CONNOTATORS, BLENDED SPACES, AND FIGURES OF GRAMMAR: REFLECTIONS ON TRADITIONAL CHINESE POETICS THROUGH A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF SU MANSHU’S POETRY

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Abstract: This essay probes into the craft and criteria of traditional Chinese poetry through a study of Su Manshu’s poetry. Su Manshu has been praised as one of the last representative figures of classical Chinese poetry, while his distinctive poetic techniques rendered him a precursor of the New Literary Movement in the early years of the Republic of China. A semiotic examination of Su Manshu’s poetry and its intricate relationship with tradition and transformation in Late Qing literary arena makes an ideal case study of the criteria of classical Chinese poetry. Su Manshu’s poetry is interwoven with connotative elaboration—allusions, metaphors and multifarious figures of speech. Meanwhile, function words, colloquial markers and illocutionary acts play in its “less poetic” grammar, making it the construction of both archaic and modern transmutations in the era of paradigm shifts. The approaches of semiotics and linguistics are expected to offer novel perspectives of the poet, providing a methodology hitherto rarely used, if ever, in studies of Chinese poetics.

Introduction

When it comes to the question of demarcating poetry from “non-poetry” in the Chinese literary context, accounts differ, and opinions vary. It is widely accepted, however, that the principles of Chinese poetic criticism underwent a tremendous change with the rise of vernacular poetry in early 20th century. Su Manshu 蘇曼殊 (1884-1918) has been praised as one of the last representative figures of classical Chinese poetry. (Xie 1998, 151) His poetry incorporates diverse legacies of quintessence from Chinese literary tradition, and his distinctive word organization renders him a precursor of the New Literary Movement in the early years of the Republic of China. Su Manshu’s poetry is interwoven with connotative elaboration —traditional allusions, metaphors and multifarious figures of speech, while function words, colloquial markers and illocutionary acts play in its “less poetic” grammar, making it a kind of construction of both archaic and modern transmutations in the era of paradigm shifts of Chinese literature.

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† In discussing Su Manshu and classical Chinese poetry, the term “poetry” refers to the specific genre of shi poetry in classical Chinese literature that belongs to the mainstream of “highbrow literature”. All Su Manshu’s poems cited in the essay are in Chinese are from Liu Yazi, ed. The Collected Works of Su Manshu (Beijing: China Bookstore Press, 1921, 1985).

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In this regard, a study of Su Manshu’s poetry is suitable for reflections on the criteria of appraisal of classical Chinese poetry. This essay reads Su Manshu’s poetry as discursive sign-systems with a special design. The approaches of semiotics and linguistics are expected to offer new perspectives, and provide a methodology hitherto rarely used, if ever, in studies of Chinese poetics. It explicates how classical Chinese diction participates in the syntactical and rhetoric mechanism of classical poetry, analyzes how it contributes to the processes of mapping and blending of conceptual spaces, and examines how Su Manshu constructs the spatio-temporal configurations and contextualizes subjectivity through literary discourse, thus reviewing the sociolect of classical Chinese poetry in a new light.

I. The Coding of the Langue in Su Manshu’s Poetry

Su Manshu’s poems have been widely considered to have affected the readers with their genuine emotions and beautiful language. Prior to him, pioneers of the poetic revolution in the late Qing Dynasty, Huang Zunxian 黄遵憲 (1848-1905) for instance, had spared no effort in applying vernacular and loan words in composition. Compared with Huang’s radical experiment, Su Manshu's poetry seems more conservative in terms of rhyme, rhythm, imagery and diction, and the tribute to distinguished poets in the past demonstrated therein makes it markedly divergent from the upcoming vernacular poetry. However, Su Manshu did elaborate new motifs and themes with a kind of quasi-prosaic grammar. Xie Mian 謝冕 (b. 1932), one of the leading contemporary critics of poetry, spoke highly of Su Manshu as “the last poet who made the ultimate endeavor on traditional poetic forms in the history of Chinese poetry”, and referred to his works as “the last peak of classical poetry.” (Xie 1998, 151)

In fact, Su Manshu was not particularly known for his learning of traditional China, though he was a productive translator of British, French and Indian literature on the other hand. Notwithstanding that, Su Manshu’s poetry managed to carry on the torch from classical Chinese poets and served as a herald of the forthcoming literary trend.

How should we properly characterize this kind of traditional yet unconventional poetry then? The transformation of thoughts and the shift of paradigms never accomplish anything at one stroke. To delve into the twists and turns of these complicated historical phenomena of Chinese literature, the perspective of linguistic poetics, though less adopted, may enable us to have the access to insightful knowledge. Semio-linguistics and cognitive linguistics are to be
applied in this essay. From the perspective of semio-linguistics, Su Manshu’s poetry is first and foremost a primary modeling system mediated by classical Chinese written language and is at the same time also a secondary modeling system restrained by the genre codes and deviated from patterns of ordinary language (Lotman, 1977a). Mostly in the form of seven-charactered quatrains, Su Manshu’s poems bear acoustic euphony for the phonetic modulations, a necessary trait of traditional poetry, though not necessarily enough to make any writing poetic in itself.

Poetry is usually considered as highly condensed and polished language. It is often said that there is an end to the words, but not to the message and meaning therein. Poetry, whether “old” or “new”, is semiotically a connotative system with its plane of expression constituted by a signifying system. The signifiers of connotation, which Roland Barthes calls “connotators”, are made up of signs (signifiers and signified united) of the denoted system (Barthes, 1968, 89–91). “Whatever the manner in which it ‘caps’ the denoted message, connotation does not exhaust it: there always remains ‘something denoted’ and the continuous and scattered signs, naturalized by the denoted language which carries them.” (Barthes, 1968, 92)

In Su Manshu’s poems, the ambience, the mood, and the sentiment of poetry denoted by “archetypal nouns” meaning “close approximations of universals” (Kao and Mei), are indeed brought about by the extensive connotation of culture-specific ideologemes which, blending with conceptual spaces, create a mediated poetic entity. The image of the xiao (簫), a kind of longitudinal, end-blown bamboo-flute known in Japan as the shakuhachi (尺八), is one the poet is affectionate with, as shown in the following examples:

“春雨樓頭尺八簫”
‘Spring rain on the chamber upstairs, mournful is the flute’s melody.
(“Occasional Poems, No. 1” Liu and Su 1993, 159)

“深院何人弄碧簫”
In this deep courtyard, who is playing the green jade flute?
(“Nineteen Miscellaneous Poems Written during My Sojourn in Japan, No. 8” ibid., 257)

“猛憶玉人明月下, 悄無人處學吹簫。”
Suddenly I recall to mind the fair lady—how in the bright moonlight, / she learned to play the flute softly when no one was around.  (“Written in Wu, Using the Rhymes in I-sheng’s Poems, No.7” ibid., 223)
Since the story of Xiao Shi 蕭史 and Nong Yu 弄玉 was recorded in Biographies of the Immortals 列仙傳 in the Western Han Dynasty, flute-playing has become a classic motif in literature. It was particularly with the Tang dynasty poet Du Mu’s 杜牧 poem, “To Han Chuo, Magistrate of Yangzhou,” that this motif is closely related to the sentiment of missing a lover. The object xiao has been loaded with fixed connotations in Chinese poetry. It would be a vague statement that poets of younger generations simply “borrowed” this imagery from their predecessors, which may defocus the discussion.

More precisely, flute-playing takes part in the langue (in Ferdinand de Saussure’s sense of the word) of the intertextual activities that can help mold the contextual implication of the poem (not necessarily that of the poet) as a landmark. So is the motif of “lotus-gathering” (採蓮). In the poem “No Title”, Su Manshu wrote, “Since then, I do not know: Is it my soul or my dream-self / That paddles with her across the stream on a lotus-gathering boat?” So popular is the yuefu ballad “The Tune of West Bar” that the action of lotus-gathering has become an indexical sign for confiding affection to a lover:

I start to play with lotus seeds beyond,
Which grow in the water fresh and green.
I hold the lotus seeds in my broad sleeves,
As a keepsake for my love both day and night.  (Wang 2008, 188-189)

Homophonic puns are applied in this ballad, as “蓮子” (lotus seeds) and “憐子” (to adore you) are homonyms. The anonymous poet also plays a similar paronomasia with the character “清” (clear and fresh) in “清如水” for “情” (“affection”). The cultural-specific connotation of “lotus-gathering” frees this phrase from the pragmatic restrictions within the context of the poem “No Title”. On the contrary, it affects the understanding and reception of other constituents in this text. The poetic diction “lotus-gathering” not only conveys a semantic message to the reader, but also becomes a code (in Roman Jakobson’s sense of the word, Jakobson 1987, 66) for writers following the tradition in transmitting the connotative message to ideal readers.

Su Manshu likes to incorporate and naturalize noted dictions or lines of former poets into his own poems, whereas the allusions he sometimes applies defamiliarize such linguistic units from their surrounding in terms of semantic implication. We may also say that, though coming from the same language of Chinese literature, the poetic dictions and the allusions bear diverse functions in his poetry. The poetic heritage of Li Shangyin 李商隠 (813-858),
Lu You 陸游 (1125-1210), and among his more recent predecessors, Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (alias Ding’an 定庵, 1792-1841), are particularly cherished by Su Manshu. In “Nineteen Miscellaneous Poems Written during My Sojourn in Japan, No.10”, Su wrote, “Suddenly I recall Ding’an’s sad, mournful verse: ‘In her three existences, she dreams of Soochow, its flowers and foliage’.” (Liu and Su 1993, 257) In “Miscellaneous Poems of the Jihai Year, No.255”, Gong Zuzhen recounts the wandering life of his mistress, Lingxiao 靈簫, that in her three existences, she dreams of Soochow (Suzhou), and its flowers and foliage.

The quotation of this line in Su’s poem is not an act of simple borrowing; he adds emotional modifiers (“sad, mournful”) and foregrounds the action (“recall suddenly”). This action “outside” the content of the utterance marks the intense desire to invite Gong for a spiritual conversation. Su Manshu first met the Japanese musician Fūko Hyakusuke in 1909 and wrote several emotional poems (“half rouge specks and half tear stains”) during the year. For the poet who visited Japan again five years later, his sad parting with Fūko was already a thing of the past. Still, Fūko’s music tugged at Su’s heart strings. Su Manshu sympathized with Fūko, but like Gong Zizhen, he did not tie the knot with the confidante eventually. When Su Manshu paid tribute to Gong’s poem in his own, he also incorporated the (con)text of his predecessor’s life experiences into his. Su’s close friend Liu Yazi 柳亞子 disclosed in his poem that “in the new poem the history of overwhelming sorrow is recounted, / not for Lingxiao but for the zither.” (Liu, 1985, 316) In 1914, Su Manshu heard someone playing the zither again at a waterside pavilion in Tokyo, and he was reminded of Gong’s sad and mournful poem.

It seemed the addressee in the poem recalled a similar scene in the water-bound town of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, the same location as the city of Soochow, where Manshu used to dwell. In fact, the imaginative space summoned by the enunciator is not solely Soochow. Tokyo does not appear in the text, and it cannot be understood without understanding both contexts for Gong Zizhen and Su Manshu. Lingxiao’s hometown was also Soochow. She ended up as an entertainer in an alien land, which was why Gong mentioned Soochow in his poem lamenting her wandering life. To understand the transformation of the denoted locale, the mental processing through intertextual spaces is required as follows:

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2 It refers to the Buddhist concept of the three states of existence or incarnations—the past, the present and the future. See Liu Wuji’s annotation about it.
Therefore, the denoted locale “Soochow” acts as a trigger for reminiscence in Tokyo. The addresser’s real intention is betrayed through this indexical sign. While addressing the audience, he is also speaking to himself. The contexts shift and new information is generated through this process of auto-communication. This internal speech of the addresser can be described as follows:

context   contextual displacement
I → message 1(Soochow) → message 2 (Tokyo) → I
     code 1              message 1(now code 2) (Lotman 1977b, 101)

A frequenter of Japan, Su Manshu likes to depict cherry blossom, which has been celebrated in Japan for many centuries and holds a very particular place in Japanese culture. In his poetry. In “The Fallen Cherry Blossoms”, behind the imagery of fallen petals, the action of burying the flowers and the remorse for losing the beloved one make a treasure-trove of both Japanese and Chinese literature. “Cherry blossom” is such a powerful intertextual operator that has garnered abundant pragmatic presupposition from Japanese culture. Meanwhile, readers would easily spot dictions of déjà vu if they have read Li Shangyin’s poem “Untitled” and “The Song of Burying the Fallen Flowers” in Cao Xueqin’s novel, The Story of the Stone 石頭記. It matters little whether the image of the fallen cherry blossoms refers to a real scene.

The Japanese aesthetic tradition of mono no aware (物の哀れ), combined with the typical Chinese ideological pursuit of empathy and (sometimes) oneness of object and self, highlights a virtual stage where dialogues are held among Japanese waka poets, Li Shangyin, and Cao Xueqin. Interlocutors from various universes converse with one another in the virtual space of poetry. To sum up, the mood or ambience (“意境”), held dear by traditional Chinese aesthetics, is usually brought about by the extensive connotation of culture-specific ideologemes and, being blended with conceptual spaces, creates a mediated poetic entity. Su Manshu likes to borrow, and occasionally retrofit, noted dictions and allusions from the past.
When poets of later generations like him wrote about the action “to bury fallen blossoms”, this semantically loaded verbal phrase has a clear pragmatic purpose: the connotation it carries helps to construct the implied context of the new utterance, sometimes serving as a constraint. Allusion is widely known as a figure of speech often used in poetry. To be more specific, an allusion serves as a code for writers borrowing it from predecessors, and it transmits the connotative message decipherable to ideal readers; sometimes the allusion alienates itself pragmatically from other units of the whole text as something de-familiarized and thereby poetic.

II. “Painting in Poetry” and Mental Space Mapping

Traditional Chinese painting is usually referred to as “silent poetry”; the two art forms are generally presumed to be governed by the same fundamental laws (“詩畫一律說”). We recognize that Chinese classical poetry and painting are similar in terms of the aesthetic appeal, the mentality of the poet and the artist, and the themes and objects of their creations, while they have different codes and signification systems. For instance, a man of letters may like to compose a poem about his own painting or that of others, and the poem is then written down at the corner of the painting, making it a sub-genre of classical poetry.

The verbal message of this poem is often able to articulate some of the visual content of the painting, and the poetic signs contained in the poem may generate connotative signification in due course. It is also widely acknowledged that poems come into being in the combination of units by all manner of means on the axis of syntagmata, while a painter must display every element of the content on the synchronic plane.

As a poet Su Manshu is adept at using color words (or words with strong implications of color) to enhance the visual impact of textualized images or scenes. This is an efficient technique that makes the enunciated things picturesque. In particular, Su favors the combination of white, green and red, as shown in the following examples:

Dense white clouds embrace Thunder Peak,  
Wintry plum blossoms crimson in the snow.  
(“Written During My Stay at White Clouds Monastery on West Lake” Liu and Su, 1993, 151)

Deep under the willow’s shade the horse treads proudly;  
An endless stretch of silvery sand pursues the ebbing tide.

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The ice-flag atop a thatched store signals a nearby market. 
Red leaves all over the mountain, the lasses gather them as firewood. 
(“Passing by Kamata” ibid., 181)

Travelers point at a distance to Lord Cheng’s stone tablet, 
Where white sand and green pines merge at the edge of the sunset. 
(“Visiting Yen-P’ing’s Birthplace at Hirato” ibid., 193)

Like a fairy treading the waves she comes, her skin white as snow: 
A red leaf in hand, she asks me to inscribe a poem for her. 
(“Occasional poems, No. 4” ibid., 161)

With white streams and green mountains, one’s thoughts do not end—A light mist veils the human world as well as the sky above. 
In the red clay temple, as wind gently wafts and rain drizzles, 
One sees not the returning monk but only home coming swallows. 
(“Written in Wu, using the rhymes in I-sheng’s poems No.18” ibid., 221)

Once a scene is articulated in poetry, its signification is subject to the coding regulations in phonic, semantic, syntactic, and rhetoric aspects. The positioning and functioning of verbal signs and their coded structures are tremendously different from those of visual arts, so is the case with the readers’ perceptual process. Even though a small part of Chinese characters may be regarded as pictographs, the functions of these signs are far from being pictorial once they are integrated into a hierarchy of linguistic and cognitive relations. The aesthetic reception of the “visuality” in poetry can only be realized through the interaction and integration of conceptual spaces / domains in the parlance of cognitive linguistics. The sequential order of imageries and settings on the axis of syntagmata helps to contrive the force-dynamics and image-schemata of classical poetry.

Su Manshu is skilled in creating multi-dimensional configurations wherein the temporal domains of history and the present are evoked in succession, or rather, the space of reality and the space of imagination are superimposed. They operate together with indexical signs of various cultures like Chinese, Japanese, Indian or European to construct a mediated hypothetical space which we may call a poetic one. In “Visiting the Pond of Compassionate Sentiments, Sent to Elder Brother Chung”, Su writes,

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3 As Han-liang Chang argues in his essay “Mental Space Mapping in Classical Chinese Poetry: A Cognitive Approach”, the commonly assumed iconicity in classical Chinese poetry should be more properly called poetic indexicality rather than iconicity. (Chang, Han-liang 2011, 251)
White gauze sleeves, so thin, how many layers are there?
By the stone railing on the bridge, east of the small pond,
There is a Tartar girl who knows best the thoughts of a wandering man—
Smiling, she points to a wide-open lotus bloom, blushing alone.
(Liu and Su 1993, 197)

A literal, word-for-word rendition of the last line are as follows:

笑 指 芙蕖 寂寞 紅
Smile point to lotus flower solitary/silent red

Red is the color of the lotus flower. The word “寂寞” has two meanings, solitary or silent, which may refer to the mood of the Tartar girl or the single flower, or both. Empathy (移情) is a popular rhetorical device in classical Chinese poetry to indicate the natural correspondence between human and physics (nature), and it is generally accepted that every word of scenery is a word of sentiment. Furthermore, “solitary red” is a cultural-specific expression in contrast with the case in English culture. In retrospect, the word “red” does not naturally indicate loneliness in the corpus of classical Chinese literature.

This “archetypal” or “primitive” term must be set in relation to other components to generate such contextual signification. In many cases, the word “red” refers to beautiful / beloved woman for the rouge as a synecdoche. The imagery of “solitary flower” has been used to imply the loneliness of woman, and a famous illustration is the Tang dynasty poet Yuan Zhen’s 元稹 “The Country Palace”:

寥落古行宮
宮花寂寞紅
白頭宮女在
閑坐說玄宗

Here empty is the country palace, empty like a dream
In loneliness and quiet the red imperial flowers gleam,
Some white-haired, palace chambermaids are chatting,
Chatting about the dead and gone Hsüanchung (Xuanzong) regime.
(Lin Yutang 2015, 144)
In the case above, the gleaming flowers look lonely, and so are the viewers of the flowers. In Su Manshu’s poem, red is the color of solitude because the Tartar girl looking at the lotus blossom feels solitary, so does the speaker who is parting with her as is implied in the third line. The girl bears analogical traits with the blossom in the poetic tradition and has built a relationship with this object with an action “pointing to” the textualized reality; a new mediated poetic space thus emerges as follows:

The “thymic category” (Greimas and Fontanille) of the meaning of “smile” (笑) is euphoria, while the meaning of “lonely” (寂寞), dysphoria. They are assembled in the fourth line of the poem as antitheses, augmenting the passional effect of the disjunction between the discursive subject and the object. This is also achieved through the reader’s mental space integration.

Synaesthesia is another traditional rhetorical device in classical Chinese poetry. It can also be regarded as a technique of blending conceptual spaces that are constructed through auditory, visual, and tactile perceptions. In the third and the fourth lines of “Written During My Stay at White Clouds Monastery on West Lake”, Su Manshu writes,

齋罷垂垂渾入定
庵前潭影落疎鐘

My meal of vegetables over, I sink slowly into meditation;
Scattered sound of temple bells falls on shadows in the pool.
(Liu and Su 1993, 151)

In the fourth line, a picturesque scene is depicted. Again, the following is a literal,
word-for-word rendition of the line:

庵 前 潭 影 落 疏 鈴


“Temple” is landmark 1; “shadows in the pool” is trajector 1 which immediately becomes landmark 2. Sound of “scattered bells” makes trajector 2. The word “scattered” is a modifier for the frequency of the ringing of the bell, which cannot be reflected in water like architectural constructions or plants. The bell coordinates with the temple in the semantic field, and the temple helps to locate the source of the bell. A bell is placed in a fixed spot, but “scattered tolls” can evoke vast “time space” and “space space” in the parlance of Peter Stockwell (2002, 96). The sound also implies the listener, and a hypothetical space of the chan is thus blended with the former two spaces.

The time space is not a homogeneous one but a nested structure—the physical time and the religious time. In short, it is not just the depiction of imageries and scenes that makes Su Manshu’s poetry picturesque. By blending conceptual spaces that are constructed through auditory, visual, tactile senses as well as physical and psychological perceptions, Su Manshu’s poetry, as illustrated in the above-discussed poem, presents a vivid and dynamic Umwelt, a mediated space that is poetry per se.

