

Other Notes

Jack Body's *Alley*



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JACK BODY (b. 1944) is a New Zealand composer and ethnomusicologist. In 1998 his opera *Alley*, its libretto co-written with journalist Geoff Chapple and based on the life of Rewi Alley, was performed as part of the International Festival of the Arts in Wellington, New Zealand. The opera brings together several prominent elements of Body's creative work: the exploration of non-Western music and musical cultures and the examination of sexual identity. Homosexuality and non-Western cultures, along with a host of other identities and groups, have a history of subjection to a process of "othering" which constructs these as separate from and different to the self, establishing and bolstering the image of self through its radical polarisation to the other.¹ Against this inflexible logic of alterity, Body's work has sought to reveal the interdependence and commingling of self/other polarities, with a particular focus on the binaries of homosexual/heterosexual, Occidental/Oriental. This present essay will analyse Body's opera both in terms of its musico-dramatic representation of *Alley* and, inseparably, its representation of China. The various lines of inquiry pursued here, the sexual, cultural and musical, will be brought together in contrapuntal re-

lationship through an analysis of the logic of alterity that lies under them.

It is possible to identify two lines through which self/other binaries are explored in Body's work. The first of these has been an unmasking which brings homosexual experience into public view by documenting the objects and experiences of the marginalised or suppressed other (primarily through photographic work).² Secondly, Body has sought to expose couplings of self and other in the attempt to collapse these into a single body—the other within the self within the other. This latter project, as we shall see, was initially ventured through works based on 'double-transcription', a technique excluded from the compositional palette employed in *Alley*.³ The opera uses other means to pursue the same aim: filmic and textual homoeroticism; the incorporation of Chinese music, instruments and musicians into the opera and its ensemble; and the interpretation (using surtitles) of Chinese-language material within *Alley*. It must be pointed out that two productions of *Alley* will be considered here: the first, Body's "paper" production—represented by the score and libretto; the second, the actual production under the direction of Chen Shi-zheng, which took place in Wellington during

¹ Lawrence Kramer summarises the logic of alterity as an historical force which yet still tends 'to privilege masculinity over femininity, hetero- over homosexuality, whiteness over nonwhiteness, the West over the East, civilization over the "primitive", high over low culture, and higher over lower social classes.' Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 35.

² Examples of Body's photographic work include *The Male Nude* series (1984) and the *Runes* collection (1984) which William Dart coyly describes as 'a disturbing collage of toilet graffiti which exposed many of the inadequacies and difficulties in communication which beset our society', in 'Jack Body: The Photographer as Painter', *Art New Zealand* 35 (Winter 1985), 28.

³ 'Double-transcription' is Body's term.

the 1998 New Zealand International Festival of the Arts. The ensuing discussion will be made in reference to Body's "paper" opera, followed by a comparison of this with the actual production.

The question that now presents itself is this: why an opera about Rewi Alley? In the first instance, Body's interest in Alley derives from their mutual and extensive engagement with Asian cultures. Body came into contact with a milieu of Alley's past while recording the music of the minority tribes of China's Gansu province in 1996, the province that was home to Alley's Bailie School in the town of Shandan (1943-52). His Gansu experience provided him with some insight into Alley's character and indeed, as the following statement indicates, Body clearly conjoins his own interest and involvement in Indonesian culture to Alley's lifetime of participation in Chinese society:

Alley had obviously connected with something: a temperament, and a culture with a recorded history of three thousand years. Although Indonesia is a different experience altogether, I began to identify some of my own responses and to link them with what might have motivated this man, a New Zealander, to devote sixty years of his life to China.⁴

The second factor that drew the composer to Alley was the latter's elusive and nebulous sexual identity. Alley occupies a unique and polymorphous position in New Zealand's cultural imagination and his sexuality has certainly contributed to this. He has been iconised as an heroic example of the "good keen man" and as a kind of "Mother Teresa of China", but also demonised as, among other things, a womaniser and a paedophile. Until the recent publication of Anne-Marie Brady's *Friend of China – The Myth of Rewi Alley*, little was known about Alley's sexuality.⁵ *Friend of China* differentiates itself from earlier biographical work by its willingness to open those closets deliberately left shut by Alley and his ghost-writers in the autobiography *At 90: memoirs of my China years*⁶, and by Chapple in the biography *Rewi Alley of China*.⁷ Brady's basic conclusion is that Alley was homosexual in an era that did not permit or acknowledge homosexuality. Furthermore, she posits that Alley's move to China was, in part, provoked by his desire to live within a culture that accepted homosexuality, as Chinese culture did prior to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) seizure of power. Brady reaches this conclusion through speculation about a chance meeting Alley and a fellow soldier had with two Chinese Labour Corps men in France, during the First World War. For Alley, this was 'the first time...that I had any inkling of what China meant' and these men 'the first Chinese... we had been able to meet on the level ground of mutual respect.'⁸ Brady makes much of this meeting, suggesting that it had 'a profound effect

on him, revealing a different perspective of sexuality and, ultimately, inspiring a rebellion against his puritanical upbringing.'⁹

It is this kind of speculation, based on circumstantial and anecdotal evidence, and close reading of Alley's writings, for which Chapple has criticised Brady's work, which he feels to be overly concerned with the issue of Alley's sexuality and too eager to "prove" Alley's homosexuality. *Friend of China* may be speculative, but nonetheless it cannot be denied that there is an homoerotic aura to Alley's photos, many homoerotic moments in his writings, and a fair amount of anecdotal evidence hinting at the possibility that Alley might have been gay.¹⁰ Yet a retrospective construction of Alley as gay is anachronistic, for Alley's sexual identity was formed in an era in which our clear-cut contemporary concepts of "gayness" and homosexuality were barely in their infancy.¹¹ The point here is not simply, as Chapple believes, that Brady's work is unethical in that it 'convicts on dubious evidence, and dismisses evidence that does not suit her case'¹², but that she does not consider that Alley could not conceive of himself as gay, because the very idea of being gay belongs to the sexual taxonomy of the late 20th century. To understand Alley's sexuality we must therefore recognise the historical limits of a contemporary understanding of homosexuality. Such an (idealised) understanding attaches no stigma to homosexuality, whereas for a man of Alley's generation, sexual desire for a member of the same sex was highly stigmatised and therefore something to be kept secret and expressed only at great personal risk (as Brady is well aware).¹³ Therefore, to retrospectively construct Alley as a closeted gay man is not so much unethical, as it is historically misinformed and perhaps also insensitive to Alley's experience as an individual. Given that Chapple co-wrote the libretto for *Alley*, it should therefore come as no surprise that the opera sets about examining Alley's sexuality in a softer and more suggestive manner than Brady's work.

