

An off-centre pendulum: Neo-Japonisme and contemporary French identity in Michaël Ferrier's *Sympathy for the Phantom*¹

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Abstract: (300 words)

This paper analyses French novelist Michaël Ferrier's novel *Sympathie pour le fantôme* (*Sympathy for the Phantom*, 2010) as an instance of contemporary French neo-japonisme. Building upon the work of Edward Said, it argues that Ferrier's neo-japonisme inherits from the tradition of earlier French Orientalist romantic literature while disavowing this inheritance through a simultaneous application of universalist, social-science criticisms onto Japan. This universalism is then similarly discredited for its banality and ineffectiveness, leading the narrator to rediscover the original aesthetic, Orientalist vision of Japan through an adventure into the beautiful, anti-rational heart of the city. This rediscovery of authentic Japan is performed by the French flâneur through a planned promenade mediated by the night-time darkness, the choice of small alleyways, and alcohol. The confusion and disorientation experienced in this engineered authentic Japan is proclaimed to provide ready answers for French crises of value such as national historiography and immigrant memory. As the night clears, however, Japan returns to an ugly everydayness ready to be once again subjected to universalist critique. The swinging of this pendulum characterizes the style of Ferrier's neo-japonisme, which this paper refers to as "off-centre." Examples of this off-centre style are given in Ferrier's descriptions of Tokyo and the fictional character of Yuko, who transform from cosmopolites to premodern Japanese from day to night. Ferrier's literary use of Japan is also placed within the context of the novelist's larger oeuvre. Understanding the structure and logic of neo-japonisme in Ferrier provides one example of how Orientalist discriminations persist in culture today, when Orientalist thought has become popularly and academically discredited.

Keywords (5-10):

creolization, historiography, Orientalism, immigration, japonisme, French identity, Edward Said, world literature, Japanese aesthetics, colonial memory

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Introduction

In his *Orientalism*, Edward Said distinguishes between British and French Orientalism, which develop as differentiable strands while adapting to similar historical conditions (Said, 2003). The determinant factor in creating this difference was the British political control over the Orient, which the French failed to match in the early stages of colonialism. If for the British, 'the room available for imaginative play was limited by the realities of administration, territorial legality, and executive power,' 'the French pilgrim was imbued with a sense of acute loss in the Orient' (Said, 2003: 169). This French Orient would be 'the Orient of memories, suggestive ruins, forgotten secrets, hidden correspondences, and an almost virtuosic style of being' (Said, 2003: 170). Mediated by later Orientalists' readings of earlier writers of the same language, this aesthetic, melancholic French Orientalism persisted even after France had obtained a substantial empire of their own. Under French colonial administration, subjects were seen 'in terms of the cultivation of intellectual imperialism' and 'spiritual community between France and its colonial children.' In contrast, twentieth-century British imperialism saw their territories empirically, 'of peoples, political organizations, and movements guided and held in check by the White Man's expert tutelage' (Said, 2003: 245). The latest historical stage of American Orientalism, embodied by the figure of the social science area specialist, appears to inherit from the British legacy of practical imperialism, involving 'a certain cultural hostility and a sense based not so much on philology as on "expertise"' (Said, 2003: 291). According to Said, this emphasis on expertise shuns the study of literature, and keeps Orientals 'reduced to "attitudes," "trends," statistics: in short, dehumanized' (Said, 2003: 291).

This paper examines one response to this Anglo-American dehumanization of the Orient through the œuvre of French writer Michaël Ferrier (1967-), who appeals to the romantic French tradition of Orientalism in response. Born in France, Ferrier is of partial Indian and Mauritian descent and spent his childhood between Africa and the Indian Ocean (Bablo, n.d.). Ferrier has lived in Tokyo since 1994, defended a doctoral thesis on music in the work of Céline in 1998 (Theses.fr, n.d.), and has taught French at Chūō University since 1996 (Researchmap, n.d.). Ferrier published his first novels in 2004, both of which take place in Tokyo. This paper focuses on his third novel published in 2010, *Sympathie pour le fantôme* (Sympathy for the Phantom, henceforth abbreviated as *SF*), which was won the 2011 Prix littéraire de la Porte Dorée, awarded annually to a literary

work on the topic of exile. Aside from novelistic writings on Japan, Ferrier also publishes scholarly research on Japan and Japanese literature, including one anthology on Franco-Japanese relations in literature (Ferrier, 2009). After *SF*, Ferrier has diversified his subject matter beyond Japan, and may be characterized as overlapping the categories of creole writing and neo-japonisme (Arribert-Narce, 2021b; Arribert-Narce et al., 2016; Holtzman, 2019). This paper asks: why can Ferrier be characterized as a neo-japoniste writer, even as the author himself rejects this labelling? How does neo-japonisme differ from earlier manifestations, and how does it rationalize its own existence in the twenty-first century, when racisms like imperialism are perceived as unacceptable and archaic? How has the imagined Japan of French Orientalism become repurposed to resolve contemporary issues such as immigration and memory politics?

I argue that Ferrier practices a form of 'neo-japonisme,' which I define as an 'off-centre' authorial style that oscillates between aesthetic stereotypes of Japan as the spectral, non-modern West and disavowals of this Orientalism through critiques of Western modernity through Japan. Ferrier's neo-japonisme incorporates both the social-science knowledge of Anglo-American Orientalism and the romantic self-expression of French Orientalism, wavering between the two while clearly identifying with neither. The romantic narrative always reaches its climax with the discovery of the hidden 'authentic' Japan, however, which is necessarily a reprise of French Orientalism; just as this climax is reached, however, it is once again taken away from the reader, who is once again brought back to the sober intellectualism of Anglo-American Orientalism. These swings of the pendulum permit the preservation and valorisation of discriminatory uses of Japan within older French japonisme while claiming to have already disavowed these beliefs through a respect for alternative, more objective understandings of Japan that, through Anglo-American social science, treat the archipelago as the West's equal, which is always revealed as equally dissatisfactory. With the identification of Japan as an Oriental fantasy-land, Ferrier discovers a musical spirit that will resolve French identity politics through a rediscovery of hidden phantoms within France that had existed all along. The voyage to the east into the heart of Japan therefore concludes with an intellectual, spiritual, and artistic community between France and Japan that, as in previous eras, implicitly speaks back to the practical, unimaginative penchant in Anglo-American imperialism.

The remainder of this paper develops as follows. In the first section, I summarize the novel and set up the problematic in *SF*, namely the resolution of French memory

debates. The following section examines Ferrier's academic and literary corpus to answer the question of why Ferrier decided to locate his resolution of French memory debates in Japan. The third section examines Ferrier's 'off-centre' methodology that claims to supersede the Orientalism in japonisme, arguing that this neo-japonisme does not negate japonisme so much as oscillate between its presence and its negation. The fourth and fifth use the examples of the city of Tokyo and the character of Yuko as examples of how this oscillation occurs in the text. A conclusion caps the article.