III. Figures of Speech and Figures of Grammar

While incorporating legacies from Chinese literary tradition, Su Manshu’s poetry is commended by Yu Dafu 郁達夫 (1896-1945) as “having a fresh and modern flavor”. (Yu 2007, 281) Besides Yu’s comment, we may have a glimpse of how Su’s poetry was lauded by another renowned writer of a younger generation, Shi Zhecun 施蟄存 (1905-2003), who wrote in his foreword to Reprint of Poetry of the Swallow Niche, “Su Manshu was the most loved poet before and after the Revolution of 1911. He was a member of the South Society… each one [of his poem] has lasting affective charm. I was also one of his admirers at the time. I could recite almost every poem of his.” (Shi 1994, 220)

A popular history of Chinese literature from two leading literary historians, Zhang Peiheng 章培恒 (1934-2011) and Luo Yuming 駱玉明 (b. 1951) suggests that such a “modern flavor” in Su’s poetry mainly refers to its style of bold expression of emotions in natural language, and that Su’s works “do not utilize novel or odd concepts, but reveal a fresh
breath out of traditional forms. At the time when the oppression of outmoded ideology began
to crumble but its clout was still powerful, young people who were eager for freedom and
liberation of their feelings felt resonance of souls from Su Manshu’s passionate, beautiful and
sorrowful mood of poetry.” (Zhang and Luo 2004, 592) The “fresh and modern flavor” is
reflected on the content plane in two aspects. Far from being an other-worldly recluse, Su
shows deep concern for the nation and the people in his works which echoes the modern
reform of Chinese Buddhism; though addressed as the Reverend Manshu, he tends to confess
his own life experiences and personal thoughts in many of his poems, in which the
first-person singular speaker comes across as one weighed down by the dilemma between
secular love and religious belief. Passion between men and women is a forbidden theme in
Buddhist literature throughout history.

One may say that fighting against the lingering affection for the beloved woman is a trial
for a person pursuing Buddhist practice, but Su writes about his helpless sorrow in such a
straightforward and genuine way as has rarely been done before. An individual subject is
foregrounded by the enunciator’s self-interrogation. Through the form of traditional poetry,
the strong emotions flow, and a “personal history” is articulated with macro-history on the
side. The transformation of content coincides with that of expression, and these two are
complementary to each other.

Su Manshu pours out his heart with reformed grammatical structures. The imageries in
his poems are often accompanied by markers of colloquial discourse, and the grammar
running through the lines looks quite similar with that of daily spoken language in his time. It
may be said that Su practiced the style of “I write what comes out of my mouth” (我手寫我
口), a motto of the Poetry Revolution in late Qing dynasty. Prior to that, the Chinese
written language, let alone poetry, follows completely different rules from spoken Chinese.
We shall further argue that these diverse grammatical contrivances, interacting with semantic
contiguities and transitions, bring in alternative poetic effects in Su’s poetry.

Su Manshu’s poetry is often organized in a kind of “prosaic” grammar, almost identical
with that of daily colloquial language. The overwhelming majority of his poems are
composed in seven-charactered quatrains. As there are seven characters in each line, complex
sentences and clauses as well as grammatical materials like conjunctions, auxiliaries and
interjections are practicable, whereas in four- or five-charactered poems of classical Chinese
poetry, syntactic expletives are usually erased. There are no morphological changes in
Chinese language, and a word may serve as multiple parts of speech.
It’s not surprising that most words of a classical four- or five-charactered poem may seem to be nouns or noun phrases, as they also bear meanings of corresponding verbs, adjectives, or adverbs, and as syntactic components they function as subjects, predicates, and attributive, etc. Notwithstanding that, poets would seldom, if ever, adopt the grammatical texture and contrivances so exuberantly as Su did with the form of the seven-charactered quatrain.

In addition, the first- and second-person pronouns are not much favored by traditional poets in the past, but they are frequently used together with interrogative pronouns and interrogative adverbs to manifest different speech acts in Su’s poetry. Some of his poems write about the speaker’s self-disclosure, some others seem to invite a specific addressee into the dialogic situation while making the readers empathetic. The grammar patterns of poems translated by Su Manshu and poems of his own appear in stark contrast, as displayed in the following examples:

A.
Target text:

皇 濤 濤汗
adj. n. n.
big waves flood
靈 海 鴻 冥
adj. n. adj. adj.
mystical sea black dark
萬 龜 鼓 楫
numeral measure word v. n.
10,000 m.w. of ship swing paddle
泛 若 輕 萍
adj. prep. adj. n.
floating like light duckweed

Source text: Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean –roll!
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
(excerpt from George Gordon Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, 1921, 71)

B.
Source text:

禪 心 一 任 嫉妒
A chan mind totally allow moth-browed (beauties) envy
佛 說 原來 恨 是 親
Buddha say originally grudge is affection
雨 笠 煙 飄 帷去也，
rain bamboo/straw hat mist straw/palm-bark rain cloak return modal particle
與人無愛亦無嗔

with people without love also without hatred

(“Addressed to the Koto Player, No. 2”)

A chan mind tolerates the envy of moth-browed beauties –
In Buddha’s precept affection and anger are the same in origin.
Wearing a bamboo hat of rain and a leaf cloak of mist. I’ll return home
With no trace of love or hatred for my fellow men. (Liu and Su, 1993, 171)

It can be seen from the above that coordinate construction and complex sentence can be carried out in a seven-charactered line, while to compose a four-charactered verse, a poet may have to split the simple SVO pattern into two lines, or adopt the mainstream craft of amalgamating NPs which may be seem as imageries while rejecting function words. As Chinese is not an inflexional language, numbers, cases, tenses, voices, aspects, and moods are typically performed by conjunctions, auxiliaries, and interjections which also help to fulfill the emotive or phatic function in prosaic language.

Lin Geng 林庚 (1910–2006), a renowned scholar of Tang Poetry, has pointed out that a major signal of progression in poetic language is the removal of function words which are indispensable in prosaic writing. “Zhi (之), hu (乎), zhe (者), ye (也), yi (矣), yan (焉), zai (哉)” and so forth, can all be omitted in the five-charactered poems since the Qi and Liang Dynasties. This is by no means a simple matter, as we just imagine how difficult and awkward it will be if we remove every de (的) – the equivalent of zhi in contemporary vernacular poetry, and the thing will be clear. This is purely a matter of poetic language, and it has never happened in prose.” (Lin Geng 2011, 90–91)

The words that can be saved in classical poems are not all function words, as Lin Geng has mentioned; a line without a verb is nothing surprising, yet it is only justifiable in poetry. This tradition of composition may also have something to do with the general sense of “painting in poetry”. As François Cheng has posited, the poets of the Tang introduced the notion of fullness and emptiness to poetry; “The concept is most evident in the manner in which they make use of ‘full words’ (verbs and substantives) and ‘empty words’ (such as personal pronouns, prepositions, comparatives, grammatical particles, etc.). By the omission

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4 These are typical interjections to express the declarative, the exclamative, the interrogative or the imperative mood; zhi and hu also bear the function of structural auxiliary. Zhe can be a pronoun and ye an adverb. Yan can otherwise function as a pronoun, a conjunction or a preposition. Zai can also serve as a notional word.

5 It refers to the two consecutive regimes in southern China that existed from 479 AD to 557 AD.
of personal pronouns and other empty words, and by the reuse of certain empty words as full words, the poet puts into motion an internal opposition within the language, and a de-ruling of the nature of the signs.” (Cheng 1982, 15)

Poetry forms its special grammar in every language. In Chinese classical poetry, complex sentence patterns and function words were never popular. The most favorable design is the juxtaposition of notional words depicting imageries and scenes. Personal pronouns are used infrequently, let alone other types of relational units. The order of the parts of speech is flexible, as illustrated in the famous and highly praised lines from Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) and Huang Tingjian 黄庭坚 (1045-1105):

A. 香稻啄餘鸚鵡粒
fragrant paddy peck remain parrot grains
The parrots pecked at the remained fragrant paddy grains.

碧梧老鳳凰枝
emerald sycamore perch old phoenix branch
The phoenixes perched on the greenish branches of the old sycamore.

(“Inspirations in Autumn No.8” by Du Fu, my translation)

B. 桃李春風一杯酒
Peach plum spring breeze a cup of wine

江湖夜雨十年燈
river lake night rain ten years lamp

Xu Yuanchong’s translation:
A cup of wine beneath peach trees in vernal breeze;
Ten lonely years by the lamplight in rainy night.
(“To Huang Jifu” by Huang Tingjian, Xu 1995, 339)

The divergence between Su Manshu’s seven-charactered poem and the canonized samples of the form is clear. Su is skilled in exploiting grammatical words to build up coordinate constructions and compound sentences, in addition to forming SVO or subject-predicate sentences in a natural word order, which decrease greatly the shifts and admixtures of parts of speech. Personal pronouns are frequently used together with interrogative pronouns and interrogative adverbs, foregrounding an enunciator with the strong desire of speaking and overflowing feelings. Occasional use of inverted sentences also makes the grammar of Su’s

6 The compound word “江湖” (“rivers and lakes”), made up of two morphemes, metaphorically refers to the milieu independent of mainstream society and out of reach of the law.
poetry appear to be similar to spoken language and prose writing, eliminating the semantic vagueness and ambiguity. The pattern of seven-charactered verse enables the poet to narrow the discrepancy between written language and spoken language and between belles-lettres and vernacular literature in the longer syntagma that classical versification allows.

The practice of the style of “I write what comes out of mouth” does not mean that Su Manshu’s poems thereby turn out to be prosaic; they all follow the rules of prosody in the first place. More importantly, Su brings into play a variety of figures of grammar, which are “les metataxes” in the parlance of Group μ, or what Paul de Man called the “rhetorizations of grammar” and “figures generated by syntactical paradigms” (de Man 1979, 15). A particularly prominent feature of Su’s poetry is the strong subjective intervention deployed by personal pronouns plus interrogatives. The components of lexical and grammatical aspects find their widest applications in performing illocutionary acts of assertives, directives, commissives, and expressives, particularly in rhetorical questions and exclamatory sentences, juxtaposing spaces of reality and imagination, of the present and the absent.

In regard to the “metasememe”, the “metatax” plus the “metalogism” (Groupe μ), Su Manshu employs skillfully antithesis, oxymoron, hyperbole, irony and rhetorical questions, among other figures of speech, creating the gap between literal meaning and pragmatic signification while highlighting emotive twists and turns, as are shown in “To Elder Brother Chung as I Pass Wakamatsu-Cho Stirred by Emotions”,

契闊死生君莫問，
行雲流水一孤僧。
無端狂笑無端哭，
縱有歡腸已似冰。

Ask not whether our parting is for life or death!
A lonely monk, I wander like a floating cloud and flowing water.
For no reason at all, I madly laugh then loudly wail.
Even if I have a joyous heart, it is as cold as ice. (Liu and Su 1993, 187)

In “Occasional Poems, No. 10”, Su Manshu writes, “Nine years I faced the wall to attain Buddhahood. / Returning home with a monk’s staff, I regret to have met you.” (Liu and Su, 1993,163), the word “regret” (悔) undoes the long-haul practice of Buddhism, pulling the

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7 Two genres to represent them respectively in Chinese literature are traditional poetry and colloquial story. For the latter, the script for story-telling, huaben, is written in vernacular and larded with the stock expressions of professional storytellers.
monk away from satori. A similar case is in the lines: “I could only give back to you, dear one, an alms-bowl of unfeeling tears, / Regretting I did not meet you before my head was shaven.” (ibid., 161) The word “unfeeling” (無情) reveals an irretrievably broken heart. In “Nineteen Miscellaneous Poems Written during My Sojourn in Japan, No. 17”, Su writes down the couplet: “Empty mountains, gurgling streams, no trace of human life— / Where is the lovely lady with her songs of lamentation?” (ibid., 263)

The Umwelt of “non-self” (anatta in Buddhist terminology) without any trace of human life is intruded by the inquiry for the lovely lady with songs of lamentation. As Jakobson has posited, in verbal art, linguistic fictions are fully realized; “formal meanings” find their widest applications in poetry as the most formalized manifestation of language. (1987, 124) The goal of classical rhetoric is to move the audience and win them over with pathos, ethos, and logos. Su has achieved these two ends of rhetoric in his poetry, while the truth of logic is suspended and substituted by the pragmatic-emotional effects of plausibility. Organized in “quasi-prosaic” grammar, the components of lexical and grammatical aspects enter mutual relationships to realize abundant rhetoric performances in Su’s poems and render them poetic.

IV. The Sociolect of Classical Chinese Poetry Revisited

Looking back on the history of Chinese literature, it is clear that poetry was granted with the central position in the literary arena before the 20th century, but there was never a well-defined demarcation line between the “poetic” and the “unpoetic”. Being a special deployment of language, the discursive system of poetry is always in the dialectic and interaction with discourse of other genres. Most of Su Manshu’s poems were composed before the New Literary Movement in the early years of the Republic of China, and in the broad sense, they followed the sociolect of the old times.

Holding a selective view of the traditional repertoire, Su encoded the text creatively while incorporating new information in his idiolect; he adopted function words frequently and highlighted illocutionary acts to compose lyrical poetry in the Buddhist context. He did not overuse loanwords from transliteration as the poets of the late Qing Dynasty had done in the Poetry Revolution, but rather maintained and promoted the classical versification in the phonetic, semantic, and rhetoric aspects which were regarded as obsolete by the upcoming generation of the New Literary Movement. The old sociolect did not completely vanish after
the ‘May 4th Movement but participated in the various idiolects which partook in producing
the new sociolect as well.

Su Manshu’s practice of “I write what comes out of mouth” and that of “incorporating fresh
ambience with old style” (以舊風格含新意境) echoed the call of the Poetic Revolution
in the late Qing dynasty, but looked “old” in terms of rhyme, rhythm, imagery and diction; it
heralded the further transformation of the literary sociolect, while the inheritance and tributes
to distinguished poets in the history demonstrated in Manshu’s poems rendered them widely
divergent from the vernacular poetry that rose after 1917. In this regard, the criticism of Su’s
poetry has varied with the coordinate system it is measured in.

Bearing such an intricate relationship with the archaic and the innovative in Late Qing
literary arena, Su Manshu’s poetry is suitable, as I have argued at the beginning, for
reflecting upon the criteria of appraisal of classical Chinese poetry. From the analysis above,

it may be inferred that the “mood” held dear by traditional Chinese critics of poetics and
aesthetics is usually brought about by the extensive connotation of culture-specific
ideologemes, and by blending conceptual spaces to create a mediated poetic one. Being
widely known as a figure of speech, allusion serves as a code for writers borrowing it from
predecessors and it transmits the connotative message decipherable to ideal readers;
sometimes the allusion alienates itself pragmatically from other units of the whole text as
something unfamiliar.

By blending conceptual spaces that are constructed through auditory, visual, tactile
senses as well as physical and psychological perceptions, Su Manshu’s poetry presents a
vivid and dynamic Umwelt, a mediated space that is poetry. Organized in “quasi-prosaic”
grammar, the components of lexical and grammatical aspects enter into mutual relationships
to realize abundant rhetoric performances in his poems and render them poetic.

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A MOOR’S “UN-TWAINIAN” INSIGHTS ON COOPER’S “UN-READABLE” ART

Nizar F. Hermes*

Abstract: In this article, I argue that James F. Cooper should be treasured outside the stifling artistic horizons of Mark Twain’s Cooper’s Literary Offences. Even if Cooper’s texts are allegedly delirium tremens, global readers of world literature should join me—a post-colonial and global student of world texts and contexts—in disregarding Twain’s claims that “Cooper has scored 114 offenses against literary art out of a possible 115” (4). My present defense of Cooper should therefore be seen as an international homage to James Fennimore Cooper from a North African “Moor” whose Ibn Battutian global academic journey from the South of the Mediterranean to the American Midwest was triggered by the ‘unreadable’ Cooper some twenty years ago.

And if I can go down to the grave with the reflection that I have done a little towards it (America), I shall have the consolation of knowing that I have not been useless in my generation (Letters of James Fenimore Cooper, xviii).

Nearly two decades ago, while conducting my primary research for my Diplôme d’études approfondies in American Studies at the American Cultural Center of Tunis, I developed an enormous interest in James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales (1823-1845): the great pentalogy of the American wilderness set between 1740 and 1804. My most sought-after objective at that time was to track some textual links and references that would lead me to theoretically explore Cooper’s The Leatherstocking Tales from a postcolonial perspective. However, upon encountering Fredric Jameson’s intriguing book The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (1981) at Columbia University’s Butler Library during a Summer research visit to New York in 1999, I decided to undergo a soft “paradigm shift,” from my then rather one-sided theoretical background—at least as it increasingly seemed to me—to a more eclectic research project in which I can use my knowledge of postcolonial theory in conjunction with other historicist theories that foreground discourses of nation, race, and empire.

Working on James Fenimore Cooper had not been an easy task, to say the least. In the minds of many, Cooper is not a Hawthorne or a Melville. Admittedly, apart from the popular

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The Last of The Mohicans, few can remember that there was once a great American novelist and interdisciplinary thinker by the name of James Fenimore Cooper. Indeed, questionnaires I passed around at the time confirmed that while many knew the film version of The Last of the Mohicans and its director, few could recognize the author. Of course, even if one can always relate the neglect of Cooper to the sweeping visualization of the American culture, one cannot deny the existence of a latent anti-Cooperism among many American academics. In fact, I still remember how defensive of Cooper I was during a short conversation I had with a professor of American history at my American university of the time.

To make the long story short, the eloquent professor was stunned when I told him that I flew thousands of miles from my home North African country just to write about James Fenimore Cooper and get into, if possible, a prestigious PhD program in Comparative Literature with focus on East/West medieval and early modern encounters. He was impressed with my PhD research project, but repeatedly would utter: “The unreadable Cooper!” Cooper’s alleged unreadability, I have always contended, dwindles when compared with his political engagement with his “American mission,” as once eloquently phrased by Anne C. Loveland (245). In fact, Cooper’s literary heritage, more than any other, represents compelling evidence of the intriguingly complex connection between literature and ideology as propounded by materialist critics from different backgrounds such as Terry Eagleton, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, and Fredric Jameson. It is, therefore, the political Cooper I was fascinated by, not the Shakespearian Conrad!

Scholars of early American literature have always discussed the dissatisfaction of the pioneering American writers in their struggle to consolidate the literary independence of the United States of America and culturally contain the wilderness. In essence, their dissatisfaction was the result of what appeared to those writers as the meanness in the American materials, in comparison with that of Europe. Joel Barlow, Washington Irving, and Charles Brockden Brown all expressed their doubt about creating a respectful and independent American literary tradition that could stand up against the cultural hegemony of Britain. This impeding doubt, however, was stalwartly confronted with a full awareness of...
the urgency to create of a national literature that could fashion a pure and solid American identity. This identity was necessary in compiling this double mission of resisting the British cultural heritage and taming the wilderness. As Sarah M. Corse writes, “It is my argument that the emergence of a national literature in both Canada and the United states was concomitant with the initial period of nation-building” (9). It was the intricacy of this national mission that led many writers to express their fear of the failure of establishing an American literary tradition.

It was, however, the fortunate destiny of American literature to find in its early days, a committed man of letters and politics like James Fenimore Cooper. In fact, Cooper courageously accepted this mission and significantly helped in fashioning an American national subject not the least because he was “the principal interpreter of his period,” to quote Perry Miller’s eloquent phrase (Errand Into the Wilderness, 214). In spite of Cooper’s awareness of the modesty, if not the meanness, of the American socio-historical reality in comparison to the English counterpart, Cooper was optimistic about an independent American literary tradition’s potential for success. For Cooper, it goes with saying, the American literary independence was as nationalistically important as its political one.

In discussing the emergence of early national American literature, Robert Spiller notes that that early major American writers were caught in the dilemma of preserving their “loyalty to the English tradition” and meeting “the demand for the totally new literature” (53). With Cooper, Spiller asserts, the American writer began to concentrate on the demands of the national literature. Cooper strove to proclaim the literary independence of America and took it upon himself to textually engage with the hopes and impediments of the rising nation (Spiller, 69). Declaring the literary independence of America was not an easy mission due to the strong bonds that connected the newly independent nation to its mother culture. Not only was a total rupture with Britain culturally impossible, it was also threatening since it could create a cultural and a racial vacuum, which by its turn could jeopardize the Eurocentricity of the rising nation. A unique national language and culture, which often play key roles in nation building and in the consolidation of postcolonial societies, were both absent in the American scene. “In the first place, whether we think of Brazil, the USA, or the former colonies of Spain. Benedict Anderson writes, “language was not an element that differentiated them from their respective imperial metropolis,” Benedict Anderson writes, “all, including the USA, were Creole states, formed and led by people who shared a common language and common descent. Indeed, it is fair to say that language was never even an issue
in these early struggles for national liberation (47). Fully aware of his country’s “postcolonial” situation, Cooper confesses the inevitable British cultural influence on the rising American nation.

In one of his most provocative political tracts, *Notions of the Americans* (1828), a travelling Cooper strongly encourages young American writers to accept the British heritage without anxiety and as he puts it, “[t]o claim Milton and Shakespeare and all the masters of the language for his countrymen as an English man”(855), as he puts it. This grandly reminds one of the quasi-proverbial statement by W. E. B. Du Bois’ eloquent call to Afro-American writers to claim the white heritage of America as their white compatriots would do. As he put it, “I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm and arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls (83).

Cooper was fully alert to the danger of blindly following the cultured British and the educated English man. In Cooper’s mind, American writers must espouse a bardic nationalism, to quote Katie Trumpener’s eloquent phrase. In other words, such an ambitiously vital national project could only be achieved if his fellow countrymen commit themselves and their writings, as he did, to the American nation. The success of this national project, as Cooper theorizes, hinges on engaging American literature to narrate the American political experience and values. “The only peculiarity”, Cooper tells us, “that can or ought to be expected in [American] literature is that which is connected with the promulgation of their distinctive political opinions” (*Notions of the Americans*, 865). Cooper deemed the promulgation of the American political experience and values as the most important American literary theme. If it was unlikely to break the historical, cultural, and linguistic bonds with the mother country, the new national literature had to concentrate on the political.

