Introduction: China in English Literary Modernity

The century between the Restoration and the mid-eighteenth century saw the spread of literacy and readership amid a general expansion and commodification of the literary market. The field of literary production and distribution was dramatically transformed during this period as England emerged from the ravages of the Civil War and began its ascent to a modern imperial world power. We see greater productivity in agriculture and a tremendous growth in trade; a rise in literacy rates; the development of the Post Office and improvements in transportation; the founding of the Bank of England and the rise of the modern financial infrastructure.[1] English literary modernity is indissolubly tied to these rapid social, technological, and commercial changes commonly identified with the dawn of the modern world. However, the kinds of literary changes I am most interested in cannot be attributed to these changing historical conditions in any simple fashion: the rise of the novel, the writing of the first national literary histories, the solidification of a native English literary canon, the burst of review and aesthetic criticism in the periodical press, the spread of serial publication, the flourishing of intercontinental translations, the theorization of a native vernacular antiquity embodied in oral song. Indeed, the historical self-consciousness and national self-awareness that we see emerging in these new genres and modes of literary production engage powerfully with the notion of historical progress vis-à-vis an anterior age but always in multiple, complex, and sometimes contradictory ways.

The story that I wish to tell about English literary modernity is about the unfolding of the idea of the modern in the literature of this period. It is a story about the ways in which the idea of the modern inflects the production of literature as well as reflections on the new literary productions of the time. By no means do I wish to suggest that all literary production in this period is self-consciously 'modern' or that 'modern' works understand their modernity in any one particular way. I do believe, however, that English literature of the long eighteenth century was both interested

and invested in defining its timeliness (or untimeliness) in comparative terms. Like Kathleen Wilson, then, I understand modernity not simply as one "unfolding set of relations" with the past but as "a set of relations that are constantly being made and unmade, contested and reconfigured, that nonetheless produces among its contemporaneous witnesses the conviction of historical *difference*."[2] The challenge of my work is to account for the ways in which this idea of historical difference in English literary modernity was always already profoundly intertwined with notions of cultural difference as well. In this book, I track the particular relationship between the growing cultural awareness of China and the emergence of a modern English literary consciousness.

The theorizing and writing of modern English literary identity occurred in the midst of rising awareness of cultural, political, and social alternatives that formed an important part of the new print knowledge. National literary tradition was invented in dialectical relation to other traditions and histories, which operated variously as models to emulate, standards against which to measure oneself, and benchmarks to overcome. A "comparative perspective" was at work when English Renaissance writers struggled to prove that literature written in vernacular English need not languish behind classical texts, or when Restoration writers confronted French cultural hegemony.[3] As Alok Yadav has emphasized, well into the eighteenth century English writers openly aired their anxiety about using a weak language and belonging to a provincial cultural community.[4] With the increasing success of England's overseas ambitions, however, it became fashionable to compare English culture more favorably to other, non-European cultural sites, and English literary culture moved in more confidently to claim a superior position in the world republic of letters.[5] A sense of relative cultural lack would continue to haunt the English, however. It would do so noticeably in English encounters with China.

A growing body of scholarship on the relationship between China and eighteenth-century Britain has recently emerged to tell this story of cross-cultural encounter and influence in different ways.[6] Robert Markley has demonstrated that an economic fascination with the fabled riches of China and the Far East underwrites English literary production in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and David Porter has shown that no discussion of eighteenth-century English taste can be complete without attending to "the semiotic fluidity and transformative potency" of chinoiserie in this period.[7] Expanding on the definition of chinoiserie as "things Chinese," Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins has recently proposed that "Chineseness" is "an English literary effect" crucial to the definition of

