“STAND FIXED IN STEADFAST GAZE”: AN EDITORIAL NOTE

Yang Ye*

In this issue, we hereby present to our readers a group of four essays on literary studies from young scholars. While they are arranged in alphabetical order of the authors’ last names, we would like to offer a brief introduction to them in the chronological order of their topics.

Such articles are inclined, in general, to focus on the subject matter of their object of study, i.e., authors, works, etc. Ryan J. Harte, however, devotes the first half of his essay to an extensive and intriguing discussion of his own task, as a comparatist, per se, comparing it to, surprisingly, poetry, as both are what he considers to be “imaginary constructions” that rely on the creativity of the comparatist and the poet. In adopting a comparative approach in literary studies, Harte argues, the scholar follows a personal interest and confronts the world with its multifaceted features, and attempts to mold them into something manageable for his own use, and that is exactly what the poet chooses to do in the process of poetry composition. Harte identifies a number of similarities between the two apparently different activities, and observes that comparison, like poetry, begins from intuition, a flash of understanding, or a vague feeling. Then, the objective and analytical rigor of scholarship offers the comparatist the chance to capture such a poetic impulse, and sort it through in language. In the second half, as an illustration of the above argument, Harte presents a comparison of Bacchae, a tragedy by the ancient Greek playwright Euripides (ca. 480-406 B.C.E.), and the Zhuangzi, the Chinese classic that defies easy classification. Notwithstanding the vast cultural and generic differences between the two works, Harte demonstrates, through close textual reading, that they both start out to unsettle our fixed suppositions, or knowledge, via the common theme of forgetting, and in the process invite the audience and the readers to relinquish the previously accepted knowledge, and eventually come to the realization that human nature is not only tenuous, but also subject to changes.

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Chinese readers know about the Roman poet Ovid (43 B.C.E.-17 C.E.) primarily through a prose translation of his major work *Metamorphosis*, the long narrative poem in fifteen books, written originally in Latin in the epic meter of dactylic hexameter, that incorporates into it hundreds of miniature stories from Greek mythology. One of the best known figures of Greek mythology is Medea, who marries Jason, the legendary hero of the Argonaut in its quest for the Golden Fleece, but later, after being deserted by Jason, takes her revenge on him by murdering not only his new wife and her father, but also, in some versions of the legend, her own children with Jason. While most modern readers are familiar with Medea in the story-line recounted by Euripides in his famous tragedy, Chun Liu 刘淳 directs her attention instead to Ovid’s *Heroides*, a less known work of the poet’s that consists of fifteen fictional poetic epistles, written in the first-person singular voices of epic or mythical heroines, including such famous women like Helen of Troy and Penelope, the wife of Odysseus. Through a close examination of two of the letters in the collection, Liu reveals how Ovid, well aware of his readers’ familiarity with the mythical tradition and possibly also previous literary works, plays on the image of Medea as an outcast and outsider. In letter VI, from Hypsipyle, a former mistress of Jason’s, Medea is represented as a barbarian; in letter XII, in her own voice, Medea mocks orthodox “Greek” values and practices. Through intertextual references to each other and to the prior literary tradition, as Liu points out, Ovid manages to portray a complicated, self-reflective woman, whose multiple potentials are brought out when confronted with a diversity of life experiences; and in creating a literary character who breaks ethical and moral boundaries of the time, the Roman poet also breaks the boundaries of texts and genres. Incidentally, it is a meaningful and remarkable coincidence that the Chinese translation of *Metamorphosis* (《變形記》), which has familiarized Ovid to the Chinese readership, was made by the distinguished scholar and educator Yang Zhouhan 杨周翰 (1915-1989), a venerable predecessor of Liu’s, by half a century, at the English Department of Peking University.

On the surface the essay from Bao Huiyi 包慧怡 concentrates on *The Golden Targe*, a love poem in Middle English by the late medieval Scottish poet William Dunbar (ca. 1460-ca. 1525), but it actually moves way beyond that to involve an exploration of symbolism and allegory, the two major rhetorical devices in medieval poetry. Bao maintains that both correspond to, or rather originate from, a way of thinking that tends to understand the world and
everything in it as a “mask.” Informed by C. S. Lewis’ observation which clearly differentiates the functioning process of symbolism from that of allegory, Bao discloses how Dunbar’s poem, in its allegorical characterization, exemplifies the core spirit of allegorical poetry as a literary genre. We would like to remind our readers that this is one of the very few scholarly articles on Middle English literature from Chinese scholars these days. Reading the essay, we could not help but recall that at one time or, more precisely, in the second half of the last century, China prided on a few eminent scholars of English literature, including Fang Zhong 方重 (1902-1991) in Shanghai and Li Funing 李賦寧 (1917-2004) in Beijing, who were conversant with Middle English and made solid contributions to its study and research. With their decease around the turn of the century, the field has been deprived of its leaders in China for quite a while. We are thereupon happy that a young scholar like Bao is now able to take on the arduous and daunting task, with her brilliant and solid research and teaching, to fill that vacuum.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the Indian writer and winner of the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature, made a visit to China in 1924. The black-and-white photograph of Tagore, with his snow white hair and beard, standing in the company of two of his Chinese hosts, the handsome poet Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897-1931) and the beautiful female architect Lin Huiyin 林徽因 (1904-1955), has become a vivid lasting image of early twentieth century Chinese cultural history. While many Chinese readers are fond of Tagore’s poetry, rendered in numerous Chinese translations, they remain largely strangers to his novels or his political and social thought. The article from Nan Zhang 張楠 provides a close reading of Tagore’s novel, The Home and the World, in particular a study of its protagonists and major characters, as well as that of the “spatial tropes” used therein, against its background of the clash of patriotism and cosmopolitanism, critically recognized as one of the novel’s central themes. Based upon her thorough research of theoretical approaches and Tagore studies from both Western and Indian scholars, from Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) and Raymond Williams (1921-1988) to Amartya Sen (b. 1933), Martha Nussbaum (b. 1947), and Kwame Anthony Appiah (b. 1954), Zhang shows how Tagore draws on Buddhist thinking in postulating his vision of svadeśsamāj, a form of social collectivity that integrates inner life with traditional Indian ways of communal existence, and conveys important cosmic consideration to foster broader sympathy with the entire humankind.
Literary studies, like humanities in general, are more in danger of being marginalized these days than any time before, against the rise of materialism, ideological indoctrination, and money worship that have run rampant, all around the world, since we moved into the new century. Under the circumstances, we are very glad to notice how, as the popular Chinese saying goes, “In the Yangtze River the waves behind drive on those before,” a new generation of scholars have stepped forward and made their strong presence felt, as clearly displayed in these essays. Moreover, those of us in the field of comparative literature are only too familiar with the often-cited, ill-boding lines of the India-born English poet, Rudyard Kipling (1865-1935), who was no stranger to the cultural differences between East and West:

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgement Seat; ...

_The Ballad of East and West_ (1892)

Such pessimistic warning notwithstanding, we have devoted our studies, teaching, and research to facilitating the meeting of the East and West, because we hold the firm belief in the common virtues and universal values of human kind, all endowed with, to use a Buddhist expression, the “seven emotions” of joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hate, and desire. In this sense, we feel gratified indeed to see how these young scholars, one American and three Chinese by nationality, have taken such an attentive and careful deliberation of the rich heritage of East and West, from ancient Greek and Roman poets to the Chinese classic of the _Zhuangzi_, from a late medieval Scottish poet to a modern Indian author, in the way depicted by John Milton: “The stars with deep amaze / Stand fixed in steadfast gaze” (_On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity_ 1645). We have no doubt in our mind that such a “steadfast gaze,” in due course, will certainly lead to further and better understanding between East and West, and in spite of the tumultuous “sound and fury” around us today, to a brighter and more peaceful world for all to share tomorrow.
ALLEGORICAL CHARACTERIZATION IN WILLIAM DUNBAR’S
THE GOLDEN TARGE

Bao Huiyi

Abstract: Symbolism and allegory are two major rhetorical devices throughout the medieval poetic corpus. Both correspond to, or rather originate from, a way of thinking that tends to understand the world and everything in it as a “mask,” as if the surface is always deceptive. Among modern scholars on medieval symbolism and allegory, including Johan Huizinga, C. S. Lewis, Umberto Eco and Alastair Minnis, only Lewis, in his Allegory of Love, clearly differentiates the functioning process of symbolism from that of allegory. And it is Lewis’ definition of allegory that brings us closer to the core spirit of allegorical poetry as a literary genre, of which The Golden Targe, written in Middle English by the Scottish poet William Dunbar, is a fine example. This essay examines Dunbar’s allegorical characterization through a close analysis of The Golden Targe, in the hope of better understanding allegory as a pivotal mode of thought in medieval literature.

Omnis mundi creatura
quasi liber et pictura
nobis est, et speculum.
Nostrae vitae, nostrae mortis,
nostri status, nostrae sortis
fidele signaculum.
Nostrum statum pingit rosa,
nostri status decens glossa,
nostrae vitae lectio.
Quae dum primo mane floret,
defloratus flos effloret
vespertino senio.

—Alan de Lille

The differentiation between the terms “symbol” and “allegory” in a medieval literary context, as both are abundant and conventional in the poems of the period,

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may go as far as it suits a theorist’s specific critical purpose, based on his understanding of the two conceptions. One reason for this uncertainty is that both symbol and allegory in the Middle Ages correspond to, and perhaps originate from, a mental habit of comprehending the world and everything in it as a mask, as something that means more than what it looks, an attitude beautifully summarized in the above quoted verses by Alan de Lille. As Johan Huizinga has observed in The Waning of the Middle Ages:

Of no great truth was the medieval mind more conscious than of Saint Paul’s phrase: *Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmatie, tunc autem facie and faciem*... Such sensations may take the form of a morbid oppression, so that all things seem to be charged with a menace or a riddle which we must solve at any cost. Or they may be experienced as a source of tranquility and assurance, by filling us with the sense that our own life, too, is involved in this hidden meaning of the world. (Huizinga 1965, 194)

This tendency, very likely a highly undesirable and unwanted obsession in most modern eyes, is no mere example of the vicissitudes of literary taste. It has its root in the Biblical exegesis tradition of the Fathers at the latest, and has been enhanced by the medieval intellectual atmosphere of Scholasticism, as well as that of grasping the world via *pictura*, in a gradually fixed system of images. “Pictures were the literature of the laity (*laicorum literatura*).” (Eco 2002, 54) Such a line of thinking, combining allegorical exegesis with homiletic rhetoric, underlies the iconographic tradition of most illustrated bestiaries of the High Middle Ages, in which a pelican always stands for Christ, and a unicorn for chastity, etc. Long before the tendency reached its full bloom, Augustine had proclaimed in unmistakable words that “when that which is said figuratively is taken as though it were literal, it is understood carnally... He who follows the letter takes figurative expressions as though they were literal and does not refer the things signified to anything else.” (Augustine 1958, 84) Hugh of St. Victor developed the idea in even clearer message: “Every analysis begins from things which are finite, or defined, and proceeds in the direction of things which are infinite, or undefined.” (Hugh of St. Victor 1963, 92) However, Hugh at the same time scrupulously warned against the danger of intemperate allegorical interpretation by an inexperienced mind, and advised the middle-path:
Why was that former people who received the Law of life reproved, except that they followed the death-dealing letter in such a way that they did not have the life-giving Spirit? But I do not say these things in order to offer anyone the chance to interpret the Scriptures according to his own will...it is necessary both that we follow the letter in such a way as not to prefer our own sense to the divine authors, and that we do not follow it in such a way as to deny that the entire pronouncement of truth is rendered in it. Not the man devoted to the letter “but the spiritual man judgeth all things.” [I Cor. 2:15] (Minnis 2009, 81)

For Umberto Eco, both symbol and allegory may be categorized under “medieval symbolism,” which may be further divided into “metaphysical symbolism” and “universal allegory.” The former is “related to the philosophical habit of discerning the hand of God in the beauty of the world,” and to medieval symbolists such as John Scotus Eriugena (ca. 815-ca. 877), “the world was a great theophany,” manifesting God’s causes in His beautiful creations. (Eco 2002, 56) Eco’s definition of “universal allegory” is less clear despite its greater popularity and extent of institutionalization, but it is roughly summarized as a way of perceiving the world and every creature in it as possessing four levels of meaning (literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical). Though the process is hard to trace even with supra-linguistic methods, sometimes the former may transform into the latter, and “the crystallising of symbol into allegory...in the Middle Ages...were contemporaneous.” (Ibid. 58) For Eco, the two are merely different expressions of the same aesthetic interest and are even interchangeable under certain circumstances, the division line is unstable and fluid. Nevertheless, a quarter of a century earlier before Eco’s crystallization theory (which was first published in Italian in “Sviluppo dell’estetica medievale” as a single chapter in a book by various authors in 1959), things were very different with C. S. Lewis, who regards symbolism, or “sacramentalism” as “almost the opposite of allegory,” and separates symbol from allegory with unmistakable determination:

The difference between the two can hardly be exaggerated. The allegorist leaves the given—his own passions—to talk of that which is confessedly less real, which is a fiction. The symbolist leaves the given to find that which is more real. To put the difference in another way, for the symbolist it is we who are the allegory. We are the “frigid personifications”; the heavens above us are the “shadowy abstraction”; the world which we mistake for reality is the flat
outline of that which elsewhere veritably is in all the round of its unimaginable
dimensions ... the poetry of symbolism does not find its greatest expression in
the Middle Ages at all, but rather in the time of the romantics; and this, again,
is significant of the profound difference that separates it from allegory. (Lewis
1936, 45-46)

It is Lewis’ definition that brings us closer to the dominant rhetoric device usually
associated with medieval allegorical poems, of which William Dunbar (ca. 1460-ca. 1525) came late into the tradition. In such allegories, personified ideals are set against each other as rival authorities in competition for a spiritual prize—often the protagonist’s soul—in a battle which Lewis calls the Psychomachia, or *bellum intestinum*, ‘the Holy War’. (Ibid., 55) Another theorist, Angus Fletcher, has tried to explain the passion for such a literary device and the causal links between allegorical actions with the Frazerian anthropological concepts of contagious and sympathetic magic, as well as with psychoanalytic terms by partly identifying symbol with the Freudian Unconsciousness, concluding that with symbol the “normal” order of things is perceived directly “without any logical extrapolation from the phenomena of our material world, whereas in allegory there is always an attempt to categorize logical orders first, and fit them to convenient phenomena second, to set forth ideal systems first, and illustrate them second.” (Fletcher 1964, 18) If we are to understand exactly how this type of allegory functions as a powerful literary (not to be simplified as a mere rhetorical) device, Dunbar’s *The Golden Targe*, being both an allegorical love poem and a dream vision, thus demonstrative of two distinctively “medieval” genres, with its somewhat surprising concision of 279 lines, is a good example to examine in details.

*The Golden Targe* may be counted among those works of Dunbar that have not be given due credit by modern critics. The very “aureate style” which, associated by the poet with his distinguished predecessors John Gower and John Lydgate, but best illustrated in *The Golden Targe* itself, has been frowned upon on account of its overabundance of Latinate vocabulary as well as its “poetic diction” which, to quote Patrick Cruttwell, “is just as lifeless and conventional as the worst that eighteenth century can show.” (Cruttwell 1954, 175) Lewis, though expressing appreciation of the poem’s language, style and images, speaks harshly about Dunbar’s allegories in general: “His allegories are not of historical importance. They have no purpose in the world but to give pleasure.” (Lewis,
1936, 251) About the allegory of The Golden Targe in particular, Lewis also remarks: “It has an intelligible allegoric action...But this action is so slight and degenerates so often into a mere catalogue of personifications (which is the only serious fault of the Targe) that we are right to neglect it...in it we see the allegorical form adapted to purposes of pure decoration.” (Ibid., 252) This is barely a satisfactory defense of the Targe’s repute, for it is, after all, the allegory that makes possible the whole dramatic mechanism of the Targe, and it is primarily by the effectiveness of the allegory that we judge the craftsmanship of a fifteenth century poet writing in the allegoric form. The allegorical figures in the Targe are neither purely ornamental nor a superfluous, dead name list as the result of “degeneration,” which I believe may be demonstrated by a close examination of the poem.

The Targe’s allegorical figures may be roughly divided into two categories: the deities from the classical tradition, both male and female, who descend from the ship but do not engage in the battle for the narrator’s soul (with the sole exception of Venus); and the qualitative figures standing for one’s manners, social status and morality (inherited from a relatively new tradition first brought to eminence by Roman de la Rose) who become warriors in the Psychomachia led by Venus. Dunbar’s treatment of the two categories of personae is very different, and suitable for their respective functions. The entrance scene at the beginning of the allegorical section of the poem (starting from stanza 6) is among the most vivid and lifelike descriptions to be found in the genre, manifesting the glitter and glamour of a moving parade cart staging a mystery play, as well as the sensuous beauty, idyllic leisure, and provocative undertones only seen together in a Renaissance oil painting by the Venetian School:

... quhar fro anon thare landis
Ane hundreth ladyes, lusty into wedis,
Als fresch as flouris that in May up spredis,
In kirtillis grene, withoutyn kell or bandis.
Thair brycht hairis hang gleting on the strandis
In tressis clere, wyppit wyth goldyn thredis,
With pappis quhite and mydlis small as wandis. (ll. 57-63)¹

As if the emphasis on the ladies’ lack of caps and headbands, their loosely hanging tresses and the symbolic greenness of their gowns is not sufficiently suggestive, the poet has to direct our eyes to their deliciously white breasts and slim waists. And as if even that is not enough, an occupatio of the “inexpressibility topos” follows immediately in the next stanza, concluding that neither Homer nor Cicero has the skill required to portray “that paradise complete.” (l. 72) Here, under the pretense of describing the charm of the garden, Dunbar is already writing in dangerously suggestive terms of the perfect happiness promised by erotic love.

Up to this point, Dunbar has made no distinction between the two types of allegorical figures: presumably the “one hundred ladies” include both. The next six stanzas (9-14), however, are reserved for classical pantheon out of which deities and semi-deities walk in flesh-and-blood animation, not as wooden allegories. We have details of the action: “Thare saw I May, of myrthfull monethis quene...Within the gardyng walking up and doun...Thare saw I Nature present hir a goun...Of evry hew under the hevin that bene, depaynt and broud be gude proporciooun.” (ll. 82-90) We have dynamic description of expressions: “Thare saw I Mars the god armypotent, aufull and sterne, strong and corpolent. Thare saw I crabbit Saturn, ald and haire...His luke was lyke for to perturb the aire.” (ll. 112-15) Priapus, Phanus and “Janus, god of entree deltytable” (l. 120) are deliberately placed one after another to insinuate an arousing atmosphere filled with images of phallus, fertility and sexuality. And Pluto is transformed from the grim underground ruler into “the elrich incubus, in cloke of grene” (ll. 125-26)—a mischievous seducer figure incarnating the power of nature—in order to be paralleled with “Bacus, the gladder of the table” (l. 124) to enhance the orgiastic ambiance in a demonic and disturbing dream, in which hell breaks loose in the disguise of deities dressed in green and earnestly playing harp or lute, perhaps symbolizing the dreamer-narrator’s latent sexual anxiety. It may naturally be argued that much of Dunbar’s characterization of the deities consists of inherited stock phrases, but it is Dunbar’s creative arrangement and skillful illumination of them that makes the figures dance suggestively in a quasi-Aphrodisiac erotic dream. It is also useful to remember that even Homer has not ridden his epics of epithet periphrases like “ox-eyed Hera” and “Eos with rosy fingers,” and that the characterization of Dunbar’s shipful of deities is finished within the length of a mere 54 lines.
The second type of allegorical figures are animated by a milder version of the “Peeping Tom” topos—the narrator does not pay the price of his eyesight “all throut a luke” (l. 135) but is assailed by the archers of Venus. Passive tense dominates in this turning-point episode—“I was rycht sudaynly affray” (l. 134), “I was aspyt” (l. 137)—as if the narrator falls a helpless victim into a trap deliberately set for him, but it is in fact he himself that voluntarily “crap...throu the levis and drew nere (l. 133),” and even upon being discovered, he is not totally without comfort: “yit rycht gretly was I noucht affrayit, / The party was so plesand for to sene. / A wonder lusty bikkir me assayit.” (ll. 143-45) The “point of epiphany,” to borrow Northrope Frye’s term, the decisive moment between the Roman pantheon allegory and the truly medieval allegory of love—the central allegory of *bellum intestinum*—is actually a highly “realistic” description of the semi-voluntary, self-destructive process of falling in love.

After the ladies have let fall their green mantles, exposed the bows hidden in their tresses, and stood in a battle formation, “Dame Beautee” leads the first round of attack accompanied by the generally desirable and rather predictable qualities of a courtly love heroine: Fair Having (Attractive Deportment), Fyne Portrature (Fine Appearance), Plesance (Delightful Nature), and Lusty Chere (Joyful Countenance), some of which recognizable as traditional figures from the earlier love allegory corpus. Then with the entrance of a single rival, namely Reson (Reason) “with schelde of gold so clere...that nobil chevallere (ll. 151-53),” the one-to-many battle officially begins, of which the narrator takes no share, but hides behind his defender in perfect passivity. Denton Fox structualizes the following battle by dividing Venus’ camp into three different groups standing for three different stages of femininity: the maiden (led by tender Youth, followed by “virgyns ying” of grene Innocence, schamefull Abaising, quaking Drede and humble Obedience); the young woman or “the perfect bourgeois matron” (led by Swete Womanhede, followed by Nurture, Contenence, Pacience, Gude Fame, Stedfastnes, Discrecioun, Gentrise, Considerance, Levefull Company, Honest Besynes, Benigne Luke, Mylde Chere, and Sobirnes); and the mature woman “with all the additional attractions of nobility and wealth” (led by Hie Degree, followed by Estate, Dignitee, Comparisoun, Honour, Noble Array, Will, Wantonnes, Renoun, Libertee, Richesse, Fredome and Nobilitee). (Fox 1959, 327-328) This is, of course, a logical and readily graspable categorization. Nevertheless, apart from implying the staged growth in age, temperament and social status of a woman presumably of noble birth, these three unsuccessful
assaults may also stand for the temptation from an entire spectrum of feminine qualities. One of the mysteries of erotic attraction lies in that it is not always virtues that fascinate, but imperfections, sometimes even vices as well. Allowing all the room for flexibility in interpreting words like “Wantonness,” “Libertee” and “Fredome” in their medieval semantic context, all the qualities listed above cannot consistently be embodied by a single woman. It is as if Venus is trying to figure out what type of woman is the narrator’s cup of tea: innocent Cinderella or Femme Fatale, the moral gentlewoman or the dangerous Gypsy. Although not all of the above-mentioned allegorical figures may be pinpointed as clear archetypes, Venus’ warriors do seem to have gradually changed their chant from the Songs of Innocence to the Songs of Experience.