Much influenced by his call on his fellow American writers to rely on what he hails as “the impulses of talent and intelligence,” to overcome all the above-mentioned obstacles, Cooper had successfully subdued his romantic talents to serve this national project of establishing an American literary tradition. He did so by exploiting the romance’s generic power of national idealization and by striving for the literary independence of America. In several aspects, it was Cooper’s obsession with American politics which encouraged many to hail him as the first national American writer par excellence even if he was initially
criticized for his alleged “unrelenting criticism of contemporary America and his insistence on importing politics into the province of polite literature” (Rans, 71).

Cooper’s romantic politicization and idealization of the rising American nation should draw the utmost attention of modern readers to this once major American writer. Our understanding of Cooper’s narrative can benefit from materialist theories which focus on nation building and the concomitant discourses of politics, race, and empire. Cooper’s romances, one might venture to say, more than any others in post-revolutionary America, exemplify a postcolonial situation. For Cooper, the American nation, is a narration that loses its origin, “in the myths of time and only fully realize,” its horizons in the author’s textual eye, to use Homi Bhabha (1). In several aspects, one can say that Cooper’s romances are American odysseys that narrate an America that is independent, but also powerful and potentially imperialistic, an America that conjures up narratives of the Greek and Roman epics, or say, the Arthurian Romances (in their narration of Britain). Such a powerful national idea drove Cooper to profess writing, as illustrated in the above prefatory statement.

Little wonder, then, that Cooper, projected a romantic idea of America more than any other writer, giving the rising American literary tradition a national color, infusing it with the political, social, and economic interests of the young country Cooper’s commitment to the idea of America was the telos of his writing. “It was the very faithfulness of Cooper to his conception of an ideal republic,” remarks Vernon Louis Parrington, “that brought him into collision with his fellows and filled his later days with bitterness. To the end of his life the social and political problems of America were a burden on his conscience” (225). If the American Revolution had internationally declared the political independence of the United States of America, Cooper heavily relied upon the romance to declare its concomitant cultural independence from Britain. “The true burden of romance,” Perry Miller explains, “was not at all the love story. What all of them were basically concerned with, was the continent, the heritage of America, the wilderness” (31). One might metaphorically say that the romance with Cooper is the mirror that introduced the American subject to itself and reflected for the first time an independent image from mother Britain. This introduction,

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4 It is often claimed that Cooper wrote only as a challenge to show his wife that he could write better than Jane Austen.
however, became much more challenging of the ‘mother’ than what Jacques Lacan proposed in his interpretation of the subject’s first self-encounter during the “Mirror Stage.” With Cooper, the American subject goes beyond any complex relationship with Britain to embark on a state of total independence, of asserted subjectivity. In this context, Emily Miller Budick observes, “But Cooper touches the heart of the American subject, directing his steps away from the path pointed so unerringly by America’s magnetic attraction to England” (17).

The burden was enormously heavy on Cooper in absence of an independent pre-colonial cultural heritage that could have helped regain a lost “imagined community,” if one borrows Benedict Anderson’s exquisite description of the nation. The ambiguity of the postcolonial situation of the United States of America, which was prescribed by its cultural and historical ties with Britain, made the mission much more difficult and very different from other postcolonial societies. In traditional colonial/postcolonial societies, the resistant/emergent nations in their struggle for independence and national consolidation strive to propagate a glorious pre-colonial national condition. Frantz Fanon calls it “national consciousness,” whereby a national culture is the most influential (97). This romantically re-imagined past has been instrumental in postcolonial consolidation and the invention of what Eric Hobsbawm, calls “national tradition” (7). This is true when it comes to inventing a glorious tradition of a national history, of a common origin, of a national religion, and a national language. Postcolonial societies seek to recreate a “paradise lost” from their common pre-colonial past to strengthen their national independence, sustain their national existence, and narrate a national history. As noted by John McLeod:

If the invention of tradition is central to the nation, then so is the narration of history. Nations are often underwritten by the positing of a common historical archive that enshrines the common past of a collective “people.” The nation has its own historical narrative, which posits and explains its origins, its individual character and the victories won in its Name (70).

Indeed, Cooper found himself in such a precarious postcolonial situation: How can the emergent American national writer remove or even break the British mirror which is “always already there” through its hegemonic language and culture? How can the American

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writer recreate an American national culture that would consolidate the American national consciousness?

Through his frontier romances in general and *The Leatherstocking Tales* in particular, Cooper was the first American writer to gain national and international fame. One can say that Cooper was the first American writer to succeed in breaking the colonial mirror and announcing the rise of the American subject. Marius Bewley groups him with Hawthorne, Melville, and James. Richard Chase hailed him as the founder of the American tradition: “Inevitably,” writes Chase, “we look to the writings of James Fenimore Cooper, for it was he who first fully exemplified and formulated the situation of the novelist in the New World” (37). Cooper’s reputation, one must admit, is not indebted to a superlative literary genius, like Mark Twain certainly was. It is, however, intrinsically connected to his nationalism and his lifelong commitment to the idea of America.

*The Leatherstocking Tales* were published between 1823 and 1842. They include *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1841), and *The Deerslayer* (1842). Each of them narrates a period in the life of a quasi-mythic American pioneer, who is interchangeably called Natty Bumppo, Hawkeye, Deerslayer, and Leatherstocking. Historically speaking, each of the *Leatherstocking Tales* covers a different period of American national history: the colonial period, the war of independence, National consolidation, and territorial expansion. Because of the preeminence of historical allusions, many critics have agreed upon describing the tales as historical romances. The genre of historical romance is thought to be the personal invention of the Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott, whose *Waverley*—which many cite as Cooper’s model—announced the rise of historical romance. In this context, Leslie Fiedler tells us: “The historical romance is the invention of one man, Sir Walter Scott; and the genre did not exist until the appearance of his *Waverley* in 1814” (160). Fiedler goes on to inform us “Cooper is eminent among the followers of Scott” (160).

Scott’s influence on Cooper has been the focus of a heated debate between a group of critics that claims Cooper’s strong admiration of Scott and another group that argues for the very opposite. As early as July 1826, W.H. Gardiner, one of Cooper’s earliest reviewers, discerned Scott’s influence on Cooper in a review he wrote for the *North American Review*. “Our author (Cooper) has uniformly followed the example of the great lord (Scott) and master of modern romance,” Gardiner wrote, “in endeavoring to relieve his reader from the more painful and serious emotion of the tale by introducing some uncouth and unnatural
beings, bearing no imaginary likeness to anything on the earth or under it” (109). James Beard, the editor of Cooper’s letters, questions the veracity of this theory through investigating a letter Cooper sent to Sir Walter Scott in 1825 from St. Oven in France, in which Beard discerns an ambivalence in Cooper’s feeling towards Scott. “Cooper’s admiration of the Waverley novels, he claimed, “had been a decisive influence on his literary career, and in Scott’s heroic efforts to pay his debts, Cooper undoubtedly found a deeper and more personal sense of kinship with Scott. Yet despite his admiration, Cooper was apparently always somewhat ambivalent” (154).6

Not only was Cooper’s admiration of Scott ambivalent, it also harbored a latent antagonism. Cooper was upset at being thought of as a mere follower of Scott and thus a mere American imitator.7 Sympathizing with Cooper and recognizing his literary independence, the nineteenth century French magazine Paris Globe advocated Cooper’s romantic talent and even extolled him over Scott: “If we are now to make a comparison between the two novelists, not as between an original and a copy, but as between two powerful rivals, we should say that we prefer the American to the Scotsman” (127). Cooper’s obsession with declaring his personal literary independence offers compelling evidence of his overall national project of declaring the literary independence of the American writer from.... His undaunted obsession with executing his ambitious project of “the mental independence of America” ought to be the standpoint of our appreciation of this major American writer and man of state (?). Such a major nationalistic project was threatened by the peculiarity of the American postcolonial situation due to its strong linguistic, racial, religious, and historical ties with the ex-colonizing power.8 Fortunately, it was the overt nationalism that encouraged and motivated Cooper in his lifelong struggle to declare the literary independence of the rising nation.

Cooper’s services to the rising nation, as he confessed, had even superseded his services to his God. In 1846, in a moment of nationalistic crisis, Cooper avowed to his friend James Kirke Paulding: “if I had served my god with half the zeal I’ve served my country, it would

7 In this context, Nicholas Mills quotes Cooper’s confession to one of his friends the following truth: “If there is a term that gives me more disgust than any other, it is to be called, as some on the continent advertise me, ‘the American Walter Scott’” (155).
8 Other cases were Haiti and other countries of Spanish and Portuguese America.
have been better for me” (xviii). This confession, however, does not in any way undermine Cooper’s faith in the idea of America, as one might conspicuously discern from another letter he wrote the same year to his friend Samuel Center Hall: “And if I can go down to the grave with the reflection that I have done a little towards it (America), I shall have the consolation of knowing that I have not been useless in my generation (xviii).”

Narrating the American nation, inventing an American tradition, and consolidating an American national consciousness were indubitably political priorities for Cooper. The nation, with all its symbols and metaphors, consumed consciously and unconsciously all his life and his writing. Through breaking the colonial mirror that used to confine America to the image of the mother culture, Cooper, more than any other American writer, helped to decolonize the American mind, and liberate the American subject. As movingly captured by the prefatory quotation, James Fenimore Cooper’s reputation is not indebted to a superlative literary genius; it is rather related to a lifelong commitment to narrate romantically the American nation. Such a romantic idea of the nation had indeed consumed much of Cooper's life and writing.

Indeed, among James Fenimore Cooper’s five Leatherstocking Tales, The Pioneers has drawn attention from literary critics, historians, and cultural analysts. As a matter of fact, it was not surprising at all that the 1996 Pulitzer Prize in history was awarded to the historian Alan Taylor for a historical study he made on Cooperstown based on The Pioneers. The Pioneers, some critics still contend, has long been an autobiographical romance. Its paramount importance, according to them, lies in the pastoral moments that reach the apogee with Cooper’s description of the landscape of his hometown Cooperstown. Cooper’s nostalgic and romantic recollection and recreation of his early childhood and his reminiscence of his charismatic father Judge William Cooper, the founder of Cooperstown in 1790s, used to be the focus of critical interest in this text. Stephen Railton, to cite an example, in his psychoanalytic reading of The Pioneers comes to a psychoanalytical conclusion that The Pioneers is ultimately the result of Cooper’s recollection of his childhood in his father’s settlement in his early childhood. The autobiographical centrality is even stressed by Cooper. In fact, in an explanatory letter to the British famous nineteenth century publisher John Murray in November 1822, Cooper seems to blame himself for projecting into the romance much of his childhood. Cooper informs us: “I had announced the work as a ‘descriptive tale’ but perhaps have confined myself too much to describing the scenes of my own youth” (85).
Cooper’s written confession might be a proof that there is more in *The Pioneers* than the romantically autobiographical, as it is a hint that the descriptive cannot be the telos of the narrative either. The autobiographical unconscious that Cooper seems to blame cannot, in any way, impede us from exploring the novel’s much more influential political unconscious. Cooper’s political unconscious can be thoroughly exposed by using quite loosely Fredric Jameson’s theory of the political unconscious. In his seminal essay “On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act,” Fredric Jameson argues that although traditional literary criticism did not fundamentally preclude some of the social, historical, or even political investigations of literary texts, the output was strikingly ahistorical, asocial, indeed, apolitical. The problem, according to Jameson, is that “old historicists” conceived of the social, the historical, and the political idealistically and humanistically.

“In a word,” Adam Roberts argues, “this is what the ‘political unconscious’ is: it is history, present in every text but rarely evidently so” (77). It is, therefore, mandatory, as Jameson propounds, to historicize the act of writing (narrative) and politicize the act of interpretation (criticism). The text is a socially symbolic narrative that historicizes a society’s individual and collective consciousness. This latter unconsciously tends to repress many historical contradictions in its search for cultural, economic, and political hegemony.9

It has been my conviction that *The Pioneers* is not merely an autobiographical romance per se that has encouraged me to investigate its political unconscious and to show that this early nineteenth century American cultural production is nothing but a narrative that is socially, historically, politically a symbolic act. It is therefore the political reading as delineated by Jameson that can help us uncover Cooper’s political unconscious in *The Pioneers*. This reading does not seem applicable because Cooper is overtly a political writer. It is, however, my contention that in *The Pioneers*, everything is social, historical and “in the last analysis,” political. And above all, Cooper was the son of a famous post-Revolution politician who had indubitably bequeathed to him not only a thriving Cooperstown but also a growing interest in the politics that governed the town. “As the son of a land agent and as someone brought up in a pioneer community,” Robert Clark observes, “Cooper had a more immediate and problematic knowledge of the political economy of U.S expansion than any of his literary contemporaries” (962).

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9 I am fully aware that some would argue that the Jamesonian unconscious is essentially hidden and cannot be associated with any conscious ideology.
As such, it is not exaggerating at all, to argue that the nineteenth-century’s critical dissatisfaction with Cooper’s literary quality—which reached its climax with Twain—was not only a shortsighted liberal reaction to Cooper’s politicization of romance, but also an undermining of the role of the political in the making of one of the great American writers.

At that time the politicization of the romance was thought to be a literary “sin.” The nineteenth century’s and even the early twentieth century’s critical conception and reception of the romance were predominantly liberal humanist. In fact, many early reviews of Cooper’s romances expressed their disappointment with Cooper simply because, most politicized as they thought, the political always consumes the romantic in Cooper’s fiction. He was thought to politicize such an apolitical genre as the romance. In this context, George Dekker in his investigation of the critical recognition of Cooper between 1820 and 1852, tells us that among the dissatisfaction of the reviewers was their feeling that Cooper committed an “artistic sin” when he treated serious political issues in *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans*. “The complaint that a romancer should have turned social critic is common to most reviewers of both novels,” Dekker informs us, “because Cooper was considered the national romancer, he was condemned for expressing political and social realities in fiction...among all the inconsistencies of Cooper’s reviewers, their conviction that politics is inadmissible in fiction remained unaltered” (27). Yet, it is time to hail what used to be considered sins in Cooper’s romances, not the least because by exploring such presumed sins one might uncover Cooper’s political unconscious and appreciate Cooper’s literary corpus beyond the liberal humanist horizon.

From the beginning of the romance this tension is intensified by the dispute over who killed a deer. Judge Temple, who is accompanied by his daughter and heiress Elizabeth, who has just finished her education, shoots many bullets at a running deer. The deer continues to run until two rifle shots kill it. One of Judge Temple’s bullets hits a young man who emerges at the scene with Natty Bumppo and the Indian Chingachgook. Shocked at knowing that one of his bullets has mistakenly hit the young man, the judge and his daughter convince the hesitant young man—who is later identified as Oliver Edward—to return with them to their mansion for treatment.

After so many quarrels and confrontations between the judge and Natty that reaches its climax at the pigeon scene, the judge and his agents [law and progress] overpower Natty Bumppo and his agents [chaos and backwardness]. The romance ends up with three dramatic events: the death of Chingachgook—last of his tribe—and the exile of Natty
Bumppo after his imprisonment, and more importantly the marriage between Oliver Edwards and Elizabeth Temple. Judge Temple Marmaduke founded Templeton whose survival, consolidation, and progress hinge on the judge’s political success in dealing with many threats within and outside it. Read from this perspective, one might say, that The Pioneers is the political story of the foundation, survival, and progress of Templeton, a “Bildungsroman” of Templeton. This narrative of political growth subsumes the personal survival of Judge Temple, his unique daughter Elizabeth, and that of the communal survival of the white settlers. Judge Temple, we are told, recruited these settlers, in an effort to civilize the wilderness. At a national level, The Pioneers can be seen as a romance of national survival, a microcosmic enactment of the establishment, survival, and growth of the nation. This romance of national growth and survival consciously and unconsciously explores such crucial political issues as law, nature, property, marriage, religion, and the relation with the natives.

Fictionally speaking, The Pioneers takes place between 1793 and 1794 in Templeton, a newly established white settlement at Lake Otsego. The narrative focuses on the clash between the founder of Templeton Judge Temple and the white romantic hunter Natty Bumppo, who has been living happily in the wilderness befriending, as he has always boasted, its nature and its native inhabitants, yet without giving up his whiteness and civilization.

As pointed out by Daryl E Jones, Judge Temple Marmaduke founded Templeton whose survival, consolidation, and progress hinge on the judge’s political success in dealing with many threats within and outside it (69). Read from this perspective, one might say, that The Pioneers is the political story of the foundation, survival, and progress of Templeton, a “Bildungsroman” of Templeton. This narrative of political growth subsumes the personal survival of Judge Temple, his unique daughter Elizabeth, and that of the communal survival of the white settlers. Judge Temple, we are told, recruited these settlers, in an effort to civilize the wilderness. Unsurprisingly, as demonstrated by several scholars, the conflict between law and nature is one the most, if not the most, central themes of The Pioneers. No wonder then it has spilled much ink and engendered a heated debate throughout the years. Although no one can undermine the thematic centrality of this conflict, one might say that by giving it the utmost attention, critics have undermined the more central discursive conflict that has had a tremendous effect on the novel’s "cultural work", to use Jane Tompkins' ‘sensational’ phrase. This conflict is the latent conflict between Judge Temple and Major
Effingham over property and the right both claim over the vast lands of Templeton and its surroundings.

In the context of *The Pioneers*, similar to love and marriage, property is a discourse of national and colonial consolidation, through which Judge Temple subtly legitimizes native expropriation through matching his daughter Elizabeth to the thought-to-be half-breed, Major Effingham’s heir Oliver Edwards, who, is an example of Cooper’s contribution in fashioning an American gentleman. Through deconstructing the discourse of property, I will try to show, that behind Judge Temple’s obsession to acquire more lands, there is, indeed, a latent ‘Cooperian’ dream, if not a prophecy, of a rising American empire.

In default of a Native American resistance, Templeton is an arena of “interstitiality,” to use Homi Bhabha’s word, where two colonial gladiators peacefully compromise and agree to share the appropriated land. Property is indeed a very rich site of political, national, and racial negotiations that can help us unveil Cooper’s imperialist discourse. The centrality of the discourse of property throughout the romance has encouraged critic Eric Cheyfitz to describe *The Pioneers* as a romance of Property. “The Pioneers,” states Cheyfitz, “which can define the genre of the traditional western film, is a romance of property” (21). It is worth mentioning, however, that Cooper does not investigate property from a legal or philosophical perspective. Indeed, as convincingly argued by Mary Junqueira and others, what politically interests Cooper is the legitimization of white appropriation of native lands.

In the opening chapter of *The Pioneers*, Cooper exhibits particular interest in both the vast lands surrounding Templeton and the female beauty accompanying Judge Temple. The land is the first character that we encounter in *The Pioneers*. It is metaphorically feminized and juxtaposed to the real female character who would be very instrumental in the ensuing conflict over property: Judge Temple’s heiress Elizabeth. Three male intruders suddenly interrupt Temple’s initial colonial gaze. The buck scene interrupts Temple’s initial romantic encounter with the landscape. In display of his patriarchal relationship both to the land and his daughter, Judge Temple shot a bullet towards a roaming buck. Instead of striking the buck, the bullet strikes Oliver Edwards who appears in the scene along with Natty Bumppo and the Indian Chingachgook. wouldn’t it have been more dramatically romantic had Judge Temple’s bullet struck Natty Bumppo, or even Chingachgook?

Cooper’s selective bullet at the deer scene is an evidence of the ubiquitous presence of Cooper’s imperial unconscious. It is this bullet that secures Judge Temple’s property, consolidates the settlement, and contains the most challenging threat that could have
confiscated him and thwarted his project at Templeton. It is taming “the lion” in that apparently half-breed Indian that represents the main political agenda of Judge Temple. This hinges on, transporting him from the locus of nature to the locus of culture and law through romance and love. Cooper, by selecting the seemingly half-breed Indian, who would turn out to be Young Edward Effingham, momentarily serves the romantic motif and ultimately serves his political unconscious.

Cooper’s obsession with legitimizing Judge Temple’s property has encouraged him to intrude into the narrative and interrupt the natural flow of the romantic plot. This intrusion becomes a very awkward and direct historical discourse that praises Judge Temple’s nationalistic history over that of his lost royalist friend Major Effingham. Cooper writes:

Educated in the most dependent loyalty, Mr. Effingham had, from the commencement of the disputes between the colonists and the crown, warmly maintained, what he believed to be, the just prerogatives of his prince; while on the other hand, the clear head and independent mind of Temple had induced him to espouse the cause of the people (35).

Because of his loyalty to the American Revolution, Judge Temple found himself the owner of vast lands that his old Royalist friend entrusted to him prior to the War of Independence.

Cooper never questions the legitimacy of Temple’s property. He does not see any moral or legal problem in what Temple did with his best friend. On the other hand, he tries his best to depict Judge Temple as an innocent and legal owner. According to Cooper, prior to the War of Independence, Major Effingham, willingly, “transmitted to Marmaduke for safekeeping all his valuable effects and papers” (36). When the war ended with the victory of the colonists, the new government confiscated all the Royalists. Judge Temple, therefore, found himself the ‘legal’ owner of Templeton and its surroundings:

While, however, he discharged his function with credit and fidelity, Marmaduke never seemed to lose sight of his own interest; for when the estates of the adherent of the crown fell under the hammers of the acts of confiscation, he appeared in New York, and became the purchaser of extensive possessions, at comparatively low prices (36).