English selfhood.[8] Similarly, Chi-ming Yang has shown that ideas about Chinese exemplarity – both economic and moral – modulated eighteenth-century English ideas of virtue. Together, the work of the above critics transforms the discipline of eighteenth-century English literature as we know it, challenging us to place it in a far-reaching global context that few now can afford to ignore. While my book touches on many of the same topics treated in these books, it is more particularly geared toward China's influence on English literary history and form. The central question it raises is: what *literary* difference did China make? In particular, how did an imaginative concern with China shape the invention of new literary forms and genres in this period? My approach has resonances with Yang's in so far as I identify China most of all with a "paradoxical temporality" – "the paradox of its being an ancient yet modern" civilization – but I connect the English interest in Chinese temporality to the formal and aesthetic invention of literary modernity rather than the desire for Chinese exemplarity.[9] Thus, while I share a general field interest in the topics discussed by the above critics, I am less concerned with exploring China as an ambiguous and ambivalent figure of legitimacy/illegitimacy or virtue/vice. And while I share Zuroski Jenkins's interest in Chineseness as a literary effect, I am less specifically interested in "Chineseness as an English literary effect that is ascribed to *objects*" or in a "literary history of *material* things in English life."[10]

My project grew out of my discovery of China's place in an intellectual controversy that permanently affected the course of English literary history: namely, the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. The quarrel is widely accepted today as a defining moment in the birth of modern consciousness in both the arts and sciences – although it would take a long time before 'modern literature' could overcome the authority and the aura of the ancients. I have previously argued against the standard account that the quarrel was chiefly about the relative merits of ancient (classical) and modern (European vernacular) literature, or the contrasting achievements of ancient and modern European science.[11] What was truly at stake in this quarrel, I proposed, was a fundamental shift in the understanding of world history (or "universal history," as it was then called) which, in light of new information pouring in from the 'new' worlds of the Americas as well as the 'old' worlds of the Near and Far East, could no longer be contained within the boundaries of biblical time and narrative. There was arguably no greater challenge to biblical history than ancient Chinese history, the records of which predated the deluge by many centuries. Jesuit reports marveled at the astonishing continuity of Chinese history and the

precision of its documentary record. Ancient Chinese history, they noted, was remarkably free of miracles and punctuated by precise dates and astronomical observations. On the strength of its prodigious, evidentiary documentation, Chinese antiquity threatened not only to throw biblical chronology into question but also to set a new standard in ancientness and thereby become a new origin for universal history.

When William Temple proposed in his 1690 *Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning* that the "Seeds" of ancient Greek civilization could be found in ancient Chinese "Learning and Opinions," he was responding to the new histories of China available in his time.[12] His essay demonstrates familiarity with such texts as Alvaro Semedo's *History of that Great and Renowned Monarchy of China* (1655), Martino Martini's *Bellum Tartaricum, or the Conquest of The Great and most Renowned Empire of China, By the Invasion of the Tartars* (1655), Johan Nieuhof's *Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham Emperor of China* (1669), and Gabriel de Magalhães's *A New History of China* (1688).[13] William Wotton, whose 1694 *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* launched the English quarrel, took Temple to task for being unsound, unscientific, and most of all, unchristian in his enthusiasm for China. Against Temple's historical and cultural relativism, Wotton asserted the clear superiority of modern European science over Chinese scientific learning, dismissed the records of Chinese antiquity as merely spurious, and scoffed at the pieties of Chinese moral philosophy, which he trivialized as "an incoherent Rhapsody."[14] Wotton conceded that the ancients excelled in the arts in general, as well as in moral and political philosophy, and claimed decisive 'modern' superiority only for natural science. He had nothing good to say about Temple's enthusiasm for China, however. Compared to their relative agreement on the value of classical learning, this disagreement on Chinese history and culture is striking. Reading the English quarrel between the ancients and the moderns as the symptom of a general cultural impasse brought on by the challenge of radically different chronologies and epistemologies, I propose, enables us to place the controversy in a larger, global context, and to interpret it not simply as a struggle to understand English modernity in comparison with the western classical past, but also in connection with other, radically different, pasts, histories, and cultures.