Ultimately, when all her sirens fail to lure our Odysseus into doom, Venus changes her tactics and does something like plucking out the sailors’ earplugs. She redeployes “Dissymilance” as the charge-leader, whose already redoubtable power is reinforced by Presence (“plicht anker of the barge”), Fair Callyng (“that wele a flayn coud schute”), Cherising, and Hamelynes (“that hardy was and hende in archery”)—each belonging to the league of Experience—with the very first archer Dame Beaute reappearing and bringing up the rear (ll. 181-94), thus completing the formidable battle array and wrapping the Psychomachia allegory into a loop. “Fair Callying” has usually been identified as the equivalent of “Bialacoil” in Roman de la Rose and serves as Venus’ “uschere” (usher) in Kingis Quair (l. 673). Originally derived from “belh aculhir” (fair welcome) in Provençals, Fair Callyng is “something more than mere politeness and yet a something more which a woman of gentle breeding will find it hard to withhold from any acquaintance not obviously dishonourable or vulgar.” (Lewis 1936, 122)

It is exactly the ambiguous connotation in the favor given by Fair Callyng that becomes one of the most useful female weapons, buttressed by the equally flexible Cherising (“kind treatment” can easily turn into “fondling,” “caressing” or “pampering”) and the intimate physical contact promised by Hameynes and Presence under the leadership of Dissymilance and Beautee. At this point Reson begins to lose its ground — “The bataill brought on bordour hard us by. / The salt was all the sarar, suth to sayn” (ll. 197-98)—and is finally blinded by Perilouse Presence and banished to the “bewis grene,” leaving the narrator alone to face his doom. The next three stanzas describe the process of how the deceptively transient satisfaction of requited love deteriorates into desertion, and how New Acquyntance delivers the narrator into the hands of Dangere (cold disdain,
standoffishness, the stoutest guardian of the Rose in *Roman de la Rose*), then that of Departing (separation), and finally that of Hevynesse (depression). The allegory does not end until Eolus blows the bugle that shakes all the leaves and reduces the paradisal dream garden into a wasteland where “*all was hyne went, thare was bot wildernes, / Thare was no more bot birdis, bank and bruke* (ll. 233-34),” bringing the narrator’s former complaint about Reson’s (Reason’s) departure making “ane hell my paradise appere” (l. 215) into full “reality” within the framework of his dream vision, which is in turn shattered by the commotion made by the gun-firing, departing ship. At last, the awakened narrator finds himself once again in the flower-illuminated May garden of the first five stanzas which formerly lulls him into sleep.

As we can see, the second type of allegorical figures—the qualitative abstractions participating in the *bellum intestinum*—do seem to occasionally fall victims to what Lewis regards as “the only serious fault of the *Targe,*” reducing the allegorical figures to “a mere catalogue of personification” (Lewis 1936, 252) instead of developing them into full-fledged, animated and sophisticated dramatic personae. Nevertheless, Dunbar’s adoption of this “catalogue technique” is not without advantages in its particular context. For one thing, in depicting a situation as urgent as a battle, it is exactly the concision of the allegory, the compact, quick-paced, successive appearance of allegorical warriors in an unbroken line that catches the gist of an overwhelmingly pressing assault so hard to resist on the part of the narrator. As may be seen from the above discussion, Dunbar’s allegorical characterization is richer and more abundant in details when it comes to the deity figures not involved in the battlefield. Secondly, the dramatic sense of a medieval allegorical poem is somewhere between that of non-allegorical prose, and that of a morality play—when dealing with the same subject, it is often more vivid, dynamic and three-dimensional than the former, and less so than the latter. The most proper metaphor for an allegorical poem is perhaps a pantomime, or a puppet show—part of the actors’ charm lies exactly in a certain “woodenness” and rigidity inherent in the motion of their limbs, and too much dexterity and lifelikeness would only dwindle the mesmerizing aesthetic effect created by the puppeteer. For that matter, the complete absence of dialogue, or even monologue, on the part of the allegorical figures in the *Targe,* a limitation of poetic skill in the eyes of some critics, silently contributes to its pantomimic, enchanted atmosphere which is further enhanced by the glittering and resplendent imageries of the poem.

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Thirdly, the “catalogue technique” brings into full effect what I would like to call “the power of nomination”—a process in which every attendee is given and called by a name and assigned to play a unique role, the process in which Adam was entitled by God to have dominance over all other animals. Does not the urgent and uninterrupted calling of fourteen personae within the length of the first five lines of Stanza 19, or that of thirteen personae in the first five lines of Stanza 20, give us the impression that Venus really has deployed the entire spectrum of what she considers as desirable qualities in a female in order to sack Reson’s fortress?

Last but not the least, allegory is, by the way it functions, the exorcism of the “human” elements in a character in the disguise of personification. All allegories are anthropomorphic, but they only work by expelling the spirit of humanity from their forms; while symbols work in the opposite direction; they usually take the zoological, botanical or even insentient forms such as a stone or a wood cross, but symbolism is, at the bottom of its spirit, essentially pantheistic. It is most effective when the desires, fears and faiths of man are breathed into insentient objects, each with its allotted place in the hierarchy of medieval cosmology. It is in this sense that the central imageries of the rose and of the enamel work as such effective symbols throughout the Targe.

On the other hand, strictly speaking, it is only the second type of allegorical figures—those “abstract” qualities exorcised of human spirit but perform the roles of human warriors in the bellum intestinum—that may be categorized as pure allegories. The first group of the Roman pantheon characters are declining gods—deities that have started to lose their spiritual significance more than a thousand years ago, but the human elements in these idols in twilight have not been exorcised completely for them to become pure allegorical figures. As Yeats’ favorite quotation from Heraclitus goes, gods and men are constantly “dying each other’s life, living each other’s death.” (Yeats 1992, xxxix) Lewis has made an attempt to trace the process of the “apotheosis of the abstractions” perhaps at the expense of “the fading of the gods.” (Lewis 1936, 56) He has, however, left that discussion vastly open-ended. With these being said, we can perhaps better understand and appreciate what Dunbar is doing with his second type of purely allegorical figures: his characterization skill is more like that of a relief carver than that of a round sculptor, and he is a dexterous relief carver—not only in terms of craftsmanship, but also in knowing where and when to shift a little bit towards the round sculptor, as we have seen him doing in the portraiture of less
purely allegorical pantheon figures. The archetypal garden in May, which serves as the opening *locus* of so many medieval dream visions, derives, according to A. C. Spearing, from an ideal Mediterranean landscape in places like Greece, Italy and Palestine, “typically set in bright southern sunlight, but...also provides shade against the sun, and therefore furnished with a tree or trees...and there will usually be a breeze...for comfort in a hot country,” (Spearing 1976, 17-18) except that for Dunbar, the real Scottish May climate features the chilly gust of Eolus “*that with the blast the levis all toschuke*” (l. 231) instead of a benign and cozy Mediterranean breeze. The fact that the narrator is only able to return to the garden *locus* or earthly paradise—Spearing suggests influences from both Eden and “the jewelled brilliance” of New Jerusalem in the Apocalypse (Ibid., 17)—upon waking up from the dream, provides an alternative way of understanding the otherwise allegory of love.

*The Golden Targe* may simultaneously be read as a poem processing the anxiety of influence suffered but also bravely confronted by a poet coming late into the tradition. Dunbar, in his poetic career, has aspired after “*reverend Chaucere, rose of rethoris all*” (l. 253) as well as “*morall Gower and Ludgate laureate*” with “*sugarit lippis and tongis aureate*” and “*angel mouthis most mellifluate* (ll. 262-65);” after the kind of poetic virtuosity represented by the beautiful, translucent yet highly artificial garden at the beginning of his dream vision. The same set of vocabulary and imagery is adopted to describe both the garden and the skill of the poets he admired (“*anamalit,*” “*illumynit,*” “*ourgilt,*” “*depaynt,*” “*goldyn,*” “*brycht,*” “*licht*”) and the central image of “*rose redolent* connects the two in perfect Nature and perfect Art at the same time. Near the end of the dream vision, the poet discovers that his garden of supposedly perfect poesy is in fact only a bare and barren wasteland, resembling his modest description of his own “*lytill quair*” (little book) at the very end of the poem—“*Rude is thy wede, disteynit, bare and rent.*” (l. 278) However, when awakened from his dream, the poet is once again in the beautiful, fertile garden, only this time he finds that “the joyous sense of reveling in sensuous nature is somewhat lessened” and “the air attemperit, sobir, and amene (l. 249),” implying a more objective view of his own poetic skill and the poet’s finding peace with himself—the regained paradise is not perfect, but things may be improved upon the simple awareness of that imperfection. In the course of the humiliating and frustrating dream, the narrator (this time also the poet) has exchanged a perfectionist ambition of his own craftsmanship for a more realistic and
Some scholars seem to have ignored Dunbar’s use of allegory. For example, Fox has remarked: “Dunbar does not, in fact, seem to be much interested in the allegory of his poem...not primarily concerned with maintaining a clear allegorical narrative.” (Fox 1959, 318) Of course, the Targe does not have to be understood as a meta-poetical allegory. The allegorical genre has often, by nature of its definition, made us forget that allegory is, first and foremost, one among many methods of appreciation. Just as in Biblical exegesis the allegorical meaning does not exclude the other three levels of meaning, nor does “decoding” the literal meaning makes it justifiable for us to nullify the intrinsic poetic value of the allegories in themselves and discard them as used tools. The significacio in medieval allegorical poetry is not “a chilling and irrelevant addition to the story.” (Lewis 1936, 250) Rather, allegories work like lamps that throw light upon obscure corners between the lines, allowing us the jouissance of discovering new landscapes when visiting old places. In The Golden Targe, Dunbar’s allegories serve as prisms that turn the entire poem into a hall of mirrors, in such a self-conscious manner and with such ingenious craftsmanship, that one is prone to find Fox’s above-cited view rather unwarrantable. From Dunbar’s fifteenth-century Middle English dream visions to Robert Burns’ highly suggestive modern English verses, the art of allegorical characterization was never truly lost in Scottish poesy.

References

ALLEGORICAL CHARACTERIZATION IN WILLIAM DUNBAR’S THE GOLDEN TARGE

**BREAKING BOUNDARIES:**
**MEDEA AS THE “BARBARIAN” IN OVID’S HEROIDES VI AND XII**

Chun Liu *

Abstract: Medea is an intriguing figure in Greek mythology who has been portrayed in a variety of ways by ancient Greek and Roman authors. One dominating feature in all her stories is her identity as an outsider who enters the mainland Greece through her marriage to Jason. In the Heroides, the Roman poet Ovid depicts Medea in two of the single letters. Taking advantage of his audience’s familiarity with the mythical tradition and possible awareness of previous literary works, Ovid plays on the idea of Medea as an outsider: in Hypsipyle’s Letter VI, Medea is represented as a barbarian, while in Letter XII Medea mocks “Greek” values and practices. Through intertextual references to each other and to the prior literary tradition, Ovid is able to portray a complicated, self-reflective figure in these two letters, whose multiple potentials are brought out when confronted with a diversity of life experiences. In creating a figure who breaks all boundaries, Ovid the poet is also breaking the boundaries of texts and genres.

Of the heroines of all 15 single letters in Ovid’s Heroides, Medea takes up a little more than the average for the letters as a whole. In addition to Heroides XII which is under her name, Hypsipyle, the heroine of Heroides VI, also dwells extensively on Medea who has just replaced her by the side of Jason. It is obvious that Ovid himself is fascinated by the figure of Medea, and he gives various representations of her in different works. Still, one wonders why Ovid should choose to describe Medea through Hypsipyle, and, with two letters addressing the same heroine and recounting similar life events, one asks whether (and if so, why) Ovid is repeating himself. This essay discusses the representation of Medea in these two letters, and attempts to address these questions through the analysis of intertextual contact.

Before I go to the details of the text, let me say a few words about the literary

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form of the *Heroides*, Ovid himself claims to have invented a new genre, whatever we understand it to be: ignotum hoc aliis ille novavit opus (‘this work, unknown to others, he (re)invented’, *Ars Amatoria* 3.346). The verb novo means both to “invent” and “renew”; with this statement Ovid seems to be claiming originality, but he may merely claim to be initiating a Roman form of literature from the Greek counterpart. (Fulkerson 2009, 81) The former is more likely to be the case, since elegy has come a long way in the hands of Roman poets, but before Ovid there was almost nothing like the poems in this collection, written in elegiac couplets and in letter form. The only possible predecessor we know of is Propertius 4.3, a fictional letter by a woman to her husband who is soldiering abroad. Still, it is not at all clear which precedes the other,¹ and obviously Ovid’s heroines are mostly mythical figures, whose stories are familiar and variously told. Two elements deserve notice here. First, the feature fictional female figures voicing their unrequited love, while conventional elegy almost always features a male protagonist who is very much in love with a woman who is fickle, greedy, and untruthful. Thus, though fictional, these letters offer a personal perspective of the heroines, who give their own accounts of well-known traditional stories, launched at a specific moment in their lives, and employ the style that best suits their purposes. They may offer new or neglected details in the well-known mythical tradition, thus challenging previous literary texts that the readers are familiar with and accept as authoritative. On the other hand, these poems cannot be taken as letters written only to be read by the addressees. Besides the practical issues in writing and sending these letters (the most extreme example being Ariadne’s), their content and style indicate that the heroines may have in mind other possible readers, and very often they seem to be engaged in a prolonged dialogue without an addressee but with themselves.

This “new form” not only offers the poet immense possibilities, but also provides new possibilities for the readers. The fictional female voices constantly appeal to the readers’ knowledge of the previous Greco-Roman texts written by others about them, in such a way that one suspects that they have read these works themselves. Indeed, Ovid makes sure that every heroine’s fictional voice is embodied with his own literary knowledge and perception. Take the example of Medea in *Heroides* VI and XII. Ovid alludes explicitly to previous literary

incarnations of this character, most prominently Euripides’ tragedy Medea and Apollonius’ epic poem Argonautica; but very often, his allusion is not just a recollection of past events which the characters have experienced (e.g. Aeneas looking at the paintings on the wall of Carthage). Alessandro Barchiesi describes another mode of allusion in the Heroides as the phenomenon of the “future reflexive”: a later work’s allusive reflections of an earlier text creates an awareness of future events that the characters are going to experience. (Barchiesi 1993, 343) While the character is looking forward to a future moment, the readers have already known about that future as described in a previous text, and the poet stops right there, leaving the readers to think about the future as described in the earlier text, and to ponder the irony of this allusive situation. In addition, the intertextual contact between different epistles in the Heroides is interesting. Medea in XII is constantly imitating and responding to Medea in VI. Certainly it is quite possible that Medea has read Hypsipyle’s letter when she is with Jason; but as many scholars have argued (and a point on which I agree), the heroines in this collection form a community who would read, imitate, and rival each other’s letters. (Fulkerson 2005, 2) Thus the reading of each one of these letters involves the reading of a collection, and the reading of a literary background. We are going to look at the two letters concerning Medea, and see how this intertextual method works itself out.

I. Heroides VI: The Exile of a Barbarian

“(L)itora Thessaliae reduci tetigisse carina / diceris auratae uellere diues ouvis.” The first two lines of Hypsipyle’s letter outline the speaker’s pain and loss. Like many heroines in the collection, she has been praying for her lover’s safe return; sadly, she is not a Penelope for her man (and he is not Ulysses either), but more of an Odyssean Calypso. Hypsipyle plays a minor role in Jason’s heroic career, and has nothing to do with the Golden Fleece (“non erat hic aries uillo spectabilis aureo, / nec senis acetae regia lemnos erat”, 49-50). In various literary representations before Ovid, her relationship with Jason is brief and ends when he leaves Lemnos. However, in Heroides VI, Jason stays with Hypsipyle for two

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2 Homer mentions the son of Jason and Hypsipyle, Euneos, King of Lemnos (Iliad 7. 467-471). Aeschylus and Sophocles portray the Argonaut’s visit to Lemnos, but both plays are lost. Euripides’ play Hypsipyle, surviving in part, concentrates on her later life. In
years (56); the marriage contract between the two is explicitly emphasized (41-46), and in the vividly-depicted parting scene, Jason promises to return (59). Ovid’s Hypsipyle cannot get over the fact that Jason did not even stop by Lemnos on his way back, and that he sent no letter. To make things worse, Jason returns with a new bride, a barbarian from far away. Hypsipyle is not surprised that Jason takes another wife; what surprises her is that he has married a “barbara...venefica” (19). Naturally, she talks endlessly about Medea in this letter.

For Hypsipyle, there is definitely a hierarchy in space. A potential wife from mainland Greece would be superior to herself, a Lemnian queen (79-80), but she is in every way superior to a girl from Colchis, a “barbara paelex” (81) who should find a husband in her own land (107-108). Medea is thus defined by her foreignness and her geographic/tribal inferiority. Hypsipyle follows this up with an accusation of Medea’s morality and her lack of maidenly and feminine virtues. First, whereas Apollonius elaborates on Medea’s hesitation and deliberation before she decides to help Jason, and whereas in Argonautica Medea is the innocent maiden, very much concerned with “shame”, confined to a bedchamber (3. 616-824), and subject to patriarchal authority, Hypsipyle totally ignores this aspect of Medea’s characterization, but goes directly to describe the Medea who has exited from the bedchamber, as a “adultera virgo” (133). Her transgression is further marked by her use of magic. The realm of magic, as Hypsipyle portrays it, is in total contrast to the confined, domestic space for respectable Greek and Roman women; rather, it involves a series of uncivilized or non-human images: the moon, the sun, water, trees, rocks and tombs (85-90). Her disheveled appearance (“discincta capillis”, 89), and the loosened knots required in magic, seem to indicate the loosening of her moral standards.

It is true that in ancient literature women are often portrayed to be associated with medicine and magic, and Medea as a sorceress is a staple characterization by Ovid’s lifetime. Yet for the Roman poet to assert that she uses poison on Jason to win his love is somewhat surprising. In Apollonius’s Argonautica, Medea is the victim of Eros (3. 284-285); as an impressionable maiden she is helpless before Apollonius’ Argonautica, she is portrayed as the queen with whom Jason never had an explicit marriage; and when Jason wants to leave she lets him go, never expecting him to return (“ἀλλ’ οὐ σύγε τήνδε μενονήν σχέσεις, οὐτ’ αὐτὴ προτιόσσομαι δῶες τελείωθα.” 894-895). Euripides’ Medea has the heroine kill her children so as to make Jason childless, which seems to neglect the tradition of any child by Hypsipyle.

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the gods’ conspiracy and Jason’s words, and she is thus easily “won” over as the hero’s booty. Yet in this letter, Hypsipyle emphasizes that she did not win Jason through beauty or merit, as a woman should, but by her magical incantations, “carmina” (83); she yoked this man through magic just as she yoked the ox (97), a transgression of feminine reserve. Likewise, Medea also transgresses the boundaries between man and woman, husband and wife, by stealing into the male sphere and laying claim to fame: “adde quod ascribi factis procerumque tuisque / se iubet et titulo coniugis uxor obest” (99-100), lines that remind us of Jason’s claim in Euripides’ Medea, that he did a great favor to Medea by bringing her to Greece and making her famous. She is indeed famous now, as Hypsipyle proves by her detailed knowledge of what Medea has done, and how people talk about her (101-104). But she has definitely stepped out of the standard feminine role, which is passive, obedient, and largely confined to the domestic sphere.

Furthermore, Hypsipyle accuses Medea for what she did to her family. While Hypsipyle herself is staying in her fatherland and among her people, Medea betrayed and left her fatherland (“deseruit Colchos; me mea Lemnos habet” 136), killing her brother en route (“sparagere quae fratris potuit lacerata per agros / corpora” (129-130). Thus Medea has consciously severed all ties to her family, a shocking act especially because male members of the family are supposed to represent and protect the rights of a married daughter. Scholars have pointed out that, from the archaic to classical period, there was a general change in the marriage system from an exogamous to endogamous emphasis. That is, people in such societies tended to arrange marriage for their children within the patrilocal society, with individuals of similar social and economic status, so as to maintain wealth, security, and social status across generations. Thus for the 5th century Athenians as well as for Romans of Ovid’s time, the readers would expect married daughters to retain a stronger tie with the family of origin than that matrimonial tie, as represented in archaic literature.

In this context, Medea’s distant fatherland and spatial activity become an issue, her special ability in magic is disquieting, and her attitude to her family shocking. It is no wonder that Hypsipyle has been distancing herself from Medea, contrasting her own behavior with Medea’s. However, the letter ends with an

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interesting twist. Towards the end of the letter, she curses Medea to suffer whatever she has herself suffered, to do harm to her children and husband just as she harmed her father and brother, and to be a perpetual exile, ("exulet et toto quarat in orbe fugam", 158), she also specifies in considerable detail that Medea is to take to the air after she has exhausted all routes on sea and on land: "cum mare, cum terra consumperit, aere temptet" (161). This is almost exactly what is to happen to Medea in her relationship with Jason. The readers cannot help but be reminded of the last scene of Euripides’ play, when Medea, after avenging Jason and killing her own children, stands above the stage in the sun chariot, ready to fly away, leaving Jason helpless and desperate—a scene where Medea’s superiority is graphically and all too emphatically visualized. In the end, Medea demonstrates her formidable power: not only is she able to travel over vast expanses of land like a man, but she is also able to ascend to the sky in a god-like fashion. Readers may also be reminded of Hypsipyle’s own future. According to a tradition depicted in Euripides’ eponymous play, she is later exiled by her fellow Lemnian women when they find out that she spared her father.

How do we take this curse? From Hypsipyle’s perspective, given that she curses without knowing the future, the irony is brought out by the superior knowledge of the poet and the readers: the one who curses will also be an exile, and the one cursed is going to demonstrate her formidable power in the fulfillment of her own curse. From the poet’s perspective, the subtlety of his maneuver lies in the fact that, while avoiding a direct depiction of the heroines’ future—especially given that it is preceded by Euripides’ tragedy, Ovid is able implicitly to insert Medea’s future activities into Hypsipyle’s curse. Thus Hypsipyle turns the future Medea—the formidable magician and infanticide, the

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4 Euripides’ flying Medea might be the most well-known image, but not the only one. Apollonius’ Medea also imagines the blasts bearing her to go over the sea to Iolcus, to reproach Jason in face, if he ever forgets her (3. 1111-1117). This is laughed off by Jason as “vain talk”, but the image of a flying Medea is hinted. Even Ovid himself depicts her flying in the sun chariot in the *Metamorphoses*. In that context, she flies in her chariot after killing Pelias through his daughters’ hands to escape punishment (*Metamorphosis* 7. 350 ff). A little earlier, Ovid depicts Medea as if she were a female Odysseus, searching for new lands of sophistication (*Metamorphosis* 7. 53-58). Obviously, Ovid is familiar with the image of Medea flying, and may choose to depict her male features and enigmatic powers.
flying semi-goddess—into a figure compelled by circumstance, and her triumphant ascent to the sky is pronounced as a punishment. Hypsipyle has shown her disdain for Medea’s “carmina” (83), where *carmen* is used in the sense of a spell, while she herself is writing a *carmen* of a higher form, a “song”. However, at the end of her letter, Hypsipyle utters the exclamation: “Medeae Medea forem!” (151) Ironically, Hypsipyle’s threat is realized in the sense that she, like Medea, also uses *carmen* as a spell. Indeed, Hypsipyle certainly knows how to curse someone at a distance (90-2). She has successfully made a simulacrum of Medea, and has been stabbing it with her “acus”, the stylus. Hypsipyle has cursed Medea, thus giving an ironic nuance to all of Medea’s future actions, namely that she (Medea) will act in that way only because of another woman’s curse. In this respect, Hypsipyle, like Medea, also gains a certain divinity: she is like a goddess in one of Euripides’ tragedies, and unwittingly foreshadows the future plot for a heroine who is emerging from behind the curtains.