It seems axiomatic that Judge Temple purchased the lands with the money Major Effingham confided to him.

Oliver Edwards’s appearance, therefore, appears to negotiate the issue of his grandfather’s property. This makes sense particularly if we remember that Oliver Edwards comes up with Natty Bumppo, who reveals at the end of the romance that he was one of
Major Effingham’s old faithful servants (441). This makes readers expect a conflict between Oliver Edwards and Judge Temple over the ownership of Templeton and its surrounding. This, however, never happens. Cooper succeeds in repressing such a conflict that could conjure up the old conflict royalists and colonists. Through a Deus ex machina—the unexpected reappearance of Major Effingham who endorsed the marriage between Judge Temple’s daughter to his unique heir Oliver Edwards—Cooper reconciles between royalists and Republicans in his envisioning of an America that can forget the agony of the past. To repress this conflict, Cooper successfully confines young Oliver Edwards in the cloak of the romantic lover, who is always ready and willing to give up everything for the sake of a union with his beloved. In the seventh chapter, for instance, after being injured and deported to Judge Temple’s mansion, Oliver Edwards firmly and angrily demands a compensation for the deer that Judge Temple believed he shot at the opening scene: “In the morning, then,” says Oliver, “I will return and see Judge Temple, and I will accept his offer of the sleigh in token of amity” (92). This tone of challenge surprises Judge Temple, who seems to wonder about the source of Edwards’ enmity to him. Temple says: “It is strange that one so young should harbor such feelings of resentment” (92). Temple’s surprise does not convince us that he was doubtful, if not sure, of Oliver Edwards’ real identity.

Cooper diverts his narrative to deal with the origin of the settlers, thus, violating, for another time, the natural flow of the plot. Through this diversion, Cooper provides Judge Temple with enough time so Temple can think of a subtle way to contain the threat of Young Oliver. Soon after this incident, Judge Temple informs his daughter that he would offer Oliver Edwards “a residence within these walls for life” (111). This confession foreshadows the marriage between Elizabeth and Oliver Edwards that would settle all the threatening conflicts in Templeton. “The marriage plot belongs to Temple more than to the happy couple,” Richard Godden writes; “Arguably, he knew who Edwards was almost from the beginning, and, therefore, has a direct interest in promoting a union that will protect the integrity of his lands” (135). Richard Godden’s point of view is approved by critic Eric Cheyfitz, who argues that, by changing the identity of Oliver Edwards from a threatening enemy into a son in law, Judge Temple gains ultimate control over the land (125).

Interestingly enough, through love, Judge Temple tames the wild in Oliver Edwards, who, through his return to culture, regains not only his lost identity, but also his whiteness and his civilization. This dramatic change stuns readers, as it does Natty Bumppo, who seems incapable of understanding what has happened to his young companion. In the pigeon
scene, Natty Bumppo verbalizes this feeling: “there is Mr. Oliver, as bad as the rest of them, firing into the flocks as if he was shooting down nothing but Mingo warrior” (246). After taming Oliver Edwards, Judge Temple does not find any problem in negotiating the problem of land ownership with him. When sympathizing with his old tutor, whom Judge Temple indicted of law violation, Oliver Edwards alludes to his rights in a scene on which Cooper comments by showing the importance of the discussion between the two men. Cooper’s phrase: "The volcano burst its boundaries" (345), strongly translates the delicacy of any possible conflict between the two men. What is latent in this repressed conflict is that Oliver Edwards, according to Judge Temple and Cooper, cannot claim any property as long as he still claims Indian blood. Neither Judge Temple nor Cooper is ready to discuss any Indian claim of land ownership. “I have heard young man that thou claimest descent from the natives," says Judge Temple," These lands are mine by the very grants of thy ancestry if thou art so descended” (345). Cooper, here, makes a very direct political message: the white appropriation of the lands is legitimate by the very virtue of being approved by the natives themselves. Judge Temple and Cooper’s obsession with land ownership translates the capitalist relentlessness to acquire more sources of production not only within the literal boundaries of Templeton but also within the metaphorical boundaries of China.

The capitalist deeds of appropriation, one may venture to say, hides beneath it an Oriental dream of an American empire. Interestingly, if viewed from the critical lens of Edward Said, The Pioneers can be perceived as an orientalist or/and an imperialist text. Said’s reference to Cooper in Culture and Imperialism is not random in my view. “There is also a dense body of American writing, contemporary with this British and French work,” Said tells us, “which shows a peculiarly imperial cast, even though paradoxically its ferocious anti-colonialism, directed at the Old World, is central to it. One thinks, for example, of the puritan “errand into the wilderness” and later that extraordinarily obsessive concern in Cooper, Twain, Melville, and others (63).

Among the twenty-four chapters that make The Pioneers, the sugar plantation scene and the mine scene clearly translate the imperialist unconscious of Cooper’s romance. These two scenes reveal how powerful is the ‘Cooperian’ romance in narrating not only a politically and racially harmonious nation, but also a capitalistically imperialist nation that dreams of creating markets everywhere in the globe. Again, it is Richard Jones, who reminds Judge

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Temple of the enormous benefit of introducing industry and technology in the sugar plantation that their obsequious agent Billy Kirby is managing. During their visit to the sugar plantation, Richard Jones deplores the lack of modern technology in the work of Judge Temple’s tenants:

“This is your true sugar weather, ‘duke,’” he cried; ‘a frosty night, and a sunshiny day. I warrant me that the sap runs like a mill-tail up the maples, this warm morning. It is a pity Judge that you do not introduce a little more science into the manufactory of sugar among your tenants. It might be done, sir, without knowing as much as Dr. Franklin—it might be done, Judge Temple (221).

Richard Jones’ judicious suggestion reveals an imperialist awareness of the need and benefit of exploiting the vast natural resources that natives could not exploit due to their technological “backwardness”. Technological superiority, as understood by Richard Jones, was, according to historian James Axtell, one of the most significant elements of white superiority in the history of the colonial encounters in North America. "The second more important course of the white man’s power in native America was his technological superiority", Axtell notes, "In a very short time, the enterprising newcomers discovered how to turn the natives awe of European technology to private advantage" (57).

Richard Jones’s dream of technologizing the sugar industry is just a starting point for what might be seen from a postcolonial lens as the romance’s imperialistic discourse: replacing the traditional imperialist powers of the world, Britain and France, and taking over their domination of international trade. It is, however, through undermining the awkward irony and accepting the literal meaning in Elizabeth’s reply to her cousin’s vision that we can uncover Cooper’s dream of an American domination of world trade:

And purchase the cargo of one of those ships that, they say, are going to China,” cried Elizabeth; “turn your potash-kettles into tea-cups, the scows on the lake into saucers; bake your cake in yonder lime-kiln, and invite the country to a tea party. How wonderful are the projects of genius! Really, sir, the world is of opinion that Judge temple has tried the experiment fairly, though he did not cause his loaves to be cast in moulds of the magnitude that would suit your magnificent conceptions (223).

As a woman, Elizabeth is stereotypically portrayed as too shallow to understand the dream of an American empire.\(^\text{11}\) Cooper, it is to be noted, has always been confident in the power

\(^\text{11}\) For feminist readings of Cooper, see Nina Baym, “The Women of Cooper's Leatherstocking

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of white man’s technology and its paramount role in transforming the American wilderness and exploiting its natural resources. In the opening scene, the encounter between the white man’s machine and the native nature augurs well for ultimate victory of the white man’s technology: the sleigh, as a sophisticated white man’s machine, triumphantly crosses the thaw, thus foreshadowing the indispensable role the white man’s machine would play in taming the native wilderness and conquering the world. This scene clearly translates Cooper’s projection of an industrial republic and not an agrarian republic as postulated by Brook Thomas, who claims that Cooper’s “vision of the ideal republic remained agrarian” (93).

Richard Jones’s dream of technologizing the sugar plantation is strongly approved by the capitalist Judge Temple who even predicts a change in the balance of imperialist power when he dreams of a new world system led by the United states of America after the decline of Britain and France. According to the expectations of Judge Temple, America will build up its empire on the ruins of the two traditional empires: “Thou reasonest with judgment, William,” returned Marmaduke. “So long as the old world is to be convulsed with wars, so long will the harvest of America will continue” (229). Cooper, here, is both prophetic and aware of the concept known as “the movement of empires.” The analogy that Cooper makes between Templeton, a microcosm of the rising empire, and Rome is culturally pregnant with Cooper’s dreams of the American empire. Cooper writes:

“Why, there is judgment in all things,” said Kirby, stirring the liquor in his kettle briskly. “There’s something when and how much to stir the pot. It’s a thing that must be larnt. Rome wasn’t built in a day, nor, for that matter, Temple-town ’ither, though it may be said to be a quick-growing place” (226).

In its building of an empire, the United States of America, as Cooper theorizes, needs power and patience as it needs the imperial expertise of its settlers who used to be British and French colonists. This is the case, for instance, with the French settler Mr. Le Quoi, who, as implicitly stated by Richard Jones, will be of great benefit in improving the sugar plantations in Templeton: “Here is Mr. Le Quoi, he has been in the West-Indies, and has seen sugar

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made. Let him give an account of how it is made there, and you will hear the philosophy of the thing” (222).

Sugar, along with tea, coffee, and spices, according to postcolonial theory, is one of the most imperialist commodities that stimulated western colonial enterprise. By invoking sugar industry and the wall of China, *The Pioneers* transforms the domestic conflict over property to an allegory of an American empire that has the superlative technological and capitalist capacities. With such technology and capitalism, Cooper prophesied that America will indubitably be capable of both monopolizing global trade and supplanting the declining British and French empires. As such, it is worthy of note that the American empire needs both inside territorial expansion and outside maritime ambitions. This latter, according to Martin Green, was hailed by Cooper as America’s most vital manifest destiny (162).

Fascinatingly, in his political essay *Notions of the Americans*, Cooper makes it clear that the American empire will not only be the fruit of the westward expansion, but also the result of gazing beyond the ocean. “The tide of emigration, which has so long been flowing westward, must have its reflux”, he prophetically asserted, "The great outlet of the rest of the world, the path of adventure, and the only, at least the principle, theatre for military achievement open to the people of this country is on the ocean”(73). Remarkably, when it comes to the idea of an American empire, Cooper exhibited a prophetic vision that modern history can do nothing but recognize. Judge Temple’s desire for more land property, Edward Said would have alerted us, can only expose a Cooperian dream of an American empire that would one day monopolize the wealth of the globe.

If certain modern readers cannot appreciate the literary art of Cooper due to an alleged unreadability, they should be gently reminded of his colossal contribution to the establishment and development of an initially post-colonial but ultimately imperial American mind. For all the obvious historicist (old and new) reasons, Cooper should be treasured outside the stifling artistic horizons of Mark Twain’s *Cooper’s Literary Offences*. Even if Cooper’s texts are allegedly delirium tremens, modern readers should join me—a post-colonial and global student of world texts and contexts—in disregarding Twain’s claims that “Cooper has scored 114 offenses against literary art out of a possible 115” (4). My present Cooper’s defenses should therefore be seen as an international homage to James Fennimore Cooper from a North African ‘Moor’ whose *Ibn Battutian* global scholarly journey from the South of the Mediterranean to the American Midwest was, Twain would not believe it, triggered by the ‘unreadable’ Cooper some twenty years ago.
References


Representations of Feminine Matters in Haruki Murakami’s Killing Commendatore

Hinako Oki

Abstract: Haruki Murakami has delved into the theme of losing females in his writings for many years. His representations of females have been almost overlooked, since they seem to be, at first glance, one-dimensional or stereotypical. In the broadest sense, that kind of analysis should be correct. However, in Killing Commendatore, the reader notices the development of the author’s representations of losing females. This essay is designed to illustrate the theme of losing as an essence of Murakami’s literature by analyzing the way in which the depictions of feminine matters develop into a more universal existence.

Introduction

Innumerable females have been lost in Haruki Murakami’s writings. Throughout his literary career, losing females has been a consistent theme. For example, in Norwegian Wood, the protagonist Watanabe loses his sweetheart, Naoko, and tries to hold on to the memories of her. The title of the anthology, Men Without Women, which was inspired by the identical title by Ernest Hemmingway, luminously suggests the importance of this theme. In addition, this recurrent theme has been especially developed in 1Q84, where the theme of seeking women transforms to be reciprocal in the relationship between Aomame and Tengo.

In Killing Commendatore, Murakami elaborates on this significant theme, as it is also a story on losing and regaining females. To begin this essay, I will summarize the plot. The narrator is an artist who draws commercial portraits. One day, he is informed of the intent to divorce by his wife. He then leaves their flat and goes on an odyssey around the Tohoku area in his car. After his trip, he is offered a vacant house to live in by his friend, Masahiko Amada. Masahiko’s father, Tomohiko, the great Japanese painter, used to live in the house. He is about to die at that time. Living in the house, the narrator finds a mysterious hole while searching for the sound of a ringing bell in the forest. Simultaneously, he feels the spirit of Tomohiko and finds his hidden painting called Killing Commendatore.

In the hole, an existence called the Idea has been confined. The narrator is acquainted with

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the Idea, which is an embodied of the image of the character of Commendatore from the painting. During these events, he draws the portrait of his neighbor, Menshiki, receiving extraordinarily high pay. Afterwards, Menshiki asks the narrator to draw a portrait of a beautiful girl called Mariye, who is suspected to be Menshiki’s daughter. Before completing the portrait, Mariye goes missing. In order to search for Mariye, the narrator enters the metaphorical world by killing Commendatore in front of the dying Tomohiko. As the story continues, the series of events begin to entangle each other. Through these experiences, the narrator resurrects his life as a person and as an artist by regaining his wife and establishing his identity.

As Murakami indicates in his ['Rabbit’ leads Murakami through novel / Latest work features protagonist reaching a new stage in life] interview,¹ this work is intended to be an homage to Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, which has the above theme in common. As Murakami himself says, *The Great Gatsby* has greatly affected his writing. The intended analogy between the two authors illustrates the significance of *Killing Commendatore* as the essential kernel in Murakami’s literature.

Moreover, this work develops the feminine representation that is found in previous works of Murakami and seems to open new facets to the reader.² In *Killing Commendatore*, as the subtitles show, the “Idea” and the “Metaphor” are crucial concepts. In this section, I will develop the concept of the Metaphor as suggested by Fumiko Asari.³ The work not only delineates the losing of women but also of the holistic power of femininity as the Metaphor. This essay will investigate the representations of females and feminine matters in *Killing

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¹ See the morning edition of Tokyo’s The Yomiuri Shimbun, 2nd of April 2017.
² As Tadahiko Haga infers in his book, female representations in Murakami’s writing have been almost overlooked until the present (80).
³ Asari discusses the meaning of the Idea and the Metaphor in her essay. In this thesis, I will focus on the fifth definition of the Metaphor in her discussion, as follows: “The fifth, then, is that the Metaphor means experiencing the story which will lead “I” to self-restoration and maturity. In chapter 55 of part two, “I,” upon visiting the underground world, hears the words of Donna Anna. She says, “It is filled with hidden possibilities that only finest metaphors can bring to the surface . . . It should be obvious, but the best metaphors make the best poems.” She realizes that Tomohiko Amada’s *Killing Commendatore* “was a perfect metaphor, one that launched a new reality into the world,” which leads “I” to the story that he “meets himself.” A “new reality” is the sum of internal experiences that “I” restarts by drawing the portraits requested of Menshiki, discovering the hidden hole in the forest and finding the Idea that appears from it, by traveling the underground world, trying again to communicate with his wife and finally, finding the possibility to live as an artist. The whole experience of the story is the self-restoration and gaining of maturity for “I” (45 Translation mine).” In this essay, I will expand this discussion that the Metaphor would be both the story of self-restoration, and the trigger of that story through the four females: Komi, Yuzu, Mariye and Mariye’s mother.
In order to analyze the universal relativity between the narrator and others. Furthermore, it will discuss the establishment of the protagonist’s identity as an artist by believing that the Metaphor relates to femininity.

I. Females Transcending Time and Space

After the metaphorical prologue depicts the narrator’s confrontation against the faceless man, the story begins with his recollections on parting from his wife, Yuzu. In that scene, Yuzu tells the narrator that she is going to leave him since she saw a realistic dream, as follows:

A few days ago, just before dawn, I had a dream,” she said instead. “A very realistic dream, the kind where you can’t distinguish between what is real and what’s in your mind. And when I woke up that’s what I thought. I was certain of it, I mean. That I can’t live with you anymore (18).

This quotation shows that Yuzu refuses the narrator since she saw the dream, which blends the boundary between the dream and reality. Yuzu’s words seem to suggest the characteristics of a worldview of this story, by a reality that resembles a dream. In the world of this story, the narrator experiences varieties of incredible events. He speculates on the series of supernatural events:

I felt like it had taken place in a dream. I must have been having a long, very vivid dream. Or maybe this world now was an extension of the dream, one I was shut up inside. But I knew this was no dream. This might not be real, but it wasn’t a dream either (238).

In this quotation, the narrator reflects on the surreal events which he has been through. Furthermore, the narrator’s entry in the metaphorical world exemplifies the aberration of reality in this story. He enters the metaphorical world that resembles the hole in the deep forest where he lost his younger sister Komi. When he enters the world of the Metaphor in order to save Mariye, who looks like Komi, he reaches the hole near his house and his body is moved supernaturally.

As we have seen, the narrator transcends space in an aberrational way. However, the transcendency of space and time can simultaneously be seen as a representation of lost females in this story. This timeless connection to the lost females can be seen in the representations of Komi, Yuzu, Mariye, and Mariye’s mother, and this connection among four females delineates
them as one “soul,” or a metaphor. In this section, I will analyze the affinity of these four females and how their existences are merged into one “soul” in the narrator’s mind.

Among these four women, Komi and Mariye’s mother are already dead. These two dead women are virtually positioned in the center of the story. Furthermore, since Komi would have been the most significant figure in this story, I will illustrate her as a prototype of the metaphor of femininity. At first glance, the story depicts the losing and regaining of the narrator’s wife, Yuzu. However, behind the surface of the story of Yuzu lies the shadow of the narrator’s dead sister Komi. After the scene of parting, the narrator recollects the first time he met Yuzu and why he was attracted to her. The following quotation illustrates Yuzu’s charm:

It was my wife’s eyes, too, that drew me to her. Something I could see deep in them. When I first saw those eyes, they jolted me. Not that I was thinking that by making her mine I could restore my dead sister or anything. Even if I’d wanted to, I could imagine the only thing that would lead to was despair. What I wanted, or needed, was the spark of that positive will. That definite source of warmth needed to live. It was something I knew very well, but that was, most likely, missing in me (28).

Here, the narrator depicts something in common between Yuzu and Komi. He finds “the spark of will” in both females. Although he denies that he wants to restore his dead sister, he has kept seeking something of Komi that he has already lost. This intense feeling of loss for Komi could be the driving force of the story. Since the narrator has had this profound feeling, he unconsciously sees Yuzu as having an existence similar to Komi, and this could make their relationship destructive.

The narrator reflects on the relationship between him and Yuzu and realizes he has thought of it based on the relationship between him and his dead younger sister (32). Such a conscious can be seen in his attitude during a sexual intercourse with Yuzu. The narrator calls Yuzu “Sudachi, a similar type of fruit, as a joke” (30). Although calling her the other name is a joke, it may symbolize the narrator’s unconscionness of seeking the soul of his dead younger sister (287). Simultaneously, Yuzu also feels that she is not Sudachi, but Yuzu herself. It is possible that Yuzu might feel uneasy since she is not told the “sole secret” (30) of the main reason he had been attracted to her, which is that her eyes reminded him so much of his dead sister.

Nevertheless, near the end of the story the relationship between the narrator and Yuzu is restored. The important factor that induces this restoration could be Mariye. She seems to dissolve the narrator’s conflict of seeing Komi’s figure in other females. The narrator drew the portrait of Komi after her death, before drawing abstract paintings at art university and

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commercial portraits as his job. His drawings were a sincere effort of his soul trying to awaken his sister’s (115). Drawing Mariye’s portrait could be seen as an act that is almost identical to him drawing his dead sister, since he confuses Komi’s figure while he is drawing Mariye’s, as in the following quotation:

I looked at those three dessan over and over again, intently focusing, trying to construct a concrete picture of the girl in my mind. As I did this, I got the distinct sense of Mariye Akikawa’s figure and that of my sister getting mixed into one. Was this appropriate? I couldn’t say. But the spirits of these two young girls nearly the same age were already, somewhere—probably in some deep internal recesses I shouldn’t access—blended and combined. I could no longer unravel those two intertwined spirits (331).

As this quotation shows, when looking at the three dessan of Mariye, the narrator sees Komi inside them. For him, the spirits of the two young girls are “blended and combined” and “intertwined.” This sense of blending and combining spirits develops further to include Yuzu (464) and, in the end, Mariye’s dead mother (619). Moreover, their images are combined with Donna Anna’s, as follows:

Cheered on by Donna Anna and Komi, I had managed to overcome my deep claustrophobia. No, Donna Anna and Komi could have been a single entity, Donna Anna at one moment, Komi at the next. Together, perhaps, they had shielded me from the dark powers, and protected Mariye Akikawa at the same time (598).

This is the scene after the narrator exits the metaphorical world. In the metaphorical world, he is helped by Komi and Donna Anna to exit it. The narrator, at the time, considers Donna Anna and Komi as “a single entity” that protects both him and Mariye.

As we have seen, the souls of four females are united to Donna Anna for the narrator. It is interesting that four females are combined to a “single entity,” though two of the four females (Komi and Mariye’s mother) are already dead, while Yuzu and Mariye are still alive. By combining their existences, the narrator’s mind seems to transcend time to meet Komi’s soul again, experiencing catharsis.