As Douglas Lane Patey puts it, the quarrel continues to mark a "watershed": "in the Moderns' rejection of the authority of the Ancients, their texts, and the rules drawn from them, we can locate the birthplace not only of eighteenth-century criticism but of modern thought."[15] Although it has

been pointed out that similar versions of the quarrel can be found much earlier in European history and that the "historical self-consciousness with which the *moderni* have squared off against the *antiqui*" is a "literary constant, as normal and natural in the history of European culture as the alternation of generations is in biology," critics nonetheless agree that, in the long run, the quarrel drew a lasting line between older and newer models of history, science, and taste.[16] The resulting "two most important consequences" of the quarrel, according to Paul O. Kristeller, were as follows:

> First, the Moderns broadened the literary controversy into a systematic comparison between the achievements of antiquity and of modern times in the various fields of human endeavor, thus developing a classification of knowledge and culture that was in many respects novel, or more specific than previous systems. Secondly, a point by point examination of the claims of the ancients and moderns in the various fields led to the insight that in certain fields, where everything depends on mathematical calculation and the accumulation of knowledge, the progress of the moderns over the ancients can be clearly demonstrated, whereas in certain other fields, which depend on individual talent and on the taste of the critic, the relative merits of the ancients and moderns cannot be so clearly established but may be subject to controversy.[17]

Ultimately, it was this 'modern' position that insisted on separating the arts and sciences, and claiming that the sciences were progressive in a way that the arts were not, that would dominate over the 'ancient' position that was much more skeptical about the achievement of modern science. Like most accounts of the quarrel, however, Kristeller's summary glosses over the fact that the "systematic comparison" between the achievements of the ancients and moderns also entailed a systematic comparison not only between the modern Europeans and their ancient, 'classical' forebears, but between Europe and the rest of the world. It is only when this global span of the quarrel is taken properly into consideration that the full political and cultural implications of the quarrel become abundantly clear.

Within Europe, the quarrel led to a lasting division between the progressive sciences and the non-progressive arts in modern European culture. Concurrently, it also gave rise to an aggressive program of comparing the achievements of Europe with those of ancient and modern Egypt, Arabia, India, and China in which this distinction between science and culture would sometimes be forgotten. In Dipesh Chakrabarty's words, the historicism that resulted from the quarrel came to posit "historical time as a measure of the cultural distance (at least in institutional development) that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West." By the

nineteenth century, modern historicism became a key intellectual tool for the imperial conquest of the world by Europe: "Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global over time, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it."[18] Modernity, in short, became a global geopolitical idea and narrative. This, however, is a later development. In its initial phase, the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns was all about looking for a vocabulary and a conceptual framework that would make it possible to compare ancient and modern, eastern and western civilizations, on whose relative values thinkers were hardly in agreement. The intellectual drive to compare different civilizations and cultures along evaluative axes of relative superiority and inferiority is one we have been trained to regard with skepticism, precisely because of the politics of modernity, especially of the kind described by Chakrabarty. When we examine the original quarrel, however, it is evident that the intellectual effort of trying to think of numerous different scientific and cultural achievements together in a global context was in many ways a positive and necessary response to increasing contact between Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia. The quarrel shows that intellectuals were actively taking stock of new information about distant civilizations and remapping their knowledge of the world. It was a profoundly worldly quarrel in this sense, a response to real changes and exchanges taking place globally in the realms of trade, diplomacy, religion, and politics. At the same time, however, it was also an imaginative quarrel based on imperfect, second-hand knowledge of distant lands and cultures. It was never clear what kind of commensurability could be established between what seemed to be radically different civilizations. Nonetheless, the quarrel shows us that an emerging global consciousness was beginning to exert pressure on existing, self-contained canons of knowledge in Europe, including canons of literature, forcing thinkers to formulate with much greater precision the criteria of cultural value.