Incorporating French minorities into the national narrative

In *SF*, the protagonist is a fictionalized version of Ferrier who works as a professor of French literature at Chūō University and prepares television and radio programs for Japanese media on the side. The story begins at a filming for *Mirrors of France*, a television program appearing twice weekly. Ferrier stars in this program with his co-worker, another Frenchman named Fritz (Ferrier, 2010a: 23). Though the program is popular with the Japanese audience, Ferrier himself finds it superficial and lacking editorial risk-taking. *Mirrors of France* is supervised by Jean-Christophe, a former diplomat at the French embassy and the 'special consultant for the image of France' at the television station (Ferrier, 2010a: 28). With an office on the highest floors of the television station, Jean-Christophe imposes upon the station's programming a highly traditional vision of French identity. At the filming Ferrier describes at the start of the book, *Mirrors of France* is shooting an episode on Paris. The images of Paris shown by the editorial collective, however, are that of 'cafe terraces, pressed suits, blue and white tablecloths, bread and pastry stores...' (Ferrier, 2010a: 30). The video avoids immigrants, laborers, and non-white residents, repeating instead stereotyped and touristic images. In the program, Ferrier is tasked with the 'culture corner,' where he reads a few minutes of poetry by Hugo and Baudelaire chosen by Jean-Christophe (Ferrier, 2010a: 31-32). Ferrier expresses disappointment at how the program is organized, from the presence of external consultants and the disrespect for literature to the audio-visual medium of television itself.

Ferrier receives an opportunity to cast a television program to his liking from Yuko, the deputy director of *Tokyo Time Table*, the centrepiece program of the same television station (Ferrier, 2010a: 33). *Tokyo Time Table* is a big-budget enterprise,

screening at nine in the evening for three hours with commercial breaks every twenty minutes (Ferrier, 2010a: 34). Yuko explains that the studio will produce a special program for *Tokyo Time Table* commemorating the 150th anniversary of Franco-Japanese relations (Ferrier, 2010a: 39). Yuko agrees with Ferrier's distaste for stereotyped representations of France, and proposes a co-authorship where Ferrier writes the script and Yuko prepares the images (Ferrier, 2010a: 43). Ferrier ultimately comes up with a program that will narrate the personal histories of three forgotten French minority figures. The first is Ambroise Vollard (1866-1939), a French art dealer borne in Réunion known for discovering important artists; Jeanne Duval (1827-1862), a Haitian actress and mistress of Charles Baudelaire; and Edmond Albius (1829-1880), a slave in Réunion known for developing a technique for the cultivation of vanilla plants. The novel follows Ferrier's life in Tokyo as realizes this television program while also preparing for an academic conference on French identity.

In the preface of *SF*, Ferrier sets up the setting and problematic for his book. He explains the story is about a writer in twenty-first century Tokyo, and the issue tackled is French identity politics. Ferrier writes in the opening paragraph:

Maintenant, ils se demandent tous d'où ils viennent, qui ils sont et ce qu'ils font ici, ils essaient de montrer qu'ils sont français ou, au contraire, qu'ils ne sont pas français, il se raccrochent de plus en plus à leurs lois, leurs coutumes, leurs traditions ou leurs tribulations [...] Ils sont fiers des empires de leurs pères et de serments de leurs frères. C'est le ramdam des mémoires, le grand tumulte mémoriel : l'une contre l'autre, elles s'épaulent tout en se poussant du coude, elles se soudoient mais elles se montrent du doigt. (Ferrier, 2010a: 15)²

Ferrier speaks to ongoing debates in France surrounding the writing and commemoration of the nation's history (Boucheron, 2017; Ledoux, 2021). These debates

² Today, they all ask from where they come, who they are and what they do here, they try to show that they are French or, to the contrary, that they are not French, they cling more and more to their laws, their customs, their traditions or their tribulations [...] They are proud of the empires of their fathers and the segments of their brothers. It's the racket of memories, the grand memorial tumult: one against the other, they shoulder each other while pushing at elbows, they bribe each other but they show each other the finger.

follow a gradual recognition of the memories of social minorities following Pierre Nora's famous *Realms of Memory* (Mercer, 2013; Nora, 1997) and form part of the larger discussion on the desirability of state secularism in a multicultural nation (Nilsson, 2018; Wolfreys, 2018). This 'racket of memories' that Ferrier describes bears similarities to what Michael Rothberg calls 'competitive memory,' where social groups believe the recognition of one party's memories as infringing upon the liberties of another (Rothberg, 2009). Like Rothberg, Ferrier argues to the contrary: that it is possible for memories disagreeing with the national narrative, including those of immigrants, to coexist while preserving all of their diversity. The recognition of diversity, furthermore, does not involve a rejection of the French nation. Though generally supportive of Ferrier, Yuko occasionally casts doubt upon Ferrier's planning, such as in the following exchange:

— Tu crois vraiment qu'on peut savoir ce qu'est la France avec ces trois histoires...

— Mais ils sont français, tu sais ! Ah, comment on *estrange* les gens, comment on les rend étrangers, comment on les refoule dans l'espace et le temps... (Ferrier, 2010a: 150) (Italics original)³

Here, Ferrier argues that subjects such as slaves and colonial immigrants are Frenchmen that are 'rendered strangers' by prevailing historical narratives, and that their individual stories are representative of the French nation. Similarly, in the book's epilogue, Ferrier confronts an angered Jean-Christophe who has read Ferrier's finished script. Their exchange proceeds as follows:

— Vous croyez à une France multiculturelle coupée de ses racines, c'est ça ?

³ — You really believe that we can know what France is with these three histories...

— But they are French, you know! Oh, how we *estrange* people, how we make them strangers, how we stifle them within space and time...

— Mais non. [...] Trois moments très particulières, très forts. Sans eux, on ne comprend rien à l'Histoire de France. Tout un peuple de brassage, de montage... Cela donne des être uniques, forcément. Dérangeants. (Ferrier, 2010a: 256)⁴

In Ferrier's account, all of France is a 'people of intermingling, of assembly,' and that this intermingled character, rather than some imagined racial identity, form the roots of contemporary France. For this reason, the France that Ferrier describes cannot be described as 'multicultural,' for it does not recognize 'France' as an ethnic or cultural body that can be distinguished from other races or cultures. At the same time, he does not discard the value of France as a symbolic marker entirely, instead incorporating the forgotten memories of all of its minorities within the nation.

This desire to incorporate the forgotten minorities of French history explains *SF*'s title. In *SF*'s epigraph, Ferrier describes two definitions of 'phantom' in French. In the first definition, a librarian places a card called a 'phantom' in the place where a book that is borrowed out or displaced once was. If it was borrowed out, Ferrier adds, the card does not mention the name of the borrower. In the second definition, when a person plays a piano, the chord of a key other than the key struck may emit a 'phantom' note. This occurs when the frequency of the key struck matches the frequency of the phantom key. The phantom key's vibration, which the pianist does not intend yet which can be barely heard, is said to be out of 'sympathy' for the struck key (Ferrier, 2010a: 13). These two definitions of 'phantom' clearly reference the place of forgotten characters in French history. In accordance to the first definition, for minorities such as slaves, the historical trace often does not exist and is ignored even when it does. Though a marker in the library of history may acknowledge its existence, we cannot know which borrower currently possesses the documents, nor can we know the content within them. At best, the phantom references an original object that cannot be found, but which triggers our memory of something that ought to have existed.

⁴ — You believe in a multicultural France cut from its roots, is that so?