II. The Hole as Femininity

In section two, I have delineated that the four females are symbolically combined as a single entity and, therefore, the narrator’s mind succeeds in transcending time to meet Komi on a
metaphorical level. The overlapping images of them suggests that femininity absolutely reigns in the world of the story, since the narrator seems to keep finding images of lost females throughout. In this section, I will analyze the meaning of femininity in the depictions of the hole. The hole should be the starting point of the story and should be the symbolical origin of femininity; the femininity the narrator is attracted to is symbolized in the imagery of the hole.

To begin with, the hole is the very place the Idea was confined in. Inside the hole, the Idea was ringing the bell and the narrator, upon hearing the sound, emancipated it. The emancipation of the Idea virtually means the main story begins when this event occurs in chapter 15, as suggested by the title “This is Only the Beginning.” Although the emancipation is “only” the beginning, it certainly is the beginning. Furthermore, the hole is virtually the trigger of the story.

Although the main plot begins with the narrator’s parting with Yuzu, the essential beginning of this story could be the narrator’s losing of Komi when she entered the hole. When the narrator was thirteen years old and Komi ten, they went alone to Yamanashi Prefecture to visit their mother’s brother. They visited the cave where the narrow hole exists. Upon discovery, Komi was interested since it looked like “Alice’s rabbit hole” (250). Despite the narrator’s worries, Komi had entered the hole and exited from there after a while. Nevertheless, the narrator thinks that Komi had already gone to the world of death at that time (252-53).

The narrator is convinced that Komi’s life was snatched from her when she was in the hole. For the narrator it is not an assumption, but a conviction. After the narrator saw that her dead body had been confined in a small coffin, he began to fear narrow places. It is certain that her death was an unequivocally traumatic experience for him. This traumatic experience recurs when the narrator enters the metaphorical world. Therefore, the hole could be the beginning or the origin of the story since one of the themes could be the narrator’s triumphing of his trauma.

In the metaphorical world, he visits a cave which resembles the one in Yamanashi Prefecture, and enters the hole where Komi lost her life. After exiting the metaphorical world, the narrator reaches the hole near his house in Odawara. The two holes are connected. They are identical existences on a metaphorical level.

Interestingly, feminine imagery is luminously depicted in both holes. Specifically, the hole

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4 The motif of Alice in Wonderland is recurrent in Murakami’s literature. For example, see Hard-Boiled Wonderland and The End of The World, and 1Q84. Even in the above interview, Murakami describes writing his books as follows: “Once I start to write a book, every day is like trying not to lose sight of a rabbit that is leading the way” (Yomiuri).
in Yamanashi Prefecture seems to be depicted as the womb and the one in Odawara is depicted as the vagina. Both feminine images of the holes imply the ambiguous border between the self and others. First, I focus on the hole in Yamanashi Prefecture. After exiting the hole, Komi describes it, as follows:

I managed to squeeze through the narrow part, and then deeper in it suddenly got lower, and down from there it was like a small room. A round room, like a ball. The ceiling’s round, the walls are round, and the floor too. And it was so, so silent there, like you could search the whole world and never find any place that silent. Like I was at the bottom of an ocean, in a hollow going even deeper. I turned off the flashlight and it was pitch dark, but I didn’t feel scared or lonely. That room was a special place that only I’m allowed into. A room just for me. No one else can get there. You can’t go in either (251).

This description of the hole inevitably associates images of the womb. The room of the hole is “round” and it is “so silent,” as though she is “at the bottom of an ocean.” The roundness and the silence of the hole imply the conditions in the womb. The image of the ocean also suggests femininity or maternity. Furthermore, its darkness and the lack of fear or loneliness illustrate that the hole symbolizes the womb since it is the place where unborn babies are connected to their mother. This image is empathized in Komi’s further description that in that room, “it’s like your body is gradually coming apart and disappearing . . . You don’t know if you still have a body or not. But even if, say, my body completely disappeared, I’d still remain there. I wanted to stay there forever” (252). Komi’s words suggest the ambiguity of the border between child and mother in the womb. This assumption is reinforced by the narrator, who has “gotten too big to get in” (251) the room.

Nevertheless, the narrator enters the hole in the metaphorical world to save Mariye in the end. Before entering the hole, the narrator is in his house and starts to sketch it, as follows: “As I sketched, the eerie sensation that I was merging with the pit returned. It wanted me to draw it . . . It was a pure act of creation, and it brought with it a kind of joy . . . Only then did it hit me how much it looked like a woman’s genitals” (381).

In this scene, it could be said that the narrator has found a way to enter the hole by feeling that he is “merging with the pit.” He feels “the eerie sensation” while he is drawing the hole and with “a kind of joy,” the narrator enjoys the “pure act of creation.” These depictions show the narrator’s resurrection of his passion toward creation. Simultaneously, the narrator’s entering the hole should result in his rebirth after confronting the bitter trauma of losing Komi. By saving Mariye the narrator accomplishes saving Komi in a reciprocal meaning, which he
could not do in his past.

III. The Establishment of the Narrator’s Identity

As we have seen, the four females are combined as a single entity in the narrator’s mind, and his spirit is seemingly reborn by entering the hole that is represented as the womb or vagina. In this section, I will discuss the universal relativity between the narrator and others which is led by the feminine power.

The worldview of this story delineates that every existence or phenomena is connected to each other, and this connectivity unequivocally encourages the narrator to find and establish his identity. The narrator undoubtedly lives in the world of relativity. Just before killing Commendatore, the narrator realizes the connectivity of everything, as follows: “I felt the rush of owl wings, and heard a bell ring in the dark . . . Everything was connected somewhere” (540). The narrator’s words illustrate that everything in this story seems to be “connected somewhere.”

In such a world of relativity, the narrator finds his identity from the interlocution with Menshiki, Tomohiko, and the man with the Subaru Forester. To begin with, the relationship between the narrator and Menshiki grows deeper through the making of Menshiki’s portrait. Their close relationship is not formed entirely naturally; Menshiki’s intentions are involved in the construction of their relationship.

Menshiki describes the act of drawing or being drawn as “a kind of exchange” (102). His view toward constructing the artwork illustrates it as the mingling of two persons. Menshiki is seemingly forming a firm relationship with the narrator, and through the act of drawing or being drawn in the portrait they exchange their parts metaphorically. Working on his intentions, the narrator also begins to feel that he is connected to Menshiki. He feels this similarity to Menshiki, as follows:

And strangely enough (at least to me it felt strange), I’d begun to feel a closeness to Menshiki, a closeness I’d never felt to anyone before. An affinity—no, a sense of solidarity, really. In a sense, we were very similar—that’s what I thought. The two of us were motivated not by what we had got hold of, or were trying to get, but by what we’d lost, what we did not now have (289).

In this scene, it is significant that they have become close since both are motivated by what they “did not now have.” These sentences particularly delineate the importance of the theme of
losing in the story. As I have already indicated, losing is the obvious theme in Killing Commendatore. Although this theme is indeed consistent in Murakami’s writing, it seems to be particularly developed in this story.

In Killing Commendatore, both females and a male become lost. The theme of losing females develops to become more universal since the narrator’s sense of loss also resonates with that of Tomohiko; Tomohiko could not have saved his brother just as the narrator could not have saved Komi. Like the narrator who was always trying to save Komi, Tomohiko had always been trying to save his brother, Tsuguhiko, since their childhood (396). Interestingly, both Tsuguhiko and Komi were three years younger than Tomohiko and the narrator. Moreover, the narrator accomplishes Tomohiko’s hidden will in the painting, Killing Commendatore.

By literally killing Commendatore in front of Tomohiko, the narrator can enter the metaphorical world to meet Komi again on a spiritual level. This murder has further meaning as in the following quotation, where Commendatore describes the meaning of killing him to the narrator: “‘All right, now bring it down,’ the Commendatore said. ‘I know my friends can do it. Remember, my friends will not be killing me. My friends will be slaying your evil father. The blood of your evil father shall soak into the earth’” (542). The words of Commendatore suggest that for the narrator, killing him signifies the murder of the evil father.

Who, then, is the evil father for the narrator? He is the man with the Subaru Forester who symbolically reproaches him repeatedly. When traveling around the Tohoku area, the narrator accidentally had sexual intercourse with an unknown woman. From that time, the image of the man with the Subaru Forester has been occasionally following the narrator and tells him the metaphorical message that “I know exactly where you’ve been and what you’ve been up to” (217). Although the narrator realizes the man’s rancor, he cannot understand the reasons for it. This enigma in the narrator’s mind reflects the ambiguous or multistoried meaning of killing Commendatore, as it describes this killing as to kill “another someone’s body” (543).

The ambiguity in killing Commendatore implies that the narrator both kills his evil father for himself and kills “someone” instead of Tomohiko. By accomplishing the will of Tomohiko and himself by killing Commendatore, the narrator succeeds in establishing his identity as an artist. Tomohiko should be a role model for the narrator as a father for a son. For the narrator, Tomohiko is a good father in contrast to the man, with the Subaru Forester, who is an evil father.

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Conclusion

This essay delineates the way in which the losing of females is transformed to have a universal meaning. By mingling the existences of the self and others, the narrator seems to acquire his own identity as an artist. In this story, the narrator finds his role model in Tomohiko. For the narrator, Tomohiko is the good father who shows him the ideal way of living. By referring to the life of Tomohiko and by accomplishing his hidden will from the painting, the narrator intakes this metaphorical father’s former life and improves it with his own. Through the universal relativity developed from the femininity, the narrator kills Commendatore as an evil father and acquires his identity.

*Killing Commendatore* is indeed a story of losing. However, the narrator regains the lost object in a metaphorical way. This regaining is accomplished by believing in the power of the Idea and the Metaphor. One of the clarified statements in this story should be that believing is significant, as the narrator says that his daughter should believe in the existence of Commendatore (681). This statement should suggest a kind of message or prayer in the present world, especially after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, since that historical event is luminously imposed into the story. By publishing this story, Murakami imposes his statement about the significance of his commitment to the world by depicting the mingling of the self and other.

References


5 Murakami indicates the background of *Killing Commendatore* in the interview as follows: “There were expectations that the advent of the internet would make discourse, which had been dominated by the mass media, more democratic. However, the opposite has happened. In Japan, after the bubble economy burst, we had the Great Hanshin Earthquake, the Tokyo subway sarin attack, the economy was in the doldrums, then we had the Great East Japan Earthquake and the nuclear accident [Fukushima]. . . I thought our state and the economic system would have become more sophisticated, but that didn’t happen. Even so, I believe good stories can give people a certain kind of power (Yomuri).”
Abstract: This paper aims to explore the issue of modernity in Chinese philosophy in the early 20th century. The case study focuses on modern scholar Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877-1927)'s criticism of his contemporary Gu Hongming 辜鴻銘 (1857-1928)'s English translation of the classical Confucian text Zhongyong. I argue that Wang Guowei and Gu Hongming’s case in fact demonstrates two alternative approaches towards philosophical dialogue and cultural exchange. Wang’s approach is a very cultural context-sensitive one: understanding the differences and selecting what is needed for cultural inspiration and reformation—we could call this approach nalaizhuyi 拿來主義 (taking-inism)—borrowing without touching the cultural essence. Gu’s approach is more a songchuzhuyi 送出主義 (sending-outism). It is a global-local context sensitive one: searching for the local’s path towards the global. Reevaluating Gu’s not very exact cultural translation can provide an opportunity to look beyond the “modernization complex,” deconstruct westernization “spell,” and build a new internationalism. I further argue that Gu’s case represents a kind of risky songchuzhuyi and a false internationalism which makes the native culture speak in the other’s terms while Wang’s cultural stand and his “journey” back to his own cultural sensibility sticks to its own terms and discovers the value of the culture. I then further look at Wang Guowei’s ideal of shengshengzhuyi 生生主義 (live-life-ism) which was originally expressed in his Hongloumeng Pinglun 紅樓夢評論 (Critique of A Dream of Red Mansions, 1904) and claim that not only can the ideal of shengshengzhuyi explain the underlying reason for an essential turn in Wang’s academic interests from Western philosophy to Chinese history and archaeology, but it can also be applied positively to the contemporary world.

Introduction

This paper aims to explore the issue of modernity in Chinese philosophy in the early 20th century. I have raised the issue in the paper “Wang Guowei and A Dream of Red Mansions” where I discuss how crucial to understand the role that Chinese sensibility plays in Wang Guowei’s borrowing from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in his idea of tragedy (see JET 8 [2018]). The case study focused on Wang Guowei’s Hongloumeng Pinglun 紅樓夢評論 (Commentaries on A Dream of Red Mansions, 1904). I tried to show that Wang Guowei’s alienation/misunderstanding/misinterpretation of Schopenhauer and

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his becoming close to Nietzsche was actually a double movement (backing to his own cultural sensibility), which shows the true face of the beginning of Chinese aesthetic modernity. The case study of this paper will be focusing on Wang Guowei’s criticism of his contemporary Gu Hongming (1857-1928)’s English translation of the classical Confucian text Zhongyong. Interpreting the differences between Wang Guowei and Gu Hongming will help us further understand the issue at hand. I would argue that at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the process of modernizing Chinese culture, Wang Guowei and Gu Hongming’s perceptions of comparative philosophy are quite a showcase. Wang passionately searched for new blood to refresh the old tradition, but his borrowing is dominated by his unconscious attachment to his own culture and a deep understanding of the difference between the East and the West. By contrast, Gu was educated by Western culture; his double movement is shown in the fact that he eventually chose to apply Chinese civilization to a culture he was familiar with. It is very important to revalue his cultural translation: on the one hand, Gu’s translation probably is just like Wang ’s critique—departing from the original cultural meaning. On the other hand, his cultural translation complicates the issue of modernization in the early 20th century China.

I will divide this paper into two parts. In part one, I will start with a brief introduction of Gu Hongming and Wang Guowei, then I will discuss Wang’s criticism of Gu’s translation; In part II, I will offer some of my thoughts on the issue of Chinese philosophical modernity and cultural communication.

I. Wang Guowei’s Criticism of Gu Hongming’s Translation of the Zhongyong

I-1. Gu Hongming and Wang Guowei

Gu Hongming was born in Penang, Malaysia in 1857 and studied in Scotland, Germany and Paris, in the fields of literature, engineering, laws. He went back to China in 1885, and worked for a very famous Qing reformer and high official Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909) for 20 years. Zhang was famous for advocating “Chinese learning for fundamental principles and Western learning for practical application”. In 1915, Gu became a professor at Peking University. He lived in China until his death in 1928.

Wang Guowei was 20 years younger than Gu Hongming. Gu had developed his interest in Chinese culture in his late 20’s when he was in Europe. Wang developed his interest in Western philosophy in his 20’s too, when he moved from his hometown in
Zhejiang province to Shanghai. However, his interest in Western philosophy lasted less than 10 years. In their later years they were both viewed as “cultural conservatives.” They taught at Beida and Tsinghua respectively and both wore traditional clothes and queues, which was symbolic in the eyes of cultural revolutionaries in the 1920’s.

Gu’s translation of the Zhongyong was first published in Shanghai in 1906, and later in London in 1908. At that time, Wang Guowei was the chief philosophy editor of a Journal called World of Education in Shanghai. He published his criticism of Gu’s English translation in that journal in the very same year, 1906. Gu had been back in China for above 20 year, while Wang Guowei was still passionate about Western philosophy.

I-2. Wang Guowei’s Criticism of Gu Hongming

In his (Shu Gu Tangsheng Yingyi Zhongyonghou 書辜氏湯生英譯中庸后) [Comments on Gu Tangsheng’s English Translation of Zhongyong], 1906), Wang comments that the biggest problem with Gu’s translation is that it is “not faithful to the past” since he applies Western philosophical terms which bear no [semantic] connection at all with Zhongyong’s own terms…. He says,

Although Zhongyong 中庸 is a philosophy which raises ‘Cheng’ (誠) [integrity, sincerity] as the essence of cosmos and life, it is still different from modern Western philosophy. ‘Cheng’ as a concept is not only different from Fichte’s ‘Ego,’ Schelling’s ‘Absolute,’ Hegel’s ‘Idea,’ Schopenhauer’s ‘Will,’ and Hartmann’s ‘Unconscious,’ but it is also different in interpretation and explanation. I don’t think that borrowing the concepts of modern Western philosophy to interpret ancient Chinese philosophy is the right way to approach our ancient philosophy in its own terms. Our ancient scholars were not so systematic in their writing; in one passage, they can freely talk about both tiandao 天道 and renshi 人事, the same as for a whole chapter, and they feel free to use one word to express all the different meanings, and to use one concept to discuss both tian and human beings. (Wang, 1997, 45)

He chose one paragraph from Gu’s translation of Ch. 23 of the Zhongyong to show why the words Gu chose to translate the Zhongyong were philosophically unfit:

誠則形，形則著，著則明，明則動，動則變，變則化。

Where there is truth (誠 cheng), there is substance(形 xing). Where there is substance (形 xing), there is reality (著 zhu). Where there is reality (著 zhu), there is intelligence (明 ming). Where there is intelligence (明 ming), there is power (動 dong). Where there is power (動 dong), there is influence (變 bian). Where there is influence (變 bian), there is creation (Creative power” in the London version) (化 hua). (Ibid, 46)
Gu uses truth to translate the central concept of the Zhongyong, 真诚 cheng, which is usually translated as sincerity or integrity. 形 xing (form; determinate) as substance; 著 zhu (manifest) as reality; 明 ming (understanding) as intelligence; 動 dong (affected) as power; 變 bian (change) as influence; 化 hua (transformed) as creation/creative power.

As I pointed out in “Wang Guowei and A Dream of Red Mansions”:

One of the most persistent ideas in Chinese philosophy is that since there is no transcendent divinity in Chinese culture comparable to the Western transcendent spirit, the Chinese concerns for “life” are expressed and embodied in “the proper way of human beings” (rendao 人道) and concrete, familiar things in this world (renshi 人事). Concepts such as dao and tian in Chinese philosophy cannot be interpreted in the same way as the concepts of Idea, God, Will, and other absolute principles often found in Western philosophy. Chinese philosophy concerns itself with the proper way of human beings even more than the way of tian; or, to put it another way, the way of tian (tiandao 天道) is actually the same as the proper way of human beings (rendao 人道) and is not something above and beyond rendao. (He, 2018, 60)

Cheng as a philosophical concept shouldn’t be understood in the way as the one behind the many, the truth beyond or behind things. This chapter of Zhongyong, in fact, describes the ongoing inter-transforming process of cultivating utmost cheng in oneself. It expresses all the spontaneous, continuous possibilities in this process. The metaphoric, poetic Chinese language expresses these inter-relational, con-consummate achievements in a holographic but not a systematic way. Applying Western terms such as truth, power, reality and influence, will misinterpret the Chinese sensibility and turn it into an effective, external, causal, linear power relationship. Just like Wang says in his comments:

...[those terms are] now translated into Western metaphysical terms such as substance, reality, isn’t a mistake to use Western philosophy to interpret this book (Zhongyong)?...there is no the term like tian in foreign language, just like no such term as God in our Chinese language....our Chinese tian is not the heavens 天, not God, it is something in between, it is theomorphic physical reality but has the spirit of divinity. That is the same for the concept of xing 性. (Wang, 1997, 47)

Wang’s criticism is no doubt correct. Not only does it show that he is a master of his own culture, just as the later scholars agreed, but it also demonstrates his deep understanding of both Chinese and Western philosophy. This case actually could be used as an example to argue against the mainstream reading of Wang’s borrowing from Western philosophy—

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call it the “westernization” interpretation (I have argued in “Wang Guowei and A Dream of Red Mansions against this dominant [mis]reading). I will explain my point in more details later.

Now, probably it is a little hard to understand Gu Hongming’s case. Gu is also famous for his language abilities and cultural sensibility. Of course, those things cannot guarantee that he would be a good translator. With 20 years lived in China when he translated Zhongyong, with his reputation as an “extreme” protector of traditional values and culture, [he is notorious for advocating monarchy and concubinage], was Gu’s understanding of Chinese culture really as inferior as Wang criticized? Or there was a hidden thought behind his cultural translation?

Let us first look at the English words he chose to translate the title of Zhongyong---The Conduct of Life; or, The Universal Order of Confucius. He explained: “the Chinese word Chong 中 means central-hence right, true, fair and square; and Yung 庸 means common, ordinary—hence universal. The two Chinese words therefore mean the true, fair and square universal standard of right; in short, the common sense of right.” (Gu, 1920, 7)

As I mentioned above, Gu was an advocator of Chinese civilization. He claims that the Western civilization failed to order the society with its police and physical force, whereas Chinese civilization is successful in cultivating “moral force.” He argues:

This force in China is not police or physical force. It is the force of the highly developed, law-abiding instinct of the Chinese people…It comes from a strong sense of moral obligation in the Chinese people. But whence do the Chinese obtain this? The answer is: from Chinese civilization. I say, therefore, that Chinese civilization is a wonderful success. (Ibid, 12)

In another very popular book, The Spirit of the Chinese people (1915), Chinese civilization is described as a “religion of good citizenship,” (Gu, 2013b, xxv) a “power of goodness.” (Ibid, xxix) Gu hoped to derive from Chinese civilization a way of ordering human society. Having this strategy--exploring the Chinese model of “universal order, a conduct of life” for the world, it is not that hard to understand this seemingly strange translation:

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\begin{align*}
\text{xing} & \quad \text{性 as law of our being} \\
\text{dao} & \quad \text{道 as moral law} \\
\text{jiao} & \quad \text{教 (usually translated as education) as religion}
\end{align*}
\]
In *The Spirit of the Chinese people*, Gu again provides an eloquent argument for the Confucian “religiousness,” he claims that

The greatness of Confucianism lies even in *this*, that it is not a religion...the greatness of Confucianism is that, without being a religion, it can take the place of religion; it can make men do without religion. (Ibid, 16)

He was so eager to provide a “remedy” for Western civilization that he composed a “practical” or “popular” translation rather than a philosophical translation for Western readers. Here, I don’t mean that he didn’t want to do a faithful translation, I believe that he actually believed that he was doing a faithful translation. He was so faithful to his mission that he failed to be faithful to translating Chinese sensibility in its own terms.

