iafor

The IAFOR Journal of Literature and Librarianship
Volume 2 – Issue 1 – Spring 2013

IAFOR Publications

Executive Editor:

Joseph Haldane

The International Academic Forum

The IAFOR Journal of Literature and Librarianship

Editor:

Melissa Kennedy, University of Vienna, Austria

Assistant Editor:

Thomas French, Ritsumeikan University, Japan

IAFOR Journal of Literature and Librarianship, Volume 2

Interpretative Encounters

Edited by Melissa Kennedy

Notes on Contributors

Chandrava Chakravarty is an Assistant Professor of English at West Bengal State University, Kolkata, India. She obtained her doctoral degree on the study of gender-culture interface in Eighteenth century British drama. As post-doctoral pursuits she has engaged in studying the complex connections among gendering, identity and nation- building in various forms of canonical and non-canonical texts. She has presented papers in various National and International conferences. Her areas of interest are Eighteenth Century British Literature, Gender & Culture Studies, Popular Culture and Bollywood. She obtained the prestigious Charles Wallace India Trust Scholarship from UK. Her book titled *Gendering the Nation: Identity Politics and the English Stage* is forthcoming. At present she is engaged in editing a volume of essays on Rabindranath Tagore.

Enrique Galván-Álvarez holds a Ph.D. in Tibetan-English poetry from the University of Alcalá and an MA in South Asian Studies from the University of Manchester. He has published on the interweaving of religious and political narratives in nation-building projects, both in South Asia and the Tibetan diaspora. His interests comprise post-Buddhist literature, film and nationalism in post-colonial contexts, and Buddhist-Anarchist dialogue.

Justyna Weronika Kasza teaches the Japanese language at the University of Central Lancashire (Preston, UK). She holds a M.A. in Japanese Studies in 2006 (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland). She is currently completing her Ph.D. on the problem of evil in the works of Endō Shūsaku (University of Leeds, UK). In 2008-2009 she was a visiting researcher at the Institute of Comparative Culture, Sophia University (Tokyo, Japan) as a recipient of the Japan Foundation Fellowship Grant to support her PhD research activities. Her current research interests focus on Endō Shūsaku within the cross-cultural context and resulted in several articles, translations and conference papers.

Melissa Kennedy lectures in English Literature, Culture and Media Studies at the University of Vienna. She has published on Maori, New Zealand and Francophone postcolonial literature and cultural studies. During four years as Assistant Professor at Nagoya University of Commerce and Business she worked on the indigenous Ainu and "postcolonial" Japan. Recent publications include *Striding Both Worlds: Witi Ihimaera and New Zealand's Literary Traditions* (Rodopi, 2010), "All Our Pasts Before Us: Hamish Clayton's Wulf", *Journal of New Zealand Literature* (forthcoming), "Early Ainu and Maori Postcolonial Theatre: Postman Heijiro and Te Raukura", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (forthcoming), and "Contemporary Tradition: Reconfiguring Ainu Identity in Modern Japan." She is editor of the IAFOR *Journal of Literature and Librarianship*.

Andreas Pichler received his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Utah in 2002 and has been teaching in the English Department at Aix-Marseille Université since 2004. His recent publications include "Geography and Literature: The Bloomsbury Group" (University of London, London, UK) and "L'identification endocryptique du 'secret' de

Dorian Gray" (Rue des beaux art, Paris, France). He currently works on a "Sense of Place" in modernist English literature forthcoming with the Sorbonne-Nouvelle Université, Paris.

Nicholas de Villiers teaches film, literature, and gender/sexuality studies at the University of North Florida. He has published essays on Taiwanese cinema in *Senses of Cinema* and *Jump Cut*. He is the author of *Opacity and the Closet: Queer Tactics in Foucault, Barthes, and Warhol*, from the University of Minnesota Press (2012).

Sukanya Sompiboon is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Speech Communication and Performing Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. In 2012 she completed her Ph.D. in Drama entitled *The Reinvention of Thai Traditional-Popular Theatre: Contemporary Likay Praxis* at University of Exeter, UK. Her research areas include tradition-based contemporary theatre and reinvented popular performances in Thailand. Sukanya Sompiboon has presented articles at academic conferences in Japan, Australia, England and Thailand. Apart from an academic, she is a singer, actress, director and playwright on traditional-popular and contemporary theatre. Sukanya Sompiboon is a permanent member of the Makhampom Theatre Troupe and the Anatta Theatre Troupe, and she has performed a number of the Makhampom's contemporary Likay projects since 2003.

Akiyoshi Suzuki is Professor in the Faculty of Letters at Konan Women's University in Japan, where he teaches American literature from the standpoint of world literature. He is also visiting professor in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Suzhou University of Science and Technology in China, where he gives lectures of comparative literature and culture. He continued to serve in various positions such as a member of English Test Writing Committee of National Center for University Entrance Examinations in Japan (2008-2010) and a board member of Japan Society of Stylistics (2010-2012), and now executive director and a member of editorial board of Japan Society of Text Studies and vice president of Katahira Association of British and American Literarure. He holds a Ph.D. in Anglophone literature from Meiji Gakuin University. He has published articles and books on American, Japanese and comparative literatures. Additionally, he created the Web site "E-job 100" (http://e-job-100.sakura.ne.jp/), which contains video recordings of scenes in which English is used in various work places in Japan, in order to motivate students to learn English as a foreign language and to facilitate their English ability. His recent books and papers are *WorldCALL: International Perspectives on Computer-Assisted Language Learning* (co-authorship) (New York: Routledge, 2011), *On Late Life of Writers* (co-authorship) (Kamakura: Minato-no-hito, 2013), "Houxiandai de yanjuan" in *Dangdai Wentan* (Chengdu) 2012-2 (2012), and "What Happens in the Times of Supremacy of Politics: From the Perspective of World Literature" in *The Katahira* (Tokyo) Vol. 47 (2012).

Table of Contents

Introduction: Interpretative Encounters

Melissa Kennedy

Welcome to the International Academic Forum's second volume of the *Journal of Literature and Librarianship*. Following the inaugural issue in 2012, *Literary Journeys and Journeys in Literature*, the theme of cross-cultural encounters continues to promote IAFOR's remit to encourage dialogue in interdisciplinary conferences on, for and in Asia, with open dissemination of its findings in free-access e-journals. This collection stems from the 2012 IAFOR Asian Conference on Literature and Librarianship, in which the theme of "Encounters" explored East-West and East-East inter- and intra-Asian cross-cultural interaction, travel, interpretation and translation.

