticker. New York: Washington Square Press, 1974.
- Molière, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin. *The Miser and Other Plays*, tr. John Wood. Baltimore: Penguin, 1953.
- Murasaki Shikibu. *The Tale of Genji*, tr. Royall Tyler. New York: Viking, 2 vols., 2001.
- Owen, Stephen. *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.
- Pak Tujin, "Inscription Etched by Water," trans. Edward W. Poitras. In David R. McCann, ed., *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Korean Poetry*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, 126-28.
- Sidney, Sir Phillip. *The Defense of Poesy*. In Michael Payne and John Hunter, eds., *Renaissance Literature: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, 501–26.
- Wordsworth, William. *The Poems of William Wordsworth*, ed. Nowel Charles Smith. London: Methuen, 3 vols., 1908.

比較できないものを比較する  
世界文学 杜甫から三島由紀夫まで

国際シンポジウム『世界文学とは何か?』における基調講演  
2011年11月12日、於東京大学文学部1番大教室

デイヴィッド・ダムロッシュ

私の著書『世界文学とは何か?』で中心的に扱ったのは、文学作品が元来の環境の外へ出て、翻訳され世界文学のグローバル空間に入って新しいものになるとき、作品に何が起るのかという問題だった。しかし、ここで私が論じたいのは、異質な伝統間に見られる断絶をどう考えるべきということだ。その断絶は決して絶対的なものではない。そして今日のグローバル時代にあっては、各伝統の持つ共約不可能性こそが、新たな重要な役割を果たすということを示したい。

(1) まず、東アジアとヨーロッパで、詩作がどのように捉えられてきたかを比較しよう。西洋の伝統では、文学は詩人や作家が「作る」もの(ポイエーシス)である。他方、中国や日本では、杜甫や芭蕉の詩を見ればわかるように、文学は現実に深く根ざしたもので、詩人は自分の観察と経験をありのままに書くとされた。しかし、この違いを強調しすぎるべきではない。それは本質的な差というより、程度の問題である。杜甫や芭蕉の詩もまた緻密につくり上げられた構築物という側面を持つものに対して、ワーズワースは<詩人=フィクションの作り手>とする西洋の伝統の内部で詩作しているにもかかわらず、その作品の背後には伝記的要素が秘められている。

(2) 17世紀から18世紀にかけて、世界の様々な場所で、商人階級が新たな力を得て自らの声を響かせはじめ、19世紀に至り旧来の貴族制を決定的に退去させた。文学はこうした推移を、初期段階からいち早く取り上げた。まったく異なる文化圏が、同様の推移を経験したため、そこから生まれた作品どうしの興味深い比較が可能になる。格好の例として、フランスの劇作家モリエールの『町人貴族』(1670)と近松門左衛門の『心中天網島』(1721)を挙げよう。日仏の演劇の伝統はまったく別のものだったが、これら二人の戯曲家は勃興しつつあった新たな社会秩序への関心を共有していた。そのおかげで、二人の作品の間には興味深い一致が見いだせるのである。

(3) 現在多くの作家たちにとって真の「外国文学」とは、外国の同時代の文学よりも、自分の伝統における古典作品のほうではないだろうか。日本の近代作家のなかで三島由

紀夫ほど、前近代の失われた過去に深い関心を持ったものもないだろう。『豊饒の海』四部作は、前近代アジアの過去と、グローバルな近代性を織りあわせる方策の百科事典と言ってもいい。三島は平安時代の世界を新しく蘇らせるためにプルーストを用い、さらにプルーストを脱構築するために紫式部を用いた。この二重のプロセスのおかげで、三島はどちらの伝統に対しても、深く依拠しながら、単なる模倣に終わらずに済んでいる。近代世界文学に対する三島の最大の貢献の原動力となっているのは、古代と近代、そしてアジアの伝統とヨーロッパの伝統の共約不可能性である。そして共約不可能性の比較こそは、今日の世界文学研究の新しい一面なのである。