II. *Heroides* XII: Greek or not Greek?

Hypsipyle ends her letter with a curse: that Jason and Medea should live on their “deuoto... toro” (164). In XII, Medea has lost this cursed marriage bed, and vainly asks Jason to return (193). Whereas in *Heroides* VI Medea is depicted as one who violates all the conventional rules and norms, in *Heroides* XII Ovid creates a Medea who ruthlessly mocks and laughs at such rules and norms. *Heroides* XII is a highly self-reflective letter, and more like a soliloquy in her imagination; she mainly speaks to Jason but sometimes she shifts her address to her dead brother, her father, and her fatherland. Most of the time, Medea is entangled in a sea of past recollections, her present predicament, and her future actions. Medea brings up the issue of memory, “memini” (1), from the first line, and plunges directly into past events, as indicated by “tunc … tum” (3, 5) and then by the frequent use of pluperfect and perfect tenses. Because she writes to a man who is always forgetful (“immemor”, 16) of the favors he received, it is necessary for her to constantly remind him of what she has done and given up for him. On the other hand, Medea’s repeated reference to the past is not for remembrance; she constantly shows her obsessive reflection on past events.

*tunc quae dispensant mortalia fila sorores*
debuerunt fusos evoluisse meos.
tum potui Medea mori bene! (3-5)

quantum perfidiae tecum, scelerate, perisset,
dempta forent capiti quam mala multa meo! (19-20)

These lines almost echo the words of Odysseus who, in recounting his wondering to Alcinous, looks back on his past experience from the perspective of someone who’s learnt his lesson and knows better. Indeed, for Medea, reviewing the past would shed light on the present; she is different now from what she was in the past. As Florence Verducci points out, it is memory that serves to reconcile the youthful and the mature Medea. (Verducci 1985, 71) But I think there is more than that; whenever Medea reviews the past, she is thinking about the present and the future. For example, she evokes the idea and imagery of fire image on multiple occasions: Jason could have confronted the fire exhaled from the bull unanointed (15), she burns with an extraordinary fire at the first sight of Jason (33, “nec notis ignibus arsi”), and so on. These images not only remind Jason of the dangers that she has fended off for him, but are also a sinister omen of the conflagration that she is going to instigate in Corinth. (“(M)eritas subeamus in alto”: in the immediate context alto refers to the depths of the sea, but the word can also mean “high up”. Medea is also implying that she may rise up.) Sometimes, it is very hard to determine whether she is invoking past memory or making future threats—or perhaps she is doing both. “(Q)uod facere ausa mea est, non audet scribere dextra” (115); where “est” can be replaced by the future, “erit”, which fits perfectly into the present context: what she is going to do is to be hinted at, but not explicitly written down. Medea keeps Jason’s past in her memory, and on the basis of past favors she claims possession of Jason’s present; in addition, she also determines and controls his future.

Medea has obviously learnt well from Hypsipyle. Reminding Jason of past favors, comparing herself with the new bride, and pleading his resemblance to the children (12. 25-30, 103-104; 12. 189 cf. 6. 123) are Hypsipyle’s methods; and “nostri fructus illa laboris habet” (12. 174) is a direct imitation of “Vota ego persolvam? votis Medea fruetur!” (6. 75). But more importantly, Medea contests all the previous literary accounts of her story, including Hypsipyle’s. For example, Medea makes the point that, after Jason came to Colchis, she was crying all night, but within her chamber (57-62), and it is only after her sister exhorted her in the
morning that she agreed to meet Jason in private, an account which not only refutes Hypsipyle’s accusation but also goes against Apollonius’s story. Another refutation of memory is her account of the bull. Euripides’ Medea claims that she herself yoked the bulls (479), and Hypsipyle follows it up by saying that Medea also yoked the man in the way she yoked the bulls (6. 97). However, Medea in XII claims that she only sat watching when Jason fought the bulls, “pallida sedi” (97). Is she lying? If so, Jason would know, and this glaring mistake would remind him even more of Medea’s past favor; if we accept the statement as it is, Medea would also refute Hypsipyle’s accusation that she subdued Jason by erotic poison. The issue is still more interesting if we consider the fact that Thessaly, where Jason is from, is considered the traditional locus of magical events. (Fulkerson 2005, 114) Medea’s recounting of her first sight of Jason shows a magical effect: “vidi et perii” (33). In one tradition, Jason indeed does bewitch Medea, not the other way around. (Jacobson 1974, 99 n. 12)

Medea also subtly rejects the tag “barbarian”. In line 70, she mentions the statue of Diana made by a barbarian hand, “barbarica manu”. By this, does she mean a Greek hand or a Colchian one? Does being a barbarian depends more on one’s perspective and, ironically, on what one needs? This idea is bitterly and powerfully brought out in 105, when she is recounting her aid in subduing the snake: “illa ego, quae tibi sum nunc denique barbara facta”. It is not until this point that Jason thinks of her as a barbarian; she was not barbara as long as she was helpful to him. Medea is well aware of the insults that she receives because of her identity as an outsider; but she is exceptionally good at returning such insults, following the “Greek” way. She probably has in mind Hypsipyle’s account of her dowry (6. 117-8) when, imploring Jason to come back to her marriage bed, Medea imagines Jason asking her for dowry (“dos ubi sit, quaeris?”), 199 While Hypsipyle promises her fatherland and herself as the dowry, Medea sarcastically points out that her dowry has been paid in cash on the field (“numeravimus”, 199), and that her dowry is no other than the life and safety of Jason and his Greek young men (203). The dowry has been paid for the marriage, in the Greek way; and it should be returned according to the Greek way in divorce, a point Medea makes strenuously:

In following the market-place terms in Euripides and the practice of the Greeks, Medea shows her way of being a Greek woman; her ironic barbs are directed beyond Jason and extends to all the Greeks, who are obsessed with money matters. Her disdain and threat are well rendered in describing Jason’s wealth as “Sisyphean” (204), a word which means Corinthian in the immediate context but also suggests the futile efforts of a deceitful man. In many ways, Medea mocks Jason’s Greek mores. She talks about supplicating him just as he often supplicated her (185); she also imitates Greek rhetoric in her language, a skill that Jason is famous for and is well demonstrated in Apollonius. Throughout the letter, Medea demonstrates her ability in using ambiguous insinuation, or in making threats without actually spelling them out: all in all, she and Jason are birds of the same feather. But she also makes it clear that she transcends these Greek ways that she can easily imitate.

Towards the end of her letter, as if feeling that she has condescended long enough and tried to be elegiac long enough, Medea gives more blatant threats in the simple future tense:

\begin{quote}
\textit{dum ferrum flammaeque aderunt sucusque veneni,}
\textit{hostis Medeae nullus inultus erit!} (181-182)
\end{quote}

However, right afterwards, Medea talks about her “preces” (183) that may touch Jason’s heart; and the readers cannot help but wondering about the sincerity of these entreaties—or could they perhaps be sincere and deceitful at the same time? For her, though, these are merely “animis… verba minora meis” (184). At the end of Euripides’ play, Medea transcends all boundaries of man and woman, mortal and divine, heaven and earth; likewise, Medea at the end of \textit{Heroides} XII hints at her divinity and pointing to the unspeakable, greater things:

\begin{quote}
\textit{ingentis parturit ira minas.} (207)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{viderit ista deus, qui nunc pectora versat.}
\textit{nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit!} (211-212)
\end{quote}
After all, she takes pleasure in reproaching the ungrateful man in this letter (21). Medea is different from most heroines in the collection, in that they will either wait for their man or commit suicide after the letter is written; but, she is much more than a wife and mother, more than a female, and more than a mortal. Medea is going to have many actions and better days; her “greater” future exceeds the boundary of this letter and the entire collection.

Ovid’s *Heroides* depicts the figure of Medea in two of the single letters, but he is by no means repeating himself. Through intertextual reference to each other and to the prior literary tradition, Ovid is able to portray a complicated, self-reflective figure, whose multiple potentials are brought out when confronted with a diversity of life experiences. The figure of Medea, who is always capable of something “more”, also shows us that this is not simply a collection of elegies with gender reversal. To read the collection as successive displays of female lament for and complaint at the absent lover would be of little avail, and easily incur the unjustified accusation of monotony and repetition. On the other hand, the experience and thrill of reading the *Heroides* resembles the process of reading literary history, with Ovid’s implicit and subtle comments and criticism. As we have seen in the figure of Medea, although the letter is written at a specific location and moment, Ovid invites the reader to review the whole lifetime of the heroine, and all previous texts about her. Just like Medea breaks all boundaries between men and women, mortal and immortal, heaven and earth, Ovid is also breaking the boundaries of genres and texts.

References


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COMPARISON AS POETRY:
READING EURIPIDES’ BACCHAE AND THE ZHUANGZI

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Abstract: This essay has two major parts. First, a comparison between poetry and comparative work itself. Second, a comparison of the Zhuangzi and Euripides’ Bacchae. Comparison is like a poem in that both are imaginative constructions that rely on the creativity of the comparatist or poet. Comparison and poetry take features of the world and alter them in such a way as to suggest an alternative. The Zhuangzi and the Bacchae, via the theme of forgetting, do the same thing—unsettle our fixed suppositions or knowledge. The argument that a comparative work is like a poem thus relies on the comparison of Zhuangzi and Euripides as an illustration. Both the Zhuangzi and the Bacchae invite a relinquishing of fixed knowledge, and depict a human nature that is tenuous and given to change. This article suggests that a similar experience characterizes the practice of comparison, and that such an experience is something we often see in poetry.

This essay attempts to describe comparison as a poetic activity, supported by a somewhat freewheeling reading of Euripides’ Bacchae and the Zhuangzi. Questions of method in comparative work dominate the scholarship, but the role of imagination receives relatively little attention. I suggest some ways in which a comparative work is like a poem, and then think through the implications such a view might have carried. Euripides and Zhuangzi bring two things to the discussion. First, these two poetic writers give us texts that act upon us as we read them. Comparison as a poetic activity does the same to the comparatist. Second, I compare the Bacchae and the Zhuangzi on their incorporation of oblivion into form and content, thus demonstrating the very comparative process that I outline.

For the purposes of this essay, when I speak of comparison, I am referring to a work of scholarship, usually in the humanities, that explicitly compares two thinkers or texts written in different languages or from two different cultures—the

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sort of work one would typically find in comparative literature. Insightful comparison can be done between Plato and Aristotle, for example, but such a work need not be overly concerned with cross-cultural or cross-linguistic or even cross-temporal comparison. I also take it for granted that we generally think of science as tending towards the objective, and of poetry as tending towards the subjective. My goal is to think about scholarly comparison as, like a poem, a work of the imagination.

G. E. R. Lloyd, a major voice in comparative studies of early Greece and China, has criticized two common and opposing approaches to comparison, both overgeneralization that flattens out the variety present in a culture (“the Chinese mindset” or “the Greek spirit”), and piecemeal approaches that cherry-pick apparently similar bits from different cultures incapable of supporting any substantial insights. I accept Lloyd’s argument for the most part, but I want to draw attention to the absence of creativity in his schema. Lloyd, and most comparative scholarship in Greece-China studies, focuses on method, on good or bad comparison, but does not consider why we compare. In contrast, I take my cue from Robin W. Lovin, who remarks that “there is more than method here, because the goal we set for our comparison is inevitably a way of bringing some order out of the porous and dangerous reality we are exploring.” (Lovin 2010, 262) A “porous and dangerous reality” is precisely what Zhuangzi and Euripides depict in their poetic works, and this parallels the task of the comparatist: trying to impose temporary order on unstable and chaotic reality.

Good comparison is hard work: choosing comparable points or problems, setting up qualifications and frameworks, trying to treat each object honestly and without distortion. To compare Aristotle and Confucius well, one must know something about Aristotle and Confucius: knowledge of Classical Greek and Classical Chinese, historical background, general skill in literary criticism and philosophical analysis, etc. These are skills that we take to be objective in some way. One can either read Aristotle in the original Classical Greek or one cannot, after all. The entire credentialing process in academia is in some sense premised on the idea that objectivity is possible: we set standards for language ability, for

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1 Lloyd returns to this question of method countless times throughout his work. For a clear and thorough argument on these two pole of comparison, see G. E. R. Lloyd, Adversaries and Authorities: Investigations into Ancient Greek and Chinese Science (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
writing ability, for persuasiveness of argument, we review books according to a
variety of impersonal criteria, and so on. As a work of scholarship, then, a
comparison has some claims to objectivity. Granted, this is ambiguous. We do
not think of a book review as being objective in the same way a lab experiment
is objective. My point is just that comparison commands the same authority and
glamor of objectivity as any other rigorous scholarship.

And yet, a comparison does not yield any objective or permanent knowledge.
Comparison is more idiosyncratic than science. Two scholars can compare Plato
and Zhuangzi and come away with quite different understandings, with different
knowledge even. This points to something whimsical about comparison. There is
no particular reason why one should compare Plato and Zhuangzi, or Sappho and
Wang Wei. A comparison of Plato and Aristotle makes a kind of obvious sense:
one was a student of the other, and the question of how Plato’s views evolved and
are challenged in Aristotle is almost natural. But in cross-cultural comparison,
especially over so large a gap as between ancient Greece and China, this sort of
obviousness is not available to us. The comparatist is left not only to compare, but
also to explain and justify her comparison in a way the classicist is not. There is
something unnatural about a comparison.

Comparing Euripides and Zhuangzi, as I do below, tells us little about the
evolution of Greek or Chinese civilization. Neither does it tell us anything broad
about Greek tragic poetry. The two texts do not belong to the same genre, and in
fact, early China had no tragic drama, and early Greece certainly had nothing like
the genre-defying Zhuangzi (neither did early China, for that matter). But all this
does not mean that we cannot glean something insightful from a comparison.
Indeed, one of our motivations for comparison is to see thinkers or texts in a new
light. Here we return to the “why” of comparison, to the personal motives and
desires involved—something debates about comparative method tend to
overlook. It would be dubious at best to claim that one needs to understand
Sappho in order to understand Wang Wei. Each poet can and should be grasped
on their own terms.

Historian of religions J. Z. Smith once remarked that in the humanities we
are denied the power of experiment.\(^2\) Much of what we study is ancient or

\(^2\) A paraphrase from an interview with Smith conducted by the University of Chicago’s
campus newspaper in 2008:

http://chicagomaroon.com/2008/06/02/full-j-z-smith-interview/.

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beyond easy manipulation—we cannot throw human beings or texts together in a petri dish or a particle accelerator to see what happens. Comparison, Smith argues, is our version of experiment. Speaking of creativity in science, we usually point to people who thought outside the box, who asked a question nobody had asked, who tried something different. This applies just as well to comparison. It is not immediately apparent why one ought to compare Sappho and Wang Wei, but a sufficiently creative comparatist might just make such an endeavor worth the price of admission.

Any scholarly work has something of personal interest, of course. In comparison, however, this personal interest takes center stage. Sappho wrote lyric poetry, and describing what Wang Wei wrote as lyric poetry both fits and doesn’t fit. It’s hard to imagine Wang Wei, famous for his Buddhist-inflected verse focused on nature, writing any of Sappho’s lines expressing erotic desire. How to compare a poet known for her intensely personal love poetry with a poet known for her detached and impersonal nature poetry? To take Smith’s reasoning, the point of putting Sappho and Wang Wei into the particle accelerator and blasting them against each other is simply to see what happens. Might our presuppositions about lyric poetry be undermined by Wang Wei? Perhaps a defined persona or speaker is not a prerequisite for lyric after all, for example.\(^3\) The possibility of interesting conclusions alone seems somewhat shaky justification for juxtaposing two such disparate poets, and at bottom, the only real reason to compare Wang Wei and Sappho is because one wants to. This is why comparison should take into account personal creativity and imagination.

A comparison is a made object, like a poem.\(^4\) The comparatist uses the powers of imagination and creativity to bring into being something that would not naturally exist. Euripides and Zhuangzi have no historical affinity to recommend comparison—it is only through the imagination of the comparatist that a pairing

\(^3\) This very point has recently been made by Jonathan Culler, who criticizes the narrow model of lyric poetry that reads lyric as a dramatic monologue, focusing on a speaker, an audience, a context, etc. To my point, however, Culler does not engage in any comparison outside the Western canon. A comparison with someone like Wang Wei, who often eschews any sort of clear speaker, would make Culler’s argument even stronger. See Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015).

\(^4\) Here I have in mind the Greek meaning of *poiēsis*—“making” in a broad sense.
takes place. This highlights the subjective dimension of comparison, a dimension often overlooked in scholarship, which is seen as more objective. We are obsessed over comparative method, I suggest, partly because we are invested in finding the “right” and the “wrong” way to compare. This implies objective values. My goal is not to deny that some comparisons are better than others. Rather, I want to push back against the overwhelming tendency, at least in Greece-China studies, that ignores the subjective elements in comparison in a way that we don’t do when dealing with poetry. Poetry is an especially rich analogue for comparison because a poem is a made object that in turn shapes us.

Poetry has several qualities that, I venture to suggest, also apply to comparison. First, poetry exercises and thus strengthens the imagination. Second, more powerful imagination means more flexibility when it comes to seeing “internal and external events from different and ever-changing perspectives.” (Yearley 2011, 256) Third, poetry shows us the cracks in life, in the world, from which we might otherwise turn away. Our ability to forget or overlook may be necessary to life (e.g. moving past some trauma), but poetry keeps us honest, and prevents us from flying too far into fantastical denial. Fourth, poetry opens a space for encounters. On a formal level, we encounter unusual syntax or vocabulary that stretches our comprehension. Images and metaphors allow a poet to make ambivalent value claims, to mean more than one thing at the same time. Paradox, ambiguity, and contradiction are all at home in poetry, and this makes the experience of reading a poem potently transformative. Poet and critic Robin Skelton explains it thus: “because it communicates in intuitive, emotional, sensual, and intellectual ways, and because it involves its reader in sharing as well as recognizing an experience, [poetry] presents a kind of ‘total’ perception which is not available elsewhere. The reader undergoes and observes an experience at the same time.” (Skelton 1978, 76. My

5 Any sort of complete philosophy of poetry is well beyond the scope of this essay, but I draw here on remarks about poetic language by Simon Critchley, Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens (New York: Routledge, 2005) and by Lee H. Yearley, “Poetic Language: Zhuangzi and Du Fu’s Confucian Ideals” in Ethics in Early China, eds. Chris Fraser, Dan Robins, and Timothy O’Leary (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), pp. 245-266.

6 I call this “oblivion” and discuss it at more length below in my comparison of Euripides and Zhuangzi.
Poetry allows us to see things as they are. It lets us see particulars being various. But, and this is its peculiarity, poetry lets us see things as they are anew, under a new aspect, transfigured, subject to a felt variation… Poetry describes life as it is, but in all the intricate evasions of as. It gives us the world as it is—common, near, low, recognizable—but imagined, illumined, turned about. It is a world both seen and unseen until seen with the poet’s eyes. (Critchley 2005, 11–12)

Poetry presents us with our world transformed, with a scene or an object or a feeling that is familiar but somehow altered. Poetry suggests how the world or a situation might be other than it is, even if the difference is only minuscule. Crucially, the poet works with the world already present to us, but it is a world that we cannot see until the poet’s imagination orient the light for our vision.

Comparison is analogous to this view of poetry. The goal in comparison is not so much generating or acquiring some new knowledge or propositional content (although this is involved). Instead, we can think of comparison as an experience that disrupts, challenges, or shatters what we thought was fixed knowledge. Comparison confronts us with reality as we know it but slightly different. Wang Wei is not as alien to a Western reader as to be unintelligible, but he might call into doubt what we think we know about lyric poetry and poetic voice. Zhuangzi challenges the very practice of intelligible discourse, performing linguistic feats unknown to someone trained only in European languages, undermining even the basic safety one feels in making simple subject-predicate claims. What sort of stable knowledge about poetry can one have when “poetry” must include such disparities as Homer, the Shijing, Sappho, Sophocles, the Tianwen, and Wang Wei? Comparison is an interpretive vertigo constructed by the comparatist, a vertigo that in turn unsettles distinctions and fixed knowledge, offering glimpses of an alternative, of another way of doing things.\(^7\)

\(^7\) For the phrase “interpretive vertigo” I am indebted to Jennifer Rapp, whose article on a poetics of comparison inspired by her own. While following Rapp somehow, I depart from her in several ways, the most obvious of which is that her argumentative focus is on the

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Lee H. Yearley describes comparison as “imaginative construction” at the close of his comparative study *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage*:

As comparativists we manipulate the different and the common as we work. We choose which to highlight and which to neglect, and we choose when to relate them. We must work from similarities, else we will establish only contrasts or perhaps even incommensurabilities. But even then our work is anamorphic not homologous. The similarities always are just resemblances; they live in and usually are deeply informed by sharply divergent contexts. We must also pursue differences, however, if the comparisons are to be more than juts tautological exercises. If they are to be interesting, revealing, and therefore also inevitably problematic, differences must be highlighted. Neither the equivocal nor the univocal can be neglected; to focus on the analogical is to work constantly with each and between both of them. (Yearley 1990, 199)

I want to make several points here. First, Yearley’s distinction between the equivocal (ambiguous) and the univocal (unambiguous) parallels the distinction between objective and subjective. On Yearley’s model, comparison aims at both multiple interpretations and singular meanings, at subjective whimsy and objective knowledge. The poet must capture the distinctive concreteness of a vase, a fountain, a landscape, an emotion, while also making a poem that communicates to other minds. Second, Yearley describes the comparative process as analogical. Analogies do not exist naturally; they are fleeting and come into being only to better understand one or both of the separate analogues. An analogy is not simply two objects—it is two objects placed in a special relation by the analyst. Likewise, a comparison is not merely two objects juxtaposed (i.e. Lloyd’s piecemeal approach). The comparatist must build a framework within which comparison takes place, and like an analogy, there is great room for creativity here. The same two objects can be analogous in a variety of ways, and one comparatist will bring out something that a different comparatist does not.

ethical dimensions of comparison. I have also tried to take what seems a good pairing in Euripides and Zhuangzi and make it clearer on several fronts. See Jennifer Rapp, “A Poetics of Comparison: Euripides, Zhuangzi, and the Human Poise of Imaginative Construction” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78:1 (2010), pp. 163-201.
Sappho and Li Qingzhao may both sing of love, but they do it in their own
distinct voices.