At the end of the *Preface* to the *Zhongyong* translation, Gu stated again:

In the following translation then this idea of moral obligation, which forms the basis of human conduct and social order in the scheme of the Chinese civilization, will be explicitly set forth. There is of course no “new learning” in all this, but what is better, there is *true* learning in it... The enunciation in the same form and language as it is in this book, written two thousand years ago, is to be found in the latest writings of the best and greatest thinkers of modern Europe. (Gu, 1920, 13)

His “reconstructed” translation provided a pragmatic interpretation of Chinese values that, in his mind, were very compatible with great modern European philosophy —which is exactly Wang’s criticism.

It is worth to mention that twenty years later, in 1926, only a year before he committed suicide in Kunming lake, Wang Guowei was a Tsinghua Professor in Classical studies and was the same age of Gu Hongming when Gu published his translation of the *Zhongyong*. Wang wrote a note after his comments for another publication which said “Mr. Gu is known for his brilliance and knowledge. This paper pointed out some small specks in his translation. If readers use this comment to diminish Mr. Gu’s contribution, it is definitely not my wish, nor was of my intention when I wrote this article twenty years ago either.” (Wang, 1997, 54)

I personally believe that, by then, Wang Guowei probably understood why Gu Hongming gave *Zhongyong* such a foreign face. It was already far from his interest in Western philosophy and they were already both be called as cultural conservatives.
II. Some Thoughts on Cultural Translation, Issue of Philosophical Modernity, and New Internationalism

II-1. Cultural Translation and the Issue of Philosophical Modernity
This case study serves not only as a simple remind that we should conduct in situ practice when evaluating the process of modernization in the beginning of the 20th century. The “westernization” reading of modern scholars’ works is one of the typical issues. What do I mean by “westernization” reading? I think, this phenomenon is represented by two trends. One, studies on modern Chinese culture are measured by Western culture, focusing on whether the “borrowing” is correct/success or not; two, using “the borrowed principle and methodology” to argue “scientifically” for the uniqueness and superiority of Chinese culture or for its self-denial.

Wang Guowei and Gu Hongming’s case in fact demonstrates two alternative approaches towards philosophical dialogue and cultural exchange. Wang’s approach is a very cultural context-sensitive one: understanding the differences and selecting what is needed for cultural inspiration and reformation—we could call this approach nalaizhuyi 拿來主義 (taking-inism)—borrowing without touching the cultural essence. Gu’s approach is more a songchuzhuyi 送出主義 (sending-outism). It is a global-local context sensitive one: searching for the local’s path towards the global. Gu applies Western terms in his translation and suspends the cultural nuances to fit the globality. One could say, that he was trying to build a new internationalism with Chinese civilization. Their senses of “modern” have different directions and can’t be simply categorized in the main “westernization” generalization. A comparative perspective is needed when introducing a new culture in one’s own society, so one could learn to properly select without losing what should be cherished for the sustainable development of a long-standing culture.

A double movement is also needed so one could develop a healthy sense of contribution to the global dialogue. Wang Guowei’s passionately searching for new blood to refresh the old tradition is still very inspiring in many ways in contemporary Chinese scholarship. His borrowing from Western civilization was selective and practical, determined by his deeply rooted cultural sensibility. Gu was actually selling Chinese culture in a language that was attractive or acceptable enough to Western readers. To reevaluate his not very exact cultural translation can provide an opportunity to look beyond the “modernization complex,” deconstruct westernization “spell,” and build a new

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internationalism. Of course, we should admit that Gu’s reconstructed cultural translation is very risky—it might develop an even deeper and bigger misunderstanding of one’s own culture and the target audience, so it eventually will end up as a false internationalism. Perhaps studying the intention behind this kind of translation and pointing out its value and damage is one way that leads to the proper path—especially after a hundred years of movement of modernity.

II-2. Building a New Internationalism through Wang Guowei and Chinese Philosophy

Now I would like to take a new perspective to further look at Wang Guowei’s case. In fact, after 1907, Wang Guowei experienced a rather dramatic academic turn. His short passion for xixue 西學 (Western learning) died out as his devotion to guogu 國故 (national cultural heritage studies) intensified. Although one could argue that his mentor, Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉 (1866-1940), the famous archaeologist, played an important role in this turn, still we should never underestimate the importance of the inner departure made by Wang himself. ¹ As a devoted Confucian scholar, Wang’s encounter with Schopenhauer inevitably turned out to be a rather frustrating experience. One passage from Hongloumeng Pinglun 《紅樓夢評論》 (Critique of A Dream of Red Mansions) demonstrates his cultural stand very well. In the passage, Wang refers to Schopenhauer’s pessimistic doctrine as “wusheng zhuyi 無生主義” (lifeless-ism) and characterizes his own doctrine, in direct opposition to Schopenhauer, as “shengsheng zhuyi 生生主義” (live-life-ism). I have quoted it in other articles on Wang Guowei, but never had chance to explain it. I requote it here:

One doctrine that is opposed to this (pessimistic) doctrine of lifeless-ism (wusheng zhuyi) is live-life-ism (shengsheng zhuyi)... Based on the ideal of live-life-ism, if we want to maximize the quality of life in this world, we should minimize the purview of the individual. The so-called “maximizing of happiness” and “benefit for the greater number” is only a dream of ethics... however, without this dream, our world will be ruled by the law of the jungle. (Wang, 1983, 58)

My interpretation is that Wang’s emphasis on live-life-ism was derived from what I call “cultural unconscious”—the very Confucian sensibility—renjian jingshen 人間精神 (the

spirit of this world) that is implied by the expression of “minimizing the purview of the individual” and “maximizing the happiness and benefit of the greater number.” This cultural unconscious was so dominant in his thinking that it made Wang eventually depart from Schopenhauer and Western philosophy altogether.

Interestingly, apart from the paragraph quoted above from Hongloumeng Pinglun, the phrase did not appear in any of Wang’s other works. Apparently, Wang had no intention of establishing a full-fledged theory of “living.” However, through my ongoing reading of Wang Guowei, I believe shengsheng zhuyi articulates his Confucian sensibility, as does the phrase renjian jingshen (the spirit of this world) that expresses it. Not only can it be used to explain the underlying reason for the essential turn in Wang’s academic interest from Western philosophy to Chinese philosophy, history and archaeology; it also provides a means to explore how the ideal of shengsheng zhuyi could be applied positively to the contemporary world.

Shengsheng zhuyi—live-life-ism is not only an affirmation of this human world (as I tried to show in the article “Wang Guowei and A Dream of Red Mansions”), but more importantly, it represents the ideal of living a sustainable life in this world. In an article Lan Jinnian zhi Xueshujie 《論近年之學術界》 (On Contemporary Scholarship) which was published in 1905, Wang criticizes Kang Youwei and others because they use the “new learning” (namely, Western learning in Chinese eyes) to “pursue their political goals.”

While Wang acknowledges the importance of national independence, he believes that independence and strength cannot be gained by joining the world’s mainstream, which is—competing and fighting for survival (zheng 争), using Wang’s expression in Hongloumeng Pinglun—“ruled by the law of the jungle.” (Wang, 1983, 58)

Many years later in 1924, by then Wang, as a well-known Chinese historian and “conservative” scholar, wrote a long memorial to Emperor Pu Yi (1906–1967), which is entitled as Lunzheng Xueshu 《論政學疏》 (Memorial on Politics). In that letter, Wang summarized the damages and harms of Western learning (xixue) to the already decaying Chinese civilization:

Western learning is prevailing in the world. It is because nations seek after wealth and

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2 I have used the concept of renjian jingshen 人間精神 (spirit of this world), or renjian qinghuai 人間情懷 (feelings for this world) to describe the cultural sensibility that plays role in Wang Guowei’s thinking.

3 Wang Guowei (1983), 95. This article was originally published in Jiaoyu Shijie 1, no. 93 (1905).
strength. However, since the Great War (World War I) in Europe, all the powerful states in the West are in decline…having never seen a life this cruel before… Half of the reason for the moral decline, fights and poverty, of the last 20 years in China was caused by this (the New Learning)... I have been thinking of the reasons and found two: one, Westerners consider rights as bestowed upon people. Their politics is all about wealth and powerful states. Contest and competition is a natural thing to them, making progress is considered as a great quality…therefore, states fight with each other; the superior fights the inferior, the poor fights the rich…those are all derived from greed. The harm of Western learning comes from the fighting heart.

I see the Westerners deal with things through scientific methodology. Science deals with space, time, materials and the bodies of humans and animals…as for human heart and human society, they have their own national/cultural character…cannot be ruled by science…Westerners only see this, but forget all the other aspects of life…this is the second disadvantage of Western methodology.4

Wang’s frustration and disappointment with the new learning is directed against its ideal of individualism and its valorization of struggle, contest and competition. For him, this is the root of life-less-ism. His nostalgia for the culture he was immersed in—a culture for “human heart and human society” (in that sense, Wang Guowei and Gu Hongming share the same feelings towards Chinese culture)—the root of the ideal of live-life-ism, is expressed in his letters to some of his close friends.

On March 14, 1919, in a letter to his mentor Luo Zhenyu, Wang wrote, “The current situation of the world is the consequence of the Western idea of pursuing wealth and strength in the last hundreds of years… If, in the future, there are still survivors, they must adopt Eastern values and politics.” (Wang, 1984, 285) Again, in 1920, in a letter to his Japanese friend, archeologist Kano Naoki (1868-1947), he wrote: “Eastern values and politics will prevail in this world in the future. A shallow mind just cannot see it.” (Ibid, 311)

Wang’s promotion of Eastern values is also expressed in one of his very influential historical works, Yinzhou Zhidulan 《殷周制度論》 (On Yin and Zhou Systems).5

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4 Quoted from Yuan and Liu (1996), 420-422. There were debates about the authenticity of the memorial. According to Luo Jizu, Luo Zhenyu’s grandson, the memorial was indeed written by Wang, Luo Zhenyu’s adaptation is without the beginning and the ending (Luo Jizu, Wang Guowei zhi Si [The Death of Wang Guowei], 291).

5 Wang Guowei’s Yinzhou Zhidulan 《殷周制度論》 (On Yin and Zhou Systems) was included in Guantang Jilin 《觀堂集林》 (Guantang Collection, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959). Guantang Jilin was a collection originally edited by Wang Guowei in 1922, which includes Wang’s works on ancient history, archaeology, Chinese graphology etc.—his contribution to guogu—cultural heritage studies. Guantang is Wang’s another style name.

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Like Confucius, Wang also “follows Zhou.” (Lunyu, 3: 14) Wang uses the ideas of qinqin 親親 (consummating intimacy [family feeling]), zunzun 尊尊 (revering the esteemed) and xianxian 賢賢 (lifting the good) to explain the ideal practice of Confucian moral-political philosophy. In a letter to Luo Zhengyu, on September 13, 1917, he explained why he was writing Yinzhou Zhidulun:

I just finished my writing on the political system of the Yin and Zhou Dynasties...It is about the reformation of the Shang system by the Zhou...The imperial system is derived from the sensibility of qinqin (consummating intimacy) tradition. Rulers, dukes and princes are derived from the zunzun (revering the esteemed) tradition... all the ritual ceremonies of the Zhou dynasty come from this system, and ruler, duke, high officials and common people are brought into morality by this system, making their community a moral one. There has never been a better political ideal. (Wang, 1984, 214)

Zhou, as an agricultural society with a patriarchal clan system, emphasized blood relationships and used these to enhance its authority. The Zhou ruler viewed the close clan relationship as the important band to bond the society. Wang Guowei does not promote the idea that Chinese society should return to the ancient patriarchal clan system, but rather examines the origin of this “moral group” in order to pursue the “ideal of politics.” That is, through these three concepts qinqin, zunzun and xianxian, Wang perceived the spontaneous moral power of natural feeling, which he viewed not only as the bond that holds the whole of society together, but also sustains it forever. He claims:

In the ancient time, the so called “guojia” 国家 (state family), is not just the crux of politics, it is also the crux of daode 道德... if the ruler, dukes and high official everyone follow one’s duty and ritual... if the upper understands the difference of male and female through qinqin zunzun and xianxian, the below will be regulated subsequently. This is called zhi 治 (governing)... this is the essence of the politics of Zhou... how could the sages in the ancient time have no intention to pursue one’s family’s happiness and wealth... but they do realize that one family’s happiness is one with ten thousand family’s happiness, and one and ten thousand family’s happiness is combined with its daode. Therefore, the one who rules long is focusing on de 德 (excellence) and min 民 (people). (Wang, 1959, 475-476)

Wang believes “the great strategy of peaceful governing of ten thousand of generations” to be expressed through the qinqin and zunzun system of Yin and Zhou. His confidence in the shengsheng (ceaselessly creative) system of Chinese moral political philosophy arises
exactly here, however, in a time of cultural angst, such as that when he took his own life, the confidence and the ideal were only destined to be a sentimental “dream” journey…

Conclusion: Shengshengzhuyi: The Contribution of Chinese Philosophy?

If Gu Hongming’s case represents a kind of risky songchuzhuyi and a false internationalism, Wang Guowei’s “journey” back might bring an opportunity to develop a new understanding of the culture which could be beneficial for contemporary world. One big difference between the cultural stands of Gu Hongming and Wang Guowei is Gu’s songchuzhuyi makes the native culture speak in the other’s terms, while Wang’s “journey back” sticks to its own terms and discovers the value of the culture.

Wang Guowei’s double movement back into his own cultural sensibility is a process of affirmation of his ideal of live-life-ism. He reads Confucian moral-political philosophy as “ziran 自然” (natural, spontaneous) philosophy. Confucian moral-political philosophy is an organic and dynamic philosophy derived from the authentic feeling of human beings. Wang’s fresh historical eye sees the Zhou political system as deriving from the true feeling for/with the people (i.e., “minyi 民彝”) (Wang, 1959, 477) which not only shows that Wang was eager to save the already collapsed last imperial dynasty (of course he tragically failed), but more importantly, to affirm that the essence of this “ziran” philosophy is not for contest (zheng 争), but for a sustainable development.

Yet, in his time of cultural angst, Wang, as a scholar searching for remedies to repair his culture and console himself, eventually failed. The disappointment and frustration with the new search for the meaning of life and nostalgia for the culture in which he was immersed was the main reason for him to choose death. In my opinion, Wang’s tragic ending only enhances the high value in which he held his culture and demonstrates strikingly how far the reality failed his ideal.

Wang’s frustration with the culture of zheng (fighting, competing) and his ideal of returning to the “ziran culture/philosophy” on which the shengsheng zhuyi (live-life-ism) is based should still inspire us who live in this contemporary world. Today, we live in a

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6 In Wang Guowei’s article Kongzi zi Xueshuo 孔子之學說 (Confucius’s Teachings) (was first published on the Journal of Education World [no. 161-165] in 1907-1908) in which he discusses Confucian tiandao as following ziran and shengsheng 生生 is its innate character. He then claims that “moral intention” (daode) is the ziran (nature) of human being (Wang Guowei, 1997, 110-116).
world that is so big and at the same time so small. We can experience the pains of others far from us—tsunamis and earthquakes, religious conflicts, power competition, global climate changes, etc. The philosophy of *shensheng zhuyi*, as expressed in Wang Guowei’s life and thinking, is needed for supporting each other and for rebuilding this one world with nature and one another.

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GOD’S ARE CRUEL: FAULKNERIAN SOURCES OF ENDŌ SHŪSAKU’S LITERATURE

Justyna Weronika Kasza*  

Abstract: The purpose of this essay is to put Endō Shūsaku, a well-known Japanese author for his work Silence (1966), on world literature map by focusing on diaries he kept during his stay in France (1950-1953). The study of Endō has focused on the influence of French authors, particularly Catholic writers, represented by François Mauriac, Georges Bernanos, and Julien Green. However, in his diaries, Endō repeatedly refers to American authors and it is clear that William Faulkner was one of the writers who had significant impact on his writing. Yet, the scholars of Faulkner in Japan have overlooked his influence on Endō. This paper will highlight new perspectives in researching Endō’s texts by expanding the frameworks of existing studies and recognize his writing as a contribution to Faulkner studies in Japan.

There is no such thing as was—only is. If was existed, there would be no grief or sorrow. I like to think of the world I created as being a kind of keystone in the universe; that, small as that keystone is, if it were ever taken away the universe itself would collapse. My last book will be the Doomsday Book, the Golden Book, of Yoknapatawpha County. Then I shall break the pencil and I’ll have to stop.
--William Faulkner

Faulkner is not the writer you should read in autumn. Nor should he be read on peaceful spring days or during the cold winter days. I feel that I can understand some of the world of perplexing writer such as Faulkner when I read his works on a hot summer day, my body covered in sweat in the full sunshine.
--Endō Shūsaku

I. Introduction: Shift of Influence from France to America on Japanese Literature

The works of William Faulkner occupy a special place in the history of post-war Japanese literature. Widely researched and discussed, translated and interpreted, his powerful narratives and unique literary techniques (whose linguistic specificities cannot be fully rendered in Japanese language), set direction for the development of post-war literature. This statement, however, may seem as an overcomplication, if not too redundant: “global Faulkner”, as suggested by the authors of the study on the

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writer’s legacy in global age published in 2009, much exceeds the frameworks of existing research, whereby the reader is no longer constrained to national boundaries. In accordance with this line of thinking, George Handley argues that such approach offers a new debate on the writer’s relevance to “New World cultures” and “makes the boundaries of one’s community tenuous since the reader is brought out of bounds, beyond the confines of accepted knowledge and into the uncertain terrain of calls and echoes between and among the communities” (Handley, 2009: XII). In other words, what Hadley aims to point out, is “the recognition that this knowledge is produced between author and reader, between revelation and translation” (Trefezer, 2009, XII).

Global approach places the great value on cultural translation that conditions the process of reading, rereading and appropriation of literary texts from distant lands and will remain important for the analysis in this paper.

As already noted, any attempt to properly outline the processes of formation of post-war Japanese literature, requires the recognition of two spheres of influences and interactions: first, French literature, predominantly, the existentialists (Sartre, Camus), but also the popularity of works by Mauriac, Gide, Bernanos, followed by the nouveau roman (Alain Robbe-Grillet) and the works by Françoise Sagan, just to mention few. Ōe Kenzaburo, Abe Kōbō, Mishima Yukio, as well as some of the members of Daisan no shinjin group (The Third generation of writers), including Endō Shūsaku, remained under the strong influence of French literature. Critics and literary historians, for instance Katō Shūichi and more recently Michael Emmerich observe that French impact spanned from the late 1940s and lasted approximately until the 1970s, after which the presence of American literature in Japan become more evident. As Emmerich points out, the proposed time caesura could be associated with the debut of younger generation of the writers, notably with Murakami Haruki.

Yet, it must be pointed out that the proposed differentiation does not fully cover, and these two cultural spheres of the influences (French/American) need to be acknowledged as overlapping and in constant interdependence. There are number of present-day writers and intellectuals, including Furukawa Hideo, Kazufumi Shiraishi, Ōe Kenzaburo, Abe Kōbō and Endō Shūsaku received university degrees in French literature.

1 Ōe Kenzaburo, Abe Kōbō and Endō Shūsaku received university degrees in French literature.

Ono Masatsugu, Wakamatsu Eisuke who openly point to French literature as the sources of inspiration. As I intend to demonstrate, the explicit time caesuras in literary studies may be misleading: Japanese literature has remained under the strong influence of both literary traditions, which on various levels constantly complement each other.

By treating the works of Endō Shūsaku (1923-1996) as the case study, I aim to propose the new paradigm of thinking on the issue of literary influences within the post-war Japanese literature, but also establish (where applicable) the context, background and the relevance of examining the impact of American literature, especially the works of William Faulkner, in the process of the formation of Endō Shūsaku’s literary texts.

II. Reading William Faulkner in Japan

A considerable amount of literature and critical studies have been published on Faulkner in Japan, some of which are worth mentioning here in order to outline the dominant tendencies and topics of research questions that address the critical evaluation of Faulkner’s works. As the deeper and more insightful assessment on the topic remains beyond the scope of this paper and does not exhaust the complexity of Faulkner’s lasting legacy in Japan,3 here I focus on just few scholarships.