Spanning the great distances and differences covered by the umbrella term "Asia," the English language and the theoretical methodologies of academic practice provide mediating modes through which to bridge and connect the Indian subcontinent, Nepal, Tibet, China, Japan, South-East Asia, and the Asia-Pacific. By literature we encompass both old and new media, in fiction, drama and poetry as well as manuscripts, comic books, film, photography, and fine arts. Literary and cultural studies are particularly well-suited to examining cross-cultural encounters, as their focus on human nature and on the imagination illuminate the multiple and subjective pathways of key issues in the humanities, such as national identity, cultural expression and social critique. As IAFOR conferences draw from an international and interdisciplinary group of students and scholars, both the conference and these journal papers demonstrate a variety of academic approaches. Furthermore, the majority of presenters and writers have more than one national, cultural and/or academic background: they are themselves models of cross-pollenating encounters.

The *Journal of Literature and Librarianship* highlights the close link between Asian and European and Anglo-American literary, cultural and theoretical foundations. Although many scholars apply Western pedagogy and theory to Asian texts and contexts, this is never a case of direct importation, but rather a question of picking and choosing, of adopting and adapting valid points and discarding those that do not fit. Such exercises are critical in moving forward the academic disciplines to cope with the increasingly global situations in which they are tested. The current collection of essays offers multiple examples of such theoretical encounters, offering unconventional critical perspectives with surprising results.

In the first essay, "Theoretical Encounters: Postcolonial Studies in East Asia," Melissa Kennedy considers the applicability of postcolonial studies to East Asia, in particular to Japan. The broad ambit of this first essay is followed by three close literary analyses of Japanese writers, which in various ways play out the questions asked in Kennedy's essay about how to bring Western literary studies to bear on Japanese literary texts. Akiyoshi Suzuki's inventive "Mapping the Subterranean of Haruki Murakami's Literary World" illuminates submerged layers and hidden worlds in Murakami's literary imaginary. Here, the interplay between the real and the imaginary is complex, and Professor Suzuki demonstrates the rewards awaiting astute Murakami readers. From depictions of Tokyo to portrayals of France and of London, Justyna Weronika Kasza's "Polysemy of the Other: Endō Shūsaku's Encounter with the West" and Andreas Pichler's "'Braving the fog': Natsume Soseki's *The Tower of London*" focus on these Japanese writers' trips to Europe. For both Endō and Soseki, the destabilisation of being abroad lead to deep and troubling questions of their own identities, as well as that of Japan's national identity. The second section of the collection turns to other

East-Asian and South-East Asian contexts. Nicholas de Villiers provides a queer studies reading of Tsai Ming-liang's films. However, de Villiers's essay, "Spatial and Sexual Disorientation in the Films of Tsai Ming-liang," illustrates the above-mentioned mis-fit of Western theoretical paradigms in Asian contexts. De Villiers demonstrates the impossibility of neat categorisation as "gay" of this Malaysian-born Taiwanese filmmaker, offering instead destabilisation as a legitimate foundation. Sukanya Sompiboon, who is indeed an ambassador of "encounters" as an actress and academic, and as an English-educated Thai, draws from all her worlds in "*Likay Aka Oni* Red Demon: Encounter and Exchange of Intercultural Performance." This extraordinary musical theatre production literally enacts, on stage, multiple levels of encounters between actors and with the audience, including linguistic, performative, translational, and cultural. In "Relocating Tagore's Binodini: New Spaces of Representation in Rituparno Ghosh's *Chokher Bali*," Chandrava Chakravarty analyses adaptation from novel to film. Chakravarty challenges the postmodern and postcolonial "present" of the 2007 film by describing its deeply Victorian, and thus colonial, underpinnings. In the final essay, Enrique Galván-Álvarez, a specialist on the implications of writing in English and working in exile for Tibetans, addresses the issue of translation in "Translating the Translator: Identity and Revision in Trungpa Rinpoche's Buddhism(s)." His analysis of the cultural and linguistic translation of Buddhism into the Western world from the 1960s describes one of the most important East-West encounters of our times.

Although we have travelled far from the concerns of the first essay to those of the last, from Japan to Tibet, throughout the collection we also see common allegiances to counter-hegemonic thought and challenges to dominant academic critical perspectives. *Interpretative Encounters* raises more questions than it answers, which is an admirable achievement in the spirit of IAFOR's vision as an international think tank on Asia.

I would like to thank the contributors, reviewers and editorial board for their work on this issue. We look forward to seeing you at the 2013 third IAFOR Asian Conference of Literature and Librarianship, for which I am sure that the theme "Connectedness, Identity and Alienation" will generate research as innovative and as insightful as this current issue.

Melissa Kennedy

Editor
librasia_editor@iafor.org

Theoretical Encounters: Postcolonial Studies in East Asia
Melissa Kennedy

Abstract

Postcolonialism has grown from a minor branch of English literary studies applied to the decolonising movements of the British Empire in the 1950s to a term increasingly applied to various legacies of exploitation, exclusion and discrimination around the world. As globalisation is recognised as a contemporary form of cultural and economic imperialism, and as world literature and the global circulation of media make available voices from hitherto under-represented peoples, postcolonial studies has become a many-headed beast. While South Asia (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) and South-East Asia (former British, French, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish colonies) are represented in the field, East Asia remains under-explored. This essay applies postcolonial precepts to minority communities in Japan, particularly the indigenous Ainu, and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of applying the postcolonial framework to a non-European setting.

Keywords: Postcolonial studies, Japanese imperialism, Ainu, East-Asian studies

The last room of the museum at Japan's national shrine, Yasukunijinja, Tokyo, features a map of the world highlighting the decolonisation movements that swept the world from the 1950s. Centred on this giant map is the following explanation:

Not until Japan won a stunning victory in the early stages of the Greater East Asia War did the idea of independence [for Asian peoples] enter the realm of reality. Once the desire for independence had been kindled under Japanese occupation, it did not fade away, even though Japan was ultimately defeated. Asian nations fought for their independence, and achieved triumph.[1]

And so ends Yushukan, the national museum devoted to "high-principled people" and "enshrined deities" who "devoted themselves to build[ing] 'a peaceful nation'" (brochure). The context of peace in this last room is an abrupt and jarring end to the museum, of which the fifteen exhibition halls detail a long history of warfare in Japan. This begins with the first plaque of the first room, which defines "the spirit of the samurai" as fighting in the name of patriotism and concern for Japan's future, before moving on to outline "overseas expansion" and "expedition to North East Japan which conquered and quelled uprisings" in the eighth century. Claims of liberation-motivated warfare continue throughout the museum, from Japan's 1894 invasion of and later annexation of Korea as liberation from the Chinese, to the December 1941 declaration of war on the US, Great Britain and the Netherlands as Japan's protection of Indochina and the Dutch East Indies from Western colonisation.