— But no. [...] Three moments very particular, very strong. Without them, one can understand nothing about the History of France. All a people of mixing, of assembly... This creates unique beings, necessarily. Disturbing ones.

The second definition can also be interpreted through the framework of the memory of French minorities. In the second definition, the piano player does not intend to sound the phantom. Because of the natural relation of the keys' frequencies, however, playing the intended chord necessarily sounds the phantom chord alongside it. Like the relationship between the lives of powerful politicians and lowly factory workers, the two notes share an unequal relationship: the phantom note responds to the intended note, and listeners often ignore the consequences of the former. When Ferrier titles his novel as a 'sympathy for the phantom,' he suggests that this phantom, too, deserves sympathy as partially constitutive of the sound produced by the pianist hitting the intended key. Like the phantom in the library, the identification of this phantom is difficult, and its very existence is both epiphenomenal and constitutive. By bringing phantoms back into the grand narrative of French history, Ferrier complicates and shakes its structure without dislocating it entirely. If French history is the intended note, acknowledging the presence of phantom notes enriches one's appreciation of history's musicality while hesitating from making any sweeping negations of the overall tune.

Japan as a site for fissures and re-organization of memory

The concept of a 'Tokyo Time Table,' also the name of the television emission that Ferrier orchestrates in *SF*, is a repeating trope within his books. It is the title of his personal website (www.tokyo-time-table.com), though even on the website, Ferrier does not clearly describe to what it refers. Ferrier does hint towards a definition towards the end of the preface of *SF*. In the process of criticizing previous historical narratives of French identity, Ferrier writes that 'you have been taught to tell, of course: history, a history. But now that the centuries are winding, that the memories rumble, time itself seems out of joint' (Ferrier, 2010a: 18). Ferrier distinguishes between history in the singular tense and memory, which has multiple temporalities. He sees debates about French identity as resultant upon the outflow of what has been repressed by hegemonic historiographical narratives, which ignore the personalized nature of memory. At the end of the preface, Ferrier suggests that a musical use of memory could overcome identity debates without acrimony. Ferrier describes this method as follows:

Tout le passé revient, impur : un passé métissé de différents passés, de différentes cultures. [...] Ce sont des problèmes de durée, du mouvement, de vitesse, de répétition ou de stagnation, de transformation. Ils requièrent une technique spécifique et subtile [...] un étrange mélange de friction et de fluidité... Tous les éléments maintenant se stabilisent sur ma table, y trouvent leur forme, leur texture propre. Comme des sons se connectent et se condensent, trouvent leur place sur une tablature, y font enfin leurs motifs, leur mélodie. (Ferrier, 2010a: 19)⁵

In this passage, Ferrier explains that in the present day, the past returns to the present through the ongoing identity debates, and the sheer multiplicity of different shades of identity requires a more fluid method of comprehending them. This more fluid method does not foreclose a degree of 'friction' and organization, too, however. To organize this fluid memory, the novelist-cum-scholar must 'stabilize' the 'elements' of these identities upon their 'table'; these elements must 'find their place on a tablature,' a tablature being a musical notation indicating the fingering of certain instruments. In brief, Ferrier claims to write culturally sensitive alternative histories through artistic work sympathetic to the nuances and beauties of each individual.

If the preface explains the relationship between 'time' and 'table,' it does not explain the role of 'Tokyo.' *SF* inherits directly from Ferrier's 2004 novel *Tokyo: Petits portraits de l'aube*, where he gives a more explicit definition. In an episode where Ferrier leads the reader to a bar in Shinjuku's Golden Gai, the author explains Tokyo's pedestrian etiquette as they leave Shinjuku Station:

Tu n'as qu'à lever la tête si tu trouves le temps long, Tokyo est un superbe et méconnu livre d'images. N'essaie pas d'imposer ton allure, tu n'y arriveras pas :

⁵ All of the past returns, impure: a past interbred with different pasts, with different cultures. [...] These are problems of length, of movement, of speed, of repetition or of stagnation, of transformation. They require a technique specific and subtle [...] a strange mix of friction and fluidity... All the elements now stabilize themselves on my table, find there their form, their own texture. Like sounds connecting and condensing, finding their place on a tablature, finally creating there their motifs, their melody.

chaque pays a son temps, sa pulsation, sa minutie. Il faut retrouver le rythme de la ville, il change selon les quartiers, les moments, les saisons, tu dois toi-même prendre tes marques sur cette gigantesque table de temps. (Ferrier, 2004b: 101)⁶

Ferrier advises the reader not to be impatient, not to shove other pedestrians and not to walk before the green pedestrian signals. Rather, the reader must adjust themselves to the speed of the city, which differs depending on the season, moment, and neighbourhood. Knowing how to adjust one's pace to the circumstance requires the aid of a 'time table.' Like the 'tablature' in *SF*, 'table' in *Tokyo* refers principally to a table in the sense of an organizational tool (e.g., a multiplication table) rather than an object of furniture. This time table controls how quickly and in what manner the pedestrian walks; the pedestrian, in contrast, cannot impose their own speed upon the place and moment. This table is not rigid, furthermore, as it changes with the passing time, and requires the incessant care of the pedestrian to read the city's atmosphere and hear the city's rhythm. In contrast to other cities in the world, in Tokyo, the resident must not only adjust to Tokyo's rhythms, but also always pay attention to Tokyo in order to figure out what its exact rhythm is. To walk in Tokyo is akin to how a musician keeps his music on beat (i.e., keep time), except that the flâneur must write the musical score (i.e., table) as he walks. It is no coincidence, then, that Tokyo is the prime site for the resolution of French identity. If writing a musical score harmonizes identity debates, then walking around Tokyo is perfect practice, as the rhythms of the city train the pedestrian in musical composition.

This idea of Tokyo, and by extension Japan, as a site where the individual must permanently learn to reorient and re-stabilize him or herself dates back to Ferrier's two earliest novels, both published in 2004. The novel *Kizu (La lézarde)*, for instance, narrates from the perspective of a middle-aged Japanese salaryman who descends into depression as his life progressively falls apart (Ferrier, 2004a). The title plays on the Japanese word *kizu*, meaning wound or scar. A partial French translation is *lézarde*, meaning 'crack,'

⁶ You only need to raise your head if you find the time long, Tokyo is a superb and underestimated book of images. Don't try to impose your speed, you won't succeed: each country has its time, its pulse, its meticulousness. One must rediscover the rhythm of the city, it changes according to the neighborhood, the moment, the season, you must yourself find your bearings on this gigantic table of time.

written similarly to *lézard*, or 'lizard.' As the narrator suffers from a series of unfortunate minor and major tragedies, his home develops cracks and becomes overrun by lizards. In the final two chapters, the narrator decides to reorganize his life and renovate his home, only to witness a tremendous earthquake that sends his furniture all tumbling to the ground. The book concludes with the following passage:

Tokyo est une bête, une bête blessée, agitée de soubresauts nerveux. Certains de ses membres sont peut-être déjà brisés. C'est à ce moment seulement que l'on s'aperçoit que des hommes et des femmes crient, crient à perdre la raison depuis le début. (Ferrier, 2004a: 75)⁷