One of the most significant study is *Faulkner Studies in Japan* (1985), edited by the leading specialist on Faulkner, Ohashi Kenzaburō, and the professor of American literature from Chiba University, Ono Kiyokuki. The study was designed not only as an overview of critical and scholarly texts but contains writers’ testimonies on inspirations they took from Faulkner’s novels (Ōe, Oba Minako, Kagawa Otohiko, Fukunaga Takehiko). Ohashi Kenzaburō began editing *The Complete Volumes of Faulkner’s Works* (Fōkunā Zenshū) in 1967. In the 1995 edition, the critic Karatani Kōjin contributed to the volume by making a very telling comment, saying that “Over the thirsty years since the first edition of Ohashi’s volume, the intellectual and cultural climate in Japan have changed completely. These changes are reflected in Ohashi’s editions on Faulkner’s works. Once, there had been much expectations towards these

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3 It should be noted that William Faulkner visited Japan with series of lectures in 1955. Though his works had been known in Japan prior to his visit, but there were no proper translations and most of the novels were read either in original or in French translation.
editions. I don’t think it still lasts. I don’t even know if there are people who still read Faulkner” (Karatani, 1995: 357; quotation from Suwabe, 2019, 86). Despite Karatani’s pessimistic predictions regarding the reception of Faulkner’s works in Japan, his unique narratives are, nevertheless, still appreciated by the Japanese readers. This was proved by Ikezawa Natsuki, who included Absalom, Absalom in Ikezawa Natsuki’s Bugaku Zenshū [A Collection of Ikezawa Natsuki] and devoted one of the chapters in the collection William Faulkner. Also, Ono Masatsugu and prominent critics, Toko Kōji and Sasaki Atsushi, point to Faulkner as the contributing force in Japan’s coming into contact with world literature. Numano Mitsuyoshi proposes yet another interesting view on Faulkner (as an example of global writer). In the essay Atarashii sekai bungaku no sōzō (The creation of new world literature), we read that:

If we want to find out what characterizes the language expression for the twenty first century, we need to go to Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha, then we need Garcia Lorca’s Macondo, followed by The Abhasia of Fazil Iskander, Ōe’s fields in Shikoku, Shinjuku-district as portrayed in Hideo Levy’s novels – we need to maintain the characteristics of all these places around the world while making it the common place for all of us. I call this utopian place a new world literature (Numano, 2001/2012, 240).

Apart from the above studies, we should also mention The William Faulkner Society of Japan and journal Fōkunā (Faulkner). In May 2018, the special edition focused on Faulkner and Japanese literature, whereby scholars like Suwabe Kōichi, Abe Masahiko, and Nitta Keiko outlined comparative perspectives, from diverse angles and cognitive perspectives, including the comparison between Faulkner’s modernism and the modernist movement in Japan, the problem of historicity and memory depicted by Faulkner and in Mori Ōgai’s novels, or subjectivism and relativism in Tanizaki’s Sasameyuki (The Makioka Sister) and Imamura Natsuko’s fiction as seen from the perspective of Faulkner’s novels. Yamashita Noboru in his online article “William Faulkner and Three Japanese Novelists: Affinities and Parallels” extended the existing scholarship by making an interesting comparison between the American writer and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Dazai Osamu and Murakami Haruki,” whereas Tanaka Takako in the chapter “The Global/Local Nexus of Patriarchy: Japanese

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4 The article by Yamashita was published in online version of the website Center for Faulkner Studies.
Writers Encounter Faulkner” (published in the hitherto mentioned study Global Faulkner) builds the argument upon historical circumstances (the defeat of the South after the Civil War and the collapse of the Shogunate in Japan in the 19th century) as the binding and common features of Faulkner’s and Nakagami Kenji’s fiction. Focusing on the issue of transition (as the consequence of historical processes), Tanaka explores the “trauma of modernization” and the complexity of re-adaptation to new world order.

III. Overlooked Endō Shūsaku

As much as the above studies offer diverse and multi-layered interpretations of Faulkner’s literature, they do not mention or include the examination of the works by Endō Shūsaku. I attempt to fill an important gap in existing research on Endō’s texts that has overlooked the impact of American literature by focusing on French literature, predominantly the milieu of Catholic writers, represented by François Mauriac, Georges Bernanos, Julien Greene. It is therefore expected that this essay will highlight new perspectives in researching Endō’s texts by expanding the frameworks of existing studies and recognize his writing as a contribution to Faulkner studies in Japan.

Due to the limited capacity, this paper focuses on selected parts from the diary (nikki) which Endō kept during his stay in France as a student between 1950 and 1953 (Lyon and Paris), prior to his becoming the writer. 5 There are number of reasons for treating the diaries as a primary source for the analysis: first of all, they have been slightly neglected and overlooked in previous research (even in Japan) whereas they constitute priceless sources for understanding the background of Endō’s writing; they are not only personal records but more importantly they can be read as the testimony of Japanese student’s (and the writer to be) coming into contact with texts of world literature. With regards to this issue, it must be pointed out that there exists a misconception that Endō’s literature was modelled (only) on French Catholic literature. The conventional image of the “Japanese Catholic Writer” (or Japanese Graham Green – as he is often identified) has significantly narrowed down the interpretative practice

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5 Endō Shūsaku’s debut works are two novellas Shiroi hito. Kiiroi hito (White Man. Yellow Man), which in 1955 were awarded Akutagawa Prize.
excluding other literary traditions in the analysis. This tendency refers not only to the methodological approach but also to the texts that have been chosen as the object of the analyses – principally these are novels or short stories (therefore, fictional texts), whereas there exists a large body of non-fictional texts (essay and critical works) that have not been properly explored so far.  

The references to Faulkner in Endō’s diary are numerous, and what is more interesting is the reading process itself: Endō did not read in original, his appropriation of Faulkner’s novels (as well as other American writers) is mediated by French translation, which is also visible in his process of interpreting the content of Faulkner’s texts. The “interference” of French offers an interesting paralell reading (not unfrequently the misreading) and shows the semantic difficulties in de-coding the essence of Faulkner’s narrative. As a result, names of the characters or places (which, in Faulkner’s prose, not unfrequently contain a hidden meaning) are often confused, misspelled or impossible to identify as Endō writes in Japanese katakana (phonetic writing transferring the French reading of English names into Japanese) and they significantly differ from the original. Therefore, when examining the case of Endō Shūsaku, a series of translational questions occur, taking into consideration that not only does he simply read Faulkner but also attempts to make cultural/linguistic transfers (which he records in his diary). This is strictly related to the key issue: “sources” or “influences” – how shall these be explored?

As already noted, in the existing literature on the subject of the influence of Faulkner's work on Japanese literature, the name Endō has often been neglected. Usually associated with the milieu of Catholic literature, Endō remained, nevertheless, under the strong influence of Faulkner's prose. Taifutsu niki (The French Diary) is the outcome and the testimony of his encounter with the West (both physical and on more abstract level that consists in cultural, intellectual and spiritual encounter). Reading the selected passages from the diary, we notice that in the midst of large number of names, François Mauriac and William Faulkner are the authors that appear side by side, literally becoming the axis that connects the process of Endō’s appropriation of Western literature. Endō reads these two writers simultaneously by making comparisons between Mauriac’s Thérèse Desqueyroux (1927) – the novel he would

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6 For more details on Endō Shūsaku’s essays and critical texts, please refer to my monograph *Hermeneutics of Evil in the Works of Endō Shūsaku: Between Reading and Writing*. 

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call *watashi no aishita shōsetsu* (the novel I have loved), and Faulkner’s *The Light in August* (1932) he first came into contact with while in France. The purpose of this paper is to review selected passages from the diary (mostly those parts written in the summer of 1951) in which Endō notes down his impressions and thoughts upon reading Faulkner’s text or, in some cases, examining critical works (written by French on American literature, for example by Jean Paul Sartre).

Since the object of the analysis is the diary it might be worth elaborating on how the genre can be approached and whether this determines the process of interpretation. According to Philippe Lejeune, known for his study on various forms of life-writing narratives, and the author of *On Diary*, where he attempted to establish the definition of *journal intime*: “diary is the point where life and literature meet; we are looking for the creativity in the most unliterary accounts”, and emphasises that “diary is not a fiction” (Lejeune, 2009, 19). On the other hand, in Japan the term *nikki bungaku* consists of fiction and non-fiction. A detailed investigation into Endō’s diary (nikki) demonstrates how the genre escapes the conventional classification into life-writing narrative. The application of Philippe Lejeune’s theories of the genre (*le journal intime*) and references to Japanese tradition of *nikki bungaku* provide us with the methodological tool in order to redefine the notion of ‘writing the self’. Thanks to Lejeune’s extensive scholarship, various narrative features that, according to French scholar, compose diaristic writing narration timelines, detectable subgenres (travelogues, literary criticism, creative literary fiction), process of fictionalization of the writing persona can be further explored (but of course, this has to remain outside the scope of this paper).

With regards to Endō Shūsaku’s diaries, we must bear in mind that the discussed texts are not the only diaries he kept: throughout his lifetime he produced a large body of *nikki bungaku* (including shōsetsu sōsaku nikki—diaries or journals that register the process of creation of his novels). Therefore, it could be argued that *Nikki bungaku* constitute a separate genre within his oeuvres.

Due to enormous amount of versions and editions of diary from the time he spent in France in the early 1950s, and editorial variations (some texts published in *Kindai Bungaku* or *Mita Bungaku* literary magazines), and for the clarity and coherency of

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7 In 1984, Endō published the collection of essays *Watashi no aishita shōsetsu* (The Novel I Have Loved) on Mauriac’s novel *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. 
the analysis, I refer to the 2018 edition of *Sakka no nikki* (The Writer’s Diary) published in *Endō Shūsaku Zennikki* (The Complete Diaries of Endō Shūsaku). The diary in question covers the period of June 1950 and August 1952.8

IV. Translations, Adaptations, Interpretations: Exploring Literary Influences in the Age of World Literature

Central to the discussion is the concept of “sources” whose implementation and use throughout the paper need to be clarified. In order to provide a thorough examination of the trances of American sources within Endō’s literature, I propose to approach the topic from the perspective of “world literature” in order to establish a coherent mode of reading his diaries.

The popularity of world literature in today's academic discourse calls into question the relevance of researching literary sources or influences. If we want to approach the literary text as an example of world literature, the question arises whether the study of what we define as “literary sources” or “literary influences” does not lead to a tautology? We may argue that world literature itself is conditioned by multilayered processes of joint influences, interactions, inspirations. In accordance with David Damrosch’s definition, “world literature” is:

a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike [...] It is important from the outset to realize that just as there never has been a single set canon of world literature, so too no single way of reading can be appropriate to all texts, or even to any one text at all times. A work enters into world literature by a double process: first, by being read as literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin. As it moves into the sphere of world literature, far from inevitably suffering a loss of authenticity or essence, a work can gain in many ways. To follow this process, it is necessary to look closely at the transformations a work undergoes in particular circumstances [...] To understand the workings of world literature, we need more a phenomenology than an ontology of the work of art: a literary work *manifests* differently abroad than it does at home (Damrosch, 2009).

The dynamics of discussions, interpretations, analyses and polemics launched by world literature discourse9 have made the methodological or theoretical approach to its

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8 In 2018 edition of the diary these are on the pages 9-252.
background. Researching world literature, we often face dilemma of lack of precise methodological or cognitive tools that would provide us terminology, perspective leading towards expected outcomes.

As the proposed essay deals with sources/influences in Endō Shūsaku's texts, it is worth addressing the above questions. How relevant therefore is to examine “literary influences” or sources in the age of world literature? In the *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom explains that:

> “Influence” is a metaphor, one that implicates a matrix of relationships-imagistic, temporal, spiritual, psychological—all of them ultimately defensive in their nature. What matters most […] is that the anxiety of influence comes out of a complex act of strong misreading, a creative interpretation that I call “poetic misprision.” What writers may experience as anxiety, and what their works are compelled to manifest, are the consequence of poetic misprision, rather than the cause of it (Bloom, 1995, XXIII).

There remains one more aspect to be taken into consideration on the occasion of the discussed issue: it is a very broadly understood translation, and more precisely the role of a translator. With regards to Faulkner, Pascale Casanova elaborates on this matter in her seminal study *The World Republic of Letters*, “world literary space” is being created. The translator, having become the indispensable intermediary for crossing the borders of the literary worlds, is an essential figure in the history of writing. The great translators of the central literary countries are true architects of the universal, which is to say of the attempt to unify literary space (Casanova, 2009, 142).

This leads us to an important issue, namely recreating literary canon in Japan. This can be approached through the lens of *hon’yaku bungaku* (literally: translated literature; literature in translation) that designates the process of translation of works of Western literature into Japanese. In accordance with major scholarship and studies, the term is associated with the rise of modern Japanese literature in the late nineteenth century (the so-called Meiji period, 1868-1912), when the entire notion of *bungaku* (literature) was re-examined and adjusted as the consequences of social, political and


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9 In this paper, I apply the term “world literature” although recently the term global novel has been also used.
cultural conditions in westernized Japan. The question whether hon’yaku bungaku is or is not a separate literary genre remains open. 10

Reading the passages from Endō’s diaries, we may venture: what was or what was not “the canon of world literature” for Endō, taking into consideration that he approaches the texts that are not only from distant countries but also he himself is in a distant land (in France, therefore we may presume that he somehow “projects” the French reading onto his choice of literature”). On interdependence between “world literature” and “literary canon”, Zhang Longxi points out in his essay “Canon and World Literature” that:

[…] it should be the task of literary scholars to everywhere to introduce and present the canonical works they know best to the world beyond the culture of their origin. I say canonical works because these are by definition the best and more exemplary works of different literary traditions, works that have stood the test of time and proven to be valuable for generations of readers under very different social, political and cultural conditions […] Because there are far too many books to read, we cannot afford but to read the very best of the world’s numerous literary works, and the only way to know what are the best books is to depend on critics and scholars of world’s different literary traditions to tell us about their canonical works, and to convince us why they are worth reading […] World literature is the integrated body of canonical works of the world’s literary traditions (Zhang, 2016, 122-123).

Zhang also stresses the significance of “time”, saying, “time, it seems, is the only thing that makes or breaks a canon” (Ibid).

10 The intensive process of translations that began in the 1870s and continued throughout the early twentieth century, lead the path towards creating the notion of literature (bungaku) and rise of new literary forms, including shōsetsu (the novel). Approaching Japanese literature from the perspective of hon’yaku bungaku is to recognize “translation” as culture and identity forming device and, in some instances, to question the authenticity and singularity of modern Japanese literature. As Donald Keene observed, “The translations of European literature that appeared after the Meiji Restoration were the absolute condition for the creation of a new Japanese literature […] Assessing the consequence and impact of hon’yaku bungaku, Keene further comments that, “Adaptations of European literary works, as opposed to translations, were of perhaps greater importance in the development in modern Japanese literature […] By the end of the nineteenth century no Japanese writer of significance remained unaffected by a knowledge of European literature, and before long some writers were insisting that they felt closer to Tolstoy, Dostoevsky or Stendhal, all read in translations, than they did to any work of the Japanese tradition. Donald Keene, The Age of Translation, in Down to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Vol. 3, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 60.
I have stated above that translation constitutes an important part of formation of contemporary literature in Japan. As Indra Levy has aptly noticed “The entire modern Japanese culture is translation”. Similar comment was made by another prominent scholar, Sakai Naoki on the formation of the modern Japanese society whereby translation is perceived as the identity building tool that conditioned the shape of modern Japanese culture.\(^1\)

Following this line of thinking, we may ask, if hon’yaku bungaku should be considered as a separate literary genre? In other words, does literary translation constitute a new genre? Douglas Robinson would answer that they are, as “what the literary translator imitates is not just the source text but the source author’s strategies in creating the source text [...] translators are narrators and translations are read as narratoriality.” According to Robinson,

> literary translation is a new genre of literature: it is a target language rewriting of source text that fictionally pretends not only to be equivalent to the source text but to be the source text, that achieves literariness not solely by imitating the textual contents of the source text but by imitating the literary strategies employed by the source author or similar authors in the target culture (Robinson: online source).

The influence of hon’yaku bungaku in creation of modern Japanese literature was explored by Mizumura Minae in her novel Honkaku shōsestu (A True Novel). The plot revolves around the notion of literary canon and cultural heritage in Japan since modernity. The words are spoken by the narrator, an inspiring young female novelist who plans to write the novel – her own reinterpretation of Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*. Mizumura follows the path delineated by previous generations of Japanese writers who borrowed literary patterns, motifs, characters from the West and compromises literary traditions. Mizumura’s novel is not experimental or innovative but only proves how hon’yaku bungaku is still present and, to a certain degree, an integrated part of creative process. As much as Mizumura’s case demonstrates certain tendencies among Japanese writers, let us briefly evaluate the status of world/global literature in present-day Japan.

Despite the growing interest in *sekai bungaku* (world literature) in Japan and within Japanese Studies in recent years, key methodological questions still appear to be: How to locate Japanese literature on world literary map? What are the criteria or cognitive tools that lead towards establishing Japan’s interconnections with literatures of the world?

Mizumura Minae devotes a considerable part of her seminal book *The Fall of the Language in the Age of English*, recreating the process of establishing literary canon in post-war Japan. The book, written as a personal account, received mixed reactions in Japan when it was published in 2008. Regarded as the book on “world literature, translation, reading, and writing”, Mizumura acknowledges the translingual formation of national languages (including the Japanese) but, at the same time, points to the negative effects of institutionalizations of literature. Taking the case of the contemporary Japanese language, she “warns against losing the precious diversity” and calls for the attention and protection of what national writings and texts, and what she considers that ultimate form—national literature. Mizumura significantly contributed to the discussion on the status of Japanese national canon in post-war era in the period dominated by constant tension between what is considered “national” and “foreign” intensified by political reality of post-war Japan.

As much as the above comment might be applicable to the Japanese literature (and to the evaluation of Endō Shūsaku’s diaries), we may also conclude this section by saying that (paraphrasing Pascale Casanova’s words), that “the various ways in which writers seek access to literary recognition are of a piece. No clear boundary separates them: all these solutions to literary domination need to be jointly conceived in terms of continuity and movement, recognizing that in the course of his career a writer may successively or simultaneously investigate one or more of these possibilities” (Casanova, 2009, 143). Let us now move on to the final section of the paper to examine how Endō reads William Faulkner.

V. Gods are Cruel: Endō Shūsaku and William Faulkner

The title of this section “gods are cruel”, as well as of the paper (*kamigami wa tashikani zankokoku da*: Gods are certainly cruel) has been borrowed from Endō Shūsaku’s diary. It is not clear whether it was his very first encounter with the works
of Williams Faulkner, nonetheless, there are number of important comments noted by
Endō that shed the light into his progressively evolving literary tastes. The majority of
comments and notes were taken in the summer of 1951 when Endō was reading
Faulkner’s novel *The Light in August,* where he states that;

> I personally think that the central topics in *The Light in August* are the depiction of
human carnal desires and brutality of God. Gods are certainly cruel and human
virtue is totally ridiculed by the Devil.

What seems to be an interesting in the above passage is the use of both singular and
plural in reference to “God”: kami and kamigami. The same pattern appeared in 1947
essay ‘Kamigami to kami to’ (The Gods and God), written prior to his arrival to
France, when he was a student at Keiō University. The essay that opened his literary
career and was later included to the collection ‘Katorikkusu sakka no mondai’
(Dilemmas of Catholic Writers, 1952), announces one of the core area of his literary
(as well as intellectual/theological) investigations, notably the tensions that arise on
the axis of monotheism and pantheism. At this stage, we cannot establish to what
extent the application of singular or plural are deliberate, or whether they are the
outcome of his interest in this topic.

It seems interesting, and to a certain degree intriguing, that Endō turns his
attention to the protestant tradition of thinking: he does that especially when
reconsidering the question of human destiny, or to be more precise, human free will.
This is the area where Endō—the Catholic seems conflicted but nevertheless he
continues to make extended study on the topic (which he later expands on to the issue
of human passivity in relation to evil and sin, as explored in the works of François
Mauriac).

The image of human destiny is a recurring topic in Endō’s diary and his early
writing, and without any exaggeration, this was the impact of American literature
Endō was reading during his university years in France. However, what needs to be
noted is that apart from Faulkner, it was Julien Green (bilingual, Catholic, American
writer) who had huge impact on Endō, especially his novel *Moira* (1951).
Let us see how Endō interprets Faulkner’s novels in his diary. In one of his first passages, he refers to the study, *Contemporary American Writers.* On December 10th 1950, he notes in his diary that: “I am so grateful, I discovered American literature. Thanks to *The Sound and Fury* and as *I Lay Dying,* I could understand the misery of modern humanity and I can totally relate these topics.” Following this comment, Endō conducts an extended analysis of Faulkner’s literary techniques—but since he is reading in French his examination, is based on the French translation. Already at this early stage of his interest in Faulkner’s literature, Endō singles out one specific image: the misery of human desires, that in later passages of his journal he will link with human inability to escape or to make any change in the fate that has already been prescribed to every single human being. From the theological point of view, this view opens an interesting discussion on the issue of redemption and salvation (the topics that will be extensively explored in his fictional texts) but for obvious reasons, these need to be put aside.

As we continue reading the diary, we can see how gradually he immerses into Faulkner’s world: “Faulkner does not spoil his readers”, writes Endō, and throughout December in 1950, just couple of months after his arrival to France he continues reading Faulkner, which eventually will lead to the discovery of the complex issue of human unconscious (*muishiki*) that will in later years become a salient topic for his own writing, including in *Scandal* (1986) and in his last major novel *Deep River* (1993).

Reading Faulkner’s novels (still in French translation) through the lens of human unconscious, leads Endō towards discovering the writing of Freud, and he attempts to apply the psychoanalysis method to literary interpretation. In other words, Faulkner becomes the case study for the deeper examination of key questions that particularly interest Endō in the early 1950s: what is the relation between the unconscious and human destiny (*unmei*)? Are these two related? If so, how? And why? When Endō embarks on literary career after his return to Japan in 1953, these questions will be linked to the problem of original sin (*tsumi*) and human predisposition to evil but we can already see how this interests and preoccupies Endō, and he searches the

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12 Unfortunately, I was not able to identify the name of the French author of this book as Endō provides only the phonetic (katakana) writing of the foreign name.
inspirations beyond the tradition of thinking that would be the closest to his belief and conviction (that is Catholic religion), but far beyond.