Yushukan's framing of Japan's military history as dually motivated by peace and Asian national independence promotes a view of Japan as benevolent big brother and leader of the East Asian region. Japan cultivated a role as protector of pan-Asian regionalism through expansion and colonisation from the Meiji era until its defeat in the Pacific War. Such self-styled leadership, however, did not end with the War. On the back of the Japanese economic miracle, the nation's position as Asian ambassador re-emerged in the 1970s as leader of Asian industrialisation and modernisation. This was consolidated in the 1980s by Japan's entry to international Western fora as often the only Asian representative, and continues in current times in its much-vaunted role as one of the largest foreign aid donors in the world— funding which has been gradually decoupled from its original purpose as reparations payments for war damage. The ideological segue from coloniser to benevolent regional leader, from war reparations to aid donations, and from imperialist expansion to South East Asian liberating force, all display a retrospective historiography that places Japan as central and foremost supporter of regional decolonisation, championing a pan-Asian identity clear of European and American control. In gathering together South-East Asian nations under the umbrella of post-war independence, Japan was promoting regional postcolonialism long before the academic discipline thought to look at it, albeit without employing the terminology. Although the term "postcolonial" is not employed at Yushukan, the other terms against which the postcolonial is positioned are present, including: colonial/colonialism; Empire; expansion; occupation; imperialism; annexation; and settlement. Furthermore, the Japanese need for labour and mineral resources that was used to justify Japanese annexation of the Korean peninsula and its invasion of South-East Asia is a specifically colonial motivation that might be separated from a more general imperial drive for regional power.

---

[1] All citations from the English language museum plaques and information brochure. Visit on 25 February, 2012.

Corroborating a sense that the use of colonial terminology to describe nineteenth to mid-twentieth-century Japanese imperialism entails a post-War terminology of the postcolonial, the theory has been applied by scholars of East Asia in Korea, and in the Chinese context to Tibet, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. There is a smaller amount of research applying the postcolonial to minority and indigenous communities in Japan to Zainichi Koreans, indigenous Ryukyuans, Okinawans and the Ainu, and post-War Japanese literature in general. Although none of these individual studies has attempted the daunting project of outlining a distinct East-Asian context of colonialism, they each identify marginalised indigenous or ethnic groups which experience lack of voice, rights, recognition, and negative perception by the national dominant discourses of Japan and China. The connection with postcolonialism is made through claiming these minorities to be subjected to oppression, dispossession, and exploitation, coupled with national ideologies that contain systemic yet barely acknowledged discrimination, selective historical remembering, and claims of national identity that shut out recognition of these cultures. These broad criteria certainly suggest that the scope of the postcolonial is potentially very large indeed. In fact, in a comprehensive collection of essays under the title *Indigenous People of Asia* (1995), that includes minorities from Balochistan, Asian Russia, Nepal, China and Japan as well as South-East Asia, the real criteria of inclusion is not indigeneity *per se* but group self-identification of a culture whose ancestral lands are occupied. Indeed, the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues and the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) defines as indigenous "colonized peoples of the world who are prevented from controlling their own lives, resources, and cultures" (Gray 1995, p. 35).

An initial argument against the inclusion of East- and South-East Asia under the postcolonial umbrella is that such globalisation stretches the field too far away from its original conception; to describe the legacies of European colonisation starting from the decolonisation energies of the 1950s. However, as a discipline committed to understanding contemporary—and thus changing—issues of local, national and regional identity and belonging, postcolonial studies has, in recent years, expanded in response to cultural and economic globalisation. The postcolonial framework has thus become more interdisciplinary, informed by world literature in translation as well as non-literary fields such as macro-economics, human geography, sociology, anthropology, and migration studies. For most Asian indigenous peoples, access to postcolonial discourse has been through the IWGIA, which is closely linked to the United Nations Human Rights Council and the UN Forum for Indigenous Affairs. Each of these international NGOs is founded on the United Nation's principles of recognition, rights and autonomy.[2]

The entry of East-Asia into postcolonial studies corresponds to the field's expansion in the past decade into parts of the world not touched by European empires and away from its predominantly literary field of study to become more interdisciplinary. Indeed, even without this expanded version of the postcolonial, the impact of British and other European imperialisms on Japanese expansion and Chinese practices of aggression against their own dissenting peoples is well worth investigating. A lack of analysis of the legacies of European colonialism in these two nations may stem from the same reason as that cited in a special

---

[2] The UN and IWGIA charters are virtually interchangeable in terms of their criteria for inclusion and professed aims, with UN policy recommendations embodied in the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

issue of the journal *Postcolonial Studies* entitled "Southeast Asia's absence in postcolonial studies": the post-War decolonising period which proved so generative of independence and national solidarity for Indian, African and Caribbean nations was not experienced in Asia, which was immediately plunged into the Cold War and debilitating civil wars (Beng Huat 2008, pp. 232-233). Another reason might be that the Asian thinkers and cultural critics who shape their respective national ideologies do not find the Western concept of the postcolonial useful. However this flies in the face of widespread embracing of parallel and related Western critical paradigms in cultural and literary studies, particularly of postmodernity and deconstruction. Indeed, IAFOR's remit and the themes of the *Librasia* journals of cross-cultural and cross-theoretical study exemplify the pervasiveness of this approach.

In the countries in which it is common currency, the postcolonial viewpoint has helped unmask the colonial-era origin of many historical inequalities, ingrained prejudices, and unconscious discriminations that remain in place in contemporary democratic and independent nations. This in turn has led, on occasion, to some policies aiming to rectify such imbalances, which may include target-area funding in the social sector such as housing and health care, work or education quotas for underrepresented communities and other forms of affirmative action, and reparations of land or money for past injustices. In white settler nations such as the United States, Canada and Australia, the postcolonial creates a framework for discussions of the place of indigenous peoples as well as of later immigrants. By contrast, Japan's professed cultural homogeneity and social classlessness ignores a range of ethnic, cultural and socio-economic differences. Challenges to this perception have multiplied in recent years, with both Japanese[3] and Western sociologists calling for recognition of its national minorities, which include the internal Burakumin caste, the indigenous Ainu and Ryukyuans, Chinese and Koreans forcibly settled in Japan during Japanese occupation, and labour immigrants from the Philippines, Brazil and Peru. However, very few of the many texts claiming Japan's cultural heterogeneity refer to postcolonialism, and those that do—in passing—use it to contrast nations that accept contemporary responsibility for the ongoing ramifications of colonialism with Japan's official non-acknowledgement (Befu 2001; Clammer 2001; Kuwayama 2004; Lie 2008). John Clammer accurately captures the repercussions entailed by accepting a postcolonial perspective on the citizenship rights of Zainichi Koreans and Nikkeijin South Americans: "to *have* a policy would be to publicly acknowledge Japan's historical and economic debts and to link itself morally with the fate and future of those nations from which migrants [. . .] come" (Clammer 2001, p. 54, italics in original). This in turn would, at the very least, require addressing the social imbalances outlined above.