In literature, too, the quarrel effectively introduced ideas of cultural alterity and plurality, ultimately opening up the canon to include a wider spectrum of writers from the vernacular past, encouraging vernacular translations of non-classical literatures, and even turning Homer's characters into "Strangers."[19] According to Patey, the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns "contributed to an understanding of all human works as historical products (cultural constructions) and consequently to a relativization of taste, increased interest in non-classical cultures both past and present, and ultimately to that late eighteenth-century body of thinking we have come to call 'historicism.'"[20] This early form of historicism was

explorative, self-critical, and curious about non-European cultures. In the English quarrel it was Temple, not Wotton, who was truly committed to the "relativization of taste" and "increased interest in non-classical cultures both past and present."[21] This is why, if we examine the English quarrel primarily for its impact on English literary history, we realize that the ancients had a much more lasting impact than initially may seem apparent. For this reason, Temple has turned out to be the surprising hero in this book (*Figure 1*). Temple's 'ancient' skepticism about the virtues of the English language notwithstanding, his ideas about the English national character and his theory of genius, as well as his interest in China, provided a fertile groundwork that later writers would turn to again and again. Addison's *A Discourse on Ancient and Modern Learning*; Hume's essays "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," "Of National Characters," and "Of the Standard of Taste"; and Goldsmith's *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* and "On National Prejudices" all show a keen awareness of the multifaceted dimensions of Temple's writings. In this sense, contrary to his own 'ancient' propositions, Temple ironically was a key contributor to the cultural shift that began to take shape in the aftermath of the quarrel, resulting in a broad transition from the classic to the modern.

In *The Making of the English Literary Canon*, Trevor Ross narrates the background to what he calls the "anti-classicist revolution" of the eighteenth century in terms of major shifts in poetic production.[22] Drawing on the work of J. G. A. Pocock, he notes that, as the older values of civic humanism and republicanism came into conflict with a newer ideology of commercial humanism, the field of literary production became increasingly autonomized as a sphere independent of politics. Whereas the older literary values of eloquence and rhetoric had strong "traditional associations with ritual demonstrations of male valour and productivity in the world of practical affairs," and upheld "a heroic ideal for poetry" that it traced back to the classics, the waning of patronage and the rise of a commerce-based system of publication led to a great diminishment of the political value of writing and, concomitantly, to a redefinition of poetic values. As classicism declined as a model for literary production, a new poetic theory based on "lyrical expressivity, as well as upon feeling, fancy and passion, categories of experience traditionally equated with the feminine" emerged.[23] The force of this cultural change can be gauged in part by the fierce opposition it created. Pope's withering portrait in *The Dunciad* of the modern literary sphere as "a new Saturnian age of Lead" presided over by the Goddess Dulness (Book 1, line 26), "Daughter of Chaos and eternal

Fig 1 Jacobus Houbraken, *Sir William Temple*. Engraving. 1738. Harvard Art Museums/ Fogg Museum, Gift of William Gray from the collection of Francis Calley Gray, G1987. © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Night" (Book 1, line 10), is probably the most famous example.[24] For Ross, the decline of classicism amounted to a "poetic revolution" because it "coincided with a reorganization of the cultural field so extensive as to alter the relations and position-takings within the field." In other words, it was not a question of a set of rival positions sorting themselves out within the cultural field. Rather, "whatever the specific values endorsed by writers, the cultural field in general was no longer seen as supporting a set of political relationships and was thus bereft of its former source of legitimacy."[25] Placed in a new context of commercial humanism, and increasingly dissociated from the progressive sciences, the field of culture itself was redefined as, on the one hand, an autonomous field of the imagination and, on the other hand, an object of consumption. It was this ambiguity of the cultural field, caught between autonomy and irrelevance, that prompted the extravagant alarm in Pope's poem.