As depicted in *Kizu*, Tokyo seems well-organized on the surface, with its modern technology and everyday rituals. When shaken by its regular earthquakes, however, it becomes agitated, making evident the wounds and fissures that had always existed underneath it. The depiction of Tokyo is similar to the illustration of the emotions of the story's narrator. A discovery of fissures and wounds due to unfortunate events both sends the narrator into a dolorous state and helps them recognize the very fragility upon which their everyday lives made sense. Ferrier valorises this fragility throughout his writing, and frequently uses Tokyo's beastliness as a repeating trope to evidence it. Ferrier's other 2004 novel, *Tokyo: Petits portraits de l'aube*, is more joyful than *Kizu* (Ferrier, 2004b). The protagonist in *Tokyo* is a fictionalized version of Ferrier himself. The chapters are a series of illustrations of Ferrier's life as a foreigner in Tokyo, with a particular emphasis on nights spent out drinking sake until the sunrise. The tipsiness caused by alcohol and the obscurity of Tokyo nights act on Ferrier in unison. In one scene, Ferrier describes the sentiments felt alone in the city at four in the morning, when his drinking companions have left him:

C'est l'heure où les démons reviennent nous hanter. En dessous de nous, à des profondeurs insoupçonnées, des hommes et des idées s'agitent. En nous-

⁷ Tokyo is a beast, a wounded beast, agitated by nervous jolts. Some of its joints are perhaps already broken. It's at this moment only that one perceives that men and women cry, cry to have lost their reason since the beginning.

mêmes, les rêves se déplacent, les phrases naissent, les pensées se forment
obscurément comme des flammes.

J'écoute. (Ferrier, 2004b: 55)⁸

Similar to in *Kizu*, the Tokyo in *Tokyo* hides deeper fissures that haunt both the city and its residents when they are off guard, in this case inebriate and during the nighttime. Also similar to *Kizu*, the moral lesson offered by these uncomfortable demons is the necessity of lending them a ear.

Ferrier has written consistently of how Tokyo is among the best places in the world to listen to these hidden demons. In an article titled 'Tokyo, capital of intoxication,' for instance, Ferrier writes that 'Tokyo is the city of bars. In this country of danger and continual alert, always exposed to some catastrophe—tsunami, fire, typhoon, volcanic eruption, earthquake, floods [...] bars are simultaneously retreats, refuges, dens, and sanctuaries' (Ferrier, 2016: 120). He later adds that 'few cities are as suitable as Tokyo to the 'long, immense, and reasoned disturbance of all of one's senses' that alcohol can provoke,' explaining that the winding disorganization of its streets imbalances even the sober flâneur (Ferrier, 2016: 123). In another essay titled 'Tokyo: Real city, dreamed city, revealed city,' Ferrier examines how successive postwar planners have proposed designing Tokyo, writing that 'Tokyo is both a challenge and an impressive nourishment for contemporary artists, and for each of us. It feeds today a true art of bricolage and diversion: political subversion, formal versatility, aesthetic renewal' (Ferrier, 2014: 116). In these writings, every element of Tokyo is described as supporting the city's premier role as a medium for ghosts, from its propensity for earthquakes and its winding premodern streets to its super-modern postwar urban planning. All of these elements destabilize Tokyo for natural and manmade reasons. This perpetual danger of destabilization is then paired with artistic inspiration borne from a situation *in extremis*. It may lead the subject to seek for safe spaces such as bars, or it may prompt the artist to

⁸ It's the hour when demons come back to haunt us. Below us, in unsuspected depths, men and ideas agitate. Within ourselves, dreams displace, phrases are born, thoughts form in obscurity like flames.
I listen.

think of new aesthetic uses for old forms. As in *Kizu*, Tokyo is a wounded beast that prompts its citizens to reflect upon, to organize, to *table* their existential problems.

Off-centre: From japonisme to universalism, to japonisme again

Does Ferrier genuinely distinguish himself from older japonisme in French literature? Like traditional Orientalism, in his writing, Ferrier treats Japan in opposition to the West. Japan, for Ferrier, is a land of haunting ghosts that arise from the city's cracks and epic disturbances like earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. These supernatural events are also a source of artistic inspiration: this discomfort proves romantic, and Japan invites the visitor to compose music and rethink their life habits. These elements suggest that Ferrier is hardly so novel as he claims. For instance, borrowing from philosopher Karatani Kōjin's critique of 'aestheticism' (Karatani, 1998), Emmanuel Lozerand characterizes 'neo-japonisme' in postwar French thought as an interest only in the aesthetic elements of Japan rather than the 'worries of ordinary Japanese' who 'struggle with intellectual and ethical problems inherent to modernity' (Lozerand, 2016: 68). The Orient is imagined as the 'fulfilment of the symbolic,' as a homogenous community that exists outside of history (Lozerand, 2016: 69). This characterization fits well with how Ferrier illustrates Tokyo. Though Ferrier claims that each neighbourhood in Tokyo has its own rhythm, this difference is only important insofar as they are musical. If modernity is understood in terms of order and efficiency, then Tokyo is aesthetic and anti-modern. This aesthetic city, furthermore, exists outside of history, as Tokyo's propensity for anti-modernity is explained through everything from earthquakes to urban planning, such that technological progress has done little to inhibit its primitive tendencies. Lastly, as it is the 'beast' of Tokyo that is most important in the resolution of French identity debates, ordinary Japanese play insignificant roles, as it is the spectral, aesthetically shocking, and inhuman Japan that provides answers to France's questions.

Other literary critics describe contemporary Francophone representations of Japan similarly. Tamaki Mihic, for instance, describes a 'neo-japoniste' tendency in contemporary French literature (Mihic, 2020: 118) that treats 'Japan as a source of aesthetic and artistic inspiration, as well as a faraway place of escape and mystery, which appears to be a revival of the japonisme of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries' (Mihic, 2020: 138). Bruno Sibona compares two Francophone authors who perform a

'ritualized wandering' around Kyoto's gardens that culminates in the 'dissolution of the self' followed by a soul-searching and re-affirmation of identity (Sibona, 2016). This disorientation followed by self-discovery mirrors Ferrier's route as he wanders around Tokyo. Lastly, in his reading of Amélie Nothomb's *Fear and Trembling* (1999), Jean-Michel Lou argues that the name of 'Japan' is merely a marker for a location that brings the individual into a 'limit-experience' of the 'exemplary negativity' of the West (Lou, 2011: 65). Ferrier's similar treatment of Japan as the West's absolute negativity also suggests that any location, not necessarily that of Japan, would have been acceptable, so long as it pushes the overburdened pedestrian into the limits of reason. The story ultimately becomes about the Western traveller's internal psychology than about the territory in which they find themselves.

Ferrier, however, clearly distinguishes himself from this discriminatory, aesthetic japonisme that literary critics ascribe to French literature. Indeed, Ferrier himself is one such critic. In an essay titled 'The Coral Writers' first pronounced in 2013 and later translated to English (Ferrier, 2017), Ferrier contrasts earlier French japonisme with his own writing. In Ferrier's words, this earlier japonisme suffers from, firstly, 'a traditionally uniform representation of Japanese society' and, secondly, a 'bilateral exoticism' where 'the reception of Japanese culture establishes itself [...] under the sign of opposition or of complementarity' (Ferrier, 2018: 23-24). Japoniste writers therefore treat Japan as both homogenous and the inverse mirror of Europe or France. These tendencies create tropes such as the identification of authentic Japan with purity, rurality, and the premodern. By treating Japan as an 'anthropological sanctuary situated on the other side of the world' (Ferrier, 2018: 26) the Japoniste writer either ignores modern elements of Japan or expresses regret that premodern traditions have been lost. This ahistorical and utopian understanding of Japan, per Ferrier, elides social problems and practices of everyday life that are quite similar to those faced in other developed countries. As noted in earlier sections, however, Ferrier's own writing follows many of these same Orientalist stereotypes he criticizes.