Clammer's point signals the political vipers nest that admitting to the presence of internal minorities entails. Several essays in *Indigenous Peoples of Asia* similarly comment on the lack of government intervention which necessitates work by foreign NGOs to revitalise indigenous minorities, often in impoverished or developing countries. Even some developed nations with commitments to, negotiation of and redress for indigenous communities, such as Canada and New Zealand, were unable in 2007 to ratify the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on the grounds that several of the provisions contradict national

---

[3] In agreement with points made by both Margaret Hillenbrand and Takami Kuwayama I acknowledge that the Japanese scholars from which I draw, all work outside of Japan: Befu, Kuwayama, Lie, Murakami, Sugimoto, and Oiwa and Suzuki. The influence of postcolonial theory on academics educated and working solely within Japan is thus still not covered.

constitutions and even some indigenous frameworks (Banks, 2007). Certainly, any government would be unwilling to potentially alienate one constituency in favour of another, especially concerning indigenous or internal minorities. On the other hand, the multiple and ongoing civil strife afflicting many Asian countries (recently Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, and Indonesia) begs the question of whether any nation-state can afford to ignore social imbalances of identity and citizenship both within its boundaries and in relations with its neighbours. Passing into a postcolonial phase that begins with sensitivity to opposing perspectives of history with an openness to accepting historical fault might cause fewer diplomatic gaffes, standoffs, boycotts, and impasses both internally and internationally. For example, a key focus of Japanese minority lobbying groups is the correction of national history text books to include accurate and representative information about, for example, the Ainu, the Nanjing Massacre, and Pacific War Japanese atrocities in Okinawa and overseas (Chan 2008; Hein & Seldon 2000; Loos & Osanai 1993; Suzuki & Oiwa 1997). Notably missing from the decolonisation map at Yushukan is mention of independence movements in Tibet, Taiwan, or the fracture of North and South Korea. In fact, Korea, China and Taiwan are not even on the map,[4] although their regional relationships with Japan are the closest. Indeed, these communities have been most vocal in protesting incidences of Japanese historical nationalism. Examples include anti-Japanese demonstrations in China and Korea in 2005 following Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni, which enshrines convicted war criminals, and the Chinese-Japanese dispute over the Senkaku Islands, escalating since 2008. Most recently, violent protests broke out in China in September 2012 in response to Japan's further claims to the Islands. It would thus appear that the kind of pan-Asian identity and regional solidarity that Japan has long advocated is unrealisable as long as the participants do not address historical sore points, foremost of which is Japan's Meiji-era colonisation and Pacific War invasion of its neighbours, closely followed on the national level of addressing the presence of a large population of Korean and Chinese in Japan.

On the national level, the indigenous Ainu provide an example of the kind of demands made in Japanese minority discourse through deployment of postcolonial principles. Despite ratifying the UN Human Rights Committee's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1979, the government claimed that there were no indigenous peoples in Japan. After joining the IWGIA in 1987, the Ainu brought international attention to their situation by hosting visits by the IWGIA Chair in 1991 and two World Indigenous Peoples' Summits in 2008 and 2010 timed to coincide with Japan hosting the Kyoto G8 Summit and COP10 respectively. In each case, Japan responded to this international attention (Siddle 1996, p. 185) by declaring the presence of Ainu as a minority (1991), recognising Ainu as indigenous (2008), and beginning government advisory roundtable talks with Ainu representatives (2010). Thus it would seem that joining with other indigenous peoples in an international NGO setting helped the Ainu circumvent national recalcitrance. On a larger scale, an Asia-specific commitment to postcolonialism might be one such platform that could conjointly agitate for minority issues throughout the region, as indeed is already the case in terms of indigenous rights.

Despite dedicated and long-standing efforts toward minority and indigenous empowerment, such movements have rarely translated into policy change. Indeed, postcolonial ideologies have not proven very useful in offering decolonising or liberating strategies in the real world. Even once a minority community achieves recognition and has a forum to be heard, this is no

---

[4] The map outlines the mainland continent in order to only emphasise South-East Asia.

guarantee that any real progress will be made in political representation or socio-cultural respect. The Ainu situation is a case in point: following two years of roundtable negotiations, the outcome was a list of recommendations with no timeline for action to be taken. At least partly in frustration to well over 100 years of protest and few government concessions,[5] Ainu launched their own political party in January 2012.[6] A similar mismatch between ideals and political practice in modern nation-states is evident on the international scale. The UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which has been ratified by 148 nations, only provides guidelines only that have yet to be implemented by any government. Although institutionalisation of the Declaration is top of the agenda for the new Ainu Party, there is little international incentive or precedent for the Japanese government to acquiesce.

The mismatch between aspiration and application cuts to the heart of current debate over the parameters and ambit of postcolonial studies. The exercise of applying the framework to East Asia fruitfully reveals holes and weaknesses in the discipline's theoretical basis and current modes of application. In particular, when applied to an ex-colonial situation that is not European in origin, postcolonial theory reveals its Eurocentric foundations, a concern that must be addressed at this juncture as the discipline spreads itself increasingly thin.[7] In particular, the ideological suppositions which underpin postcolonial theory are deeply Eurocentric. Although perhaps nobody would deny that liberal notions of equality, freedom and fair treatment for all are principles that ought to be aspired to, the very particular post-War European genesis of the UN organisation (1945) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is troublesome. Founded on indisputably European, Christian values steeped in the modernising project (Slaughter 2007), it is clear that applying these precepts to Asia is bound to be problematic. The question over Japanese postcoloniality may well be as thorny as that over Japanese modernity. The literature on Japan's position vis-à-vis modernity is large and disparate, with little consensus on how post-War Japan became the only nation to modernise without passing through European colonisation, or, according to some, bypassed modernity altogether to pass directly into the postmodern. Nevertheless, all studies search for their answers in unique aspects of Japanese society, including, to name a few, Shintoism, family and corporate structure, and political soft totalitarianism. Similar investigation would be fruitful in considering Japanese colonialism and postcolonialism. While postcolonial theory—like postmodernism—is based on a deconstructionist model that contests the perceived Eurocentric hegemony of the colonial and modern paradigms by advocating local and indigenous philosophies, the human rights model is never far from the surface.