As the conditions of cultural production underwent a profound change, so did the producers and the products. In literary terms, the period discussed in this book – the late seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century – marks the transition from an older world dominated by the figure of the classical poet to that of the professional writer, novelist, editor, and periodical author. The eighteenth century made way for eclectic new genres that replaced the high modes of epic and dramatic poetry. The break between the old and the new was more startling yet in prose production. As J. Paul Hunter puts it, there was a "nearly universal perception in England by midcentury that a literary revolution was taking place": "New readers, new modes of literary production, new tastes, and a growing belief that traditional forms and conventions were too constricted and rigid to represent modern reality or to reach modern readers collaborated to mean – in the eyes of both proponents and critics – that much modern writing was taking radical new directions."[26] Hunter defines the new species of writers as "moderns who championed novelty as a major tenet in their program to discover an originality and literary innovation that would appropriately represent 'modern' experience."[27] What the new modern writing would look like was initially far from clear. Hunter proposes that "Claims for novelty in the literary world – claims that a significant interruption of tradition had occurred and that new forms and directions had taken over" came in "two waves two generations apart." He dates the beginnings of the first wave – experimental, audacious, and as yet undefined in terms of literary form – to the 1690s, precisely the decade in which the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns took place. Instancing John Dunton's *Athenian Mercury* as a prime example of this first wave of new writing, Hunter notes

that it was singularly unabashed in its call to "lovers of Novelty" as well as inattentive to the question of literary form. Unlike this first wave, which coincided with the careers of the great Augustans such as Pope and Swift, who loved to satirize the moderns, and was formally "unfocused, sprawling across genres and modes more or less indiscriminately," the second wave of the 1740s was centered on a new and "hitherto unattempted" "species of writing" that eventually became synonymous with novelty itself: that is, the novel.[28]

According to Jonathan Kramnick's account of the making of the English canon in the first half of the eighteenth century, the "narrative of progressive and unfolding refinement" in English letters and search after a "polite modernity" were part of a progressive, Whig version of history which celebrated the ascendancy of English literature along with English commerce and national culture. In an ironical reversal, however, this Whiggish view of English cultural history also produced an anxiety about the effects of the market economy on letters as well as a "nostalgia for the literary past," which resulted in the weakening of the narrative of refinement and a rediscovery of the value of the ancients.[29] This time around, however, the ancients in question were the English ancients: Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare. The "battle between the ancients and the moderns, now staged within English culture itself," thus produced an antiquated national canon and a national literary history which could be called 'modern' in one sense (in so far as all English writing written in the vernacular was 'modern' in contrast to literature written in the classical languages of Latin and Greek) and yet also 'classic' (in the sense of establishing a canon of literature that would serve as a standard of greatness for all literature to come).[30] In this way, England's 'modern classics' were born as a new canon of national literature.

When I refer to English literary modernity in this book, then, it is with these different kinds of histories in mind. None of these literary histories simply privileges the dawn of the modern, but situates the birth of the modern in complex and shifting relations to classical heritage, the public sphere, the marketplace, and the nation. The reason why I focus on the works of Daniel Defoe, Joseph Addison, Oliver Goldsmith, and Thomas Percy in this book is because I find their innovations in literary form most relevant for my exploration of English literary modernity.[31] These authors were all active participants in the new literary sphere made possible by the growth of the commercial print market, the spread of commercial humanism, and the receptivity toward novel experiments in literary production. In this sense, they would appear to be good representatives of English