How are we to understand comparative work if it is imaginative or poetic?
Yearley notes that viewing comparison as an imaginative act does not mean “that
standards dissolve”—rather, the “possibility of error remains.” (Yearley 1990, 197) We evaluate works of creative imagination all the time, and we need not
admit the slippery idea that all opinions are equal when it comes to poetry.

Comparison as a poem can be evaluated on three levels. First, there is basic
accuracy. Mistakes of language or terminology, inaccurate or incomplete
historical knowledge, errors in analytic or logical reasoning—one can criticize a
poetic comparison on all these grounds without giving up the poetic model I am
describing.

Second, we can evaluate a poetic comparison more conceptually. Poetry does
violence to the world and to language itself, twisting words and ideas into strange
contortions, defamiliarizing our own world to us. This gives poetry its power to
unnerve or to strike us with wonder. What business, after all, does the archaic
Greek poet Stesichorus have describing a river as “root-silver” or a child as
“bruiseless”? Comparison as poetry should also be understood to twist its objects.
The juxtaposition of two thinkers or texts from disparate cultures inevitably
comes with distortion, but perhaps distortion per se is not the enemy.

Comparatists have an ethical obligation to the facts, of course. And because we
want any new knowledge generated by the comparison to be valuable, we must
strive for accuracy and rigor. We want to take each comparandum on its own
terms, but comparison itself undermines that very goal. My point is that
comparison as poem can be evaluated for its conceptual construction—how it is
framed, how it treats its comparanda—while still taking into account that the
construction is going to be a little wobbly. The aim is not fixed and permanent
objective knowledge. The aim is a creative juxtaposition that may grant
temporary insight. We should no more demand objectivity of a comparison than
we would of a poem.

Third, the most common methodological complaint when it comes to
comparison is that X and Y are simply “not comparable.” Why? If a comparison is
an imaginative construction, something creatively made by the comparatist, then
there is a sense in which the comparatist’s imagination is its own justification.
What makes Plato and Zhuangzi comparable? A comparatist qualified and willing
to compare them. The results of that comparison may be more or less interesting,
insightful, or illuminating, but that is how poems work too. We do not ask the poet to justify her poem—we only read it. In fact, in poetry, two terms that lack an obvious connection make a good metaphor, because they force the mind in new directions. We should not be so quick to dismiss a comparison because of seeming incomparability. Afterwards, we might never read a certain poem again, we might think it missed something essential, we might find it derivative, but we do not ask the poet to justify the creative act itself. The comparison that looks wobbly and incapable of supporting its own weight may, in the end, offer flashes of insight. Zhuangzi and Plato could very well have conspired when nobody was looking: both agreeing to grapple with the problem of language, the dangers of transmitting wisdom in writing, the deployment of a butcher analogy. The two philosophers did not pass notes behind our backs, but by comparing them, millennia after they have died, we construct something that might give us more knowledge about both texts than either text could on its own. As is the case with poetry, we might learn something about humans more generally, we might have our suspicions confirmed. Or, conversely, we might be forced to abandon beliefs we took for granted, to shift our awareness of the world. This is what I mean when I say that a comparison is a made object that in turn affects the maker and the reader; comparison dislodges our fixed knowledge.

The poem as a made object contains two pairs of tensions that also characterize comparison. First, a poet must navigate the conflicting demands of necessity and randomness. Some elements of poetic convention result from bare facts about the language. Ancient Greek poetry, for example, never rhymes, whereas Italian poetry almost always rhymes. Other poetic conventions are more random, such as stanzaic structure. The poet must voice her subjectivity in this pre-existing context. Some conventions facilitate poetic expression while other conventions may stifle or complicate it. In the end, the personal voice of the poet emerges changed—not entirely subsumed or quashed by necessity, but not able to entirely dispense with it either. The poet is situated at a confluence of objective necessity and subjective expression. The comparatist occupies similar ground, constrained by the necessity of doing justice to her comparanda and her distinct traditions but also trying to construct her own imaginative bridges between two far-flung topics.

8 Rapp 2010 illustrates this point at length with her insightful reading of Kay Ryan’s poem “Ghost Ribs.”

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Second, the poet must make her subjective experience mesh with a wider audience. We can imagine a poem so solipsistic that it cannot penetrate the public that it does not extend a hand for the reader to clasp in recognition of shared humanity. Formally, this consideration might affect the poet’s use of symbolism or imagery, language, diction, and topic. As mentioned above, the poet does not divorce entirely from the common human world even as she gestures to another one. For the comparatist, subjective intuition must still hold up in the wider world of a scholarly audience. Failure would be a comparison of pure whimsy, without any substantive “proof” on the part of the comparatist propping up the juxtaposition.

These shared features of poetry and comparison reflect Yearley’s description of comparison as an analogical, imaginative process. He remarks that the comparatist may be driven to compare by “the inchoate but pressing need we feel to put vague ideas into the ordered form that analogical analyses demand.” (Yearley 1990, 201) Comparison, like poetry, begins from intuition or a flash of understanding or a vague feeling. The objective and analytical rigor of scholarship offers the comparatist the chance to capture this poetic impulse and sort through it in language. Yearley also calls attention to the ways in which comparison can “produce personally informed, evocative kinds of invention” with “the power to give a new form to our experiences.” (Ibid. 197) Comparison begins from the suspicion or the thought that some similarity or difference would exist between two things if only we could draw them together somehow. This suspicion is then either confirmed, denied, or complicated by the comparative act itself. In Yearley’s phrasing, “we assume, entertain, consider, and even toy with or pretend that certain constructions of experience are true.” (Ibid. 200) Like poetry, comparison involves a perception of how things are, how things might be otherwise, and a willingness to relinquish those perceptions.

I turn now to a comparison of Euripides’ Bacchae and the Zhaungzi, beginning with the following statement by Martha Nussbaum on the former:

In the middle of this cosmos sits the human world, a world of social morality, of pity and compassion, of fellow feeling with other mortal intelligent beings. But the human realm is not shown, here [the play], as self-sufficient. Its walls are highly porous: influences flow in from the other realms, and human beings make strange and sudden exists into them. What is stranger still is that, apparently, their full humanity depends on these exits… So if human beings

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close themselves off from Dionysus’ call, they apparently become less than fully human. But if they listen to Dionysus, this carries…the risk of another sort of beastliness. Humanness appears as an unstable and temporary achievement, poised among dangers of many kinds. And the deep question of the play is: What is a human morality, and what is its relation to the acknowledgment of Dionysus? Can there be a life that repudiates this religion and also remains moral, civilized, and fully human? (And who are the spectators of this place, seated in an apparently civilized manner in the theater of Dionysus?) (Nussbaum 1990, xx)

Nussbaum’s description of the Bacchae raises possible similarities between this Greek tragedy and the Zhuangzi. The Zhuangzi depicts humanness as “highly porous,” and also suggests that “full humanity depends on these exits.” At the same time, the Zhuangzi seems to resist offering any fundamental essence of human life—in Nussbaum’s terms, “humanness appears as an unstable and temporary achievement.” The Zhuangzi repeatedly “repudiates this religion” or that religion—that is, the Zhuangzi consistently rejects various ideals and dogmas, and thus confronts the problem of whether such a life “remains moral, civilized, and fully human.” Lastly, although the Zhuangzi is certainly not a dramatic work, it does have spectators—readers—who might well ask about the intended target of such a genre-defying text. We are “seated in an apparently civilized manner” reading and teaching the Zhuangzi, even as the Zhuangzi itself undermines formal teaching, direct transmission of knowledge, and legible discourse itself. Nussbaum’s remark draws attention to how the Bacchae does something similar: Euripides presents good Athenian audiences with a play in which they witness the total breakdown of civilized and familial order, in which the line between reality and illusion blurs to disastrous effect. In both cases, the audience occupies a position that the text seems to take into account.

I have claimed that comparison, like poetry, unsettles our fixed knowledge. In what follows, I explore the role of oblivions in the Zhuangzi and the Bacchae on the level of form and content. Oblivions also unsettle fixation, incorporate instability and loss into the texts. But such instability or loss is not wholly negative, and Euripides and Zhuangzi demonstrate the ambivalence of oblivion. By the end, I hope to have highlighted this point and also to have shown how it bears on comparison-as-a-poem.

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The Ancient Greek ἐληθεία (ἀλήθεια) means “forgetting,” but also, in older Homeric contexts, “place of oblivion.” 9 Related to ἐληθεία is the verb λανθάνω (λανθάνω), meaning “to look away,” “to go unnoticed,” “to overlook.” 10 The Ancient Greek word for “truth” is ἀλήθεια (ἀλήθεια), and in the archaic period, ἀλήθεια was commonly opposed to ἐληθεία, thus giving ἀλήθεια a literal meaning of “not forgotten” or “unconcealed” (a “not” + ἐληθεία). (Detienne 1999) Forgetting and looking away therefore have a relationship to notions of truth. Forgetting in the context of ancient Greek literature often carries several of these meanings at once, especially in poetic or philosophical usage. In Classical Chinese, wang 忘 carries a similar range of meanings: “forget,” “omit,” “neglect.” The semantic components of the character are xīn 心 (“heart-mind”) and wang 忘 (“destroy,” “perish,” “flee”), thus giving wang 忘 a sense of something having fled from or been destroyed in the mind. 11 By “forgetting” I intend all of these meanings, literal and figurative. My goal is to just briefly suggest that the Bacchae and the Zhuangzi display forgetting in similar ways, both in their content and in their written form.

It is beyond the scope of the present paper to make any overarching argument for the importance of forgetting in human life. A brief sketch of the concept will clarify the idea. Ever since Plato, the Western tradition has tended to emphasize the importance of memory. In orthodox Platonism, we are fallen creatures and require rational philosophizing to recollect the Forms, the transcendent objects of pure intellection. Our ignorance of Truth or Justice or Wisdom is thus a forgetting of those Forms. We might also think of the injunctions to “never forget” that circulate the media airwaves after some collective disaster or trauma. This reflects something of the ancient Greek view that forgetting entails an oblivion, an erasure that renders those who are forgotten lost to time. Heroic glory, a form of immortality, requires memory. 12

9 Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon, s.v.
10 Ibid.
11 Although semantic breakdowns of Chinese characters are not always reliable explanations of meaning, I think that in this case the breakdown is suggestive and not far-fetched. The Shuowen jiezi 說文解字, a traditional etymological dictionary, defines wang 忘 as 不識也: “not knowing” or “not acknowledging.” This is similar to the sense of “not notice” or “look away” of lanthanô.
12 For a good overview of memory in the Western philosophical tradition that clearly

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American poet C. K. Williams sums up the position I take on forgetting: “Forgetfulness is one of the gods’ most precious offerings to us… perhaps that is because we have to look away before we can begin again.” (Williams 1998, 91-93) Williams’ remark echoes the semantic range of forgetting outlined above. In describing forgetting as a divine gift, however, he hints that forgetting may be more ambivalent than we commonly suppose. Consider this hypothetical, a common example: running up against writer’s block, a scholar closes her laptop in frustration, unable to untangle the messy argument into which she has dug herself. After a few days away from her work, as she sits in traffic on her way to meet a friend, her rambling mind returns to the argument and she can no longer even recall why she was hung-up in the first place. Whatever problem had seemed so entrenched now seems inconsequential, and later that night she sits back down to work and breezes through several pages. This is just one mundane instance of how looking away, figurative forgetting, allows humans to move on through life. Euripides and Zhuangzi demonstrate forgetting in this ambivalent sense, both in ordinary and in radical ways.

Human life requires forgetting, requires gaps and inattention. Nussbaum’s remarks on the Bacchae describe human life as tenuous, poised between an array of competing tensions. One major tension of human life is the pull between memory and forgetting. The Zhuangzi and the Bacchae show forgetting as an essential part of human existence, a feature and not a bug. In my above example, forgetting yields some new outlook; it allows one to recover insight or move past a fixation. Forgetting may also be destructive, though, as Euripides especially shows. The tension between memory and forgetting is uniquely suited to exploring human life as “highly porous.” Nussbaum claims that the human world and human life are characterized by incursions from outside forces (gods, madness, passions, etc.), and by a disruption of the boundaries between beast, human, and god. She emphasizes that “full humanity depends on these exits,” on these border crossings. Forgetting is one way that we cross these borders, one way that we experience the precarious poise of human life. This precariousness also characterizes the position of the comparatist, poised among the competing tensions of objectivity and subjectivity, between necessity and whimsy.

I begin with a comparison between the physical body and the textual body. The body and the theme of embodiment, in Euripides and in Zhuangzi, often involves forgetting or inattention of some sort. Since the two poets also reflect forgetting in their written form, it makes sense to ask about the similarities between physical and textual embodiment. Some concrete examples may make this clearer.

One of the Zhuangzi’s more iconic instances of forgetting comes in Chapter 6, “The Great and Honored Master” (大宗師). The scene runs as follows:

顏回曰回益矣仲尼曰何謂也曰回忘仁義矣曰可矣猶未也他日復見曰回益矣曰何謂也曰回忘禮樂矣曰可矣猶未也他日復見曰回益矣曰何謂也曰回作忘矣仲尼蹴然曰何謂坐忘顏回曰墮肢體黜聰明離形去知同於大通此謂坐忘仲尼曰同則無好也化則無常也而果其賢乎丘也請從而後也

Yan Hui said, “I’m making progress.”
Confucius said, “What do you mean?”
“I’ve forgotten all about humaneness [ren 仁] and responsibility [yi 義],”
“Okay, but you’re not there yet.”
He came another day and said, “I’m making progress.”
Confucius asked, “What do you mean?”
“I’ve forgotten all about propriety [li 禮] and music [yue 樂],”
“Okay, but you’re not there yet.”
He came yet again another day and said, “I’m making progress.”
Confucius asked, “How so?”
“I just sit and forget [zuowang 坐忘].”
Confucius, startled, asked, “What do you mean… ’sit and forget?’”
“Limbs and torso drop away, senses and perceptions are chased away. Disperse physical form and farewell knowledge and become one with vast openness [同於大通]. I call this ‘sitting and forgetting.’”

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This passage has generated a small sea of scholarship, which I cannot review here. Let me confine attention to a few points. “Sitting and forgetting,” zuowang 坐忘, is the key term of the passage. Livia Kohn glosses the phrase as “sitting in oblivion,” (Kohn 2014, 127ff) which dovetails nicely with the old Homeric meaning of the Greek lêthê as “place of oblivion.” Yan Hui’s senses reel and his perceptions fade. This relinquishing of attention and awareness suggests similarity to lanthanô, to a shared ground between forgetting and turning away. In Yan Hui’s case, this oblivion, this relinquishing of attention, also means a turning away from social norms like ritual (li 禮) and responsibility (yi 義). This passage depicts oblivion as a state of simultaneous loss and gain, of annihilation and recuperation. Yan Hui gives up his senses, his bodily form, his place in the social tapestry, and yet this “does not mean eradicating one’s self.” (Jochim 1998, 55) The self is not destroyed entirely but rather is depicted as something open and shifting, something unstable and temporary. The ambivalence of oblivion is clear: Yan Hui forgets his body and his responsibilities, but he gains a new perspective, a fusion with “vast openness.” One might also think of the iconic opening scene of the Zhuangzi in which the Kun fish transforms into the Peng bird—the loss of one bodily form coincides with a shift of perspective, literally a bird’s-eye view of all creation.

Yan Hui’s physical body, his form (xing 形) dissolves; the Zhuangzi presents this idea not just in the context of an individual human body, but also in the context of the textual body:

荃者所以在魚得魚而忘荃者所以在兔得兔而忘荃者所以在意得意而忘言吾安得忘言之人而與之言哉 (Zhuangzi 26.13)

Fish traps are there for fish; once you get the fish, you forget the trap. Snares are there for rabbits; once you get the rabbit, you forget the snare. Words are there for meaning [yi 意]; once you get the meaning, you forget the words. Where can I find someone who has forgotten words and have a few words with him?

Here language itself drops away, relinquished just like Yan Hui’s bodily form and social attachments. The passage reminds one of Wittgenstein’s famous ladder: “My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them,
over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) 14 Nussbaum’s description of human nature in the Bacchae does not reject any sense of identity whatsoever, just as Wittgenstein’s ladder does not deny the possibility of acquiring awareness. The ladder, however, must be cast aside after it does its work which, for Wittgenstein, is to bring the reader to an understanding of the senselessness of Wittgenstein’s own propositions. He uses the ladder as a metaphor for a text that undoes itself. In the above passage, the Zhuangzi suggests that its language, like Wittgenstein’s, might be forgotten once the meaning is clear.

Crucially, this is not an endorsement of nihilism—the point is not that everything is devoid of all meaning. Remember that Yan Hui does not turn away from the body and from society to a state of annihilation. Oblivion diverts attention, opens up gaps, and in the process allows something new to form or take place. Oblivion is ambivalent. The Zhuangzi demonstrates how oblivion registers on the bodily and the textual level, and how in both cases, this forgetting is nevertheless productive, leading to some new awareness or transformation. The ambivalent nature of oblivion, its potential for destruction and creation, is why human nature is tenuous, poised between competing forces. Forgetting exemplifies this ambivalence, on both a bodily and a textual level, in the Zhuangzi. One more example of forgetting in the Zhuangzi may help to make my point about this ambivalence.

In Chapter 20, “The Mountain Tree” (shan mu 山木), we find the story of Zhuang Zhou and the gamekeeper:

莊周遊乎雕陵之樊睹一異鵲自南方來者翼廣七尺目大運寸感周之顙而集於栗林莊周曰此何鳥哉翼殷不逝目大不覩蹇裳躩步執彈而留之睹一蟬方得美蔭而忘其身螳蜋執翳而搏之見得而忘其形異鵲從而利之見利而忘其真莊周怵然曰噫物固相累二類相召也捐彈而反走虞人逐而誶之莊周反入三月不庭藺且從而問之夫子何為頃間甚不庭乎莊周曰吾守形而忘身觀於濁水而迷於清淵且吾聞諸夫子曰入其俗從其俗今吾遊於雕陵而忘吾身異鵲感吾顙遊於栗林而忘真栗林虞人以吾為戮吾所以不庭也 (Zhuangzi 20.8)

While rambling about Diaoling Park, Zhuang Zhou spotted a weird bird coming from the south. Its wings spanned seven feet, and its eyes were a whole hand span wide. The bird brushed Zhuang Zhou’s forehead, and then landed in a chestnut grove. Zhuang Zhou exclaimed, “What kind of bird is this? Huge wings but clumsy, big eyes but blind!”

He grabbed his robes and walked out, cocking his crossbow and steadying himself. He then spied a cicada that had gotten itself a pretty patch of shade and forgotten itself [忘其身]. Nearby, a mantis raised its pincers to spring on the cicada, but, concentrating on its prey, the mantis forget itself [忘其形]. The weird bird, behind the mantis, prepared to take advantage and swoop in, but in its own concentration the bird forgot itself [忘其真].

Zhuang Zhou cried out. “Things are bound so tightly together. Even different sorts of creatures [二類] are all bound up together!” He put up his crossbow and turned to leave, but a gamekeeper followed and started scolding him.

Zhuang Zhou went back home, and for three months didn’t even exit the house into the courtyard to talk with his students. Lin Qie approached him and asked, “Master, why have you stopped teaching us in the courtyard?” Zhuang Zhou said, “In preserving my own form [守形] I forgot myself [忘身]. I stared into muddy water and confused it for a clear pool. I’ve heard Laozi say that when you go where common folks go, you ought to do as they do. Recently, I was roaming through Diaoling and forgot myself [忘吾身]. A weird bird brushed my forehead, and I meandered off into the chestnut grove and forgot these truths. The warden of the grove took me for a poacher! That’s why I’m not coming into the courtyard.”

Here we see the ambivalence of forgetting on full display. For Yan Hui, the oblivion of forgetting allowed a transformation into a new way of being in the world. For Zhuang Zhou, the oblivion of forgetting almost got him killed—the gamekeeper nearly clipped his wings as surely as he attempted to do the same to the strange bird. The repetition of wang 忘 (“forget”) through this passage drives home an element of danger inherent to all oblivions. The cicada, the mantis, the bird, and Zhuang Zhou himself each fixated on an object of desire and in doing so forgot. Following Nussbaum’s view of human nature as “an unstable
and temporary achievement, ” I propose that the enemy of human flourishing is not oblivion per se but rather fixation.

Fixation, inflexibility, obsession—nothing comes under fire more in the Zhuangzi. A major interpretation of the text is that distinctions and classifications ossify thought itself, binding us and diminishing our powers. The Zhuangzi aims at a way of life more “flexible, tolerant, and aware of the infinite range of possible ways of responding to life.” (Hansen 1992, 284) Forgetting—so often viewed as a negative to be avoided or corrected in Platonism and its descendants—is, in the Zhuangzi, an ambivalent oblivion.

Euripides’ presentation of the tension between memory and forgetting, between attention and inattentiveness, is grimmer: bluntly stated, nobody is torn to pieces while still living because of oblivion in the Zhuangzi. The Bacchae concerns itself with the power of illusion, with the complications that arise from the entanglement of seeing and not seeing the truth. In the content of the play, illusion and delusion abound: King Pentheus denies the truth of the foreign god Dionysus; the women of Thebes have forgotten their responsibilities and roles and fixated ecstatically on the god, retreating into the mountains to dance and sing; Dionysus himself repeatedly transforms and disguises himself; Pentheus is dressed up as a woman to spy on the wild maenads (the Theban women now devoted to Dionysus); the maenads, led by Pentheus’ mother Agave, tear the young king apart limb from limb. That is, in the end, Agave’s forgetting is so annihilative that she murders her own son, only remembering herself when she stands, bloodied, with his head in her hands. One might say that Pentheus fixates on trying to prove what’s real, trying to discredit Dionysus, to the extent that he is unaware of the significance of the world around him, an inattention that ultimately seals his fate.