Having discussed Alley's sexuality in some depth, we should now more fully attend to his life, before beginning an exegesis of the opera itself. Rewi Alley was born

4 Sarah Schieff, *Talking Music: Conversations with New Zealand Musicians* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2002), 106.

5 Anne-Marie Brady, *Friend of China - The Myth of Rewi Alley* (Auckland: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

6 Rewi Alley, *At 90: memoirs of my China years* (Beijing: New World Press, 1986).

7 Geoff Chapple, *Rewi Alley of China* (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980)

8 Rewi Alley, *At 90*, 41.

9 Brady, 'West Meets East: Rewi Alley And Changing Attitudes Towards Homosexuality In China', in *East Asian History* 24 (June 1995: 97-120), 100.

10 Brady at one point uses the example of passages Alley underlined in his copy of Daryl Klein's *With the Chinks* (London: The Bodley Head, 1919), a 'sardonic, homoerotic account of the training of the Chinese labour Corps ...'. One such passage runs as follows: "Nude as mermen they raced over the sand and entered the water with a splash and a cry. There was beauty in their shining bodies...". in *Friend of China*, 13. For examples of Alley's photographs see Brady, *Friend of China* and 'West Meets East.'

11 See David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (Routledge: New York, 99), 15-40. I am grateful to Linda Hardy for alerting me to Halperin's work.

12 Geoff Chapple, 'Rewi Alley's Chinese Takeaways', *NZ Listener* (March 1, 2003), 50-52.

13 That Alley had to conceal his sexuality from both New Zealanders and Chinese is clear in a letter to his sister Pip, in which he asked that she not pursue the subject, and from the excuses he gave to Premier Zhou Enlai when questioned about his continued bachelorhood: 'I dash about all the time and it is very dangerous. If I died wouldn't it harm [the woman I married]?' In Brady, 'West Meets East', 100 and 118.

in Springfield, Canterbury in 1897. His upbringing was dominated by his father, Frederick Alley, a school teacher, whose outlook was progressive regarding education, but otherwise puritanical, particularly concerning “sexual” matters, such as nudity (breaches of correct behaviour were met punitively).¹⁴ Puritanism, of course, was hardly exceptional at this point in New Zealand’s history. More importantly, Alley’s Anglican childhood and his father’s commitment to social reform may have instilled in him a high regard for the struggle for social equality. Rewi attended high school in Christchurch and, at the age of 19, joined the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to fight in the Somme during the First World War. It was during this period that the meeting with the two Chinese Labour Corps men, discussed above, took place. Whatever effect this meeting may have had, it is clear that it was significant to Alley: after returning to New Zealand for six years, which were spent attempting to run a sheep farm in Taranaki (the farm itself was eventually abandoned), Alley left for China, where he thought he could ‘help a bit’ in the Chinese civil war.¹⁵

Arriving in Shanghai in 1927, Alley quickly found work as a fire inspector with the Municipal Council of the International Settlement. This led to a position as chief factory inspector. Alley’s interest in Chinese life and culture grew rapidly from the time of his arrival and, according to Brady, Shanghai’s then liberal culture also offered Alley the freedom to explore his purported homosexuality.¹⁶ Of equal significance is that as a factory inspector, Alley encountered the misery created by economic exploitation of China’s poor. It was not long then, before he began to try to find ways to alter this situation, initially through his work as a factory inspector and then through participation in famine relief efforts, which opened his eyes to the extent of the Kuomintang government’s corruption and its role in the exploitation of the poor. As a result, Alley became increasingly politicised and, in concert with like-minded ex-patriots, contributed to the Red Army’s underground support network in Shanghai.¹⁷

In 1930, together with Edgar and Peg Snow, Alley initiated the movement that was to bring him worldwide attention: Gung Ho (‘work together’), which at its peak consisted of thousands of industrial cooperatives spread across China. As revolutionary struggle intensified through the 1930s, some Gung Ho cooperatives were set up within Red Army controlled areas to provide the revolutionaries with vital items such as hand grenades and blankets. The Kuomintang, aware of the role that Alley was playing in this, eventually terminated ‘[Alley’s] services as technical expert to the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives’, and encouraged him to leave China by offering him ‘first-class fare via England to New Zealand... [and] two thousand U.S. dollars compensation.’¹⁸ Rather than leave China, Alley found

another way to continue to his humanitarian project. This came in form of greater involvement in the Bailie Schools that had been training ‘young Gung Ho cadres.’¹⁹ In 1943 Alley organised and led the relocation of the Shuangshipu Bailie school in the Shanxi province to a new location in the town of Shandan in West Gansu. Thus began a period that he describes as ‘the richest and happiest of my life’²⁰ and one that has been the basis of much speculation concerning the possibly non-platonic nature of Alley’s relation to his pupils.²¹ The school lasted until 1953 when the CCP took it over, transforming it into the Lanzhou Oil and Technical School. From this point on Alley’s life in China changed drastically. In the years 1938–52 Alley had been a hands-on man of action (and some adventure), spending much of this time roughing it across China in his tireless efforts to help change the country. In 1953, however, he was pushed by the CCP into the diplomatic roles of Peace Worker and Foreign Friend, both of which granted him considerable prestige but also required that he conform to the party line in representing ‘New China’ to the world. As Alley later made clear in a letter to his brother Pip, in accepting these roles he had made a “Faustian choice”, sacrificing personal autonomy for the right to stay on in China.²² Despite this, from 1953 until his death in 1987, Alley unceasingly devoted his formidable energies to this essentially propagandist work, his unswerving devotion reflected in the accolades heaped upon him by the Chinese government in the years leading up to and following his death.²³

Having briefly outlined Alley’s life, we can now turn to the opera itself. Alley derives its underlying narrative trajectory from a chronological recounting of significant events in Alley’s life in China. Within this framework, the opera is an ostensibly psychological exploration of Alley’s history, which anticipates the issues that Brady deals with so directly: Alley’s sexuality and his “Faustian choice”. The scenario from Body and Chapple’s libretto gives a clear synopsis of the structure and aims of the three act opera:

Rewi Alley is on his deathbed. His life has spanned 90 years, the last 60 as part of an apocalyptic Chinese history. As visionary founder of the Gung Ho movement, as creator of a desert school, as writer, his place in history has been perfected. At his death, he is China’s most honoured foreigner. Yet as his mind tumbles towards oblivion unsettling images arise. The fearsome Thunder Navel [Yen Wang], an embodiment of China’s dynastic power and of death, provokes and

14 Brady, ‘West Meets East’, 99-100.

15 Gwen Somerset (Alley’s sister) recounts that Alley said that war was ‘the only thing I know anything about, and I guess I can help a bit [in China].’ Quoted in Brady, ‘West Meets East’, 102.