literary modernity in the sense discussed by Ross and Hunter. Defoe wrote without regard for classical models of writing, modeling his literary production instead on journalism, criminal biography, and the new sciences. Addison was a champion of vernacular rather than classical literacy and molded a cultural theory for a new commodity culture. Goldsmith began his career as a Grub Street hack and plied his pen for the commercial press, though often reflecting bitterly on the fate of the professional writer in a corrupt republic of letters. And Percy, the gentleman scholar, excavated an alternative set of 'reliques' and marketed them as England's rich and antique literary heritage. Each of these writers has a different use for the concept of the 'modern.' And although they were all important commentators on China, their attitudes toward China likewise differed greatly. They can hardly all be aligned with Wotton's position; in many instances, they show great sympathy for Temple's ideas. What they do have in common, however, is a pressing need to theorize, in their own ways, their position in the ancients-and-moderns debate as a way of reflecting on the value and meaning of their own cultural productions. They are all legatees of the quarrel in this sense. The key argument in this book is that, in all these authors' strategies of self-definition, there is a keen awareness of what I have called the global, and especially Chinese, context of the English quarrel – a context that goes missing, however, in the literary histories I have cited above. Connecting the eighteenth-century discussion of China back to the original English quarrel helps explain why China keeps appearing in multifarious and striking ways in the literature of the first half of the eighteenth century. It also proves that literary history took place in a much wider world than national literary histories would like us to believe.

The quarrel between the ancients and the moderns greatly enlarged the framework of historical inquiry both in space and in time, with the result of defamiliarizing and estranging the present. After the quarrel, Kirsti Simonsuuri writes, the moderns "looked at the culture of antiquity for the first time from the standpoint of a stranger."[32] They also looked at themselves from the eyes of strangers, of whom perhaps the most challenging representative was the Chinese. In her examination of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century books on China that were marketed in France and England, Laura Hostetler shows that the European "authors framed their works with self-conscious comparison in mind"; "achievements at home became measured in terms of what was known (or imagined) about points of reference abroad." These books thus activated a form of "early-modern exchange, which provided a window onto another world" and "also provided a mirror" in which Europeans might see themselves

"through the eyes of the other." Thinking about and thinking through China, in other words, served as a rhetorical way to look objectively at the European self. For Hostetler, this "global awareness of one's own realm in relation to that of the larger world was a hallmark of early modernity reaching into many facets of the period, including trade, technology, diplomacy, and the representation of state power in art."[33] These comments can be used as a poignant introduction to Goldsmith's project in his Chinese letters of impersonating a Chinese philosopher in London. As I shall show, however, this strategy of "self-conscious comparison" with China is not specific to Goldsmith but very widely shared by other writers such as Defoe, Addison, and Percy. For them, China is not simply an object of representation or misrepresentation, but a thinking tool through which they arrive at a self-conscious appraisal of their modern cultural moment. As Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy, and Steven G. Yao write in their introduction to *Sinographies*, " 'China' is not something one thinks about but something one thinks through; it is a provocation; it realizes itself various as subject, process, and end of articulate thinking."[34]

In English literary modernity, China became a means of thinking about the modern in comparative, cultural, and historicist terms, as well as a tool for thinking about the distinctive modality of modern time. As Johannes Fabian has noted, "Time, much like language or money, is a carrier of significance, a form through which we define the content of relations between the Self and the Other."[35] In this book, I follow up on this central insight of Johannes Fabian to ask how notions of time and temporality operate in tandem with notions of identity and difference in the representation of China in English literary modernity. English literary modernity was committed, on the one hand, to a model of decentered, secular, linear time in which universality was understood not in terms of one's incorporation into sacred history but as synchronicity. As Benedict Anderson put it, the modern understanding of simultaneity in time is that of "transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar."[36] Modernity was not quite "an idea of 'homogeneous, empty time,' " however.[37] It entailed, crucially, a comparative and evaluative idea of historical progress. Had China made achievements equal to Europe's in terms of progress in the arts and sciences? This question would never have taken on the importance it did had it not been for the additional evidence of Chinese material culture in the eighteenth century. The technological superiority of many Chinese luxury imports such as porcelain suggested that the Chinese were indeed 'modern' in relation to Europeans, if the

word meant outdoing and outperforming them.[38] A growing sense of economic and political competition with China led some writers to employ what Fabian has called "devices of temporal distancing" in order to deny coevalness, and to relegate China to a different historical time – in other words, to claim it had not progressed equally in history.[39] We thus see emerging in English literary modernity a discourse of Chinese difference that writes China in terms of both spatial distance and temporal disjunction, as non-coincidence and non-identity.