The Bacchae reflects the themes of oblivion not only in its dramatic content but also in its poetic form. At one point in the play, Dionysus summons an earthquake to reduce the Theban palace to fire and ruin. The language of the chorus stresses the element of vision in such a way as to draw attention to the illusory nature of the play itself: “Did you see these stone lintels upon the columns spread apart?” and “Do you not behold the fire, do you not see it around Semele’s holy tomb?”15 When Dionysus appears onstage, he asks, “Did you

15 Bacchae 591 ff. Translations and italics come from the translations used by Segal (cited in full below).
Charles Segal explains the emphasis thus: “The physical reality of the miracle is not denied, but the phrasing stresses the subjective side of the event.” (Segal 1982, 221) Euripides uses the language of chorus and of the god to formally underscore the tension between objective reality and subjective perception, a tension that permeates the story of the play (and also the work of the comparatist). The boundary between reality and illusion is one the poet toys with, as Segal elaborates:

[The poet’s] concern is not just to depict a coherent reality but to question the symbolic discourse and the aesthetic means that enable him to create the world his characters inhabit… The miraculous power of Dionysus to elude Pentheus’ bonds and emerge from the enclosed darkness into the “light” (cf. the Chorus’s cry, “O greatest light,” phaos megiston, 608) contains the kernel of the entire play. The audience that responds to the religious thrill of the god’s saving light from darkness is also submitting to the magic of the poet’s fiction acted out before them… Within the play, as within the audience’s reaction to the play, the real and the imagined event, the act and the emotion, are strangely, inextricably blended. (Ibid., 222–223)

The chorus of Greek tragedy occupies a key role in this in-between quality of the play. More has been written on the complex and puzzling role of the Greek tragic chorus than can possibly be summarized here, but a few brief remarks will make my point. The chorus is not a character, and this means that the chorus is not limited in the way a character might be—by linear or plot progression, by emotional and personal and intellectual unity, and so on. The chorus dances (indeed, this is the original meaning of the word “orchestra,” a dancing ground), it moves—similarly, the boundaries of the chorus shift. Renaud Gagné and Marianne Govers Hopman explain:

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If the central characters are simultaneously here and there, on stage and in the play, the chorus can simultaneously be here, there, and elsewhere, now and then, this and that, meld one into the other, and pass freely between these different levels through the semantics of word, sound, and movement. Its well-known ability to reference itself and its own dance in performance, or to ‘project’ itself on other, distant choruses, is part of a much wider pattern of mimetic transfer set in motion by the choral song. *Without ever breaking the dramatic illusion, the chorus can radically shift the focus from one level of reference to another and create greater depth through a superimposition of semantic layers.* (Gagné and Govers 2013, 1)

The chorus plays a mediating role, able to shift attention from meaning to meaning, from idea to idea, even from one frame of reference to another (sometimes breaking the fourth wall and sometimes dialoguing directly with characters). The *Bacchae* amplifies this element of the chorus: “One of the decisive features of the *Bacchae* is the fact that it is arguably the only transmitted tragedy where the dramatic and performative roles of the chorus are intertwined, and, as far as dancing is concerned, are practically indiscriminate and identical.” (Bierl 2013, 211) So the chorus, especially in the *Bacchae*, is a form of self-awareness on the part of the text, a way to pull the audience or reader into the action, and a formal manifestation of themes and content in the text.

The *Zhuangzi* has no chorus, but the text does have a feature that performs a similar role. Chapter 27 of the *Zhuangzi*, titled (following Ziporyn) “Words Lodged Elsewhere” (*yuyan* 寓言), identifies three types of language or rather, words (*yan* 言): lodging words (*yuyan* 寓言), double words (*chongyan* 重言), and goblet words (*zhiyan* 尊言).17 Lodging language “lodges words elsewhere,” meaning to “put one’s words into the mouths of other people.” (Lin 1994, 53 and Wang 2004, 202) In this sense, the meaning behind a word is lodged elsewhere.

More complicatedly, lodging language allows the speaker in the text (a character or narrator or whoever) to inhabit the position of the intended audience. The most infamous example from the Zhuangzi might be the figure of Confucius, usually depicted in dialogue with one of his disciples. Such scenes offer the reader familiar ground on which to orient herself, characters who come with readily accessible viewpoints, an easy entry into the text. This facilitated entry of the reader into the text then makes it even more effective when the Zhuangzi undermines or subverts a figure as famous as Confucius. But why would the Zhuangzi not simply ridicule or attack Confucius directly? Yearley highlights features of lodging language that separate it from regular ad hominem assault:

“One feature is the nurture of sympathetic identification. The other is the nurture of our ability to move among positions that differ from those that normally attract and hold us.” (Yearley 2005, 510) This second feature is crucial. The Zhuangzi presents a kind of wandering as a spiritual or philosophical ideal, as an exemplary way of moving through life. Yearley remarks: “This kind of lodging place language involves wandering among positions in which you might lodge. It exhibits, that is, the spiritual perfection of the wanderer, the person who may temporarily light in one or another place, but whose lodging is always temporary and contingent.” (Ibid., 511) Here one is reminded of the striking opening chapter of the Zhuangzi and its title, emblematic of the text, “Free and Easy Wandering” (xiao yao you 逍遙遊).18

Double language (chongyang 重言) refers to words that contain multiple layers or rays of meaning that refract an opalescent light and thus convey and conceal a whole host of meanings.19 Double language corresponds roughly to figurative language, wherein a word expresses more than its denotative meaning. Depending on if one reads 重 as “zhong” instead of “chong,” “heavy words” is also an acceptable translation in the sense that these words often carry

18 An excellent meditation on the philosophical significance of “free and easy wandering” for the whole Zhuangzi, including an argument for why the phrase summarizes the entire text, can be found in Kuang-min Wu, The Butterfly as Companion: Meditations on the First Three Chapters of the Chuang Tzu (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990).


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authoritative weight, especially when put into the mouths of traditional figures. According to Yearley, the power of double or heavy language lies in its ability to knock us out of complacency, to ram us with the authority of a speaker or source so as to bring us up short. In this way, double/heavy language might be what dislodges us from our temporary positions occupied via lodging language. For example, near the end of Chapter 2, Ju Quezi asks Chang Wuzi, “So how do I know that enjoying life isn’t just a delusion?”20 The question is then rephrased and repeated several different ways, each hammering down like an existential blow: “How do I know that those who hate death are not just exiles who don’t know the way home?”21 “How do I know that the dead don’t regret ever craving life?”22 Yearley writes of double/heavy language that “initial bewilderment is often followed by the kind of insight that both brings satisfaction, at least temporarily, and embeds within us a notion, phrase, or story.” (Yearley 2005, 512) Bewilderment followed by insight and accompanied by absorption is similar to the effect that poetry often has on us (especially the memorizing, on a bodily, rhythmic level, lyrics that are nevertheless not always clear). Double/heavy language “often brings us up short; our ordinary intellectual inertia is overcome by something both perplexing and exciting.”23

Goblet or spillover language (zhìyán 厙言) is sometimes understood to describe the Zhuangzi’s overall philosophical stance on language rather than any particular linguistic strategy. Shuen-fu Lin describes goblet language as “speech that is natural, unpredmeditated, free from preconceived values, always responding to the changing situations in the flow of discourse, and always returning the mind to its original state of emptiness.” (Lin 1994, 65) Goblets fill up, tip over, spill, right themselves, and return to equilibrium and poise. Yearley explains that

20 Zhuangzi 2.12: 予惡乎知啟生之非惑邪。
21 Ibid., 予惡乎知死之非弱喪而不知歸者邪。
22 Ibid., 予惡乎知夫死者不悔其始之齟生乎。
23 Ibid. Yearley gives his own example, but I would offer the following lines by Emily Dickinson: “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, / And Mourners to and fro / Kept treading – treading – till it seemed / That sense was breaking through –”. See The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition, ed. by R. W. Franklin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), no. 340. These lyrics are immediately enticing and also confusing, requiring one to slow down and try to make sense of them, but in a way that also lends them to memorization and internalization.
“goblet language is that kind of fluid language in which equilibrium is kept despite (or perhaps because of) the presence of changing genres, rhetorical forms, points of view, and figurative expressions.” (Yearley 2005, 518)

Three features of goblet language are especially salient to my purposes. First, goblet language dampens the authorial voice such that words seem to come from the void. Yearley observes: “We are rarely sure who is speaking and therefore we know neither from what perspective statements come nor with what authority they are delivered. We face...words that seem to come from a void.” (Ibid., p. 523) Without any stable authorial voice to anchor the majority of the Zhuangzi, authorial intent fractures and meaning multiplies such that interpretation of the text becomes something of jigsaw puzzle made of glass. The effect is that the reader herself is able to, carefully, try and piece this puzzle back together. Here we are returned to lodging language, which helps the reader enter the text in such a way as to play an active role in the construction of meaning.

Second, goblet words force the reader to respond actively and creatively to the Zhuangzi. One instance of goblet language’s spillover and then abrupt reorienting might be the countless non sequiturs that populate the Zhuangzi. Not only are entire casts of characters regularly replaced with others without warning, the entire topic or theme of conversation is liable to shift at any given moment. The lack of linear argument or plot forces the reader to make sense of things. What is noteworthy is that goblet language pulls us in often by dumping us out. The unstable nature of the text causes us to lose our footing, a loss that paradoxically forces us to scramble for purchase.

Third, goblet language draws attention to the major Daoist theme of emptiness, particularly how emptiness ends up being productive and valuable, and a site of creation itself. The metaphor of the goblet is not that of a cup that empties itself and never fills up again. Yearley notes that “the vessel will never be empty in the sense that absence defines it—and a continuing motif in the Zhuangzi is how a perfected person’s emptiness and language always displays fullness not vacuity, stillness not a lack of vitality.” (Ibid., 525) Here one thinks again of Nussbaum’s remarks on humanity as a tenuous poise. Goblet language is poised between overflowing and emptiness, never staying in one state overlong and thus denying us the stability to say of language either that it is empty/meaningless or that it is full/meaningful. Language is both. It is ambivalent, and just as we have seen before, the mistake is in fixating on one state over the other. From a textual point
of view, goblet language (as well as lodging and double language) loses its power to affect the reader if we fixate on only one meaning.

The chorus of the Bacchae shares something of the features of the Zhuangzi’s three types of language. Studies of the Greek tragic chorus frequently focus on the identity of the chorus. The chorus is often identified as an “ideal spectator” or the “voice of the people,” and in some cases as “the other.”24 In the Bacchae, where the chorus is explicitly identified as the Theban women who have forgotten their own identities and are swept-up in Dionysian frenzy, the authority of the chorus is called into question or at least problematized. Not a standalone character, not an ideal spectator (since the chorus certainly does not behave in an ideal way here), not the willing or free voice of the people, not the marginalized other (the maenad chorus has terrifying power and centrality)—the Bacchae’s chorus is a liminal voice, speaking with neither the knowledge nor the authority of Dionysus. In this sense, the chorus, like goblet language’s removal of authorial voice, invites the audience to construct their own meaning. The chorus can be compared to lodging language in opening a space or entry point for the audience. This, however, is not done by voicing any idealized civic wisdom with which the audience could relate. The Bacchic chorus instead exemplifies double/heavy language to speak from a position of seeming authority while simultaneously undermining or repeatedly smashing up against conventional wisdom. Anyone looking to the chorus of the Bacchae for ideal behavior or knowledge will be shocked and disappointed: the maenad chorus defies easy conceptual categorization and so forces a more active meaning-making on the part of the audience. Both the Zhuangzi and the Bacchae display oblivion as ambivalent, as an inescapable feature of humanness, humanness that is thus portrayed as tenuous and unstable. Euripides and Zhuangzi deny any comforting view of human nature and instead, on the levels of form (the chorus for the former and the three types of

words for the latter) and content (Pentheus, the maenads, Yan Hui, Zhuang Zhou), offer a complicated tangle of the themes of forgetting, inattention, looking away, and fixation. Both texts seem to support Nussbaum’s description of human nature as porous and as passing in and out of boundaries. I have tried to give just a few examples of how the Zhuangzi and the Bacchae illustrate this in content and in form.

Let me close with a remark by Segal about the role of the tragic poet. In discussing how the Bacchae blurs lines between reality and illusion in both its form and content, Segal comments on Euripides’ own work:

That artificiality or theatricality opens up a suspended, privileged space within the society where the familiar laws and the familiar logic do not apply, where the spectator confronts a hidden, coexisting chaos within the ordered frame of the art-work, the society, and his own personality. While opening that gap for socially useful ends (e.g. cathartic, apotropaic, or monitory), the mask’s freedom from reality also prevents complete reclosure. (Segal 1982, 224)

I contend that this description applies to the comparatist as well. Like a poem (dramatic tragic poem in this case), a comparison is artificial. The comparison “opens up a suspended, privileged space” in that the comparative context is, simply, unrealistic—that is, Euripides and Zhuangzi have no intrinsic reason to be compared. Willingness to abide in the temporary juxtaposition of a comparison is a privilege “where the familiar laws…and logic do not apply.” The poet asks our indulgence as we see the world refracted through her imagination and not as it really is—the comparatist does the same. In the process, we “confront a hidden, coexisting chaos,” or, in other words, we see that what we thought was the case might not be. In presenting alternatives and undermining assumptions, comparison dislodges our fixations, those strangleholds we have on truth or knowledge. The Zhuangzi repeatedly tries to pry our fixed grips open, and tragedy, on Segal’s reading, does the same. Finally, just as tragedy opens a gap, cracking away our fixed certainty, we are also left without “complete reclosure.” I take this to mean that the experience of relinquishing fixation (knowledge, beliefs, assumptions, etc.) cannot be undone. Comparison at its best should have this same effect.

Lovin, describing the act of comparison, remarks: “It is an axiom of the quantum universe described by Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle that the objects
of our attention are always changed by being measured, just as it is a
methodological axiom of the social sciences that there are no observers who are
not participant-observers. To know a thing is to change it in some way…” (Lovin
2010, 263. My italics) Comparison as a kind of poetry strengthens the idea that
the comparatist is not a purely objective scholar but also a subjective maker, and
this recognition should lead us think about comparative work differently. The
Zhuangzi and the Bacchae, in their form and their content, emphasize how observers/readers/audience are incorporated into a work, just as the comparatist is
changed by the comparison. For both comparison and these ancient texts, the
change arises from oblivion and its ability to unsettle, to leave us tenuously
poised.

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Abstract: Scholars have observed that the clash between patriotism and cosmopolitanism constitutes a central theme of Rabindranath Tagore’s novel The Home and the World. What remains to be fully addressed, however, is Tagore’s profound depiction of affective and spiritual sources of sympathy larger than loyalty to one’s country. Tagore’s multi-personal delineation of consciousness illuminates the complicated relations between notions of the constitution of self and allegiances to vital sites of belonging—home, nation, the world, and the infinite. Through a close examination of spatial tropes in the novel, the article illustrates how Tagore draws on Buddhist traditions in presenting his vision of svadéssamāj, a form of social collectivity that amalgamates inner life with traditional Indian ways of communal existence. Paying special attention to the protagonists’ introspections, this essay argues that the novel suggests how moral judgments can be nurtured by aesthetic sentiments that are tied to such communal existence.¹

During Rabindranath Tagore’s visit to China in 1924, the Crescent Moon Society (新月社, a literary group that had been established the year before and took its name from Tagore’s book of poems, The Crescent Moon), organized a party in Peking to celebrate his sixty-third birthday on May 8. Tagore’s Chinese hosts arranged an amateur performance of his one-act English-language play Chitra at the party. Among the large audience of the capital’s intellectuals and celebrities was Lin Yutang, then a new faculty member in the English department at Peking University and a cultural critic. Lin remarked in an essay published in the Morning Newspaper Supplement (晨報副刊) on June 16 that he found the play “sentimental, mawkish,” the same way he felt about a few poems he had read by

¹ The research that led to the completion of this article received support from the Asia Research Center, Fudan University, for which the author wants to express her appreciation here.
Tagore. Lin acknowledged his ignorance of Tagore’s writings in general, but remained skeptical about Tagore’s speeches in China, which upheld the importance of spiritual purification and revival as means to counteract the doctrines of materialism. Lin faulted Tagore for being politically disengaged and distracting. To his mind, Tagore’s embrace of spiritual life betrayed a conquered people’s resort to psychological consolation and would do little to help India’s struggle to break out of the clutches of colonialism.

Lin’s criticism of Tagore was clearly constrained, as he himself conceded, by his limited knowledge of Tagore’s work. On the other hand, it was also indicative of the political climate in China in the 1920s, in which pursuits of national salvation predominated in the wake of the May Fourth advocacy of economic and political modernization through science and democracy. The resistance to material progress and political machinery that Tagore pronounced at his numerous talks, in other words, sounded out of tune with widespread endeavors to create a new political order in China. The critical responses to Tagore’s message certainly reflected the particular cultural and political conditions in China, yet Lin’s comments on the emotional and spiritual characteristics of Tagore’s work and ideas also point to complicated aspects of Tagore’s thought that often get lost in cultural translation. Martha C. Nussbaum, for example, presents a different image of Tagore in her influential essay “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism.” Invoking Tagore’s novel The Home and the World, in which militant loyalties to nation are unfavorably contrasted with allegiances to what is morally good for the community of humanity, Nussbaum portrays Tagore as a champion of “universal reason” in line with the Stoic and Kantian cosmopolitan ideals of moral rationality. (Nussbaum 1996, 17) In Nussbaum’s own words, “I believe that Tagore sees deeply that at bottom nationalism and ethnocentric particularism are not alien to one another, but akin—that to give support to nationalist sentiments subverts, ultimately, even the values that hold a nation together, because it substitutes a colorful idol for the substantive universal values

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2 Lin uses the English expressions twice to describe his impressions in this Chinese essay, titled “論泰戈爾的政治思想” (“On Tagore’s Political Thought”).

3 For a detailed account of Tagore’s visit to China and oppositions to Tagore’s message among Chinese political and intellectual circles, see Stephen N. Hay’s Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp.146-185.
of justice and right.” (Ibid., 5)

Like Nussbaum, Amartya Sen gives prominence to Tagore’s espousal of reason in his reflections on Tagore’s political and philosophical thought. Comparing Tagore and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Sen argues that Tagore was committed to “pressing for more room for reasoning, and for a less traditionalist view, a greater interest in the rest of the world, and more respect for science and for objectivity generally.” (Sen 2005, 92) Drawing attention to Tagore’s 1938 essay “Gandhi the Man,” Sen notes Tagore’s disagreement with Gandhi’s nationalistic defense of past traditions and deployment of an “irrational force of credulity in [Indian] people.” (Ibid., 99) In Sen’s analysis, reason stands as the highest ideal for Tagore. Sen remarks: “The question he persistently asks is whether we have reason enough to want what is being proposed, taking everything into account. Important as history is, reasoning has to go beyond the past. It is in the sovereignty of reasoning—fearless reasoning in freedom—that we find Rabindranath Tagore’s lasting voice.” (Ibid., 119-120)

Other critics, however, have cast doubts on accounts of Tagore’s cosmopolitan ideal that polarize abstract reason and cultural traditions. Saranindranath Tagore (henceforth ST), for instance, argues that Tagore’s conception of cosmopolitanism emphasizes rather than eschews the richness of local traditions. Quoting Tagore, ST draws out Tagore’s idea of how inherited traditions shape the mind’s ability to reason and absorb different traditions through cultural encounters: “I have come to feel that the mind, which has been matured in the atmosphere of a profound knowledge of its own country and of the perfect thoughts that have been produced in that land, is ready to accept and assimilate the cultures that come from other countries.” (Tagore 2008, 1076) ST concludes that Tagore’s cosmopolitanism is rooted in real-life experiences instead of what Nussbaum calls “universal reason.” As he puts it, “Cosmopolitan identity, for Tagore, is not simply an empty token of an abstracted universal, produced by theoretical reason … ; rather, cosmopolitan identity has to be existentially realized in each life project.” (Ibid., 1082)

A great deal of critical effort has been devoted to negotiating between Tagore’s local attachments and universal sympathies, along the lines of what Kwame Anthony Appiah has conceived as a rooted cosmopolitanism, one that must “reconcile a kind of universalism with the legitimacy of at least some forms.
of partiality.” What has received insufficient attention, however, is the spiritual dimension of Tagore’s cosmopolitan vision, which cannot be fully captured in terms of current debates about patriotism and cosmopolitanism. Tagore’s vision, in fact, involves a substantive notion of the infinite that differs from preoccupation with a world that is politically organized and coextensive with the global domain of socioeconomic existence. Tagore’s novel *The Home and the World* (*Ghare Baire*, written in Bengali, translated into English and published in 1919), from which Nussbaum draws support for her argument about cosmopolitanism, presents a dynamic picture of the complicated relation between the constitution of self and allegiance to vital sites of belonging—home, nation, the world, and the infinite. Indeed, the moral ideals upheld by Tagore’s privileged character, Nikhil, are grounded in aspirations toward cosmic infinity.

I. Nationalism and “Intimate Truths of the Universe”

The two male protagonists of *The Home and the World*, which is set in Bengal in the aftermath of the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and against the backdrop of the nationalist *Swadeshi* movement, have often been read as hero and villain. In this scenario, Nikhil, a liberal cosmopolitan figure guided by his moral ideals and humanist sympathies, stands as the antithesis of Sandip, an unscrupulous and self-serving instigator of nationalist passions and violence. The novel no doubt highlights the contrasts between their moral beliefs and social behaviors, often in Nikhil’s favor. From the very outset, for example, the different attitudes of Nikhil and Sandip toward their country bespeak their conflicting moral persuasions. Explaining why he does not accept the nationalist spirit—*Bande Mataram* (“Hail Mother”)—of the *Swadeshi* upsurge, Nikhil says, “I am willing … to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it.”

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ideals, associating them with passivity and weakness. Instead, he preaches a doctrine of patriotism based on force and unscrupulousness: “That is really mine which I can snatch away. My country does not become mine simply because it is the country of my birth. It becomes mine on the day when I am able to win it by force.” (45)

Though Sandip’s emphasis on “win[ning]” his country expresses a will to fight against colonialism, echoing the citizen’s rallying cry of “put force against force” in “Cyclops,” his doctrine of the preemptive use of violence and his attempt to snatch Nikhil’s money and wife are called into question throughout the text. In addition, the rich texture of the novel discourages a simplified picture of good and evil, or right and wrong. Indeed, in response to the questions of his readers shortly after the novel was published, Tagore explained that his writing “was realistic, representing human traits that were psychologically accurate rather than idealized stereotypes.” (Chakravarty 2013, 93-94) The narrative structure lends further support to Tagore’s emphasis on his exploration of human nature. The novel is narrated from the interlaced first-person perspectives of Bimala (Nikhil’s wife), Nikhil, and Sandip, whose various accounts complement, challenge, and sometimes contradict each other. The intensified delineation of consciousness therein also gives voice to motivations, inner conflicts, introspections, and aspirations of each individual character which demand understanding before critical judgment.