Just as Asia must find its own way of accounting for its relationship to modernity, any Asian adoption of postcoloniality would also need to be grounded in local structures of meaning. The East-Asian, or Japanese variety of postcoloniality must surely be explored by East Asianists and Japanese, both abroad and, crucially, at home. Once again we are confronted with the sticky issue of the inadequacy of applying Western theory to Asia and the associated supposition of a hierarchical relationship which configures Western thought as superior to

---

[5] For detail of the long years of Ainu protest against and resistance see Siddle *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan*.

[6] http://www.ainu-org.jp/, last accessed 15 January, 2013.

[7] For analysis of current trends in critiquing postcolonial studies, see Melissa Kennedy, "New Directions in Postcolonial Studies."

that produced in the East. Margaret Hillenbrand expresses the problem eloquently in her introduction to another *Postcolonial Studies* special issue, *Contemporary East Asia, in Theory*: the problem "lies not in the exteriority of [European theory to East Asian contexts] *per se* but in the internal void that the routine recourse to other interpretative conditions cannot help but imply" (Hillenbrand 2010, p. 318). While it is neither possible nor desirable to expunge Western theory from Asian studies, which would in any case inaccurately negate the considerable long-term influence of Western thought on and in the region, the antidotes commonly proposed to redress the imbalance are to pay attention to Eastern and local indigenous philosophical traditions (Clammer 2001, p. 74; Hillenbrand 2007, 2010; Kuwayama 2004, pp. 53-55). While the idea is applaudable, its implementation to date is lamentable. Hillenbrand's 2010 bibliometric survey that measures the frequency of citations of theorists in a leading Asian studies journal, *positions: east asia cultures critique* reveals the following most-cited theorists since its inception in 1993: Foucault (110), Benjamin (82), Spivak (61), Freud (60), Jameson (55), Said (53), Bhabha and Derrida (51), Anderson (43). The top-scoring Asian researchers score significantly lower: Rey Chow (34), Naoki Sakai (28), Karatani Kojin (25), Dai Jinhua (18). Both Hillenbrand and Takami Kuwayama further claim a concomitant lack of cross-cultural scholarship between Asian scholars (Hillenbrand 2010, p. 327; Kuwayama 2004, p. 60). Examples include Chinese scholars lack of collaboration with those of Greater China, particularly from Taiwan and Hong Kong (Hillenbrand 2007, p. 48), Korean anthropologists whose work is relatively unknown in Japan, and even reluctance from Japanese scholars to investigate cultures of their former colonies. Two cases in point are John Lie's *Zainichi: Koreans in Japan: Diasporic Nationalism and Postcolonial Identity* (2008) and Chunghee Sarah Soh's *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (2008). Soh's and Lie's books already point to the aptness of the postcolonial framework in discussions of Korean national identity and the Korean diaspora in society and literature. These works also illustrate the round-about circulation of knowledge and dissemination of research across disciplines: Lie is Professor of Sociology at UCLA, Berkeley, and Soh is Professor of Anthropology at San Francisco State. Similarly, Japanese scholar Fuminobu Murakami, well-known for his work on contemporary Japanese literature, was a Professor at the University of Hong Kong and wrote predominantly in English. These three academics, as well as Hillenbrand herself, have made significant contributions to the study of postcolonial Japan without themselves being part of Japanese academia.

Both Kuwayama and Hillenbrand describe the lack of communication between disciplines, academic traditions and nations in terms of periphery-centre power relations between Asia (periphery) and the West (centre), in which many Asian scholars tend to refer to the West rather than to their own scholarly traditions and to each other. To counter this current effect, Hillenbrand proposes a pan-Asian academic *clique,* based on the French *Tel Quel* group that now stands metonymically for "Western theory." She proposes this group would present a consolidated front based on sustained collaboration, exchange, and translation that would make Western scholars sit up and take notice (2007, p. 47-48). Rather than criticising Western epistemological "neo-imperialism" (2010, p. 322), Hillenbrand incites East Asian scholars to *construct* rather than *deconstruct* on their own East-Asian terms. Hillenbrand's citation of Abdul Jan Mohamed and David Lloyd to support her call for East-Asian solidarity intuits the potential usefulness of postcolonial precepts, as these theorists are also part of the postcolonial roll-call. Thus, to add to the suggestion of this paper that postcolonial principles are already at work *culturally* in East Asia, albeit by other names, they are also invoked *theoretically*, applicable to describing many forms and modes of power relations and hierarchies.

Hillenbrand's initiative for more equal weighting of East and West theoretical and critical approaches is equally pertinent to postcolonial studies, which has similarly slipped into a rut in which a small group of researchers continually refer back to a core group of theorists while overlooking a vast reserve of primary and secondary material available—albeit often outside the Anglo-American academy. Indeed, a bibliometric survey of the most oft-cited theorists in postcolonial critique would probably come up with a very similar result to Hillenbrand's. Several of the names that appear most frequently on her list are also central to postcolonial theory, namely Said, Spivak and Bhabha. In a similar fashion to Kuwayama and Hillenbrand in the East Asian Studies field, postcolonial scholar Neil Lazarus, in *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011), critiques postcolonialists for academic short-sightedness. He diagnoses a self-afflicted paralysis in the discipline due to the narrow range of primary texts, even smaller number of theorists, and tendency to use the same methods and draw the same conclusions (Lazarus 2011, pp. 18-19). In postcolonial literary studies, East-Asian writers could have a much larger role to play. Lazarus's challenge to broaden the texts under postcolonial consideration would certainly take up diasporic writers such as Hong Kong-Macau writer Brian Castro in Australia, Chinese-born Dai Sijie in France, and Japanese Kazuo Ishiguro in England, as well as those translated into English: Lazarus calls on Chinese writers Bei Dao, Jia Pingwa, Lao She, Lu Hsun, Mo Yan, Shu Ting, Yu Hua, and Korean Hwang Sun-won for work which taps into postcolonial concerns.