China also overdetermined the process through which the concept of beauty became temporalized and relativized – in short, modernized – to become a category of history and time. "It was during the eighteenth century," Matei Calinescu writes, "that the idea of beauty began to undergo the process through which it lost its aspects of transcendence and finally became a historical category."[40] During the eighteenth century, beauty became an idea of "irregularity, asymmetry, variety, surprise" (as opposed to an idea of simplicity, unity, harmony) and an experience of *change in time* (rather than an experience of timelessness and transcendence).[41] In his essay *Upon the Gardens of Epicurus*, Temple famously gave the name "*Sharawadgi*" to "this sort of Beauty," a "Beauty … without order" found commonly "among the *Chineses*" who scorned "Proportions, Symmetries, or Uniformities" in their gardens – a beauty, he noted, that "we have hardly any Notion of." During the course of the eighteenth century, this purportedly Chinese idea of beauty "without order," an artificially disordered beauty calculated to exact the "greatest reach of Imagination," would be widely debated, practiced, and appropriated, to become an important principle of garden design, nature appreciation, and general aesthetic practice in England.[42] Joseph Addison, who in 1712 generalized Temple's comments on Chinese gardens to theorize the pleasure the imagination takes in "Every thing that is new or uncommon," that "fills the Soul with an agreeable Surprise, gratifies its Curiosity, and gives it an Idea of which it was not before possest," cleared the theoretical grounds for the transformation of the supposed Chinese idea of beauty into an aesthetics of repeatedly renewable modernity – namely, novelty.[43] Aligning a particular spatial organization (asymmetry, imbalance, irregularity) with a temporal experience (surprise), and vice versa, novelty honors modernity as an aesthetic experience of constant change and pleasure taken in that change. As an interpretation of modernity, however, novelty also points to a central aporia in the idea of the modern: namely, its epistemological status as a vanishing point in time, for the new is what is so only for an instant before it bows to the next new thing. Modernity, in this understanding, is not an

experience of linear time so much as a repeated experience of a permanent transience.

The connection between modernity and the 'gardening' of time helps us understand the relation between modernity and tradition. As Kramnick puts it in his study of English canon-making in the eighteenth century, "Modernity generates tradition." However, I would contest his statement that English tradition and English antiquity were "patterned on the prior notion of the classical age of Greece and Rome" and that "In the initial fray between Wotton and Temple, the period term 'ancient' referred exclusively to Greco-Roman antiquity."[44] The idea of English antiquity, as that of modernity, was increasingly patterned on the non-classical worlds which crowded and changed English cultural consciousness in the early modern era and forced it to re-map itself in the world. A prime instance is the impulse to exoticize the past and to elevate it into a historical curiosity – an impulse apparent in the championing of the traditional ballad and the medieval "Gothic" romance in the eighteenth century – which, in Percy's case, is clearly aligned with the reinterpretation of Chinese culture. The attitude that "the past is a foreign country," a phrase that the historian David Lowenthal borrowed and made famous, was one born in modernity. Lowenthal writes: "Only in the late eighteenth century did Europeans begin to conceive the past as a different realm, not just another country but a congeries of foreign lands endowed with unique histories and personalities."[45] They began to do so, I propose, by transferring their experiences of contemporary foreign lands such as China to their understanding of their native as well as their classical past. English literary modernity, then, is a time that exists in the linear, contemporary 'real' time of the novel and the day-to-day newspaper, but no less in the transient time of the landscape artist, and the suspended, performative time of the printed, elliptical, antiqued, oral ballad. Filtered through a literary lens, modernity is something richer and eerier, much more ambiguous than the scientific time of modernization, ever marching forward. In the readings in this book, I suggest that an imaginative geography of China helped map a distinctively English literary terrain, just as an imaginative history of China helped locate a distinctively English literary moment.