John Marx has pointed out that in spite of the divergence of their political and moral positions, Nikhil and Sandip both belong to the English-educated Bengali elite. In Marx’s view, “The English School gives these two a political scientific vernacular in which to debate.” (Marx 2010, 110) What Marx’s interpretation leaves out, however, is how the debate between the two reflects different adaptations and applications of their shared education and scientific expertise. Whereas Nikhil tries to help the local community to develop its own industries through modern technology and finance and to acquire knowledge of political economy (26-7), Sandip promotes ideas of tyrannical power and ruthless material acquisition, which he attributes to “[a]ll the world-conquerors, from Alexander down to the American millionaires, [who] mould themselves into a sword or a mint.” (79-80) Moreover, Tagore extends the debate between Nikhil and Sandip to the local community to show the sway of Sandip’s advocacy. In an argument between Nikhil and the local undergraduate and graduate students about Swadeshi and the necessity of coercion in the governance of an estate, and by
extension, a country, the students rebuff Nikhil’s condemnation of violence of any kind by ventriloquizing Sandip’s doctrine. As a history student remarks, “Sandip Babu rightly teaches that in order to get, you must snatch. This is taking all of us some time to learn, because it runs counter to what we were taught at school.” (129-130)

More important, the arguments between Nikhil and Sandip are couched in cultural terms, which shed light on the characteristics of Nikhil’s spiritual ideal. While Sandip situates his doctrine of power and success within world history, trying to prove its truth by adducing Alexander and American millionaires, Nikhil refutes it by presenting an alternative view of universal truth. In a discussion about true freedom with his mentor Chandranath Babu, to whom Nikhil constantly turns for guidance and congenial company, Nikhil opines: “It was Buddha who conquered the world, not Alexander—this is untrue when stated in dry prose—oh when shall we be able to sing it? When shall all these most intimate truths of the universe overflow the pages of printed books and leap out in a sacred stream like the Ganges from the Gangotrie?” Nikhil’s reference to Buddha follows his emphasis on the importance of freeing the mind of possessive desires. For him, those who “seek to reform something outside themselves” fail to see that “reform is wanted only in one’s own desires.” The “most intimate truths of the universe,” in Nikhil’s description, at once reside in the inner world of the self and require an orientation toward the universe that can hardly be taught by didactic “books” and “scriptures.” (134-35)

Setting Buddha against Alexander, Nikhil does not posit a form of cultural nationalism, even though he draws spiritual sustenance from Indian traditions. By focusing attention on self-improvement, Nikhil recasts the conflict between domestic and foreign foregrounded by the Swadeshi movement and Sandip’s patriotism as one between the material and the spiritual that concerns the deeper question of human nature across national boundaries. Nikhil’s invocation of Buddha expresses Tagore’s own interest in Buddhist thought as a salient part of the Indian philosophical tradition. Niharranjan Ray has illuminated how Tagore went to the Upanishads and Buddha and Buddhism for his intellectual and emotional inspiration. According to Ray, it was “the humanist tradition of the Buddha and the Buddhist way of life that appealed to him most.” (Ray 1992, 223-32) Indeed, at the heart of Nikhil’s disagreement with Sandip lies a conception of self-creation that differs from Sandip’s deterministic viewpoint.

In many of their arguments and reflections concerning the question of the self,
both Nikhil and Sandip talk about giving life a certain shape; at first sight, their formulations seem similar. In Nikhil’s words, “Providence leaves our life molded in the rough – its object being that we ourselves should put the finishing touches, shaping it into its final form to our taste.” (197) Sandip, too, speaks of molding life into a shape: “We men, with our ideas, strive to give [life] a particular shape by melting it into a particular mould—into the definiteness of success.” (79)

Their conceptions of the shape of life, however, are substantively different. For Nikhil, it is both a possibility and a duty to realize “the great, the unselfish, the beautiful in man.” (61) The “finishing touches,” in his view, constitute humanity’s moral and aesthetic aspirations and obligations. Dismissing Nikhil’s moral delicacy as idealistic, Sandip asserts that “human nature was created long before phrases were, and will survive them too.” (57) Sandip locates human agency in manipulating the material rather than cultivating the self. He avers: “My creation had begun before I was born. I had no choice in regard to my surroundings and so must make the best of such material as comes to my hand.” (78) This seemingly defensive notion of material pursuit based on a deterministic outlook, however, immediately translates into an assertive account of conquest, an insistence on shaping life into “the definiteness of success.”

Nikhil takes Sandip to task for his mechanistic understanding of man, which, to his critical eye, is prone to “making [man] petty.” (61) Nikhil’s criticism is twofold. To his mind, Sandip’s idea is not only misguided but also deleterious as a leading principle for nationalism. Against Sandip’s principle of material success and embrace of passionate desires, Nikhil pits “the soul,” which, he affirms, “knows itself in the infinite and transcends its success.” When Sandip complains that the idea of the soul is vague, Nikhil counters, “If to gain distinctness you try to know life as a machine, then such mere distinctness cannot stand for truth. The soul is not as distinct as success, and so you only lose your soul if you seek it in your success.” (80) The opposition Nikhil highlights between a machine and the soul is crucial here. Nikhil discerns in Sandip’s outlook on life both a form of “covetous self-love” and a fetishizing of machinery widespread in the modern world. (43) He ascribes Sandip’s conception to the influences of a purely scientific understanding of man in European education, remarking, “in Europe people look at everything from the viewpoint of science. But man is neither mere physiology, nor biology, nor psychology, nor even sociology. … Man is infinitely more than the natural science of himself. … You want to find the truth of man from your science teachers, and not from your own inner being.” (61) Against
scientific claims to the truth of man, Nikhil’s stress on the truth emanating from one’s inner being echoes his Buddhist conception of the “intimate truths of the universe,” which, in turn, reflects Tagore’s views on the nation and social life.

II. Svadeśsamāj vs. Nation

Nikhil’s critique, however, is not targeted at science per se or European civilization in toto, nor is it a nationalistic attempt to establish the superiority of Indian culture. What it condemns are the mechanical tendencies that seem to Nikhil to diminish humanity as a whole. Here Nikhil gives expression to Tagore’s abiding concern for “the weakening of humanity from which the present age is suffering.” (Tagor 1917, 18) In his lectures on “Nationalism in the West,” which he delivered throughout the United States during his visit in the winter of 1916-17, Tagore compares the organization of the nation-state to a lifeless machine whose operation tends to strip people of their individuality and humanity. He observes:

When this organization of politics and commerce, whose other name is the Nation, becomes all powerful at the cost of the harmony of the higher social life, then it is an evil day for humanity … When [society] allows itself to be turned into a perfect organization of power, then there are few crimes which it is unable to perpetrate. Because success is the object and justification of a machine, while goodness only is the end and purpose of man. When this engine of organization begins to attain a vast size, and those who are mechanics are made into parts of the machine, then the personal man is eliminated to a phantom, everything becomes a revolution of policy carried out by the human parts of the machine, requiring no twinge of pity or moral responsibility. (Ibid., 23. My italics for emphasis)

In Tagore’s contrast between success and goodness one can hear echoes of the debate between Sandip and Nikhil. While Tagore’s emphasis on moral goodness

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as the end and purpose of man evokes the Kantian categorical imperative, his
denunciation of machinery resonates with both the British tradition of social
criticism and the Frankfurt School, to whose work questions of instrumentality
remain central. Matthew Arnold, for example, argues in *Culture and Anarchy*
(1867-1869) that “faith in machinery” is a “besetting danger” for “the whole
civilisation” of a modern world growing increasingly “mechanical and external.”
Like Tagore, Arnold maintains that machinery has no “value in and for itself,”
and he mounts a critique of the prevailing tendency in England to regard
machinery as “precious ends.” (Arnold 1993, 63-64) In a similar vein, Arnold’s
conception of culture as “consist[ing] in becoming something rather than in
having something, in an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an
outward set of circumstances” seems to overlap with Nikhil’s idea of self-creation.
(Ibid., 62)

Tagore goes even further and incorporates the category of “the Nation”—as
the organizing principle of political and economic life—into his vision of
machinery. Seeing the nation as a Western state organization transplanted to the
soil of India, Tagore grounds Indian history in its social and spiritual life. He
maintains, “In the West the national machinery of commerce and politics turns
out neatly compressed bales of humanity which have their high market value; but
they are bound in iron hoops, labeled and separated off with scientific care and
precision.” Indian history, by contrast, “has not been of the rise and fall of
kingdoms, of fights for political supremacy…. Our history is that of our social
life and attainment of spiritual ideals.” (Tagore 1917, 16-17) In Tagore’s analysis,
social life is not “union of a people … organized for a mechanical purpose.” By
contrast, Tagore continues:

> It is an end in itself. It is a *spontaneous* self-expression of man as a social
being. It is a *natural regulation* of human relationships, so that men can
develop ideals of life in cooperation with one another. It has also a political
side, but this is only for a special purpose. It is for self-preservation. It is
merely the side of power, not of human ideals. (Ibid., 19-20. My italics)

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7 See Raymond Williams’ *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia
University Press, 1983), for a genealogy of such a tradition in nineteenth-century Britain.
Raymond Williams is henceforth abbreviated as RW to differentiate two authors of the
same last name in References.
Contrasting social life with political organization, Tagore lays emphasis on the “spontaneous” and “natural” characteristics of the former, in contradistinction to the mechanistic and unnatural ones of the latter. Tagore’s view further aligns him with “a continuing tradition of criticism of the new industrial civilization” in Britain since the late eighteenth century, in which, as Raymond Williams (henceforth RW) has pointed out, the word “unnatural” is the constant emphasis. (Williams 1983, 15) Social life, for Tagore, cannot and should not be contained by the organization of political power. As E. P. Thompson notes in his introduction to Tagore’s Nationalism, “More than any other thinker of his time, Tagore has a clear conception of civil society, as something distinct from and of more personal texture than political or economic structures.”

What distinguishes Tagore’s conception of social life, however, is its inextricability from the “attainment of spiritual ideals.” Partha Chatterjee (henceforth PC) has illuminated Tagore’s non-statist idea of samāj (society) as an alternative to the political organization of the nation. As PC points out, the form of samāj Tagore believes India must “revive and reconstruct” is svadeśsamāj, which embodies “the collective power of self-making or ātmāsakti.”

PC draws attention to Tagore’s explanation of the relations between deś (country), svadeś (my own country), and ātmāsakti (self-making) in an essay written around 1920:

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9 Partha Chatterjee, Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 104. Partha Chatterjee (henceforth PC to differentiate between two authors of the same last name in References) also outlines the change in Tagore’s attitude towards the idea of the nation. In PC’s account, at the time of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal in 1905–6, Tagore did not deny the necessity of statecraft “for the construction of the svadeśī samāj,” even though he believed mere machinery would not suffice. PC mentions that Tagore even “prepared a constitution of the svadeśī samāj.” However, according to PC, Tagore grew increasingly doubtful about the machinery of political organization and came to see it as doomed to failure (105-6).
The certain knowledge that I have a dés comes out of a quest. Those who think that the country is theirs simply because they have been born in it are creatures besotted by the external things of the world. But, since the true character of the human being lies in his or her inner nature imbued with the force of self-making (ātmāsakti), only that country can be one’s svadés that is created by one’s own knowledge, intelligence, love and effort. (Chatterjee 20011, 104)

For Tagore, svadeś signifies neither a territorial concept nor simply an inheritance one has acquired by birth; instead, it grows out of the force of self-making (ātmāsakti). In other words, svadeś is a moral and spiritual ideal based on an ongoing process of self-creation. In addition, Tagore’s vision of svadeśsamāj, differing from the machinery of political organization, denotes a collectivity that amalgamates inner life with traditional Indian form of communal existence. While the unity of inner being and communal life underpins Tagore’s social imagining, his protagonist Nikhil’s experience in The Home and the World suggests that “one’s own knowledge, intelligence, love and effort” need to be fostered in a space that is larger than, and may even be in conflict with, the sphere of social bonds. As earlier described, Nikhil insists, in his argument with Sandip, that the soul “knows itself in the infinite.” (80) On the other hand, the infinite space, toward which Nikhil aspires, also brings him anguish and alienation from his beloved ones.

III. A Solemn Orientation Toward Infinity and Aesthetic Enjoyment

The Home and the World is characterized by many spatial tropes, beginning with the title. Critics are inclined to read home and world dichotomously—in terms of domestic and social, private and public, Colonial India and the British Empire. Rebecca L. Walkowitz, for instance, argues, “The self-styled cosmopolitanism of The Home and the World ultimately depends on the uneasy encounter between one invented place and another, between public and private, between a conventional England and an invented ‘Motherland.’” (Walkowitz 2000, 227) These interpretive paradigms are certainly true to the setting of Tagore’s novel, especially if one follows the plotline of the female protagonist Bimala who, encouraged by her husband Nikhil and abetted by her would-be lover Sandip, leaves the traditional female seclusion of purdah and gets caught up in a world of nationalist passions and violence. Moreover, “the world” also contains a cosmic
dimension in the novel exceeding the global sociopolitical systems that the word often evokes in the modern mind. In this sense, the original English translation of the title—At Home and Outside—used when the book was published serially in the Modern Review in India in 1918-19, might be said to have captured the openness and rhythm of the text more aptly.

A related trope central to the novel is the journey to Calcutta upon which Nikhil and Bimala are to embark. From the very beginning, Nikhil’s project of cultivating Bimala contains a significant spatial component. While inviting an English governess, Miss Gilby, to instruct her and trying to teach her himself, Nikhil also encourages Bimala to leave purdah and see the outside world. He proposes that they move to Calcutta to give their life “more room to branch out.” (25) Nikhil’s master, Chandranath Babu, later elaborates the importance of enlarging one’s scope of life after Bimala becomes embroiled in the chaos of the local nationalistic agitations. Rebuking the parochial patriotism that puts “the country” in the place of “conscience,” he advises Nikhil: “Take Bimala away to Calcutta. She is getting too narrow a view of the outside world from here, she cannot see men and things in their true proportions. Let her see the world—men and their work—give her a broad vision.” (165) As an important center of culture and education in India at that time, where Nikhil obtained his BA and MA degrees, Calcutta indubitably represents a larger world than Nikhil’s estate and the village they live in. Therein Chandranath Babu draws a connection between broadening one’s horizons and the achievement of worldliness.

Moreover, Nikhil’s insistence on Bimala’s exposure to the larger world constitutes his endeavor “to save the country from the thousand-and-one snares—of religion, custom and selfishness,” which he sees people like Sandip “busy spreading.” (136) Nikhil has already detected a blind devotion in Bimala at the beginning of their marriage, when she has persisted in performing the ritual of touching his feet to show her worship of him. Such a blind devotion, Nikhil believes, is both shaped by conventions and susceptible to vicious manipulation. The tendency to worship certainly has a gendered aspect to it. The novel opens with Bimala’s recollections of her mother’s Hindu womanhood, an inheritance that conditions her feelings and choices. Bimala recounts reflectively: “It was my woman’s heart, which must worship in order to love.” (18) At the same time, however, Nikhil sees idolatry as a problem plaguing the whole country and making people vulnerable to incitement and delusion. Indeed, Sandip explicitly tells of his ploy to exploit such a collective mentality for his nationalist cause:
“True patriotism will never be roused in our countrymen unless they can visualize the motherland. We must make a goddess of her. ... We must get one of the current images accepted as representing the country—the worship of the people must flow towards it along the deep-cut grooves of custom.” (120) Sandip renders Bimala an icon of “the Shakti [divine power] of the Motherland” by playing on her passion for him, (31) and in turn, he deploys the deified image of the country to inflame patriotic feelings of the people. In this light, Nikhil’s commitment to freeing Bimala from spatial and conventional constraints embodies not merely a personal concern for his beloved; it emblematizes his conviction of the importance of critical detachment for the country as well.

The journey to Calcutta, however, also symbolizes Nikhil’s spiritual longing for the faraway, which tends to clash with his domestic and communal ties. Nikhil’s yearning points toward “the outside,” which, in Nikhil’s vocabulary, extends to the infinite where the inner self seeks its abode. He throws into bold relief his perception of differences between home and outside in a contemplative moment: “There are many in this world whose minds dwell in brick-built houses—they can afford to ignore the thing called the outside. But my mind lives under the trees in the open, directly receives upon itself the messages borne by the free winds, and responds from the bottom of its heart to all the musical cadences of light and dark.” (132) Nikhil’s description of the mind living under the trees conjures up the image of the Buddha meditating under a tree and achieving his enlightenment. In his lyrical rhapsody, the mind merges into the cosmic, and designedly poetic, world of the trees, the free winds, and the musical cadences of light and dark.

While the ethereality of such a realm contrasts with the earthiness of the “brick-built houses,” Nikhil’s cosmic aspiration means more than a metaphor for a spiritual journey beyond the confines of custom. Commenting on the changing conceptions and modes of travel writing, James Buzard notes that Kant’s idea of enlightenment as humankind’s “liberation from self-incurred tutelage’ lent itself to metaphorical travel narratives about the enlightened soul’s search for its new, true homeland in that clear ether of rational discourse that was thought to lie just beyond the boundaries of all mere ‘cultures.’” (Buzard 2003, 85) Nikhil’s conception of the soul intersects with the Kantian notion of enlightenment; and yet the cosmic, in Tagore’s rendering, is grounded in the natural world, as Nikhil’s enjoyment of the trees and winds indicates. Nikhil’s invoking of the Buddha also suggests an affinity with an Indian intellectual and cultural tradition.
Moreover, Nikhil’s aspiration toward the infinite involves at once an abnegation of possessive desires and an affirmation of spiritual union. For Nikhil, “the union or separation of man and woman” is subordinate to the confluence of humanity in its ongoing striving for betterment. He constantly reminds himself of “the great world [that] stretches far beyond,” in which “one can truly measure one’s joys and sorrows when standing in its midst.” (88) On the day when he and Bimala are about to set out for Calcutta, Nikhil rewrites his relationship with Bimala into a purely spiritual one in an elegiac monologue: “As master of the house I am in an artificial position—in reality I am a wayfarer on the path of life. ... My union with you, my love, was only of the wayside; it was well enough so long as we followed the same road; it will only hamper us if we try to preserve it further. We are now leaving its bonds behind. We are started on our journey beyond, and it will be enough if we can throw each other a glance, or feel the touch of each other’s hands in passing.” (187) Clearly, the contrast between house and life reiterates Nikhil’s conceptions of home and outside; further, the passage to Calcutta, in Nikhil’s language, takes on a spiritual undertone and translates into the journey of life in which Nikhil reimagines his relationship with Bimala in comradely, rather than conjugal, terms.

Radha Chakravarty and other Tagore scholars have linked Nikhil’s desire for a companionate marriage to the influence of “the Victorian model of a new form of domesticity based on marriage as a partnership between two like-minded people” on the educated Bengali gentry in the early twentieth century. On the other hand, critics attentive to the limitations of Nikhil’s liberal humanism point to his complicity with the social hierarchies that keep women and peasants subservient to their (land)lords. Bruce Robbins, for example, claims that in spite of his effort to liberate Bimala from women’s traditional position in the home, Nikhil does not really enable Bimala to engage in social activities other than those confined to home. Robbins notes, “Just as Nikhil’s political aspirations for the welfare of his tenants are couched in paternalistic terms, so his and his creator’s aspirations for change at home remain patriarchal, even if neither can be

happy with the results.”

It is true that Nikhil does not see the importance of a profession for Bimala, or women in general, even though he is committed to her intellectual cultivation. What is glossed over in both accounts, however, is Nikhil’s questioning of the establishment of marriage itself: “In the midst of the immense, age-long concourse of humanity, what is Bimala to you? Your wife? What is a wife?” (64) In keeping with his idea that his union with Bimala is “only of the wayside,” Nikhil subsumes connubial relationship under the larger unity of “humanity.” As Tanika Sarkar observes in her analysis of the interlocking forms of love in the novel, Nikhil’s ideal of love “acquires larger, non-conventional horizons, based on intellectual and political affinities, emotional honesty and capacity for mutual nurture” rather than “prescriptive norms about conjugal monogamy.” (Sarkar 2005, 27-34)

On the other hand, as shown in Nikhil’s case, such an envisioned spiritual union of humanity in cosmic life entails both a quality of self-command and a non-attachment to connections essential to social life. Recalling Nikhil’s contrast of Buddha and Alexander, we might see resemblances between Nikhil’s emphasis on the “journey beyond” and the Buddhist doctrine, “go forth from home to homelessness.” The voyage toward the infinite that Nikhil anticipates mirrors the Buddha’s own journey from the princely life of luxury and power to one of a wandering mendicant. Gravitating to “universal life,” (187) Nikhil, too, is disposed to break up family ties. Yet coupled with Nikhil’s pursuit of spiritual freedom in the vast domain of life are feelings of anguish and inadequacy. When Nikhil tells Bimala he refuses to be her fetters and sets her free based on the belief that “[grasping] desires are bonds,” (133-4) Bimala silently questions such a thought: “can freedom—empty freedom—be given and taken so easily as all that? It is like setting a fish free in the sky—for how can I move or live outside the atmosphere of loving care which has always sustained me?” (137) For Bimala, what Nikhil offers is but negative freedom, a severing of emotional bonds between them. The atmosphere of loving care means more than material comforts to Bimala. It is also the familiar and warm sphere in which her life has been

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rooted.