I call 'off-centre' this literary and scholarly method that Ferrier employs to overcome japonisme. Ferrier uses a variety of other terms to describe this same method, including 'transplanting' (*repiquage*) (Ferrier, 2015b), 'a displacement of the critical regard' (Ferrier, 2018: 22), 'taking a step to the side' (Ferrier, 2018: 36), 'misunderstanding the point' (*être à côté de la plaque*) (Ferrier, 2015a: 223), or, most

recently, 'coral writing' (Ferrier, 2018). Traces of this method date back to the writer's earliest works. In the foreword to an anthology of essays on French and Japanese literary representations of the other culture, Ferrier claims to 'try to pulverize the old binary oppositions' and to 'open the possibility of alternative thought, of the possibility of a distance, of a step to the side, submitting our vision of the world to a vast re-elaboration' (Ferrier, 2009: 18). Concretely, this means studying multidirectional rather than unidirectional influence through a doubled, 'plural' identification with both France and Japan (Ferrier, 2009: 15-16). One chapter in the anthology, first pronounced in 2003 and later translated into English, is titled 'Creole Japan' (Ferrier, 2010b). In this paper, Ferrier argues for the application of *créolité* as a theory for understanding contemporary Japan, a nation normally assumed to be homogenous. This very questionable application of *créolité* to Japan, however, allows us to glimpse at *créolité* from a 'lightly out-of-step (*décalé*) perspective' that can be 'revealing of new stakes of thought [...] in places where one does not expect them' (Ferrier, 2009: 177). In this case of *créolité*, a French theory is used to analyse Japan, bringing both cultures into new perspective.

The inverse also occurs. To overcome japonisme, the French writer writing about Japan should also identify as the Japanese writer writing back at France, such that they become neither French nor Japanese, but rather neither and both. In an essay on 'transplanting' Japanese culture into French literature, Ferrier defines the term as moving between different cultures, narrative traditions, and languages in an 'uninterrupted displacement [...] a state of permanent destabilization [...] to participate simultaneously to multiple frames of reference [...] without identifying with any' (Ferrier, 2015b: 147). This permanently off-centre perspective is also the basis of 'coral writing.' Concretely, this involves identification with a 'median position' between France and Japan that 'brings to light [...] the assumptions and the unthought of the two parties' (Ferrier, 2018: 34). This third position refuses to use one culture as 'the perceptive and cognitive reference of another' (Ferrier, 2018: 35). Writers may study cultural exchanges and influences, above all in 'contact zones' where culture appears 'in terms of interactions, exchanges, adaptations, and reappropriations' (Ferrier, 2018: 35). Above all, the coral writer must 'multiply the points of view' by cumulating both old and new visions of 'the relation one can have with the world and with a country' (Ferrier, 2018: 36). In Ferrier's understanding, off-centre perspectives create alternative visions of Japan that are if not

more objective, then at least place into question the objectivity of traditional perspectives, which are often bound to hackneyed stereotypes and national borders.

The result of this perpetually off-centre perspective, curiously, is not a negation of japonisme as Ferrier claims, but rather involves a series of negations as the pendulum rocks back and forth between japonisme and its negation before finally settling in favour of the former. As noted previously, Ferrier's descriptions of the spectrality and aesthetic sensibility of Tokyo repeats earlier iterations of japonisme. Ferrier layers on top of this aesthetic view, however, a critique of the ills of Japanese society in a way that treats Japan as subject to the same criticisms that might be levied towards France. By equating Japan with France, and by applying the same theoretical frameworks to both, Ferrier excuses himself from criticisms of Orientalism by plausibly arguing that no differences exist between East and West. After these two visions of Japan are established, however, this pendulum then rocks back in favour of japonisme, for it is ultimately the Japan Ferrier does not know that pulls the ground out from under his feet, that allows him to critically examine problems of French historiography. For this, a *second japonisme* is necessary that transforms elements of Japan previously deemed unremarkable and Western back into objects of aesthetic exoticism for the European viewer. The following two sections examine how the shift between these multiple visions on Japan operates in the cases of the city of Tokyo and the character of Yuko.

Tokyo: Academic nonsense by day, paradise by night

As discussed earlier, Tokyo, and by extension Japan, plays a central role in the philosophy grounding Ferrier's project. With its confusing rhythms, Tokyo offers a timeless space from which the author reexamines his assumptions and rewrites the history of France. Tokyo does not always act as this alternative space, however, and these different roles are written into the novel's very structure. *SF* clearly contrasts between two modes of representing France in its narrative. The first representation takes place through the program for *Tokyo Time Table* that Ferrier creates with Yuko, whereas the second representation takes place through an academic conference on French identity organized at Chūō University, where Ferrier works. If the three biographies of French minorities are interweaved into the story of Ferrier's everyday life as he writes these biographies, this everyday life alternates between daytime and night-time activity. In general, during the day, Ferrier describes his monotonous life as an academic, whereas

during the night, Ferrier describes his generally inebriate wanderings around Tokyo that inspire his television program. During the day, Ferrier criticizes the absurdity of Japanese academia for reasons any academic around the world would recognize, whereas during the night, Ferrier praises Japan as the fount of intellectual creativity. Daytime Japan is dull and modern, whereas night-time Japan is timeless and traditional. By criticizing Japanese academia in the same way as he would criticize the West, Ferrier guards himself from the critique of the japonisme that he continues to practice during the night.

The conference on French identity that occupies Ferrier during the day is spearheaded by Ferrier's colleague Nezumi. Nezumi is the section head of the department of International Studies, an impeccably dressed sexagenarian, and a heavyweight in French Studies in Japan. Ferrier harshly mocks Nezumi, described as having an 'enormous intellectual inertia' (Ferrier, 2010a: 59) and insulted as a 'mandarin' and 'mamamouchi.' Nezumi reads nothing and relies on the 'recycling and repetition' of the work of others, an 'activity of forgery, hackneyed statements, compilation' that creates incomprehensible essays given an air of objectivity through the plentiful use of schemas and diagrams (Ferrier, 2010a: 59-60). Though intellectually hollow, Nezumi performs the work of the academic impeccably. Nezumi offends nobody, maintaining amical relations with academics the world over who provide him with invitations to international conferences and the authority to hold important colloquiums (Ferrier, 2010a: 60-62). The topics of these colloquiums reflect no consistent interest, however, but rather the latest intellectual trends (Ferrier, 2010a: 69). This desire for currency explains the title of the colloquium Nezumi now plans, 'Crisis and Mutations: The Identity of France' (Ferrier, 2010a: 63). Though French identity and *créolité* interest Ferrier, Ferrier finds Nezumi unknowledgeable about the panel on diasporas on which he wishes to place Ferrier (Ferrier, 2010a: 70), a disappointment that only grows over the course of the story.