16 Brady, ‘West Meets East’, 103-11.

17 See Alley, At 90, 73-96.

18 Alley, At 90, 158.

19 Alley, At 90, 336.

20 Alley, At 90, 232.

21 Brady, ‘West Meets East’, 111-114.

22 See Brady, *Friend of China*, 48. The instructional text *How to Be a Good Communist* also indicates what might have been expected of Alley: ‘If a Party member has only the interests and aims of the Party and Communism in his ideology, if he has no personal aims and considerations independent of the Party’s interests... then he can show loyalty and ardent love for all his comrades, revolutionaries and working people...’ Liu Shao-ch’i in William Hinton’s *Fanshen: a Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (Penguin: Middlesex, 1972), 210.

23 For a recent outline of the pre- and posthumous honours received by Alley see William Tai, ‘Rewi Alley Remembered’, in *Asia Info: the New Zealand Asia Institute Newsletter* (January 2003), 8.

threatens Alley. Two peasant figures, behind them a male chorus, chanting work songs, vigorous and impassioned, also sway him. Alley's own youthful self appears, and revived scenes show their *latent difference to the official story*. Such forces contend to make Alley's hour of death a time of frightening revelations – of a pact, *Faust-like* and destructive, of necessary masks and compulsions, of suspect motives. Even the young Alley finally turn accuser, so that old Rewi Alley's final swansong is one of bedrock identity [italics mine].

The claim that opera will reveal the 'latent difference to the official story' of Alley's life points us towards reading Alley as a deconstruction of the Alley myth, a deconstruction which is at base humanistic—albeit radically so—for it demands that the concept of self as Occidental heterosexual male be expanded and/or altered to include identities associated with the other; that is, the Oriental and homosexual. Within New Zealand's cultural imagination, the Alley myth is perhaps best understood in relation to the trope of the "good keen man". The male New Zealander is apotheosised by this mythic figure: the decent, hard-working, tough, self-reliant, reticent and of course heterosexual Kiwi bloke.²⁴ Alley was in many respects just such a man, given to action rather than words, committed to accomplishing what he set out to, regardless of the odds against it, and seemingly adverse to "blowing his own trumpet". The signs by which Brady interprets Alley as gay stand starkly in opposition to his status as "good keen man". Therefore, to suggest that Alley's character was an admixture of homosexuality and "good keen man" may be profoundly unsettling for many New Zealanders, which to some extent explains the resistance encountered by Brady in the course of her research on Alley.²⁵

The opera's humanistic project also establishes a context in which Alley's behaviour, following the seizure of power by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), can be more properly understood. As Chapple has pointed out, it was only after Alley's death that his life could be openly discussed. This was in part due to access to Alley's previously closed archives, but more to the fact that Alley was no longer endangered by uncontrolled public discussion about himself and his family.²⁶ The opera therefore, is a defence of Alley but one that runs counter to hagiographic reinforcement of the Alley myth. Alley constructs its protagonist in a way that upsets the myth of Alley as "our (good keen) man in China" and does so in order to better understand Alley as an individual, without the robust masks that he created to protect himself from the sociopolitical forces of China and New Zealand.

Alley's masked persona, his reticence regarding those matters that concerned and affected him most directly,

is the fundamental problem encountered by those who attempt—pre- or posthumously—to come closer to him. In creating a dramatic representation of Alley that purports to unmask Alley, Body and Chapple faced precisely this problem. Their solution was to use Yen Wang, a figure from Chinese mythology, as the antagonist who provokes old Alley into revealing himself, before bringing him into confrontation with his younger self. Read in this manner, the opera is both psychological and mythic—a cross-cultural drama of archetypes. The stage, ostensibly the domestic interior in which Alley will die, therein becomes a theatre of the mind upon which Alley's psychical interior is projected. These externalisations of Alley's interior life are used largely to explain his persona in relation to the events and milieux that shaped him. The first two acts place particular emphasis on the history of young Alley, the actionist and idealist who gave rise to the Alley myth. Through a series of tableaux, Acts 1 and 2 deal with the beauty of China that seduced Alley and the misery that pricked his desire to help the Chinese masses and fostered the development of his major projects: Gung Ho and the Shandan School. The 'beauty and misery' of China is a phrase that recurs throughout the opera and it is this dichotomy that is used to outline the depth of Alley's experience of China and to explain his self-effacing commitment to China and the Chinese peasantry in particular. In turn, these suggest that Alley's decision to remain in China was inevitable, although it entailed both the loss of personal freedom and, ultimately, his near-total isolation from the Chinese people.²⁷

Yen Wang provokes the self-analysis that begins Alley's death swoon—itsself another important concept in the opera—but it is young Alley who finishes it, levelling accusations that eviscerate the impact that Alley's 'Faust-like' pact (Libretto, Scenario) has had upon his life and ideals. This combination of biographical contextualisation and (constructed) self-analysis is an effective means of answering the sociopolitical charges that have been levelled at Alley; such dramatic devices evince Alley in confessional mode, laying him bare at his most vulnerable hour, effectively humanising him in a state in which he cannot easily be criticised. This itself could give rise to the charge of hagiography that has so often been fired at Alley's commentators, but it is pre-empted by the use of acousmatic 'Fragments of hagiography' (Act 1, Scene 2) from Edgar Snow and others, which make clear that the Alley myth is not the work of Alley, nor of Alley himself.²⁸

The confrontation between Alley and his younger self voices many criticisms—sloth, gluttony, deception and deceit—driving Alley to cry out for death (Act 3, Finale). Yen Wang then asserts the most fundamental of principles, mutability, and demands that Alley 'Relinquish the dreams of [his] youth' which now 'are but dust.' Against

24 For an extended exegesis of the Kiwi male see Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country: the Image of the Pakeha Male – A History* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1987).

25 Brady, *Friend of China*, 171.

26 Chapple has stated that 'For my own Rewi Alley of China there was no censorship [by Alley], but still the choice in describing the later years [of Alley's life] seemed to be between "friend-of-China" bromides, or information that, in any detail, could seriously damage Alley and his Chinese family', personal communication.