One of the most significant passages in the Diary appears on 31 January 1951, when he wrote down the following passage.

As I reread my diary again, I discovered that I have fallen to the violent self-hatered. This is not “me” who is depicted in the diary…I have recently been reading *The Study on American Literature*. I have particularly found interesting about the works by Steinbeck. The novel presents the ritual of desire and cruelty (I have payed attention to this while reading Marquis de Sade). When it comes to me, as I am strangely influenced by Mauriac, there is no distinction, between sin and desire, and then being influenced by Dostoevsky – sin is the biggest of the revelation of the abbeys for the man, and after the wartime influence sin and brutality cannot be detached from me. I am now investigating the relationship between desire and cruelty.

Endō expands his exploration of Faulkner’s novel, reading it simultaneously with Mauriac’s *Thérèse Desqueyroux* already betraying his interest in portrayal of female characters by both writers. On completion of the novel July 15th, 1951, he comments makes the following confession,

I have finished reading *The Light in August*. I think I have paid too much attention to Joe Christmas and I need to read the novel once again. It is because, after going through the novel that is over four hundred pages long, I realized that the main character is not Joe Christmas, but Doc Hinse, who fights fierce battle with God and is eventually betrayed by God. In this sense, my interpretation of Faulkner’s novel significantly differs from the way most readers would read this work.

Almost every entry in 1951 is about American literature, which Endō expands to the 19th century writers, like Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. In this sense, he examines the specificity of American literature. He makes number of references to D.H. Lawrence’s seminal study *American Classical Literature*, on which Endo comments that “According to Lawrence, America created the writers who wanted to escape from the order of the West. America is the place where everything was destructed by the chaos—this is the real spirit of the country.” This quote becomes particularly important if we take into consideration how ambiguous was the notion of the West for Endō, that does not necessarily make a clear division between Europe and America as he often uses the Japanese *seiyō* to indicate the West as the generic...
term. On July 26th in 1951, Endō counts the characteristics of Faulkner’s prose, as saying “The tragedy of love, the diabolic nature of woman, the tradition from Hawthorne.” And, he concludes his remarks by saying that, “eventually, America is the contrast with France. In France, there is balance in everything, whereas in America crosses all boundaries and falls into diabolism.”

The above quotation seems paramount for the examination of Endō’s literature, especially with regards to his interpretation of female characters in Faulkner’s prose. Endō also created number of expressive female figures in his fiction, women that oscillate between saints and sinners, as in case of Mitsu from The Girl I Left Behind and Mitsuko from Deep River. Although there is no unequivocal evidence that these characters were indeed modelled on Faulkner’s characters, certain similarities can be drawn without any exaggeration.

Endō’s analysis of American literature concludes in powerful comments that are the outcome of his thorough examination of Lawrence’s study. With regards to the female characters, that become focal point in his interpretation, he pays attention to the sentence: “l homme (les femmes) vit d’amour, mais meurt s’il aime trop” (Man (the women) live in love, but they die if they love too much). Endō, as he reveals in further parts, focuses on temporarily of human desires, that, as he comments in Faulkner’s novels demonstrate in …the tragedy of love, the demonicity of women (josei no akumasei). These are few examples of Endō’s comments on Faulkner and of course, these do not exhaust the complexity and density of topics, images and imageries, interpretations made possible thanks to Endō. His reading of Faulkner, is, unfortunately, bit chaotic, by which I mean that as in most cases, he treats the writers he reads or their works en block. But at the same time, we need to take into consideration, that it is the nature of these texts – diary, as much as rigorous and enlightening it could be, is always a life-writing narrative, it is a very personal, and subjective piece of literature. There is one more issue that requires our attention: the view on the humanity as depicted by Mauriac, regarded by Endō as his literary master, those in Faulkner’s novels.

We should not perceive Endō’s interest in Faulkner’s literature (from 1950s) as something drastic transition. Contrary, we may also venture the question whether Endōdoes not read Mauriac and Faulkner in order to point to what is common in their writing: motionless and passivity. In case of Faulkner, this would be the peculiarity of
“was”, in Mauriac, as interpreted by Endō “the motionless eyes of Thérèse Desqueyroux”. But maybe, this is where eventually, Endō, the vivid reader of world literature, emerges as the Japanese reader and succeeds in his complex endeavour to translate the novels he reads for his readers, including the readers of his very own diary.

Conclusion

This paper was aimed to present the profile of post-war Japanese writer, Endō Shūsaku and how American literature, especially the works of William Faulkner played in the process of formation of his own texts. It it understood the paper does not entirely exhaust the topic, and there are number of issues that remained beyond its scope. By referring to selected passages from Endō’s diary, I intended to draw attention of the readers on importance of his non-fictional texts, as well as his contribution to Faulkner studies in Japan in future, or possibly on the impact of American literature in post-war Japan.

Though it was France that finally became the literary homeland (furusato) for Endō, his literary endeavours had no boundaries and were expanding, across languages, cultures and time. Endō Shūsaku’s arduous journey towards and through world literature is yet to be examined and rediscovered by critics and, hopefully by the translators. The diaries could become the point of departure for further research.

Besides being a compelling record of writer’s literary growth, they show us how Endō envisioned humanity and his attempt to (re) define the world (sekai) and the self within this world. In one of his first dairy entries 1951, he writes,

For me, human life is not painful at all. However, it is not bright either. What sustains my life at the moment, is the persistent interest in the mysterious and infinite darkness of humanity. When I consider humanity, I see the body hiding from the sunlight in the depths of the swamp […] So, what is the external world? The external world is nothing more than the pieces of broken glass. I do not have any interest or concern about the external world. Only in light and shadow of human life. I cannot help but to gaze quietly on the play between the light and shadow. Otherwise, I would have to run away.\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\) Translation slightly modified.
References


BOOK REVIEWS

Hideaki Satō (ed.). *The Collection of Yukio Mishima’s Short Essays and Reviews on Sports*.

Yukio Mishima, a Japanese novelist well-known to people across the world, was not familiar with sports in his childhood and his adolescence. In 1955, at the age of 30, he trained his body and began to enthusiastically undertake sporting activities. Both before and during his sporting phase, Mishima wrote short essays and reports on sports and martial arts in newspapers and magazines. Those prose pieces were compiled chronologically according to their themes into a volume entitled *The Collection of Yukio Mishima’s Short Essays and Reviews on Sports*. The short essays and reports in the anthology evidence Mishima’s views on life and death and his philosophy of sports, evincing the progressive changes in his beliefs as his devotion to sports and martial arts increased.

*The Collection of Yukio Mishima’s Short Essays and Reviews on Sports* comprises four parts. The first segment contains Mishima’s reports on the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games. The second section includes short essays on sports, martial arts, and exercises written by Mishima between the ages of 24 and 34. The third part is composed of Mishima’s reviews of boxing matches. The final portion showcases Mishima’s essay, “The Sun and Iron,” in which he recounts the history of his experience of sports and martial arts and contemplates death.

The first part begins with a piece on the training camp and the opening ceremony of the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo and takes the reader through Mishima’s reviews on boxing, weightlifting, track and field events, swimming, gymnastics, and volleyball. It ends with a report on the closing ceremony. Mishima’s perspective of the games is sometimes humorous and at other times, it is serious and philosophical. In an article on the tradition of wrestling, Mishima says “I am fond of the feature that nobody takes pride in injury. We must remember that wrestling has valued the beauty of the body from the time of the ancient Greeks” (p. 12). Further, he expresses his opinion of gymnastics as a sport that goes against the natural human state as it requires an aspiration of perfection without error, and he notes the combination of two aspects that define the discipline: “I am

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particularly interested in gymnastics because it is the interface between beauty and power and between art and sport” (p. 14). More, he appropriately and humorously describes the athlete’s action in a walking race as “a devil of constraint that one tries to run but cannot; an action that looks like a person trying to run away from a nightmare: the upper body desperately makes haste but the lower body accurately maintains a steady pace (pp. 35-36).

In any case, Mishima is moved by the sight of athletes playing with full focus and by their spontaneous actions. He recognizes the politics embedded in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games and describes the event as cultural festival that is conceptually against nature. However, he senses the impression of peace in the world when the athletes enter the venue randomly and mix together during the closing ceremony. The Summer Olympics will be held in Tokyo in 2020 again. You may try to watch the Olympic Games with the book by your side.

At the start of the second segment, Mishima compares some sporting disciplines to art. Horse racing reminds him of Eugène Delacroix’s painting of a horse; an ice dancer leads his imagination to William Blake’s image of a person flying in the sky. After this introduction, Mishima often refers to the centrality of sports and martial arts in the accordance of valance and harmony between his body and mind. In the essay, “On Bodybuilding” for instance, Mishima lauds the positive influence exerted by the discipline of training his body on the achievement of a balance between his body and his mind. The same view finds expression in “Literature and Sport,” “Gymnastic and Civilization,” “Pen and Sport,” “Esoteric Point of Karate” and “A Comment on Sport from My Personal Experiences.” The last essay details the history of Mishima’s experience of sports. In his childhood and adolescence, Mishima harbored a feeling of inferiority with regard to his body. This feeling of inadequacy aroused his enthusiasm for sports. First, he became absorbed in bodybuilding. Next, he gained a degree of confidence in his physique and sought a sport that would train his body harder. Thus, he became interested in boxing. However, he gave up boxing in a year because of his age, and finally began the practice of kendō, the Japanese art of fencing, which he felt was most suited to his needs and personality.

Mishima ultimately finds “an ideal of harmony between the body and the mind in kendō” (p. 113). He also mentions this phenomenon in the third part of the volume in essays such as “Boxing and a Novel” and “My Sports.” However, after he starts practicing kendō, his reflections on death increase. For Mishima, kendō is the first step toward the

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practice of *iaidō*, the Japanese martial art of quickly drawing a real sword from its scabbard in a smooth and controlled manner. In “From a Gym to a *Dōjō*,” which implies the meaning “from boxing to *kendō*,” Mishima says “People in historical Japan, or the *samurai*, killed others courteously by sword. In contrast, the people of today offer courtesy merely in thoughtless association but not in killing by sword. Such an environment produces butterflies in my stomach” (p. 87). In the essay on the “Suicide of Tsuburaya,” Mishima is moved by the ex-Olympic Athlete’s death at his own hands and even applauds the act saying, “it is a beautiful and admirable final moment because he left this world due to his sense of honor” (p. 131). These two short essays demonstrate Mishima’s criticism of contemporaries who lacked self-discipline. Nevertheless, his enthusiastic practice of *kendō* as a step toward *iaidō* may also have made him criticize others from the perspective of the supreme circumstance, or death.

The third segment is composed of reviews of boxing matches. The reports are again characterized by Mishima’s critiques of his contemporaries in Japan. This censure is most vividly described in “The World without Falsehood.” “The best aspect of boxing lies in that no form of hypocrisy or compromise exists in the sport,” Mishima says. “The sport arouses the fighting instinct in its purest aspect within the acceptable range of a civilized society: a boxer fights until the other party loses consciousness. It is embodiment of the streak of wildness that modern people have lost.” Mishima continues, “A boxer, of course, uses physical as well as mental powers. This is true of other sports as well, but only boxing has the aspect of real blood” (p. 168). Also, Mishima respects a boxer as a person of action, comparing this type of athlete to common people who, according to him, never take any action but just think in complex ways about this world. Thus, Mishima says, “beauty except the one embodied in boxing looks false in this world,” and he concludes “A good match of boxing makes me feel that civilization has spoiled a human being” (p. 169).

Mishima continues his disapproval of civilized Japanese society from the viewpoint of a “world without falsehood.” In “Victory of Youth and Physical Powers,” for instance, he rejects the notion of self-defense as an unavoidable way to lose. He condemns the mask or the double mind of the Japanese who, in his view, like rooting for the underdog and are jealous of glory in “What is Beautiful” and in the reviews of boxing matches between Harada, a Japanese champion, and foreign boxers Mishima denigrates the civilized and westernized Japanese. In “Cool Japanese,” Mishima confesses his disappointment in watching a match fought by Sakurai, a Japanese boxer, because in Mishima’s mind Sakurai
does not possess the requisite wildness and the spirit of honorable death of a wandering Japanese warrior. Mishima complains that like Sakurai, the modern Japanese is “skilled, reasonable, modernized, impassive, calculating and smart” and even a boxer “will be soon become like an engineer who competes in a hyper-technological society” (p. 185). A similar criticism is repeated in reviews of boxing matches fought by a young Japanese boxer Saijo. Mishima cannot accept the lack of the traditional Japanese spirit in modern Japanese athletes. According to him, the Japanese character is typified by a sense of honor, the spirit of honorable death, a pure mind without calculation, and the wildness of a samurai, a warrior of a past glorious era.

The last portion of the volume presents “The Sun and Iron.” Mishima compares his body to an orchard in his homeland and relates the shaping of his body to the cultivation of the orchard under the sun with a hoe and a plow made of iron. The sun reminds Mishima of the war, and therefore death. Mishima’s writings are thus, according to him, “dominated by nocturnal thought” (p. 212). Besides, familiar with writing but not with sport, Mishima would understand and express his own body with words. Hence, he could not develop a consciousness of it as substance. That is why he decided to shape his body with iron tools, or to cultivate his orchard with an iron hoe and plow under the sun in order to wrest his body back from the territory of ideas. This decision contributed to the amendment of his recognition of the order of the falsely created world of words and ideas. However, as he built his muscles, he gradually found that his body was fated to decline and to confront the final moment. He also realized that he could not feel physical strength and hence could not conceive of a body as a substance without other existences. Such a thought led Mishima to the practice of boxing and kendō and subsequently even to the view that he needed physical pain in order to feel his body as substance. The supreme moment is death, or the moment when he is stabbed with a knife. All things considered, the moment when he can vividly and tangibly recognize his existence is, for Mishima, the instant of death.

Mishima paradoxically alters his idea of sports and martial arts from the position of building a body to vividly feel his existence to the obliteration of a body, or death. His philosophy of sport is like the philosophy of “tao” in Laozi, as elucidated in chapter 40: “Turning back is the way the tao moves” (trans. by Zhang Longxi, in *From Comparison to World Literature*, New York, NY: SUNY, 2015, p. 137). Also, Mishima’s philosophy of sport could be likened to the actions of Icarus, Daedalus’ son who dies as he approaches the sun with his artificial wings of wax on his body. In fact, “The Sun and Iron” and The
Collection of Yukio Mishima’s Short Essays and Reviews on Sports ends with a poem entitled “Icarus.” Thus, Mishima also finally becomes Icarus. It is well known that Mishima’s final practice was hara-kiri in the Ichigaya Station of the Japan Self-Defense Forces. Hideaki Satō’s skillful editing impressively represents Mishima’s philosophy from the perspective of sport and grants the reader a fresh look at his literary oeuvre.

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Since its first publication in French language in 1895, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (French: *Psychologie des Foules*; literally: *Psychology of Crowds*) has offered a penetrating, profound study of an important being or phenomenon of the present age, the crowd, and thus been one of the most influential small books in the world today. Even when we read it today, more than a century after its first publication, Le Bon’s book addresses readers and problems of our epoch as it did to readers and problems century ago. In our age of democracy, activities of crowds are playing more and more important roles, particularly when we extend the concept of crowd to cover not only political crowd, but also religious, ethnic, racial, or even gender crowds. In our time, “organized crowds have always played an important part in the life of peoples” as it did a century ago (p.5). In our time, “the destinies of nations of nations are elaborated at present in the heart of the masses, and no longer in the councils of princes.” (p.15). Meanwhile, in our time, “the substitution of the unconscious action of crowds for the conscious activity of individual is one of the principle characteristic of the present age”, as it was a century ago (p.5). Of course, the crowd phenomenon is not only characteristic of a totalitarian regimes. It is also characteristic of any democratic societies, including those most matured ones in North America and Europe.

Accordingly, studies of the so-called popular mind of the crowd becomes more and more important for studies democracy today. The word “so-called” is deliberately used here to underscore one important feature of the popular mind which Le Bon has explored: it is marked by its being conscious. Thus, the popular mind of a crowd is an interesting paradox: as a mind it is consciousness; meanwhile, it is a consciousness made mainly of the unconscious. At any rate, to study democracy should include studies of peoples who make democracies. A crucial part of studying peoples who make democracies is to study the crowds in peoples. And to study the crowd should start by studying the mind of the crowd, just as to study a person should start, first of all, from studying this person’s mind.

What is a crowd? As Le Bon sees it, a crowd is not merely “a gathering of individuals of whatever nationality, profession, or sex, and whatever the chances that have brought them together be.” (p.25). It is not merely an aggregation of people. Instead, a crowd is a crowd importantly because it is an organized aggregation of individuals from the
psychological point of view. Thus, a gathering of individuals becomes a crowd only when it is also psychologically organized. A gathering of individuals becomes a crowd only when “the sentiments and ideas of all the persons in the gathering take one and the same direction, and their conscious personality vanishes.” (p.26). A gathering of individuals becomes a crowd only when “a collective mind is formed” and thus, the gathering becomes “a psychological crowd.” (Ibid). A gathering of individuals becomes a crowd only when “the disappearance of conscious personality and the turning of feelings and thoughts in one direction” occur (Ibid). Becoming a psychological crowd, a gathering of individuals “forms a single being, and is subject to the law of the mental unity of the crowd.” (Ibid). A crowd is a psychological collectivity wherein no trace of individual autonomy in feeling and thinking is found, and individual feelings and thinking are ironed into a collective mind.

“While a psychological crowd is a provisional being formed of heterogeneous elements”, the most striking peculiarity of such a crowd is that all individuals that compose a crowd are turned to think and feel in one direction, and with one mind (p.30). Transformation of individual persons into a crowd “puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation.”(pp.29-30). This should not be a surprise. As modern psychology reveals, “unconscious phenomenon plays an altogether preponderating part, not only in organic life, but also in the operations of the intelligence (pp.30-31). Meanwhile, “in the collective mind, the intellectual aptitudes of the individuals, and consequence their individuality are weakened. The heterogeneous is swamped by the homogeneous, and the unconscious qualities obtain the upper hand” (p.32).

That individuals are ironed into a collectively unreflective crowd is caused by various factor. First, in “a crowd being anonymous, and consequence irresponsible, the sentiment of responsibility which always controls individuals disappears entirely.” (p.33). The crowd is a being wherein the sentiment of responsibility vanishes. Second, it is contagion. “In a crowd every sentiment and act is contagious, and contagious to such a degree that an individual readily sacrifices his personal interest to the collective interest.” (pp.33-34). A crowd is a being wherein all individuals are contaminated by abnormal feelings, ideas and thinking. The third is suggestibility of which contagion is merely an effect (p.34). Suggestibility is a unique ability of a crowd. In a crowd, an individual is brought to such a
condition in which “having entirely lost his conscious personality, he obeys all the suggestions of the operator who deprived him of it, and commits acts in utter contradiction with his character and habits.” (p.34). Therefore, “we see, then, that the disappearance of conscious personality, the predominance of unconscious personality, the turning by means of suggestion and contagion of feelings and ideas in an identical direction, the tendency to immediately transform the suggested ideas into acts; these we see, are principal characteristics of the individual forming part of a crowd. He is no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will.” (Pp.35-36).

The sentiment of the crowd is always impulsive, mobile, and irritable (p.39). The crowd “is guided almost exclusively by unconscious motives” (p.4). Thus, it is always sentimentally impulsive. Reflective constraint is not its dish. “The varying impulses which crowds obey may be…generous or cruel, heroic or cowardly, but they will always be so imperious that the interest of individual, even interest of self-preservation, will not dominate them.” (41). The crowd is the slave of its impulsiveness. That being said, meanwhile, the morality of the crowd shows qualities of “abnegation, self-sacrifice, disinterestedness, devotion, and the need of equality.” (p.63). To be sure, it is not that the crowd is more moral than an isolated individual. It is that the crowd has its unique characteristics that have moral bearing. The ideas of the crowd may be simultaneously contradictory (p.67). That is to say, the crowds subscribe to ideas without thinking over whether these ideas are consistent with one another. “Crowds are not to be influenced by reasoning.” (Ibid). Reasoning is not a department of the crowd. Moreover, the power of mind of the crowd is imagination, not reason or understanding. “crowds think in images, and these images succeed each other without any connecting link.” (Ibid.).

As a result of the above, “the crowd is always intellectual inferior to the isolated individual.” (p.37). Of course, this does not mean the crow is always psychologically inferior to isolated individuals. But in feelings, thoughts, and actions, the crowd is less conscious and reflective. This Le Bon’s conclusion is astonishing, but vowed by the historical Hitler’s German crowd, and Mao’s Red Guard crowd in China’s so-called Great Cultural Revolution. In the example of Mao’s Red Guard, that the disappearance of conscious personality and the predominance of unconscious personality were strikingly exhibited in such a fact that men and women even dress the same, thinking red color and green color are the only proper color and revolutionary ones. And “doubtless a crowd if often criminal, but also it is often heroic. It is crowds rather than isolated individuals that
may be induced to run the risk of death to secure the triumph of a creed or an idea that may 
be fired with enthusiasm for glory and honor.” (p.37).

In summary, Le Bon’s *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* presents us a unique 
kind of being that existed in his time, but also in our time. Such a being is not a religious, 
political or cultural collectivity in traditional sense, but a contingent collectivity that is 
bonded psychologically and bonded by a collective mind in feeling, thinking, and action. 
And such a collective has become the elephant in room for democracy today!

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