Nezumi is one of the three most important specialists on France in Japan, the other two being Ikebana and Kaminoke. These three names are parodies: Nezumi is Japanese for 'rat,' Kaminoke is Japanese for 'hair,' and Ikebana is the art of flower arrangement. Though less well-networked than Nezumi, Kaminoke and Ikebana also perform the act of academism well in spite of being intellectually shallow, generally appearing with subservient junior scholars at their sides (Ferrier, 2010a: 125, 128, 131). Ikebana is the 'champion of metaphor,' waxing beautiful, lyrical phrases that offer little coherency

(Ferrier, 2010a: 126-127). Kaminoke, in turn, is a master of the 'art of the preface,' which involves writing vague prefaces to edited volumes to stake authority over the entire genre (Ferrier, 2010a: 129). At a meeting intended to organize panels to be presented at Nezumi's colloquium, the three scholars are at odds. Kaminoke wants French identity to be drawn towards the south and North Africa; Ikebana wants to anchor French identity to the north, towards Scandinavia; and Nezumi wants to underline the importance of the Caribbean, where he is invited as a visiting scholar annually (Ferrier, 2010a: 134-135). Seven hours in, the debate becomes interminable; as Ferrier writes, 'they have truly turned over French identity in so many directions that they no longer find their bones, they no longer now how to resolve this puzzle...' (Ferrier, 2010a: 135).

This posturing, obscurantism, and pointless debate only continues in the actual colloquium, now with foreign scholars and a representative from the embassy of France in Japan. A sociologist named Pastourel argues that French literature should be abandoned for its ethno-nationalist chauvinism (Ferrier, 2010a: 206), whereas an American literary scholar puts the audience to sleep with an interminable lecture on France from the Middle Ages until today (Ferrier, 2010a: 210-211). Hardly any better is Ferrier's roundtable on diasporic literature, titled 'Cross-culturally speaking, speaking cross-culturally: Intellectual Cross-Fertilization' (Ferrier, 2010a: 211). This title is likely a sarcastic reference to the hollowness of intellectual intercourse, especially as it carries no explicit reference to the topic of diaspora. On the panel, Kaminoke, Ikebana, and Nezumi continue their debate on whether French identity should be tied to the north, south, or west, sparking a heated debate among the participants (Ferrier, 2010a: 213). Ferrier describes the climax of the discussion as follows:

La diaspora ! La diaspora ! Tout d'un coup, je diaspore comme je respire, je diaspore de port en port, de plus en plus fort, je m'enflamme jusqu'au phosphore, je diaspore par tous les pores... C'est la musique du grand carnage. Il faut savoir ainsi filer l'arpège... la vocalise... À la clef, sur la ligne... au refrain maintenant, à la cadence... (Ferrier, 2010a: 214)⁹

⁹ The diaspora! The diaspora! All of a sudden, I diaspore like I respire, I diaspore from port to port, stronger and stronger, I burn myself until phosphorus, I diaspore by all my pores... It's

As the discussion reaches its climax, like the metaphors of Ikebana, Ferrier's thoughts dissolve into senseless rhyming. 'Diaspora' is rhymed with 'port,' 'pores,' and 'phosphorus.' It is transformed from a noun to a verb, as Ferrier describes himself as 'diasporing like I breathe' and 'diasporing by all the pores.' In the first half of this excerpt, the clauses become shorter, more rhythmic, and more senseless; in the second half, however, Ferrier makes use of ellipses to slow down the pace. In contrast to the 'music of grand carnage,' Ferrier tells the reader that they must 'play the arpeggio' and rhythm their music with refrains and cadences. By slowing down and organizing the fervent pace of debate, Ferrier intends to bring clarity and content to academism. This does not mean denying the complexity of diasporic populations that academic debates evidence, but rather approaching the issue differently, with less impatience and more sympathy. Ferrier discovers this sympathy also in Tokyo, but during the nighttime, in the land not of modern Japanese academism, but that of ahistorical Japanese fantasy.

An earlier section has shown how Ferrier treats Tokyo as a city of fissures inducing aesthetic and existential contemplation. The transformation of Tokyo from a city of banality to a city of fantasy occurs in several sections of *SF* as Ferrier traverses from the real into the imagined Tokyo. After the conclusion of the conference on French identity, Ferrier makes his way home, tired and disappointed. He describes this 'descent' to Shinjuku on his way home:

Maintenant sur la ligne Yamanote, au milieu des visages sales de la fin de
 journée, toute la fatigue des jours et leur âme délavée... Je descends à Shinjuku.

[...] La ville entière semble un fantôme laiteux, des formes entrent en se courbant
 dans l'ombre des immeubles. (Ferrier, 2010a: 221)¹⁰

On the Yamanote train line, Ferrier's fellow commuters are exhausted with 'dirty faces' 'washed-out souls.' Soon after descending at Shinjuku, however, the city begins to take on a spirit of magic as it becomes not an overcrowded metropolis, but an 'milky

the music of grand carnage. One must know to jump the octave.. to vocalize it... on the clef, on the line... to the refrain now, to the cadence...

¹⁰ Now on the Yamanote line, in the middle of dirty faces of the end of the day, all of the fatigue of the day and their washed-out souls... I descend at Shinjuku. [...] The entire city seems like a milky phantom, forms enter in bending themselves in the shadow of buildings.

phantom'; under cover of nighttime, even the grittiness of Japan becomes beautiful. Similar to earlier japoniste authors, Ferrier negates the ugliness of everyday Japan as inauthentic and hiding a deeper spirituality. This act of 'descent' into authentic Japan is repeated in another scene where Ferrier and Yuko spend a night out in the city, which represents the shift in scenery as follows:

On redescend vers la ville, le grand puzzle irrégulier, avec ses cubes, ses anneaux, ses ruelles... bois et béton imbriqués, Tokyo, tous ces éléments disparates dont les rapports échappent à l'esprit [...] On va descendre un peu plus loin encore, plus en dessous, vers la vérité de la ville. (Ferrier, 2010a: 228)¹¹

Ferrier writes that 'we descend towards the city,' but at the start of the passage, the couple is already in Tokyo. The descent is therefore not into the city strictly speaking, but rather 'still a bit further, more underground, towards the truth of the city.' Ferrier thereby distinguishes between two Tokyos, one that is hidden underground and another on the surface. The route into this inner city is through 'one alleyway, then the other' (Ferrier, 2010a: 228) as Ferrier wanders into the hidden, authentic city. By choosing alleyways rather than main boulevards, and by choosing to stroll the city inebriated at night, Ferrier intentionally loses himself within the city streets. A final example of this transformation of Tokyo from dreariness into fantasy can be found as Ferrier returns to the capital by train from a brief holiday with Yuko in Kamakura, which he describes as following:

En arrivant à Tokyo par la route, il est difficile de se déprendre du sentiment qu'on se retrouve tout à coup dans la ville la plus laide du monde. Le trajet qui mène vers la ville traverse une sorte de vaste paysage dont on ne saurait dire s'il est industriel, campagnard, urbain [...] La route est droite, sans charme, elle

¹¹ We descend back into the city, the grand irregular puzzle, with its cubes, rings, alleyways... wood and concrete imbricated, Tokyo, all of these disparate elements between which the relation escapes the mind [...] We will descend a bit further still, more down below, towards the truth of the city.

déroule son ruban entre des étendues d'immeubles gris et de petites maisons à toits de tuile où un chat ne retrouverait pas ses petits. (Ferrier, 2010a: 195)¹²

A few pages later, however, Ferrier manages to overcome this negative initial impression:

Ainsi, dès les abords de la ville, une admiration énigmatique vous saisit.