27 See Brady, *Friend of China*, 99-124.

28 These fragments, acousmatic because they are audible but their source remains invisible, include Edgar Snow's comment that Alley 'achieved greatness in a country where few foreigners ever managed to create an authentic ripple', as well as similarly high praise from Dr Joseph Needham: 'Rewi Alley I admit unhesitatingly among my half-dozen immortals.'

this, Alley asserts a ‘bedrock identity’ (Libretto, Scenario) of hope and optimism, which reunifies young and old Alley, and links them to cause of the Chinese masses, through the singing of a song based on a poem by the Chinese poet Shu Ting (translated into English by Alley).²⁹ The words of this song pass from the mouth of old Alley, singing for the first time in the opera, to young Alley, to the lips of the two Chinese peasants. The final scene thus segues from accusation, to reconciliation, to reassertion of hope for a future that ultimately rests with the Chinese people themselves. The tone of these lyrics, with their emphasis upon the possibility of change born of revolutionary struggle, assert the Marxist ideals underlying Communism and thereby also assert Alley’s rectitude.³⁰ That this final song involves an interlingual and intermusical transfer of common materials from an Occidental (Western opera, English) to an Oriental context (*shaonian* folk song, Chinese) is highly significant, as will later be discussed.

The process of humanising Alley by demythologising him also necessitates a complexification of Alley’s sexuality. The mythic Alley has been painted asexual (chastity and hagiography making fine bedfellows), paedophilic, homosexual, rampantly heterosexual (a myth Alley helped foster).³¹ The debate has continued to boil, largely due to Brady’s portrait of Alley as a closeted homosexual whose interest in young Chinese men was fostered as much by desire as by do-good instinct. As was earlier established, Brady’s analysis, though not unaware of the sociosexual environment that determined Alley’s sexually-related behaviour, does appear to ahistorically construct him as gay without attending to his particular locus in what Eve Sedgwick terms ‘the epistemology of the closet.’³² Therefore, it is important to reiterate that as a gay man within post-WWI New Zealand, Alley could not openly express his orientation nor understand it as a clearly codified gay identity, such as exists today.³³ To attain a greater degree of sexual freedom required that Alley move to a culture in which homosexuality was accepted, that is, to the China of the 1920s, a world which could not have been more other to the New Zealand of the same period. Accordingly, rather than (mis)represent Alley as gay, the opera impregnates the image of Alley as “good keen man”—the masculine heterosexual self—with the inexpressible seed of the other—

the homoeroticised Oriental male—thereby suggestively coupling self and other.³⁴

Given this particular self-other alliance, from a hetero- and ethnocentric (homo- and xenophobic) perspective, Alley’s sexuality could be dismissed as entirely other. Alley seeks to reverse this process of “othering” and one means by which this is attempted is through the refiguring of the “good keen man’s” love of physical labour. Love of labour has been used to ally Alley to the Chinese masses—Alley portrayed as a man who understood and espoused the necessity and pleasure of labour. However, the sweat of “hard yakka” can lubricate the already labile boundary between homoeroticism and the back-slapping homosociality of co-workers. The eroticising of labour in Alley, through attention to the sensuality of the working male body (the opera’s Oriental male chorus), results in a softening of the binary boundary and slippage between self and other.³⁵ Alley then, does not go so far as to perform a bold sexual post-mortem upon Alley, but rather points to the locus of ambiguity within Alley’s history, an ambiguity readily perceptible in his writings and photographs, which nudges one towards the assumption that Alley was probably what we would today call gay.

This topography, where other is folded within self, and where the lay of this land is dissimulated—a necessity for the pre- gay liberation homosexual—is achieved heterogeneously within Alley. There are the obvious elements within the opera: an envisaged filmic component to play back a stash of homoerotic memory fragments, snatches of male beauty stolen from ostensibly non-erotic contexts (bathing, working); and more subtle means such as the use of fragments of Alley’s writing that whisper his desire. Similarly, the opera’s staging plays out Alley’s sexuality by projecting it outwards: it is never directly enunciated by the self—Alley as the opera’s centre—but enacted outside the self through film and choreography. This is often coupled with its projection upon the other—the Asian male—and therefore not acknowledged as part of the self but as something that exists objectively in the beauty of the other (a phenomenon perhaps reflected in contemporary Asian male appreciation societies).³⁶ Yet as we have noted, the opera’s drama is psychological and its stage a theatre of mind, thus what seems to be other, to be divided from the self, is but an externalisation of hidden and secret parts of the self.

As we have established, the division of self and other—the basis of Alley’s dissimulation—is threatened by Yen Wang. Early in the Act 1 Yen Wang interrogates Alley, seeking to expose the motives underlying his engagement with China. This leads to Yen Wang’s rejection of Alley’s claim that he was moved by pity and rage, instead revealing fascination to be Alley’s fundamental motivation (Act

29 Shu Ting was ‘one of the leading lights of the Meng Long (‘misty’) poetry movement of the 1970s.’ Du Yaxiong, ‘Chinese Folk Singers Perform in an Avant-Garde Opera: Gansu ‘flower-songs’ bloom in Wellington’, in *Chime Journal* 12-13 (Spring/Autumn 1998), 170-4.

30 The final stanza of Shu’s poem, as translated by Alley, reads ‘Everything present is pregnant with future/Everything future comes from past/Have hope, struggle for it/Bear these things upon your shoulders.’

31 Alley actively sought to portray himself as heterosexual. See, for example, the hints he drops in the television documentary *Rewi Alley of China* (1980) about the ‘hazards’ he faced as a Shanghai fire inspector: the come-hither advances of a naked ‘White Russian’ boarding house proprietress, and the proffer by a Shanghai restaurateur of a beautiful 18 year old Japanese girl ‘naked under her kimono.’

32 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

33 See Phillips, *A Man’s Country*, 274, for a brief discussion of the establishment of gay identity in New Zealand.

34 As Brady has suggested, ‘to Western eyes the Asian male is the epitome of the gay stereotype: effeminate and passive’, in ‘West Meets East’, 102.

35 Claire Denis’ film *Beau travail* (1998) achieves a similar self-other coupling through the eroticising of working male bodies, in this case those of soldiers.

36 These Longyang Societies are briefly discussed by Brady, ‘West Meets East’, 102.

1 Scene 4).³⁷ Fascination, the attitude of the desiring self, opens the door to traffic with the other and in an intensified form can lead to the self's undoing through swoon. Swoon, stereotypically associated with the feminine, is something that strips the male self of its power to control itself, to maintain its self-image; in other words, swoon engenders the manifestation of otherness, thereby threatening the identity of self. Yen Wang, who seeks the revelation and manifestation of truth before death, will do so through swoon. As he states to Alley, 'I can make you swoon. I can give you the physical sensation of the truthfulness of a thing' (Act 1 Scene 9). Swoon then, can be considered an alliance of eros and thanatos which also exposes these two faces of the other: eros, in the form of the Chinese labourer, inspires the self; thanatos, represented by Yen Wang, threatens the destruction of the self.³⁸ There are several examples of this eros-thanatos twinning in Alley. In Act 1 Scene 2, for example, young Alley sings of the appearance of 'A great lone wolf... With tongue lolling', which can be read as an image of otherness in the form of the animal need that threatens the disciplined self; and in Act 1 Scene 7, young Alley sings of 'two eyes'—a beautiful youth—who 'walks lightly, whose eyes burn steadily', wishing to join him in his deathly fate 'on the river bank where his life would be torn from him.'³⁹