If Bimala voices her apprehension about how Nikhil’s ideal of spiritual freedom could engender displacement, Nikhil himself regrets that he “could not impart” to humanity what he calls “the vital spark” for “self-creation.” (197) Although he determines that “[a]lone, then, shall I tread my thorny path to the end of this life’s journey,” he is torn between a longing to be “free under the starlight, to plunge into the infinite depths of the night’s darkness after the day’s work was done,” and a sense of loneliness “in the midst of the multitudinousness of life” (197, 132). Now we seem to come back to the debate concerning particular allegiances and universal sympathies. Addressing the uneasy path of cosmopolitanism, Nussbaum remarks, “Becoming a citizen of the world is often a lonely business. It is as Diogenes said, a kind of exile—from the comfort of local truths, from the warm, nestling feeling of patriotism, from the absorbing drama of pride in oneself and one’s own. In the writing of Marcus Aurelius (as in those of his American followers Emerson and Thoreau), a reader can sometimes sense a boundless loneliness, as if the removal of the props of habit and local boundaries had left life bereft of any warmth or security.” (Nussbaum 1996, 15)

While Tagore portrays Nikhil’s loneliness in a sympathetic manner, he also heightens a sense of inadequacy in Nikhil’s vision. It is important to note how the novel at once endorses Nikhil’s moral value and questions his somberness. Indeed, part of the complexity of the tone of the text lies in its simultaneous exposure of the danger of Sandip’s passion and of the inefficacy of Nikhil’s renunciation. Compared to Sandip, who was called a “Hindu Nietzschean” who worships passions by the reviewer in The Times Literary Supplement after the novel was published in 1919, (Chakravarty 2013, 94) Nikhil seems like a Buddhist monk committed to “self-denial.” As he himself laments, “How severely I have curbed my desires, repressed myself at every step, only the Searcher of the Heart knows.” (197) Through many arguments between Sandip and Nikhil and via their own introspections, the novel takes pains to accentuate Nikhil’s moral rectitude. Sandip accuses Nikhil of espousing moral precepts at the cost of emotion, asking, “Can’t you recognize that there is such a thing as feeling?” In response, Nikhil eloquently defends his moral feelings and condemns Sandip’s vices: “It is my feelings that are outraged, whenever you try to pass off injustice as a duty, and unrighteousness as a moral ideal. The fact, that I am incapable of stealing, is not due to my possessing logical faculties, but to my having some feeling of respect for myself and love for ideals.” (37) Yet, without downplaying the dangerous
power of Sandip’s siren song of hatred and violence, the text also contrasts Sandip’s ability to sing his sin with Nikhil’s incapacity for enjoyment, which Nikhil recognizes as his “incorrigible solemnity.” (64)

This description of his character reflects back on his ideal of “self-creation,” which tends toward engendering what Bernard Williams (henceforth BW) has called “the characterless self.” In his critique of the Kantian ideal that locates freedom in critical reason, BW observes:

This ideal involves an idea of ultimate freedom, according to which I am not entirely free so long as there is any ethically significant aspect of myself that belongs to me simply as a result of the process by which I was contingently formed. If my values are mine simply in virtue of social and psychological processes to which I have been exposed, then (the argument goes) it is as though I had been brainwashed: I cannot be a fully free, rational, and responsible agent. Of course, no one can control their upbringing as they receive it, except perhaps marginally and in its later stages. What the ideal demands, rather, is that my whole outlook should in principle be exposed to a critique, as a result of which every value that I hold can become a consideration for me, critically accepted, and should not remain merely something that happens to be part of me. ... It presupposes a Platonic idea of the moral self as characterless…. If the aspiration makes sense, then the criticizing self can be separated from everything that a person contingently is—in itself, the criticizing self is simply the perspective of reason or morality. 12

Admittedly, Nikhil’s ideal has a spiritual dimension that departs from the Kantian conception of moral reason. On the other hand, envisioning a union of humanity in a quest for moral ideals, Nikhil, too, superposes the moral and critical self, a colorless “solemnity,” on the socially embedded personalities.

ST has mentioned that for Tagore, “the ideal of humanity is facilitated by the aesthetic category of enjoyment.” (Tagore 2008, 1078) Indeed, in Gitanjali, Tagore’s song offerings, he locates spiritual freedom not in renunciation, but in a

joyful perception of beauty and sensuous delight. In Poem No. 73 Tagore says:

Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.

Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine of various colours and fragrance, filling this earthen vessel to the brim.

My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame and place them before the altar of thy temple.

No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight.

Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love. (Tagore 1913, 68)

Tagore’s poem can productively be brought to bear on The Home and the World. Reminiscing, at the beginning of the novel, about her mother’s devotion to her father as a manifestation of the tradition of womanhood, Bimala observes, “devotion is beauty itself, in its inner aspect. When my mother arranged the different fruits, carefully peeled by her own loving hands, on the white stone plate, and gently waved her fan to drive away the flies while my father sat down to his meals, her service would lose itself in a beauty which passed beyond outward forms. Even in my infancy I could feel its power. It transcended all debates, or doubts, or calculations: it was pure music.” (18) It is easy to see, with Nikhil, how Bimala’s commendation of wifely devotion here reflects the influences of an enslaving tradition. It also transpires that the irrational form of loyalty that transcends moral and instrumental reasoning alike is liable to be remarshaled for nationalistic causes and cruelties. As Sandip declares, his words “are not meant to be scribbled on paper” that can be analyzed, but “to be scored into the heart of the country.” (123) Still, there is something more in Bimala’s detailed description of the beauty of the loving hands and careful and gentle acts that cannot be dismissed as sheer delusion. The beauty and tenderness of the “fruits of love”—to borrow Tagore’s befitting phrase in the poem—Bimala perceives and enjoys contrast with both Nikhil’s solemnity and Sandip’s intense passion. They are what Sandip destroys and Nikhil fails to engage.
IV. Desires for Agency and Anchorage

Many critics have pointed out that the character of Bimala represents a contested site wherein the struggle between Nikhil’s moral ideals and Sandip’s destructive passions is played out. In this line of thinking, Bimala’s initial surrendering to Sandip’s hypnotic power and subsequent appreciation of Nikhil’s morality reflect both the seductiveness of passion and the triumph of moral reason. Such a binary structure, however, is too neat to capture the complexity of a range of affective states between and beyond passion and reason. Bimala’s inner thoughts and feelings warrant closer examination if we are to understand the novel’s representation of the tensions between individual aspirations, social existence, and cosmic life. Bimala’s praise of womanly devotion in the beginning, notably, is attended by a desire for agency. Reflecting on Nikhil’s love for her, Bimala describes how it “seemed to overflow [her] limits by its flood of wealth and service.” She also proclaims: “But my necessity was more for giving than for receiving.” (19) Bimala’s declaration, surprisingly enough, resonates with that of Isabel Archer in The Portrait of the Lady when she refuses Lord Warburton’s proposal: “It is not what I ask; it is what I can give.” (James 2011, 112)

Tagore lays bare the fact that Bimala’s passion for Sandip and his nationalism is bound up with a sense of empowerment. Bimala is not gullible; rather, she exhibits a keen sensibility when she describes her earlier impressions of Sandip, “too much of base alloy had gone into (the) making” of his handsome face and “the light in his eyes somehow did not shine true.” (30) However, when extolled by Sandip as the goddess, “the Queen Bee” of the nationalist movement, Bimala is inebriated by her new-found feeling of importance. She expresses her euphoria thus: “I who was plain before had suddenly become beautiful. I who before had been of no account now felt in myself all the splendor of Bengal itself. …My relations with all the world underwent a change. Sandip Babu made it clear how all the country was in need of me. …Divine strength had come to me, it was something which I had never felt before, which was beyond myself.” (50) One could see similarities between Bimala and Sandip in terms of their self-love masquerading as patriotic passion, though the narrative seeks to rationalize Bimala’s desire for admiration in a larger community due to the traditional, religious, and social constraints imposed on her as a woman. Further, Bimala shows a keen awareness of her stupefaction by Sandip. As she concedes, “There must be two different persons inside me. One of these in me can understand that
Sandip is trying to delude me; the other is content to be deluded.” (149) Bimala’s knowledge of and willing submission to Sandip’s delusion complicates a simple dualism of moral reason and blind passion.

Crucially, Bimala finally breaks away from Sandip’s spell not only because she sees through his moral depravity but also because she sees through it via an emotional bond with Amulya, a young devotee of Sandip and an enthusiast for the nationalist movement. Bimala emphatically describes the innocence and beauty of Amulya; his “guileless face, his gentle eyes, his innocent youth,” and his “beautiful [face], radiant with devotion” (147, 182) evoke tender feelings in her, which harks back to her aesthetic experience when observing her mother serving her father fruits. Indeed, Bimala recounts how her maternal instincts come alive in the company of Amulya; “delightfully, lovably immature was he – of that age when the good may still be believed in as good, of that age when one really lives and grows. The mother in me awoke.” (139) The novel, however, connects them as loving “Sister Rani” and devoted “little brother,” instead of mother and child. (159) One could argue that the relationship of siblings is less hierarchical than one of mother and son, even though Bimala treats Amulya with motherly love. This arrangement on the level of the plot also extricates Bimala from being idolized as the nationalist spirit of Bande Mataram (“Hail Mother”), thus endowing the bond between Bimala and Amulya with familial affection in contrast to patriotic passion.

In the meantime, the newly developed tie between Bimala and Amulya parallels the renewed connection between Nikhil and his widowed sister-in-law Baba Rani. In spite of his devotion to moral and spiritual ideals, Nikhil at one moment confesses that his “empty, drifting heart long[s] to anchor on to something.” (133) This desire for anchorage balances out Nikhil’s aspirations toward infinity and illuminates the significance of warm emotional connections that Nikhil’s spiritual ideal forecloses. Nikhil is astonished by Baba Rani’s determination to go with him on the day of his departure for Calcutta. He does not realize so acutely, until that moment, how she treasures her sisterly bond with him. Nikhil articulates the real reason for her decision that Baba Rani quietly conceals: “she had made up her mind to drift away towards the unknown, cutting asunder all her lifelong bonds of daily habit, and of the house itself, which she had never left for a day since she first entered it at the age of nine. ... She had only this one relationship left in all the world, and the poor, unfortunate, widowed and childless woman had cherished it with all the tenderness hoarded in her heart.” (189)
appreciation of Baba Rani’s tender feelings softens the solemn Nikhil, who now “should love to go back to the days when [they] first met in this old house of [theirs].” (190) Such nostalgia for the past seems to strain against Nikhil’s spiritual journey beyond, yet it works to relink the cold infinite space and warm social life.

V. The End of the Beginning

Critics tend to agree that The Home and the World is a tragic story. The novel ends in a Swadeshi riot in which Nikhil is seriously wounded in the head and Amulya takes a bullet through the heart. The tropes of “head” and “heart” at this tragic moment have eluded critical attention yet are crucial to central themes of the novel. The final killing scene clearly embodies Tagore’s censure of the Swadeshi movement and the consequences of nationalistic fervor. Furthermore, Tagore’s reference to the wound of Nikhil’s head and Amulya’s heart seems to convey a more specific message that both moral reason and genuine feelings fall victim to belligerent patriotism.

If the final scene highlights the failure of both head and heart, the novel reaches its significant culmination in the penultimate scene, however, where both the mind and the heart show their redeeming power. First, Nikhil criticizes his own imposition of his moral ideals on Bimala and his inability to connect with her: “I did not realize all this while that it must have been this unconscious tyranny of mine which made us gradually drift apart. Bimala’s life, not finding its true level by reason of my pressure from above, has had to find an outlet by undermining its banks at the bottom. She has had to steal the six thousand rupees because she could not be open with me, because she felt that, in certain things, I despotically differed from her.” (198) Even Sandip, troubled by “the ghost of compunction” (200), returns the stolen money and Bimala’s jewel-casket, though he characteristically denies that this represents an act of repentance under the influence of Nikhil’s moral principles. Sandip explains instead that the restitution is a tribute to Bimala, renamed by him “Queen of the bleeding hearts, Queen of desolation.” Bimala has blamed men who are either “bent on making a road for some achievement” or “mad with the intoxication of creating”—implicitly referring to Sandip’s doctrine of success and Nikhil’s ideal of “self-creation” respectively—for having no feeling for her plight itself and only caring for “their own object.” (146) On the other hand, both men show sympathy, though in

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different ways and with different degrees of consciousness, for her feelings in the end.

The moment of hope in the novel is often located by critics in Bimala’s moral awakening. Nussbaum argues that as a story of education, its success lies in Bimala’s awareness in the end that “Nikhil’s morality was vastly superior to Sandip’s empty symbol-mongering, that what looked like passion in Sandip was egocentric self-exaltation, and that what looked like lack of passion in Nikhil contained a truly loving perception of her as a person.” (Nussbaum 1996, 15-16) However, as I have noted above, Bimala is not unaware of Sandip’s delusion; her choice of Sandip over Nikhil before she steals money from Nikhil involves a desire for agency and for a more affectionate mode of connection. More important, Bimala is acutely aware of her sin when she steals money from Nikhil; her recognition of Nikhil’s morality does not await the end, when she receives Nikhil’s generous forgiveness.

Indeed, it is less Bimala’s moral awakening than the expansion of her consciousness toward something more infinite that embodies the novel’s ethos of universal humanity. After Bimala steals the money, she is tormented by the pangs of guilt. She thinks, “I had robbed my house, I had robbed my country. For this sin my house had ceased to be mine, my country also was estranged from me.” (144) It is crucial to note that here Bimala grounds her sense of belonging in moral desert, which contrasts sharply with her former pride in being idolized as a goddess of her country. She believes her moral transgression deprives her of her claim to both her house and her country. Bimala’s thought brings back Tagore’s idea of svades (my own country), which, as I have shown earlier, grows out of the force of self-making. Still, Bimala’s consciousness continues to expand from house and country into the infinite space. Gazing at the starry winter sky, she imagines that if she steals all the stars for her country, “the sky would be blinded, the night widowed forever, and my theft would rob the whole world,” and she compares her stealing to this “robbing of the whole world – not only of money, but of trust, of righteousness.” (145) Bimala’s meditation on the starry sky echoes Nikhil’s desire to be “free under the starlight,” pointing to aspirations toward a larger universe. We might also identify affinities between the imagery conjured by Bimala and Kant’s metaphor “the stars in the heavens, the moral law in our hearts.” The personification of the sky and the night in Bimala’s depiction paints not just, if at all, a material world of existence, but a moral and spiritual union of humanity. The novel, in this sense, ends with a beginning. After Sandip returns
her jewel-casket, Bimala dismisses gold and jewels, announcing: “To set out and go forth was the important thing.” (201) Bimala finally keeps alive Nikhil’s spirit, even as her emotional connection with Amulya, coupled with Nikhil’s renewed bond to Baba Rani, enriches Nikhil’s moral ideal.

VI. Tagore and Global Modernism

Summing up Tagore’s aesthetics in relation to modernism in 1913: The Cradle of Modernism, Jean-Michel Rabaté notes that “Tagore belonged to the reformist Hindu sect founded by Rammohun Roy, Brahma Samaj. It rejected ordinary Hinduism and embraced a ‘deity’ that was purposely left vague and formless. It was a religion which was an esthetic at the same time, and their fusion prevented Tagore from being a modernist, at least in the sense that modernism implies a questioning of these values and he steadily refused the accolade of modernist masters that he felt too condescending. … Indeed, he embodied the Romantic ideal of the poet as priest and prophet with a vengeance.” (Rabaté 2007, 126) Rabaté argues that Tagore’s fusion of religion and the aesthetic runs up against the supposed epistemology of modernism, even though he also suggests that Tagore’s religious beliefs betray a poetic character.

Given Tagore’s renowned reputation as a spiritual poet, it is surprising how criticisms of The Home and the World largely leave out the spiritual dimensions of the book. Among earlier responses to the novel, E. M. Forster claims that Tagore’s “World proved to be a sphere … for a boarding-house flirtation that masks itself in patriotic talk.” Criticizing the novel’s style, Forster remarks that Tagore “meant the wife to be seduced by the World, which is, with all its sins, a tremendous lover; she is actually seduced by a West Kensingtonian Babu.” Georg Lukács, in a more irascible manner, considers the novel as “a petit bourgeois yarn of the shoddiest kind” and Tagore as “a wholly insignificant figure … whose creative powers do not even stretch to a decent pamphlet.” (Desai 1985, 7) Postcolonial studies has produced abundant rich and nuanced readings of the book, but Nikhil’s spiritual ideal and renewal of the Buddhist intellectual tradition have not received much critical attention.

The stepping away from the spiritual in the novel is not hard to understand, considering how studies of colonial and postcolonial authors have largely not moved beyond the paradigm of oppression and resistance (and critique as resistance). However, as I have shown in this essay, Tagore conveys important
cosmic imaginings that work to foster larger sympathies with humankind. In *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, Pericles Lewis invites a rethinking of the spiritual energies in Western modernist novels, and he coins the phrase “secular sacred”—meaning “a way of seeing aspects of human experience itself as set apart, venerable, inviolable”—to describe modernism’s spiritual character. In Lewis’s account, modernist writers employ a language composed of words like “sacred, reverence, sanctity, magic, and soul” to speak about “ultimate truths, human truths for which supernatural explanations might no longer seem adequate.” (Lewis 2010, 30) My exploration of the cosmic in Tagore’s *The Home and the World* shares Lewis’s attentiveness to the spiritual dimension of modernism. The cosmic, I contend, proves to be an exceptionally useful way to think about the scope and politics of global modernism.

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BOOK REVIEWS


The well-known author Saiichi Maruya was also recognized as a scholar of modern British and Irish literature; he translated James Joyce’s Ulysses, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Jerome K. Jerome’s Three Men in a Boat (To Say Nothing of the Dog) and others, but perhaps first among his contributions are his critical works and essays putting forth his theory that Japanese literature began with waka, a traditional poetic form, during the Heian Period (from the 8th to 11th centuries). Koi to Onna to Nihon Bungaku, Onna no Sukuware (『恋と女と日本文学・女の救はれ』, Love, Women, and Japanese Literature, The Salvation of Women) is a work of Japanese literary criticism that discusses why the Japanese, since early times, have loved romantic stories, and illustrates a marriage ritual in which a man goes to a woman’s house to give her words of love in the form of waka and finally proposes marriage. The excellent waka considerably appeals to the woman to a greater degree. This discussion of the marriage ritual, called tsumadoi-kon or kayoi-kon, deserves considerable praise.

Although the Japanese took much of their political system and culture from the Tang Dynasty through Japanese missions to Tang China (Kentōshi), from the 7th to 9th centuries, they did not learn romance literature, an integral element in the history of Japanese literature source. In China, romances were out of favor, especially those concerning unmarried couples, due to the influence of Confucian philosophy, while Japan created its own new literary form. In Chinese literature, romantic stories between husbands and wives and detailing love affairs with prostitute were permitted, as they did not appear to cause direct damage to the marriage system. Therefore, luscious stories that dealt with love between unmarried couples, such as Jin Ping Mei (The Golden Lotus), were relegated to a second-class status. Maruya claimed that the marriage ritual of a man proposing to a woman, especially in matrilineal societies, occurred not only in Japan but also in other countries. James Frazer’s The Golden Bough cited the Pipiles in Central America and the Peruvian Indians as illustrations of other cultures having a similar marriage ritual. The author also found examples of this ritual in
Japanese mythology, including from the *Kojiki* (『古事記』, *Records of Ancient Matters*) and the *Nihon Shoki* (『日本書紀』, *The Oldest Chronicles of Japan*), which were both compiled in the 8th century. He described the characters in Japanese mythology not as immortal beings, like the Greek gods, but as human-like entities. There are many stories in Japanese mythology that exemplify the matrilineal tradition, in which the princess inherits the property and not the prince. For example, Prince Susano-o, the son of a god, was exiled from Takaamahara where the heavenly gods lived, because his elder sister Amaterasu was chosen to take over the house. Then, Susano-o went to Izumo (which is now the province of Chugoku) and killed Yamata no Orochi, the eight-headed giant snake, and married Kushinada-hime, a goddess in Izumo. In the matrilineal society depicted, all men must find their partners in a strange land. Maruya noted that even the gods in Japan followed this matrilineal tradition, which provides a key to understanding Japanese identity.

Japanese gods based on Shinto resemble ancient Greek deities more than the Christian God. Japanese Shinto is a polytheism that worships multiple deities. Each god has a particular realm where he or she holds sway, and there are vivid stories of these gods written by talented story writers. This marriage ritual, in which a man asks a woman in a strange land to marry him, resembles the tradition of courtly love in Europe, a medieval literary expression of love, invented by troubadours in Provence in the 12th century. This was a great invention of Europeans, according to Maruya. A typical story has a man, usually a heroic knight who falls deeply in love with a married woman. He blindly obeys her commands, even if being treated cruelly by her. However, his love is never accomplished. Although for a long time, the Japanese did not know any foreign cultures apart from the Chinese, they easily assimilated European literature beginning in the Meiji Era, because they had a similar conception of love to that of Europeans. Within 40 years after the beginning of the Meiji Era, European literary works such as those of Shakespeare and Jane Austen were rapidly imported and translated into Japanese. Maruya gives examples from Japanese classical literature to illustrate the form of romance, including samples of *waka*, mythology from the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki*, as well as European ethnological and critical works such as Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*. Maruya’s works clearly reveal the relationship between romance and matrilineal society.

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It is perceived as general knowledge that there is no constellation mythology in Japan. This classical belief emanates from the fact that there are hardly any words about stars in the sky in Japanese legendry as mentioned in the *Kojiki* (*Records of Ancient Matters*, 712) and the *Nihon Shoki* (*The Oldest Chronicles of Japan*, 720). When asked why Japanese mythology has so few references to stars, some typical explanations are tendered by Japanese scholars. Unlike nomads who rely on stars for directions, the ancient Japanese were an agricultural people and, thus, were not concerned with the stars. The Japanese wanted to sleep early, and actually slept early, because of their exhaustion from farm work in the daytime and, hence, they did not care about the stars. The ancient Japanese were afraid of evil spirits in the dark sky of night, and, thus, were not inclined to deify stars like the Greeks or to find in them the opportunity to study the astronomical almanac like the Chinese. The unclear air due to the humidity of the climate of Japan hindered people from clearly seeing stars in the night sky. In reality, these observations cannot explain the existence of various dialects and traditions relating to stars all over Japan, which proves that the ancient Japanese were definitely interested in the stars. Thus, it is too facile to say that there is no constellation legendry in Japan, even if there are almost no words in Japanese mythology that literally and directly refer to the stars in the sky.

After these remarks in the early chapters of his book *Constellation Legendry in Japanese Mythology*, the author Takashi Katsumata begins developing his argument in favor of the existence of constellation mythology in Japan. For this denial of the accepted dogma, Katsumata does not naively insist on his imagination. Instead, he provides the reader with varied evidence from the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki* and effects comparisons of accounts available in the ancient texts and traditions of the East and the West including the Greek, Roman, Babylonian, Egyptian, Arabian, Indian, and Chinese folklore. In a sense, Katsumata’s *Constellation Legendry in Japanese Mythology* is a work that equals the Copernican revolution in the research of Japanese traditions and the constellation mythology of Japan. Just as other mythologies have a supreme god or goddess, the Japanese mythology mentioned in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki* also depicts the supreme god Izanagi-no-ōmikami (伊邪那伎大御神), a symbol

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of heaven (天). The mythology begins with the manner in which Izanagi created the world, or Japan. According to the legend, Izanagi (天) went right and Izanami-no-mikoto (伊邪那美命), the goddess who symbolized earth (地), went left around “Ten-no-onbashira” (天の御柱), or the pole of heaven. They met each other and, subsequently, two goddesses and a god were born: the goddess Amaterasu-ōmikami (天照大御神), the Japanese goddess of the sun, was born from Izanagi’s left eye; Tsukuyomi-no-mikoto (月読命), the Japanese goddess of the moon, emerged from his right eye; and Susanoo-no-mikoto (須佐之大命), the god of violent wind and thunder, materialized from his nostril. Even modern people can easily imagine this visual. After the goddesses and the god were brought into being, Amaterasu made her offspring descend from heaven to the earth. That is the theme and plot of the Japanese myth. Thus, gods in Japanese mythology, as Katsumata points out, do relate to the stars and must depict a tale of constellations, just like the legendry in other areas.