Despite criticising postcolonialists for their reluctance to risk new approaches and the tendency to follow fashions and funding—surely critiques applicable across academia—Lazarus deeply believes in the ongoing pertinence of postcolonial studies: "the 'urgent' task facing those in the field today [. . .] is to take central cognisance of the unremitting actuality and indeed the intensification of imperialist social relations in the times and spaces of the postcolonial world" (Lazarus 2011, p. 16). Lazarus's discussion of the US war in Iraq as an example of modern day imperialism, to which can be added the neoliberalism behind the financial crisis and fallacies of development discourse, revives the relevance of the work of Franz Fanon, another cornerstone of postcolonial theory. In Lazarus's words:

[the] 'new world order' has already turned out not to be so very different, after all, from the 'old world order' of Fanon's time [. . .] Far from having nothing concrete to say to us today, his work seems to me, to have lost nothing of its relevance or its urgency. *La lucha continúa*, in the famous words of Fanon's exact contemporary, Che Guevara: the struggle continues. (Lazarus 2011, pp. 181-182)

Certainly, the indigenous and minority groups in Asia which struggle for recognition and rights have grounds on which to extend Fanon's claims for minority struggle to their particular contexts. More than yet another exercise in Western academic authority, I believe that applying the postcolonial to Japan can move forward urgent debates in Japan on its internal minorities and regional relationships. At the same time, adding East Asia to the postcolonial framework helps the discipline address its own structural issues. Both outcomes, I think, support and validate the aims of the social sciences to be meaningful and useful in the "real world," and foster the kind of academic internationalism and interdisciplinary cross-fertilising that liberal globalisation encourages.

Works Cited

Banks, R. (2007), United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Explanation of Vote by New Zealand Permanent Representative, 13 September 2007.

Befu, H. (2001), *Hegemony of Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron*. Melbourne: Trans-Pacific Press.

Beng Huat, C. (2008), "Southeast Asia in Postcolonial Studies: an introduction," in *Postcolonial Studies Special Issue: Southeast Asia's absence in postcolonial studies*, vol 11 (3), pp. 231-240.

Chan, J. (2008), *Another Japan is Possible: New Social Movements and Global Citizenship Education*. California: Stanford University Press.

Clammer, J. (2001), *Japan and Its Others: Globalization, Difference and the Critique of Modernity*. Melbourne: Trans-Pacific Press.

Gray, A., Barnes, R.H. and Kingsbury, B.(eds.) (1995), *Indigenous Peoples of Asia*. Michigan: Association of Asian Studies.

Heim, L. and Seldon, M (eds.), (2000), *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States*. New York and London: M.E. Sharpe.

Hillenbrand, M. (2010), "Communitarianism, or, how to build East Asian theory," *in Postcolonial Studies Special issue: Contemporary East Asia, in theory*. Vol 13 (4), pp, 317-334.

---. (2007), *Literature, Modernity, and the Practice of Resistance: Japanese and Taiwanese Fiction, 1960-1990*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

Kennedy, M. (2012), "New Directions in Postcolonial Studies," in *NUCB Journal of Language Culture and Communication*. Vol 13 (2), pp.3-12. Online at h ttp://ci.nii.ac.jp/vol_issue/nels/AA11319906_en.html

Kuwayama, T. (2004), *Native Anthropology: The Japanese Challenge to Western Academic Hegemony*. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press.

Lazarus, N. (2011), *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lie, J. (2008), *Zainichi: Koreans in Japan: Diasporic Nationalism and Postcolonial Identity*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Loos, N., and Osanai, T. (eds.), (1993), *Indigenous Minorities and Education: Australian and Japanese Perspectives of their Indigenous Peoples, the Ainu, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders*. Tokyo: Sanyusha.

McVeigh, B.J. (2004), *Nationalisms of Japan: Managing and Mystifying Identity*. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Morris-Suzuki, T. (1998), *Re-Inventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Murakami, F. (2005), *Postmodern, Feminist, and Postcolonial Currents in Contemporary Japanese Culture: A Reading of Murakami Haruki, Yoshimoto Banana, Yoshimoto Takaaki and Karatani Kōjin* . London and New York: Routledge.

---. (2010), *The Strong and the Weak in Japanese Literature: Discrimination, egalitarianism, nationalism*. London and New York: Routledge.

Siddle, Richard. *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Slaughter, J.R. (2007), *Human Rights, Inc.:The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Soh, C.S. (2008) *The Comfort Women: Sexual violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Suzuki, D., and Oiwa, K. (1996), *The Japan We Never Knew: A Journey of Discovery*. Toronto: Stoddart.

Mapping the Subterranean of Haruki Murakami's Literary World
Akiyoshi Suzuki

Abstract

"A good map is worth a thousand words, cartographers say, and they are right: because it produces a thousand words: it raises doubts, ideas. It poses new questions, and forces you to look for new answers", said Franco Moretti (Moretti 1999, pp. 3-4). The purpose of this article is to bring to light relations that would otherwise remain hidden in this current time of globalization and to analyze the literary works of Haruki Murakami in a literary topography: in other words, through literary maps above and under the ground, of today and of the past, and on this world and on the other world. Making literary maps of Murakami's novels, especially of the routes of the characters walks in Tokyo, has been popular (e.g. Tokyo Kurenaidan 1999, Urazumi 2000). When we consider Murakami's obsession with the subterranean world, his fictional metaphors of features like a field well and the bottom of the sea, and the characters' strange semiconscious walks, however, mapping just the surface of the ground is not enough. We should focus on Murakami's subterrane as long as he is obsessed with the subterranean world. Therefore, I superimposed a map of ancient Tokyo on that of today. The result is that you find Murakami's characters, even when they walk in downtown Tokyo, tend to walk along the water's edge and through cemeteries and burial mounds: in short, they walk with or as spirits of the dead. These mappings show the past or the dead violently controls characters in the "here and now", and is a pattern from his early novels, which are set in Ashiya, Hyogo. Murakami tells that "Yamikuro" live under the world and controls violence above the ground. The anagram of "Yamikuro" is "I mark you". It means that people on the ground are controlled by the past or the dead under the ground, which is a typical expression for power of memory of Japanese.