It should now be clear that self/other is no easy binary within Alley. As we have seen what is projected as other is sourced within the self and could be speculated to be the very foundation of the self (the self-other). It is interesting to note then, that the reverberant acousmatic space that signifies otherness within the opera—the space that Yen Wan and the Asian male chorus emerge out of—is the space into which Alley and later the Chinese peasants are swallowed in the finale. Thus Alley is taken by the other in a simultaneous triumph of *thanatos* and *eros*. Phyrnic and silent though the latter's victory might be, it is representative of the inhospitable climate in which homosexual men of Alley's generation found themselves, a climate where simple talk of homosexuality risked social disaster, if not actual death in post-Revolutionary China.⁴⁰

At this point, having traced the dual processes of self/other unmasking and coupling in the opera, we should now turn to the musical deconstruction of self/other binaries. Musically, the opera attends both to the homo/hetero binary and to the cultural division of Occident/Orient. In discussing this, it will pay first to detour into those works of 'double-transcription' that form an important part of Body's pre-Alley output. Significantly, the work that Body credits as having given him his "break" is *Three Transcrip-*

tions (1988, for string quartet).⁴¹ Transcription is the basic tool of ethnomusicologists and involves the "translation" of a field-recording of a performance into a notated form. Body has added the technique to the compositional toolkit through double-transcription, in which the field recording is first transcribed and then further transformed—the double transcription—into a form that can be played by reading musicians. The aesthetic interest of double-transcription derives in part from the aporia of transcription itself. A transcription cannot pretend to be an entirely faithful representation of its object, not least of all because it involves a shift from one medium to another.⁴² Western notation unavoidably essentialises its object in the transcriptive process, representing certain dimensions of it, while excluding others. Most obviously, Western notation is heavily biased towards pitch, at the expense of timbre, for which no nomenclature exists. For example, in attempting to transcribe the weir—nuances of vocal timbre and articulation (the grain of the voice)—used by the actor-singers of Jing-xi (Peking opera), the transcriber must substantially supplement Western notation in attempting to capture the subtleties of the form.⁴³ If this is not attempted, the transcription is hopelessly positivist, omitting certain levels of articulation while disregarding others. Such positivism is most distortive when it falls into the trap that Western art music often does: the belief that it is the score alone which constitutes the musical work.

Against this, Body's double-transcriptions are not simula-cra that mask the original, but rather are of an order that calls attention to the gulf between object (other) and sign (self). In this sense, works such as *Melodies for Orchestra* and *Three Transcriptions* are iconic; they simulate their object, but do not replace it (as musical exotica does) nor deny its existence (as popular sample-based music is wont to do). In this process the pleasure of such works emerges: the pleasurable aporia of distance between self and desired other, even as the body of the self is defined by that of the other. Double-transcription therefore articulates the distance between self and other that belies the act of transcription. The CD release of Body's double-transcription works points to this by virtue of the inclusion both of the

37 Act 1 Scene 4. The lines in question were, unfortunately, omitted from the final production.

38 As Jonathan Dollimore has put it 'Perhaps it has always been the case that the radical elements in humanism have included a strain of anti-humanism whereby consciousness identifies with what threatens it, and especially with what it submits to, thereby empowering and destabilizing [sic] itself both at once', *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998), xxii.

39 This trope is not without precedent in gay culture. See Dollimore, *Death*, ix-xii.

40 See Brady, 'West Meets East', 100 and 114-116.

41 The three movements of this work feature, respectively, transcriptions of Jiha Yueyue playing the *long-ge*, the multiple Jew's (or jaws) harp of the Yi nationality of SouthWest China; Marorazana playing the *valiha*, bamboo tube zithers from Madagascar; and the Varna Folk Dance Group playing a *ratschenita*, a dance in 7/8 time from the Shops region of Bulgaria.

42 Body acknowledges this when, in the programme note for the CD release of the double-transcriptive *Melodies for Orchestra* (1983), he writes that these transcriptions 'are [only] as literal as I could make them' (*Pulse*, Rattle Records, RAT-D0009); but the word literal here is somewhat misleading for what can be literal about a copy (the transcription) of a copy (the recording) that has shifted across three semiotic modes (reality, recording, notation) and is to be presented in the form of a fourth copy and mode?

43 See Isabelle Duchesne's 'The Concept of "Weir": "Flavour/taste" in the music of Jingxi (Peking Opera)', in *CHIME Journal* 12-13 (Spring/Autumn 1998), 8-28; and also the introduction to *Harmony and Counterpoint: Ritual Music in Chinese Context*, ed. Bell Yung et al (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 4.

double-transcriptions and the sources from which they derive.⁴⁴

Body's interest in transcription, aroused partly by simple attraction, is also born of a creative desire to transcend the self by taking on the qualities of the other.⁴⁵ As we have seen, however, the other that inspires the self can also threaten it; in this case both by demanding a different understanding of compositional authorship (double-transcriptions have authors rather than an author)⁴⁶ and by exposing the limitations of the foundational system of Western art music—notation and read performance. Regarding these, Western music's reliance upon notation has, in the minds of many commentators, resulted in its losing the immediacy and "rawness" characteristic of non-mediated live performance, which promises 'a special excitement that can readily overflow into sheer self-abandonment.'⁴⁷ Western music contains this risk within the disciplinary framework of notation, whereas non-Western music, in which notational governance is less total (or simply non-existent), is far less constrained in live performance; this in the sense that the music and the performer are no longer separated, and the performer no longer limited by what can be notated.⁴⁸

In *Alley*, Body opted against 'double-transcription' in favour of the inclusion of Chinese instruments and performers, which often have considerable autonomy in comparison to the rest of the operatic ensemble. The primary reason for this would seem to be precisely that double-transcription is an alienated music—in its acknowledgement of the transcriptive aporia—while live performance by Chinese musicians is authentic, inasmuch as this is possible outside the music's original context. Transcription distances self and other, and Body's purpose in *Alley*, as we have already seen, is to create a heterogeneous network of self-other relationships that problematise simplistic binary oppositions. While the aesthetic and affect of double-transcription may seem an appropriate means to represent Alley's psychological and sociopolitical malady, Body and Chapple's humanistic project favours contact and interaction between self and other, rather than the distance that double-transcription celebrates.