To effect his clarification, Katsumata quotes texts from the East and the West and makes them illuminate each other. In addition, he carefully interprets the etymology of ancient Japanese words with detailed explanation. For example, Katsumata explains that the word “subaru” (昴), the Japanese name for the Pleiades star cluster, originally meant “to gather together in one place” and elucidates that the word can be found as a metaphor for “a necklace” in the Kojiki and the Nihon Shoki. Furthermore, according to Katsumata, the concept of the eyes of heaven, or of a god, can be observed in the mythologies of various cultures. As mentioned earlier, Amaterasu, the goddess of the sun, is the left eye of Izanagi: thus, she is an eye of heaven in Japanese myth. In Indonesian mythology, “matahari” means the sun and also simultaneously denotes the eye of heaven. Regarding the pole of heaven, Katsumata takes several examples from old texts and traditions in other cultures. One of them is an ancient Chinese manuscript, the Dong fang shuo shen yi xing (《東方朔神異形》). It says, “In the area of Mt. Kunlun (崑崙) there is a copper pole tall enough to reach heaven. This shaft is called ‘the pole of heaven’ (天柱).” This location implies that the house of the king of heaven is above Mount Kunlun, located at the center of the world. In other words, the ancient Chinese text identifies the house of the king of heaven with the pole star. This kind of identification can be confirmed in other mythologies. Referring to Mircea Eliade, Katsumata points out that Indonesians believe that the great mountain Gunung Semeru is located at the center of the world and that the pole star is above the mountain. In addition, the conviction that

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the pole star is above a high mountain that is regarded to be the center of the world and that a tall pole supports heaven and the house of the king, or the pole star, is prevalent especially in the Eurasian region. Thus, Katsumata concludes that the pole of heaven in Japanese mythology can also be regarded as the pole star, and there resides Izanagi, the supreme god.

Using etymology and associations with the mythologies of other cultures, Katsumata reads the Japanese constellation legend recounted in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki* and finally demonstrates to us the map of the constellations. Let me refer to several examples. The Lucifer as Venus in Greece and “taibai” (太白) or a mountain hermit in China can be identified with an evil god Amanokakaseo (天香香背男) in Japan. A set of small stars of the Orion as a knife in Greece and “fa” (伐), or cutting a tree in China can be recognized as the edge of the band of the clothes worn by Amanouzume-no-mikoto (天宇受売命), a goddess of female attendants. The Orion as the Orion in Greece and a turtle, a white tiger, and a goddess in China be associated with Amanouzume-no-mikoto herself. The Lactic Way as the milky way of Hera’s breast milk in Greece and the Chinese “tianhan” (天漢), or a river in the sky made of the water of the Han River that flew up may be equated to Michinonagachiha-no-kami (道之長乳母神), the goddess of nannies, who was born from the band Izanagi wears and is the metaphor for a long way from the hell. The Hyades as the head of an ox or Hyades in Greece and “bixing” (畢星), or eight kids in China may be connected with the Japanese god Sarutapiko-no-kami (猿田毘古神), whose face is like a monkey with a long nose.

Katsumata surprises the reader by finding not only the existence of a constellation mythology in Japan but also by affirming the affinity between the traditions of constellation legendry in the East and the West. At the same time, he does not forget to highlight the differences in the constellations in the East and the West. The biggest distinction lies in the gender of the deities: the Greek and Japanese myths assign the constellations genders that are opposite to each other.

The sun goddess Amaterasu-ōmikami, or Izanagi’s left eye, is regarded as the Imperial ancestor in Japan. Japanese mythology is primarily about Amaterasu’s sending her offspring to the earth and, hence, the mythology creates a hierarchy of gods and simultaneously legitimates the rule of the Japanese emperor on the earth. This divine right to rule is similar to the body politic in both the East and the West, as expressed, for example, in the writings by Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒) and John of Salisbury. Though Katsumata does not mention politics in his book, his work reminds us of the tendency of civilizations to use mythology to
legitimize a ruler. With such thought-provoking content, Katsumata’s book *Constellation Legendry in Japanese Mythology* certainly broadens the horizon and perspective of people around the world and contributes to the discipline of East-West Studies. Just for this reason, everyone should read this fascinating book. The text is written in Japanese; however, Katsumata’s book is being translated into English. Soon the book will be accessible to people across the globe.

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The work of the Japanese classical scholar Nakashima Hirotari, who came to prominence in Nagasaki in the latter half of the Edo period, was preserved in memory—thanks, in part, to the series of discourses written by Yatomi Hamao, a pre-war scholar of Japanese literature. In particular, Hamao’s work “Foreign Matter Appearing in the Songs of Hirotari” (*Journal of Kokugakuin University* v. 28 n. 10, October 1922) showed that Hirotari, together with Oranda Tsuji—a Japanese interpreter of Dutch language and Hirotari’s student—translated the poetry of the German poet Matthias Claudius in composing the long poem “Yayohinouta” and drew the academic world’s attention as a pioneer in translating Western poetry. The book *The Nakashima Hirotari Collection* (Ookayama Shoten, 1933), authored by Yokoyama Shigeru and edited by Yatomi Hamao, collected Hirotari’s central works. Yatomi also wrote a biography, *Nakashima Hirotari* (Koseikaku, 1944). The progress of research on Hirotari before the war was remarkable.

The work of Japanese classical scholars, who were considered to have been influenced by the wartime philosophy, such as Hirotari, was generally disregarded for some time after the war, and there was little notable progress in research on Hirotari. However, more than 30 years after the end of the Second World War the spotlight came on the neglected scholars once again. Okanaka Masayuki, the author of this book, is an example of this wave.

In 1973, Okanaka reviewed several old books by Hirotari at the Suwa shrine, which is well known for its connection with him, and conducted a vigorous investigation of remnants of materials on Hirotari, which were preserved in various regions, and published the results of his research. The book under review is a compilation of the results of nearly 40 years of such research. It is published in three volumes, totaling 1,174 pages and consists of three parts: a biography, a record of travel, and a Tanka poem. The biographical volume begins with a chronological record of Hirotari, which details his life from Kansei 4 (1792) to Genji 1 (1864); followed by a chapter on Hirotari and Ohira Motoori, which shows Hirotari’s position in the history of arts and sciences; another chapter on *Keihoshuu* and Hirotari, which gives an overview of what remains of the poets who submitted to *Keihoshuu*—Hirotari’s waka poetry collection (Tenpo year 11, Hanrei edition, vol. 2 book 2); a chapter concerning published works of Hirotari,
discussing publishers of his works; and a bibliographic introduction to materials related to Hirotari. Each chapter is developed using materials on Hirotari, which served as the foundation. Many old books on Hirotari have given a summary of interpersonal relationships within scholarship. However, the omission of Hirotari’s friendships with Aoki Nagafumi, the high priest of the Suwa shrine, who supported Hirotari in Nagasaki, and the painter Kinoshita Itsuun have not been discussed.

The second part, a travel record, consists of four chapters. First, 24 pieces of Hirotari’s travel writing are summarized. Second, the *Yumeji Diary* is discussed. Third, *Kabashima namikazenoki* and the creation of that work, which portrays the Siebold incident, are examined. Finally, all 24 travel records are reproduced. Throughout this work, items that were not previously recorded have been collected, and the entirety of Hirotari’s works on travel is given. This largely contributes not only to the study of Hirotari’s travel writings but also to that of his work in general.

The third part, on his poetry, begins with a chapter “On the path of the poet,” which traces the footprints of the poet. Then, the next chapter discusses his poetical works, containing additional bibliographic considerations for Hirotari’s *Kashizonoshu* and *Shinosudare*, followed by a chapter on Hirotari Souko and Hirotari Kako, discussing the establishment of *Kashizonoshu* and *Shinosudare* from his poetry collection. The next three chapters discuss the *Nishio-shi Iwase Bunkoshuzo Hirotari Jihitsu Eiso*, Hirotari’s works in *Kashizonoshu*, and a reproduction of the works. Ranging from his published poetry collections to his own poems, the ability to find 20,000 of Hirotari’s poems provides great happiness to his researchers.

The significance of this book in the history of research on Hirotari is hereby outlined, and it is noted that it consists of two main elements: research work and collection of Hirotari’s works. In the afterword, it is noted that the study primarily aimed to compile all collections going beyond Yatomi Hamao’s *Nakashima Hirotari Collection*; thus, it was expected to create a complete Hirotari collection. However, it is noted in the afterword, “As this work is not being published on any commercial basis, a substantial burden exists on the fulfillment of its goals.” The work was published in a limited edition and delivered to households that had pre-registered for it. The publication of the new journal was also delayed. As a result, those who studied and collected Hirotari’s works have not been able to collect all of his collections. Moreover, the reach of this work is limited to a small
group, and research has not reached being made known the various aspect of Hirotari. Though Hirotari promoted a radical philosophy that linked Shinkoku-shiso—the thought considering Japan as the land of the gods—, he also welcomed and built relationships with Chinese visitors and acquired foreign items and ideas through Japanese interpreters of Dutch and Chinese languages, who were his students. Before the Westernization in the Meiji era, absorbing the cultural atmosphere of Nagasaki in the Edo period, which brought together Eastern and Western cultures, study of Hirotari’s poems on foreign concepts like “Yayohinouta” should be further pursued.

After this work, Okanaka has no plans to continue writing and leaves the completion of this collection to later generations. I hope to fulfill his expectations and complete the publication of this new collection, as well as contribute to the progress of Hirotari research; I must also ask for forgiveness for the roughness of this book review.

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At the beginning of the 21th century, Professors Chen Fukang, Zhang Fugui and Tang Yize began a series of discussions on the naming of modern Chinese literature. Over the past decade, with the promoting of many scholars, such as Zhang Zhongliang, Li Yi, Ding Fan, Zhang Tangqi, and other scholars on both sides of the Taiwan Straits, the discussion and practice of the narration of the "literature of the Republic of China" and other aspects of the research methods have become more and more spectacular. The first edition of the book "the Republic of China" as a method was published by the Shandong Publishing House of Literature and Art in 2015 is a book with the most methodological meaning in the history and culture of the Republic of China and the study of modern Chinese literature. It is also a centralized and comprehensive interpretation of the concept of "the Republic literature".

1. The Construction of the Historical View of "Republic Literature" and Academic Breakthrough

Separated from the concepts of "New Literature", "Modern/Contemporary Literature" and "Chinese literature in 21th Century" in the history of Chinese literature, the historical view of "the Republic of China" is not an abstract theoretical generalization, but a reduction and touch of the concrete "National Historical Modality". The study of the "literature of the Republic of China" is based on the full familiarity and mastery of the historical materials of literature, and also based on the experience of "temperature" for the complexity and richness of the literary subjectivity. As the scholar Li Yi said in the first part of this book, "the study of the literature of the Republic of China should restore the joy and sorrow of Chinese and Chinese writers through more demonstrative demonstration." (p. 35)

The establishment of modern literature in China is accompanied by the change of political system and ideology. At the same time, "modern literature", as an independent subject, is gradually separated from "Chinese Literature" as the product of the sinicization of modern western discipline system. Whether the "21th Century Chinese Literature", or "Rewriting the history of literature", "Re reading" and other literature research methods, there is still an embarrassment in the lack of the academic position of subjectivity in Chinese literature. The historical view of the "literature of the Republic of China" is an answer to how to
make the study of modern Chinese literature out of the use of western academic thought, and how to avoid the preconceptions and priori judgment.

Starting with the real situation of national history and the actual ecology of social culture, taking the details of history and life as the primary object of study, this book tries to recomb a new narrative way of the history of modern Chinese literature. It is an ideal path for the specific academic research under the control of the historical view of the "Republic of China Literature", aiming to find a proper interpretation paradigm for the internal tension and creativity of modern literature.

2. The Methodological Significance and Practical Exploration of "The Mechanism of the Republic of China"

In 19th Century, Spencer, a British theorist, introduced the "system" of the academic concept into the study of sociology. The successors made theoretical exposition and research attempt on many problems of social system from different aspects. Since the beginning of the new century, most of the problems related to Chinese modern and contemporary literary system discussed by previous scholars have been based on Habermas' public sphere. Under the western academic background, the discussion of the complex interaction between literature in social public sphere and media, publication review, criticism, as well as reader acceptance has surpassed the ideologically determinism paradigm and the theory of social reflection. However, in the last decade, the theoretical resources of the study of Chinese modern and contemporary "literary system" which influenced by the "institutional research" are largely from the western academic circles. The "mechanism of the Republic of China", which is proposed in the book, is neither a study of the institutional scope of literary evaluation from the perspective of pragmatism, nor a study of the literary production system and social structure in the sense of political sociology.

The second part of the book defines the conceptual category of the "Republic of China mechanism" of literature firstly: "the complex of the social culture and literature under the new social system which gradually formed after the fall of the Qing Dynasty." (p. 60) The synthesis of the aforementioned social forces includes not only "the support (but also some restrictions) of the formation of the enclosure of various social environments, such as economic patterns, legal forms, educational systems, etc.", but also "the unique spiritual orientation that emerges ". (p. 60) Obviously, the breakthrough of the "Republic of China mechanism" is highlighting the dynamic spiritual choice and pursuit of "man" as a participant in

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literary activities in the historical space-time environment of the Republic of China and the complex relationship of coexistence, complexity and interaction with the national politics, social system, cultural environment and other historical space-time ecology on the basis of paying full attention to the external social system of literature.

How should we reenter the concrete phenomenon and problems of modern Chinese literature under the research perspective of the "Republic of China mechanism"? The third part of this book "Modern Chinese Literature in the Historical Perspective of the Republic of China" explores the "constitutional government in the late Qing Dynasty" and the development of the literary space of the Republic of China, the "Revolution of 1911" and the cultural foundation for the development of the literature of the Republic of China, the "May 4th Cultural Circle" and the initial natural formation of the cultural structure of the "Republic Mechanism", as well as Zhang Daofan and the "ambiguity" and "contradiction" of the Kuomintang's literary and artistic policies during the National War. The foregoing contents show us the way of understanding and judging known literary and historical materials through literary study. On this basis, we can approach the historical reality of the social and cultural environment of the Republic of China, as well as the spiritual world of modern intellectuals. This book shows us how the "Republic of China" as a method was applied to specific literary research practices vividly and concretely. It is not only an opening vision for the future scholars, but also a guide for the future researches.

3. The Contemporaneity of the Literature of the Republic of China

In the 1970s, the scholar Fan Jun put forward "the contemporary problem of the study of modern Chinese literature". Recently, there is a trend of "de-contemporaneity" in some contemporary Chinese literary studies, lacking of concern and participation for the social reality and cultural situation of contemporary China, as well as a keen perception of key literary issues and popular cultural phenomenon. At the same time, as a contemporary popular cultural boom, the emergence of popular literary works of the nature of "mystery", "gossip" and "historical tales" concerning the anecdotes of the Republic of China makes the "Republic" a popular literary refreshment enjoyed by the general audience. However, it seems that the simplicity and rationality of the academic study of the literature of the Republic of China are deconstructed because of its "contemporaneity".
In the fourth part of this book makes a thorough analysis of many hot topics and popular cultural phenomenon in modern and contemporary Chinese literature in order to "disenchant" the literature of the Republic of China as a symbol of popular culture and a carrier of popular social interest. The so-called contemporary spirit of literary research should not put the literary problems of modern China out of the current social and cultural environment, trying to return to the original condition of the complexity of historical truth on the basis of careful analysis of existing historical data. As the book says: "The ultimate purpose of the study of literature in the Republic of China is to profoundly explain the cause of literature. All outside literature information must be included in the inside literature, and the authenticity of these information also requires to be collated repeatedly". (p. 127) It should be noticed that the latter two parts of this book especially discuss the "Republic of China literature" issues in cross-strait Chinese literature, ethnic minority knowledge and language, regional literature, the historical value of local newspapers and periodicals and other "contemporary" topics. Taking "cross-strait Chinese Literature" as an example, academics on both sides of the Straits are in the macro context of "Chinese literature", sharing the same Chinese cultural tradition and national memory, with the same experience of more than 30 years of "Republic of China" environment. Although there are complex and unspeakable differences in the understanding of the "Republic of China" between the mainland and Taiwan, Taiwan's literary forces still have blood ties with the mainland literature across the straits. Ye Shitao, a Taiwanese scholar in the 1960s, called for a redefinition of the concept of "Taiwanese local literature". Some of the following Taiwanese scholars, represented by Chen Fangming and others, continued to promote the construction of the subjectivity of Taiwanese literature since the Japanese occupation. They also called for the incorporation of local writings by aboriginal writers into literary history and tried to establish a distinction between them, and an independent "Taiwan literature" which is different from mainland literature. Obviously, the times urgently require us to face the plight of cross-strait literary exchanges. In this sense, "Republic of China Literature" is enough to form the starting point of cross-strait literary dialogue.

The proposition of the topic of "the literature of the Republic of China" can greatly reverse the tendency of "self-closure in the development of modern
Chinese literature research because of its discipline maturity, providing new enlightenment for contemporary discussions on both literary classics and important topics.

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In 1979, Qian Zhongshu’s *Guanzhui Bian* (管锥编) was firstly published by Zhonghua Book Company, which was universally reputed as the commencement of revival of comparative literature in China. From that time on, the study of Chinese comparative literature had been enjoying 40 years of development. During this process, scholars from different fields and with different training experiences made their own contributions to this burgeoning discipline in many ways. The academic world witnessed changes from spontaneous, random researches to self-conscious, systematic studies in this area, from an arbitrary approach affiliated to other disciplines in literature to an independent discipline equipped with its own methodology and discourse system.

It would be worth looking back on those early research works if we intend to keep comparative literature on the track of benign development of continuity. *Zhongxi bijiao shixue*, which was written by Professor Shunqing Cao and published by Beijing Press in 1988, might perfectly serve this purpose. It is the first monograph by the name of “comparative poetics” in China, and lays the basic foundation for Chinese comparative poetics in the following decades. This book was reprinted in 2010 with several revisions and supplements, and then was translated into Russian by International Publishing Company ‘Chance’ (Шанс международная издательская компания) in April 2017. These facts above demonstrate its indispensable position in this academic area and increasing international influence even though it has been three decades after it first appeared. Therefore, there is still a need to re-read, reevaluate and review it here.\(^1\)

By citing one of entries from *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, a brief definition of comparative poetics was given in the introduction section of this book, which is “the comparison of literary theories from various countries” (p. 3). In the next part of this section, Professor Cao discussed the general difference between Chinese poetics and western poetics and explored

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\(^1\) Considering the revised edition contains more information than other versions, both the cited content and the page numbers appeared in this article directly come from *Zhongxi bijiao shixue*, China Renmin University Press, 2010.
The reasons behind the difference from three aspects, namely the influence of economy and politics, the influence of religion, science and ethic, and the influence of thinking and language feature. The characteristic imprint of that times can be easily found within this analysis approach. However, the way of author’s argument is fairly persuasive and the purpose of author is to separately present “the unique theoretical values, national features and meanings to the world of Chinese poetics and Western poetics” (p. 28), basing on which the main body of this book spreads out.

The main body is composed of five parts, namely, “theories of the nature of art”, “theories of the origin of art”, “theories of the thinking of art”, “theories of the style of art” and “theories of the appreciation of art”, which basically range over all elements in the general process of literary creation and form an integrated framework, under which the author could safely find a feasible way to conduct his ambitious project. In order to achieve the goal he set for this book, Professor Cao elaborately selects eleven criticism terms from Chinese literary tradition, and then compares these terms with their counterparts collecting from Western literary tradition one by one. This approach, in a sense, exemplify most of scholars’ typical idea on comparative poetics that era. As Qian Zhongshu suggested in one reminiscence article written by Zhang Longxi, “…comparative poetics is an important and promising research area. One of the most important missions of comparative literature is to compare terms from traditional Chinese literary theory with that from the West …” (Zhang 1981, 135). However, it is necessary to point out that searching counterparts for traditional Chinese literary terms is not an easy work to be done, which requires deep expertise in both areas. Let’s take one pair of terms chosen by Professor Cao as example to briefly illustrate how he conducts his research.

In the chapter “Theories of the thinking of art,” the author picks the divine madness of Plato and miaowu (marvelous enlightenment 妙悟) of Yan Yu (严羽) (ca. 1180-ca. 1235) as representative theories on literary inspiration in China and the West. Before their differences are discussed, Professor Cao delineates similarities these two terms share: both of them are put forward for explaining how literary inspiration begins and works; both of them are closely related to religious beliefs. Then much ink has been spilled over their major differences: (1) divine madness is related to an irrational status, while miaowu is more rational, the ideal status of literary inspiration Yan Yu ultimately pursued is “the harmonious unity of phraseology (ci 词), reason (li 理), idea (yi 意) and
inspiration (xing 兴)."

(2) divine madness is related to a drastic, fierce status, while miaowu is slower and more peaceful, it underlines gradual enlightenment on the basis of knowledge accumulation. (3) In theory of divine madness, the inspiration is regarded as a gift from the gods, while the theory of miaowu emphasizes the inspiration is the natural result of continuous learning and increasing life experience. (p. 137-146)

Through applying this analysis mode, not only have their distinctions been clearly presented, but also their exact connotations could be dug out during the comparison process, which is hardly achieved if scholars merely paid attention to their own cultural circumstance. Another pair of terms in this book is also a good example for this. In the chapter of “theories of the style of art”, the author chooses Liu Xie’s 刘勰 (ca. 465-ca. 520) feng gu (wind bone 风骨) as the counterpart of Longinus’ sublime. For a long time, scholars in China could not reach a consensus about the exact meaning of feng gu. The text related to these two terms is examined at great length and the remarkable similarities between them are clearly stated in this chapter. It is Professor Cao who brought these two terms together and offered us a creative explanation on feng gu in a convincible way. This strongly confirms the advantage, necessity and significance of researching comparative poetics.

However, there are perhaps two flaws that need to be addressed here. The first one concerns the West employed widely in this book. It seems that the author regards this phrase as the counterpart of China; in other words, the West is one predetermined concept for Professor Cao. As Edward Said incisively pointed out in his brilliant book Orientalism, “the orient was almost a European invention” (p. 1). This then brings us to the following questions: “Is it proper to look upon the West as a whole entity before a precise definition and an extensive exploration are given on it?”, “Is it possible that “the West” is also an “invention” of Chinese comparatists based on their own cultural knowledge?” It is hard to find answers to these questions within this book, since the author has barely reflects upon the concept of the West. The second question concerns the context of these terms for making comparison. It is true they can represent the principal spirit of their own literary criticism traditions, but it is also true that they also have their own backgrounds and features of the times. Besides, their meanings always keep changing with the times. We will easily fall into the so-called “comparing for the sake of comparison” fallacy, if we intentionally ignored the time dimension in our researches. This problem still exists in recent studies and refers to the cornerstone

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of comparative literature as a discipline, namely comparability, which has been discussed in pace with the whole development process of this young discipline. Together with the groundbreaking achievements this book has already gained, I firmly believe, the flaws mentioned above should also be one part of its legacy.

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