Key words: Murakami, subterranean, maps, literary topography

1. Introduction

One of the characteristics of Murakami's novels is their characters' walking through famous buildings and in well-known places whose names are concretely referred to, such as Tokyo Tower, Aoyama Boulevard, and Shibuya. Generic places are also described concretely enough to identify them, as in the "Hyakken-cho" area (steps in the love motel alley in Shibuya) in the novel *After Dark*. Therefore, mapping the paths of the characters' routes in Murakami's novels has become popular. For example, Urazumi makes a map of the path of the route of main characters in *Norwegian Wood*, and infers that they visit historical scenes of violence, such as a massive youth movement, in the 1960s, in which the novel was set, and ascribes the characters' depression to the violence (Urazumi 2000, pp. 34-7). While Murakami's literary world can be localized in this way, it can still be read from the perspective of other countries, as well. Some of the buildings described in Murakami's novels belong to transnational companies, such as Nike, McDonald's, KFC, and so on. Their buildings are landmarks of the current consumer society in this time of globalization. In addition, Urazumi observes that it is sometimes said that cities and towns in Murakami's novels have an artificial, modern surface which is not in line with their histories (Urazumi 2000, p. 132). From the architectonic viewpoint, too, a similar perspective is proposed (e.g. Suzuki et. al. 1995). Regarding "The international 'Haruki Boom',￼" Inuhiko Yomota, who says "Murakami's novels are largely devoid of anything suggestive of […] traditional 'Japaneseness'" (p. 35), explains as follows:

In every society, his works are first accepted as texts that assuage the political, disillusionment, romantic impulse, loneliness, and emptiness of readers. Only later do they fully realize that the author was born in Japan and that the books are actually translations. While it is true that Murakami is a Japanese writer who writes in Japanese, the cultural sensibility that he draws on, the music and films that appear in his works, and the urban way of life that he depicts are all of a nature that cannot be attributed to any single place or people, drifting and circulating as they do in the globalized world (pp. 34-5).

In this way, readers all over the world can easily walk in cities and towns in Murakami's novels in their own imagination, as if they were walking in their own countries, which is said to be one of the reasons why Murakami's fiction is popular all over the world (Yonemura 2008).

Walking on or mapping just the surface of the ground is, however, superficial because, while Murakami describes the world on the ground very concretely, he always has in mind the subterranean world of Japan with its links to violence and death. In an interview with Ian Buruma, Murakami explained that a key to understanding Japan is violence and that the "Yamikuro"[1] under the ground commit all the violence in Japan (Buruma 1996, p. 60). In this passage from his book *Underground: the Tokyo Gas Attack*, Murakami relates the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack to the Yamikuro under the ground.

Subterranean worlds—wells, underpasses, caves, underground springs and rivers, dark alleys, subways—have always fascinated me and are an important motif in my novels. The images, the mere idea of a hidden pathway, immediately fills my head with stories. […]

---

[1] "Yamikuro" is translated into "INKlings" in English. However, for the purposes of this essay I retain "Yamikuro" both in my discussion and in quotations from English versions where "INKlings" was used. As I discuss later, the anagram of "Yamikuro", "I mark you", is important for understanding this aspect of Murakami's work.

[…] In *Hard-boiled Wonderland* a fictional race called Yamikuro has lived beneath us since time immemorial. Horrible creatures, they have no eyes and feed upon rotting flesh. They have dug a vast underground network of tunnels beneath Tokyo, linking their "nests". Ordinary people, however, never even suspect their presence. […]

[…] A childish fantasy, admittedly. Yet, like it or not, when news of the Tokyo gas attack reached me, I have to admit "Yamikuro" came to mind…. If I were to give free rein to a very private paranoia, I'd have imagined some causal link between the evil creatures of my creation and those dark underlings who preyed upon the subway commuters. (Murakami 2003c, pp. 208-9)[2]

Yamikuro's commitment to violence is not restricted to that in Tokyo, but also of other places in Japan.

What is the significance of locating the tensions and traumas of his novels in terms of the Yamikuro? The subterranean world where the Yamikuro live is the place of the past, and the world on the ground is the place of present day. To this point, I superimposed a map of ancient Japan on that of present-day Japan and found that the concretely mentioned buildings and places on the ground in Murakami's novels are actually located above archaeological digs such as an ancient tomb, a cemetery, a crematorium, a ritual place; in other words they are built on top of the places under which the dead are concealed. For example, Tokyo Tower is made of the steel which was used for American-built tanks in the Korean War—violence and death—but the subterrane of the tower has many ancient tombs (Nakazawa 2005a, pp. 78-9). The structure registers literal layers in this motif of violence and death. The buildings and the places detailed in Murakami's texts are landmarks which symbolize modernization and capitalism, but simultaneously they are the traces of Japanese history and hence memories of violence and/or death.

This is the environment where the characters in Murakami's novels live, people who are depressed, lonely, and bored, like the living dead. Let us remember the race which is the driving force of all the violence on the ground. It is the Yamikuro. Murakami explained that a key to understanding Japan is violence and that the Yamikuro under the ground commit all the violence in Japan. "Yami" means darkness, and "kuro" means black. Additionally, the anagram of Yamikuro in Roman characters for the Japanese is, I found, "I mark you". It means that people who are in the past mark you and drag you into the subterranean world. This signifies death, either physical or psychological.

Of course, not only Japanese but also people in other countries live with memories of violence and/or death among landmarks which symbolize modernization. The memories, however, are different in areas in the world. In addition, violent events sparked by these traumatic memories are various; a riot, a civil conflict, a war. The Yamikuro in modern Japan, in which Murakami's novels are set, do not bring about such events but rather drag the people into a subterranean world, dragged there by their own memories. (One of the examples is suicide. In fact, there are many suicides in Japan.) From the comparison, the Yamikuro certainly live *in* Japan. "INKlings", an English translation of the Yamikuro, live in other areas.

In "the Spirit of Place", the first chapter of *Studies in Classic American Literature,* D. H. Lawrence suggests the importance of thinking of literary fictions in terms of their local places.

---

[2] Quotations from Murakami's novels are basically taken from their English versions, but I changed some parts or added some words in quotations for accuracy of translation.

Every continent has its own great spirit of place. Every people is polarized in some particular locality, which is home, the homeland. Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality. The Nile valley produced not only the corn, but the terrific religions of Egypt. China produces the Chinese, and will go on doing so. The Chinese in San Francisco will in time cease to be Chinese, for America is a great melting pot. (Lawrence 1923 [1964], pp. 5-6)

When we think of the title of the chapter, "The Spirit of Place", and his comments in other chapters, Lawrence seems to look at the subterranean world as well as above the ground. Such a view is important in reading Murakami's fictional worlds when his works travel in the current time of globalization.

Let us observe how the Yamikuro take action in *Norwegian Wood*, from the following chapter on.