The musical intermingling of self and other is achieved polymorphously in *Alley*. To begin with, there is Yen Wang's *Sprechgesang* (speech-song). As a technique, *Sprechgesang* functions as a bridge between Orient and Occident. It is a European vocal technique of highly inflected

speech, speech that is almost song, and is associated with the expressionist works of the composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951); yet, it is also found in the far older and more illustrious tradition of Jing-xi (Peking opera).⁴⁹ For Western listeners *Sprechgesang* has strong psychodramatic connotations, associated as it is with expressionist contexts where the stability of self is threatened. Thus it is no accident that Yen Wang is the interlocuter between old Alley (who speaks) and young Alley (who sings). Old Alley's speech is the voice of the embattled pragmatist. Young Alley's song is the voice of idealism, hope and desire. Through Yen Wang's *Sprechgesang* old Alley is brought back to the 'bedrock' (Scenario, Libretto) of his former self and therefore can sing again, as he does in the finale. This swansong bleeds into the fountainhead of Alley's fascination and idealism, the Chinese peasant. It is Yen Wang's labile and abject voice—abject because it is both speech and song, self and other—that provokes this, engendering slippage between Occident and Orient, present and past, reality and memory; that is, Yen Wang's voice is "swoon" inducing⁵⁰, allowing self and other to melt into each other's arms (where both eros and thanatos will be found).

The collapsing of the self/other boundary within Alley is also achieved through the incorporation of traditional Chinese instruments into the body of the Western operatic ensemble and context. This location of Oriental other within the Occidental self effects a transformation in both. The result is a hybrid (or perhaps abject) ensemble that is neither Western nor Chinese precisely because it is Western and Chinese. This is most obviously achieved through the inclusion of Chinese instruments played by academy-trained Chinese musicians reading fully notated parts—the performative other articulating the musical system of the self.⁵¹ Such hybridity in the music of Western composers is not without precedent: Mauricio Kagel's *Exotica* (1971-2) uses an ensemble of non-western instruments to present an attack on European cultural imperialism. Here though, the inclusion of non-Western instruments and performers is unique its dramatic function, something which allies the opera to the music-theatre works of the Chinese composer Tan Dun (for example, Tan's *Ghost Opera* for string quartet and pipa).

This cross-fertilisation is carried further still by steeping the parts for Western instruments in performance techniques derived from Chinese music and the qualities of Chinese speech. The immediate effect of this is that Western instruments are decentred, taking on qualities

44 Body, *Pulse*.

45 'I like to transcribe music in which I sense a particular quality... which my ears find attractive but which I have difficulty deciphering. I want to understand what is happening in this music to give it this special quality. My ideal is to learn something that I might be able to apply in my own composition', Body in Schieff, *Talking Music*, 104.

46 In this sense, we should perhaps speak of these double transcriptions as "Body's", rather than Body's, work.

47 Lawrence Kramer, 'From the Other to the Abject: Music as Cultural Trope', 60. This essay is chapter two of Kramer's *Classical Music*, 33-66.

48 The Western musical cult of the virtuoso can be considered an indication of the desire of audiences to witness the transcending of this limit. See Edward Said's *Musical Elaborations* (Vintage: London, 1991), 1-34.

49 Schoenberg's song-cycle *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912) is the best-known of his works to use *Sprechgesang*; Jing-xi, literally 'the theatre of the capital' dates from at least 1790. See Colin MacKerras, *Peking Opera* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997).

50 Act 3, Finale, m.137.

51 Academy-trained musicians in China read both traditional cipher notation and Western notation. The Chinese instrumentalists in *Alley* were three members of the Huaxia Chamber Ensemble, playing the *er-hu* (Chinese fiddle), various members of the flute family (*dizi*, *xiao*, *xun*, *bawu*), and the *sheng* (a mouth organ with upright pipes). The latter is a good example of the cross-fertilization between China and the West for it gave rise to the Western harmonica following the introduction of the *sheng* to Europe in 1777.

of the other that destabilise their identity as instruments of the Western-self. There are numerous examples of this within the opera, but two will suffice here: firstly, in Act 3 Scenes 2-3, the oboe and soprano saxophone are instructed to play *suona*-like.⁵² Tellingly, this occurs at the point in the opera at which Alley is forced to relive his 'Faust-like pact' (Scenario, Libretto), in which he abandoned his own autonomy in order to remain in China, thereby becoming a vassal of the Chinese state⁵³; secondly, in Act 1, Scene 4, the timpani is to play *glissandi* (pitch "glides") 'suggesting the tones of the Chinese language.' In this, the tonal inflections of Chinese languages infiltrate the musical discourse, again taking Western instruments beyond their hidebound selves.⁵⁴ This linguo-musical transfer is also applied to other instruments. The strings, for example, consistently make use of *glissandi*, which links them not only to tonal speech but also to the performance technique of the *er-hu* (Chinese fiddle).⁵⁵ It is worth noting here that this emphasis on timbre and articulation—the sensual skin of sound—locates Body's musical mode outside that of the Western canon, which has tended to marginalise timbre and articulation as secondary decorative elements in favour of a primary focus on pitch (notes), relationships between pitches (harmony and counterpoint) and pitch derived structures (epitomised by sonata form and its structuring tonic-dominant binary). Pitch and pitch-derived structures are the hallmarks of "serious" music, whereas the skin of music—so prominent in non-Western music—is trivial, ephemeral, and at worst dangerous if treated as a primary musical parameter.⁵⁶

The preceding discussion points to those ways in which the self can be musically decentred, through the coupling of Occident and Orient. By contrast, the inclusion of two *shaonian* (courtship song) singers, filling the roles of the two Chinese peasants, does not provide a further means of melding self and other (aside from their common location within the opera).⁵⁷ Rather, the *shaonian* singers are

the presence of the "real" China, the voice of the people, chosen by Body for the beauty of their song and because *shaonian* are sung in Gansu province, home to the Shandan school. The *shaonian* singers situate the other within the context of the self, an Oriental element within an Occidental context, and this is reflected in the notation of the songs themselves. In the score, the *shaonian* parts are represented by reductive transcriptions, but the performance of the songs is not made from the score. Notation symbolically stands in for the songs, but only crudely represents them; basic pitches and words alone are notated, while embellishments, articulation and dynamics—the elements that uniquely identify *shaonian*—are omitted. In this sense, the score acknowledges its limitations in representing this musical other. Here, the aporia that double-transcription is founded upon is apparent not through the distance of double-transcription, but in the paucity of musical signs that represent the songs.⁵⁸

Yen Wang's notated part, as with that of the *shaonian* singers, does not function as a governing text. Rather, it is simply a pointer to the presence of this character, not to the actual performance he will deliver. The actual performance then, only loosely relates to its notational skeleton; like Li Gui-zhou and Ji Zheng-zhu (Chinese peasants), Chen Shizheng (Yen Wang), an erstwhile performer of Peking opera, is responsible for filling the aporia that a fully notated part, based on transcribed materials and performed by an "inauthentic" performer, could not possibly hope to fill. The result, contra double-transcription, is that the other is not lost in the self's the attempt to capture it. However, in this reliance upon the performer and moreover the performer as a representative of otherness, the compositional self—the god-composer of Western art music—draws attention to the limits of his creative power and to the hole at the very centre of his art, necessarily ceding creative control to others in order to fill it.