Puissante, mobile, insaisissable, cette cité semble s'être développée selon une logique étrange, dont l'intelligence nouvelle force le respect et suscite l'incompréhension. (Ferrier, 2010a: 197)¹³

Ferrier's first impression of Tokyo is as an ugly industrial city that is 'grey' and 'without charm'; notably, he describes the route as 'straight' and like a 'strip' in contrast to his descriptions of Tokyo by night, which are winding and unpredictable. Ferrier then appears to contradict himself by claiming that these streets actually follow a 'strange logic' that 'rouses incomprehension.' Like his planned delusions in the evening streets, here, Ferrier refuses to trust his first impression of Tokyo. He wills the city to be incomprehensible by intentionally seeking out sections that are confusing, developing, and moving, identifying that which exceeds his understanding as emblematic of the true city, and by extension the true Japan. This negation of banality and identification of Japan that exceeds the bounds of intelligence is the second extreme paired with the forceful assertion of Japanese banality that we see in the preparations leading up to the academic conference.

¹² Arriving at Tokyo by the route, it is difficult to extract oneself from the sentiment that one finds oneself suddenly in the ugliest city in the world. The road that leads towards the city traverses a sort of vast countryside which one does not know whether to describe as industrial, rural, or urban [...] The route is straight, without charm, it unravels its band between lengths of gray buildings and small tile-roofed houses where a cat would not find its young.

¹³ Thus, from the edges of the city, an enigmatic admiration seizes you. Powerful, mobile, ungraspable, this city seems to have developed according to a strange logic, in which the novel intelligence forces respect and arouses incomprehension.

Yuko: Cosmopolitan supporter by day, Japanese muse by night

Like the place of Tokyo, the character of Yuko also doubles between being rational-Western and aesthetic-Japanese. During the day, Yuko is a cosmopolitan, globe-trotting elite. As the deputy director of *Tokyo Time Table*, she belongs to the economic upper-class and knows her way around Tokyo's most expensive restaurants and bars. It is furthermore only thanks to Yuko's influence within the television company that Ferrier is able to realize his non-traditional programming at all, for it is Yuko who ensures that Jean-Christophe does not get in their way (Ferrier, 2010a: 82). She also has substantial knowledge of European art and culture and is capable in French, though the degree of fluency is never made clear in the novel.¹⁴ In one scene, Yuko is choosing music that to accompany the television program. Within her selection is Baudelaire's poem *Paysage*, interpreted in reggae form by a Quebec group called Les Colocs, and music from the band Gnawa Diffusion, which sings in French, English, and Berber (Ferrier, 2010a: 157-158). Yuko is precisely the respectful, multicultural, and off-centred citizen in which Ferrier recognizes himself.

During the daytime, Yuko is almost always shown as an obedient supporter of Ferrier's plans, and in the scenes where Yuko expresses doubt, Ferrier always wins the debate. In the scene where Yuko first proposes to Ferrier the possibility of coproducing the television program, for instance, Yuko brings up the fact that one of six Frenchmen are descendants of immigrants. She notes that many Japanese may be interested in a program that details their presence, and that 'in Japan, we don't have this type of problem' (Ferrier, 2010a: 40-41). Ferrier is quick to respond sarcastically, leading to the following exchange:

— Au mais oui, bien sûr. Le Japon, une nation homogène... La vieille chanson...

Un sang unique, une ethnie pure !

— Je n'ai pas dit ça.

¹⁴ Yuko communicates flawlessly with Ferrier throughout the entire book, though the language with which they interact is generally unclear. In one section, it is written that Yuko makes a joke to Ferrier in casual French (82), and in another, Yuko speaks to Ferrier about an article the latter wrote in an academic journal, likely in French (41).

- Tu sais depuis quand Hokkaido fait partie du Japon ? 1868.
- Oui, tu me l'as déjà dit une fois.
- Même chose pour Okinawa... Et il me semble que vous avez eu quelques mélanges avec les Coréens—les *Zainichi*—et quelques autres avec les Brésiliens—les *Nikkeijin*... Alors, tu vois... homogène, homogène... (Ferrier, 2010a: 41)¹⁵

Here, Ferrier goes on the aggressive, attacking Yuko with facts related to the international origins of contemporary Japanese society. Ferrier speaks over Yuko, and his criticism is largely unwarranted. Though increasing numbers of those living in Japan are of foreign origin, compared to other developed countries, the relative population of Japanese nationals from immigrant stock remains low. More significantly, a strong ethno-nationalist identity prevents the discursive problematization of foreigner residents as an immigrant problem (Liu-Farrer, 2020). As Yuko defends herself, she said nothing of the homogeneity of the Japanese race, and could have desired to problematize nationalist discourses in Japan. This sudden criticism of Japanese ethnic nationalism in-between a discussion on French immigration exemplifies Ferrier's debasement of mythical Japan through a forceful identification of Japan with France. If France has problems with immigration, so must also Japan. At the moment when Ferrier aggresses upon Yuko, now portrayed as ignorant and nationalist, 'Japan' is overlaid with 'France' and subjected to the same verbal aggression for its refusal to acknowledge multiculturalism. As Ferrier wrote when arguing for the applicability of *créolité* to Japanese diversity, the goal of an off-centre perspective is not its empirical validity, but rather for the sake of discovering new perspectives, that is, in order to remain off-centre. What off-centeredness allows in

¹⁵ — Ah but yes, of course. Japan, a homogenous nation... The old tune... A unique blood, a pure ethnicity!

— I didn't say that.

— You know since when Hokkaido was part of Japan? 1868.

— Yes, you've already told me that once.

— Same thing for Okinawa... And it seems to me that you have had several mixes with the Koreans—the *Zainichi*—and some others with the Brazilians—the *Nikkeijin*... So, you see... homogenous, homogenous...

this scene, however, is for Ferrier to stand on the moral high ground, berating Japan alongside the West for being like the West in its ethnic discrimination.

During the night, however, Yuko transforms from a modern, Western elite to a symbol of premodern Japan. It is this nighttime Yuko who is the object of Ferrier's romantic conquests as well as his artistic inspirations. In one evening, for instance, Yuko takes Ferrier on a 'friendly evening' near Shinagawa station (Ferrier, 2010a: 82-87). She leads him into a small alleyway, from which they enter an elevator that takes them to a bar in the highest floor. The bar table is built from a hundred-year-old Japanese redwood from the north of the country, and their way through the restaurant is guided by paper lanterns. Everyone in the restaurant knows Yuko, and salute her 'with deference' 'like the apparition of the goddess of the Sun,' the Japanese deity Amaterasu. The two are eventually led into a Secret Room in the deepest part of the building. Yuko explains that the room itself is 'like a *machiya*, a house of Kyoto, but the centre of Tokyo,' and 'a place very valued for business dinners and by politicians' (Ferrier, 2010a: 84-85). This hidden Kyoto-style room is all a 'universe of *fusama* and *tsuitate*,' elements of traditional Japanese furniture (Ferrier, 2010a: 85). The menu contains traditional Japanese dishes, and Ferrier orders a dish of potatoes from Kyoto with beans and mushrooms. The restaurant's chef arrives to greet Yuko, and explains that to Ferrier that the secret behind the mushrooms is to not cook them too much and to add a slight touch of yuzu citrus at the end.