This double process of a) commingling self and other, and b) acknowledging the self's dependence on the nourishing other (which yet reasserts the difference between self and other), can be considered a musico-dramatic representation of Alley's life: on the one hand, Alley to a large extent overcame the self-other boundary. He chose China as his home, and in accepting the puppet role of 'foreign-friend', showed the extent of his sinification in accepting a role in which personal autonomy was largely erased through service to the state; on the other hand, the limits of Alley's sinification are clear in the CCP-coined title 'foreign-friend' which marked him as a foreigner in a culture that initially regarded him as such (Alley recounts being spat on upon his arrival in Shanghai).⁵⁹

The second of the above processes is seen most clearly in the dramatic function of the *shaonian* singers. We have noted that they can be regarded as the voice of China, and

52 Body's instruction to play *suona*-like also calls attention to the shared history of Western and Eastern instruments. *Suona* is a generic name for Chinese shawm instruments that derive from Central Asian shawms such as *zurna*. Western double-reed instruments (such as the oboe and bassoon) also derive from the shawm, which 'reached Europe from the Islamic East during the 9th to the 12th centuries at the latest.', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edition, vol. 23, 229-32.

53 Young Alley will later sing to old Alley 'you served the state and in serving became its slave' (Act 3, Finale).

54 In the canonic or 'common practice' era of Western art music, 1700-1900, *glissandi* on timpani were not used, owing first to technical limitations and then, in the 19th century, to lack of interest in exploiting this possibility. The 'earliest use of a [timpani] *glissando* may well be due to Walford Davies, who [used it] in his *Conversations for piano and orchestra* (1914)', *The New Grove*, vol. 25, 494-5.

55 See for example, Act 2 Scene 1, mm. 14-31, where the *er-hu*, the timpani, bass clarinet, and strings make use of *glissandi*.

56 For example, the British composer John Casken talks about the 'dangers' of 'Polish texture music', in Paul Griffiths, *New Sounds, New Personalities: British Composers of the 1980s* (London: Faber, 1985), 88.

57 *Shaonian* are a 'vocally impressive type of courtship [song]' sung by 'young people of Chinese, Tibetan and other ethnic origins... They are mostly sung in Chinese, even by people who use a different language in everyday speech. The main

functions of [the songs] are entertainment, flirting and finding sex partners.' Du Yaxiong, 'Shaonian, Courtship Songs from Northwest China' in *CHIME Journal* 12-13 (1998), 70-86.

58 See for example the opera's finale, mm. 47-81. Here the visible lack of notation provides an indication of the extent to which the notated musical sign is a 'floating signifier', or as Suzanne Langer put it, an 'unconsummated symbol.'

59 Alley, At 90, 44.

in this capacity they offer a vision of life as lead by the Chinese peasantry, a taste of the beauty of Chinese cultural traditions, and critical commentary upon events in 20th century China, including a criticism of Alley as ‘some [fat] old big nose’ whose motorcade rushes through their village but does not stop, not even to pay for a dog that is run over and killed (Act 3 Scene 5). In this they are acknowledged as the mysterious and alluring other that has inspirited and seduced Alley, but whose power to do so lies in their otherness, their autonomy. Furthermore, the peasants are also an icon of Alley’s sexual ideal, for here we have two men united in singing songs which derive from a form used for ‘flirting and finding sex partners.’⁶⁰ In this sense, the peasants can be considered representative of an otherness that Alley will never achieve. It is therefore significant that in the finale, young and old Alley unite briefly in a song of hope, but it is a swansong and so Alley must die, leaving the unattainable other still singing.

Despite this trajectory towards otherness, there is no direct revelation of Alley’s sexuality within Alley. Rather, as we have seen, the work is homocentrically weighted. One of the most telling episodes in this regard centres on the jar of marmalade that old Alley contemplates in Act 1 Scene 4, which itself prompts young Alley to begin singing ‘The music of golden muscle music, music of muscle, of golden skin.’ This homoerotic collapsing of golden masculine muscle and music into a jar of marmalade is a pointer to the presence of illicit desire beneath the surface of the mundane—young Alley closes the scene by typing the words ‘Dear Mother, Thank you for the marmalade. I have landed a job with the Municipal Fire Brigade.’ The episode is also significant in that it directs attention to the way that music itself can be charged with the energy of the other. In the West, much has been made of the trope of music as other, the manifestation of the latent within the self: ‘Music causes me to forget myself and my true state; it transports me to another state that is not my own.’⁶¹ Heard this way, music is the labile force that opens a portal between self and other, exciting and troubling the self with ‘another chaos, that it created in us.’⁶² In Alley, as the marmalade episode shows, this otherness can indeed be found in the ‘music of muscle, of golden skin.’

Before elaborating upon this last point, let us briefly recapitulate. We have noted the following: that old Alley, who speaks, and young Alley, who sings, are united in a song that leads to the other—the final song of the peasants as desired and idealised other; that it is the labile, swoon inducing voice of Yen Wang that engenders this; and that the homosexual other is located in ‘golden muscle Music.’ Within Alley, the endpoint of the trope of music as other is that Alley’s desire for the cultural and sexual other, articulated in numerous ways in the opera, congeals into song. What we must now attend to is the fact that at an intrinsic level—within the body of music itself—there is a strong drive towards the voice of the other. The falsetto voice

into which young Alley often breaks, has been described by Body as Alley’s internal, secret voice.⁶³ The trope of the male falsetto, however, renders this voice more specifically as the voice of the other, whether this be the feminised, androgynous, castrated or homosexual man.⁶⁴ In Alley, there is a strong case for interpreting young Alley’s falsetto as the homosexual voice for it is precisely at those points in the opera when young Alley sings falsetto, that the libretto becomes homoerotic. This is the case, for example, where young Alley sings of ‘golden muscle Music’⁶⁵ and of the beautiful ‘one who walks lightly’, whom he wishes to join in death on the riverbank.⁶⁶ Moreover, the trajectory towards the other manifested as the falsetto voice, is played out gesturally within both the ensemble writing and Yen Wang’s part. The latter, as decentring other (*thanatos*) carves an upward pitch trajectory which arcs inevitably downwards. In Yen Wang’s presence the ensemble writing tends to do the same. Yet when Yen Wang is not present the texture lifts only upwards, aspiring towards the ideal, beautiful other. When, in the finale, old Alley asserts control over the ensemble (which Yen Wang for the most part governs), his swansong finally begins climbing upward—eros unbound—until it reaches the upper range of young Alley’s voice and then spurts into the falsetto register of the *shaonian*; a form often used to express sexual desire and in which ‘in some cases the singing between spontaneous partners in the dialogue singing eventually results in actual love-making.’⁶⁷

Up to this point the Alley we have been discussing is an idealised production, a mix of Body’s “paper” opera and aspects of the actual production that reflected this idealised entity. Alley was directed and choreographed by Chen Shizheng.⁶⁸ Chen made two significant directorial decisions concerning Alley: firstly, that the production would not be surtitled, and secondly, that it would not have a filmic component. These decisions were made to simplify the production and intensify its focus on performance (dramatic physical presence), which Chen maintained would serve Body and Chapple’s intention of making manifest the latent aspects of the Rewi Alley myth.⁶⁹ It appears however, that these simplifications, whilst uncluttering the production, did little to aid this intention; rather, they significantly altered the complex network of self-other relations within the opera. The most important of these, of course, centre on Alley’s sexuality. As we’ve seen, Alley is drenched in homocentric references, but never makes a bare statement concerning sexuality. The filmic compo-

60 Du Yaxiong, ‘Shaonian’, 73.

61 Tolstoy, ‘The Kreutzer Sonata’, quoted in Kramer, *Classical Music*, 56.

62 Wilde, ‘The Portrait of Dorian Gray’, quoted in Kramer, *Classical Music*, 56.

63 Jack Body, personal communication.

64 See Joke Dame, ‘Unveiled Voices: Sexual Difference and the Castrato’, in *Queering the Pitch: the New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 139-154.

65 Act 1 Scene 4, mm. 46-66.

66 Act 1 Scene 7, mm. 138-48.

67 Du Yaxiong, ‘Shaonian’, 72-3.

68 Chen (b.1964), a performer in Chinese opera troupes from a young age and formerly a leading actor in the Hunan Opera Company, moved to New York in 1986 to study theatre at New York University. He has since gone on to direct and choreograph productions for numerous opera companies, including the New York City Opera and China National Beijing Opera Company.

69 Jack Body, personal communication.

ment of Alley was to be the means by which the homo-other within the hetero-self would be objectified.⁷⁰ The libretto states that the filmic component is to be ‘close-up, illusive [sic], without specific reference to time or place’ and of a grain which, with its ‘flickers and flares’, should ‘show signs of ‘disintegration and decay.’ Just as Body imagined young Alley’s falsetto voice as an interior voice, so to is the filmic component an interior imagic memory bank storing the profits of Alley’s secret libinal economy.

There are several examples of how the filmic level of the opera would have served to amplify its soft exegesis of Alley’s sexuality and these generally work in parallel with the libretto: firstly and as discussed above, Act 1 Scene 7 reveals the association between sexual revelation and the destruction of the self (to join the ‘one who walks lightly’ is to share in his deathly fate). The filmic execution sequence specifies the ‘face of the victim turning, direct eye contact’, thereby amplifying contact between self and other through the agape gaze; secondly, in Act 1 Scene 9, the eroticising of male labour in the libretto is again amplified through film. The libretto specifies that the filmic material comprise of ‘Rhythmic images of sweating worker’s limbs, dissolving to water over youthful shoulders and back’ as the scene shifts to young Alley singing of ‘a sturdy shaven-headed boy [dashing water] over his body.’ Through rhythmicisation, these images are linked to the body of music—the most rhythmic of arts—which in turns conjoins them to the trope of music as other. Furthermore, it is interesting to speculate as to the extent to which such images would have dominated the staging of these scenes; presenting a vision of a usually hidden other, which in projected form would outstrip in size all other aspects of the staging, thereby inverting the relationship of self and other that Alley controlled so carefully during his lifetime.

If the filmic component amplifies the opera’s homoeroticism, thereby clearly attending to the question of Alley’s sexual identity, the effect of its removal is to significantly dampen this inquiry. Minus the film, the representation of Alley’s sexual interior is marginalized within the opera, leaving latent the question of his sexuality. This problem was compounded by Chen Shi-zheng’s decision to omit surtitles from the production. The omission of surtitles renders incomprehensible all Chinese language⁷¹ material in *Alley*: the parts of Yen Wang, the chorus, and the Chinese peasants. Without the privilege of access to the score or libretto, the receiver is unsure of the dramatic function of these, as indeed were many reviewers of *Alley*.⁷² This obfuscation, of course, only serves to further compound the self/other division initiated by the omission of the filmic component. By contrast, translation in the form of surtitles would bring self and other into a common ambit and what is exciting about *Alley*, in its “paper” form, is that it offers the possibility of communication between self and other, often in ways that run counter to existing cultural

stereotypes. Peasants for example, tend to be imagined as a voiceless, submissive and even stupid other, but in *Alley* the Chinese peasants clearly articulate China’s dilemma, are old Alley’s harshest critics (next to his younger self), and provide the most beautiful musical moments of the opera. Likewise, Yen Wang’s role as antagonist, spurring old Alley into confrontation with himself, is reduced to that of threatening other. Sans translation, the concept of swoon is lost. Yen Wang’s power to provoke it is thereby transformed into an inchoate and threatening force, rather than a tool of self-revelation born of Alley’s dialogue with the other. The effect of this is to encourage a reading of Yen Wang as either the sum of Alley’s fears and secrets (the closet and the skeletons in it), or an icon for the China that will hound Alley to his grave. These simplistic interpretations are engendered by the ambiguity of non-translation for without surtitles it is difficult not to read Yen Wang’s character according to Orientalist stereotypes.

In toto, the omission of surtitles makes the opera a far less challenging one than it ought to be. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the opera’s finale where old Alley’s swansong segues into young Alley’s part, which in turn merges with that of the *shaonian* singers. In Chen’s production the essential point of this—that all three are singing the same song—is undermined without surtitles. Thus this symbol of a shared ideal, a shared vision of the future, retreats into the mysterious and beautiful fog of *shaonian*. The irony here is that in distancing the audience from the non-Western elements of the opera, Chen’s production renders *Alley* as much a mystery as Alley himself was. Given Chapple’s concerns about the ethics of post-humously dissecting Alley’s character, it is appropriate that the production, incomprehensible as it was to non-Chinese speakers, would have presented no such problem to a bilingual speaker of English and Chinese such as Alley himself. ■

70 The film for the opera was to have been created by New Zealand film-maker Stuart Main.

71 Alley uses Mandarin, exclusively.

72 See, for example, Tara Werner (New Zealand Herald, 2 March 1998) and John Daly-People (The National Business Review, 6 March 1998).