In this scene, though Yuko remains an influential figure because of her leadership of *Tokyo Time Table*, she is valued in particular for her qualities as not just Japanese, but a Japanese in the style of a romanticized premodern Japan. Yuko leads Ferrier from the bustling station-side buildings filled with tired salarymen into a hidden piece of Kyoto-in-Tokyo, where everything from the furniture to the potatoes comes from the premodern heart of Japan. This authentic experience of traditional Japan leads Ferrier to wax poetic about the love the chef has for his ingredients, 'a profound sympathy for this crude root with spotted skin,' that is, the mushroom (Ferrier, 2010a: 87). The modern, daytime Yuko may be powerful and global, but is never a source of such inspiration, nor is she even a source of critique. During the day, Yuko acts as a crutch to help Ferrier achieve his goals; even when she speaks back to him by expressing doubt about his project, as has been shown earlier, she is used only as a straw man to prove the moral justice of Ferrier's theory.

Yuko's nighttime embodiment as the spectre of Japanese tradition is most evident in the scene that records the first evening she spends with Ferrier (Ferrier, 2010a: 151-167). Just before Ferrier invites Yuko to share a glass of sake with him, he describes Yuko as follows:

Yuko est habillée de blanc... La femme des neiges, le vrai fantôme... Comme dans les légendes japonaises, celle qui vous tue d'un simple souffle. [...] Elle avance ainsi, agile, semblant glisser plus que marcher, ouvrant la pièce à toute sa profondeur... Des reflets roux passent dans sa robe blanche, des *tengus* ou des *kappas*, des oiseaux de proie, des hommes ailés [...] (Ferrier, 2010a: 159)¹⁶

In this scene, Yuko is explicitly described as being a ghost, in particular the 'snow woman,' likely a reference to the *yuki-onna*, a spirit from Japanese legends that killed men in snowstorms. In an earlier passage, Yuko is described as wearing a 'long, very ample tee-shirt that lets one guess nothing of her forms but only underline them, from time to time — apparition, disparition' (Ferrier, 2010a: 152). This description of Yuko's outfit is similar to that of a standard imaginary of a ghost, a spirit that wavers between appearing and disappearing and does not show any consistent, concrete forms. This ghostliness is connected from the *yuki-onna* to other Japanese spirits like *tengu* and *kappa*. As the shapes and functions of each of these spirits differ substantially, their collective chaining likely intends to emphasize Yuko's ghostliness rather than offer any concrete description of how she appears. Like a ghost, she glides across the floor, appearing and disappearing, inspiring Ferrier's imagination just as the novelist is inspired by the fissures and unexpected rhythms of Tokyo. Indeed, this is no coincidence—Yuko, too, is the material manifestation of Japan.

Conclusion

There are two faces of Japan: one where the country is indifferentiable from France and must be subject to the same criticisms, and another where the country is

¹⁶ Yuko is dressed in white... The woman of snow, the true phantom... Like in the Japanese legends, that which kills you with a single breath. [...] She advances thus, agile, seeming to glide rather than walk, opening the room to all of its depth... Red reflections pass in her white dress, *tengus* or *kappas*, birds of prey, winged men [...]

differentiable from France and is impervious to these critiques. Though Ferrier claims an off-centre position that is neither-and-both French and Japanese, a genuinely 'Japanese' position only appears in the nighttime, when ancient Japanese traditions rise from the fissures of Tokyo, an illogical city, in opposition to the West, excluded from temporal change. Out of fear of remaining too aesthetic, this Japanese position is immediately relativized with portrayals of Japan that deny the nation's aesthetic character, a swing of the pendulum back towards a 'French' perspective that identifies France with Japan. Once Ferrier has reached this French perspective, however, he must swing back, lest he face critique for logocentric, Eurocentric universalism. This final rediscovery of 'Japan' then *returns* to Japanese aestheticism, subsuming cosmopolitan modernity within it, just as how in the evening, Yuko metamorphoses from a powerful Western cosmopolite into a seductive Kyoto geisha while preserving all of the former's charms. If being 'off-centre' involves disavowing an identification with any perspective, it also allows for the preservation of all of them, so long as each is adequately relativized as being not the only possible one. Fabien Arribert-Narce describes Ferrier's style as 'oscillating between themes and genres, tones and modes' and the author 'emblematic of the encounter with the Other, situating himself at the intersection and at the (fragile) equilibrium of diverse references and influences' (Arribert-Narce, 2021a: 16-18). Between how many and which themes and genres, however, does Ferrier actually oscillate; and if Ferrier encounters the Other, is this encounter with the Other any different from nineteenth-century Orientalism? I argue to the contrary; Ferrier's off-centre oscillation really occurs only between japonisme and its negation, and culminates with the implicit recognition that the Oriental Japan is the authentic one.

If Ferrier distinguishes himself from earlier French japonisme, it is not for the disappearance of Orientalism, but rather the addition of an additional step before the French traveller's arrival in oriental paradise. Ferrier must first recognize the sheer banality of Japan, from the dullness of his morning commute to the wastefulness of academic politics and the undeserved authority that consultants like Jean-Christophe receive. Before Ferrier arrives in paradise, this everyday Japan must be torn from its normality through nighttime obscurity, alcohol, earthquakes, or some combination of the above. Only once this daily life has been shaken can Ferrier arrive in the authentic non-West, where he repeats the adventures of previous japoniste writers. These drunk evenings must always end, however, as Ferrier returns back to his office the following

morning and the pattern between loss and discovery repeats itself again. We see in no part the genuinely 'Japanese' perspective that Ferrier promises us in his plural identification. There is only a world without Japan and a Japan seen through France that is then identified as the 'true' Japan. It is likely that Ferrier is fighting a lost cause in assuming that a distinctly 'Japanese' perspective exists, and that this basic metaphysical misstep accounts for the gap between the theory and practice of his off-centre style.

As we see in Ferrier's writing, japonisme today, and Orientalism by extension, does not only operate through simple stereotyping. In the minds of well-meaning liberals such as Ferrier, who is knowledgeable about Japan and has extended experience living in the country, stereotyping Japan is an outdated insult to principles of human equality. This conscious concern for equality, however, results in an authorial method that repeatedly disavows japonisme while also refusing to acknowledge the disappearance of Japan, that treats Japan as neither paradise nor everyday life, but as some multi-coloured configuration of both, with the harboured hope that it will culminate in the former. Ferrier's novel shows how attempts to overcome japonisme may remain fixed within its ruts, satisfying the author's need for moral alleviation by adding a layer of disavowal and rediscovery all the while hesitating from refuting its stereotypes entirely. This neo-japonisme in Ferrier is not quite like the japonisme of old; but it is clearly its post-globalization, post-critical reprise.

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