2. *Norwegian Wood* – **Naoko and the Subterranean World**

The story of *Norwegian Wood* begins developing in the second chapter, when Watanabe says "Death exists, not as the opposite but as a part of life" (Murakami 2003b, p. 30) and "In the midst of life, everything revolved around death" (Murakami 2003b, p. 31), while remembering the sudden death of Kizuki, who is one of his friends and Naoko's boyfriend. Since his death, Watanabe and Naoko have met each other for the first time by chance at Yotsuya Station, and they start walking through Tokyo. Judging from her emaciated form, Naoko seems to be shocked by the death of her boyfriend and is unable to forget him. She is still with the dead Kizuki. Not incidentally, in her walking with Watanabe, Naoko's frame of mind is mystifying, as if something controls her walking. When arriving at Komagome, she asks Watanabe "Where are we?" Before long, she becomes mentally ill and finally commits suicide. What happened when Naoko walked in Tokyo?

Naoko's seemingly inexplicable walk is explained when Watanabe follows Naoko from Yotsuya Station to Komagome. This walk is special for them and thus significant to the novel. They "were always out walking together, side by side" (Murakami 2003b, p. 3) in Tokyo, but only the route between Yotsuya and Komagome is described in detail in the text and is remembered by Watanabe after Naoko's death.

Naoko and Watanabe "left the train at Yotsuya and were walking [toward Ichigaya] along the embankment by [the rail tracks]" (Murakami 2003b, p. 20),[3] and

[s]he turned right at Iidabashi, came out at the [old castle] moat, crossed the intersection at Jinbocho, climbed the hill at Ochanomizu, and came out at Hongo. From there she followed the trolley tracks to Komagome [….]
"Where are we?" asked Naoko as if noticing our surroundings for the first time.

---

[3] Translation in English of this sentence is "We had left the train at Yotsuya and were walking along the embankment by the station" (p. 20). The Japanese original text says, however, that the route along which they walked is "along the rail tracks", and in addition, the direction where they walked is "Ichigaya", so I translated the Japanese here. The altered phrase is put in the brackets as follows: "[toward Ichigaya] along the embankment by [the rail tracks]".

"Komagome", I said. "Didn't you know? We made this big arc".
"Why did we come here?"
"*You* brought us here. I was just following you" (Murakami 2003b, p. 23).

Now let us confirm their route with a current map of Tokyo. First, they "left the train at Yotsuya" (figure 1).[4]

Figure 1

Then, they "were walking [toward Ichigaya] along the embankment by [the rail tracks]" (figure 2).

Figure 2

---

[4] English words in the maps in this paper are by the author.

She "turned right at Iidabashi" (figure 3),

Figure 3

and "came out the old castle moat" (figure 4),

Figure 4

"crossed the intersection at Jinbocho" (figure 5),

Figure 5

"climbed the hill at Ochanomizu" (figure 6),

Figure 6

"and came out at Hongo" (figure 7).

Figure 7

"From there she followed the trolley tracks to Komagome" (figure 8).

Figure 8

Their walking route can be simply shown as follows (figure 9).

Figure 9

There are several routes to Komagome, but Naoko chooses a roundabout one. She could have chosen the straight route to Komagome, but she "turned right at Iidabashi". This turn is the beginning of her roundabout trip. Why did Naoko choose this route? Urazumi infers that they are visiting historical scenes of violence, for example, universities which had a massive youth movement, such as Nihon University, Hosei University, Tokyo University, and Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Camp Ichigaya, where Yukio Mishima committed suicide (Urazumi 2000, pp. 34-7). However, if this is so, Naoko could have chosen another route, too. For instance, she could go straight at Iidabashi, instead of "turn[ing] right at Iidabashi", reach Komagome first, and then pass Tokyo University, Ochanomizu, the intersection at Jinbocho, and arrive at Iidabashi. In addition, there are several other universities which had a vast youth movement. Still, of course, Naoko cannot answer the reason why she chose the route, for she cannot remember anything; she merely feels as if she were being led by a force beyond her consciousness.

What is the force? In order to consider Naoko's obsession with "the 'field well'" (Murakami 2003b, p. 4), which is a pass between the ground and the subterranean world, it would be valuable to take notice of the subterranean world: in other words, the ancient geological layer of the route where Naoko and Watanabe walked. Let us descend into "the well".

Figure 10 is a map of Tokyo superimposed on a map of ancient Japan: what Murakami refers to as "time immemorial", as evidenced earlier in the quotation regarding the Yamikuro. Iidabashi and Komagome are on contiguous ground now, but according to the map of ancient Japan, there was much that used to be under water.
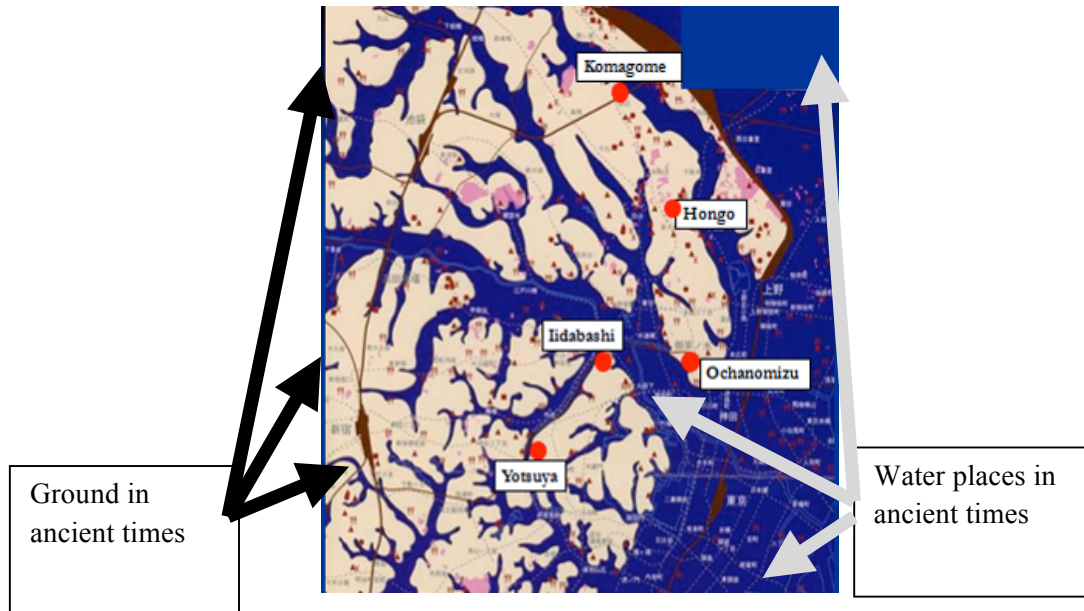
Figure 10

The ancient maps (figures 11, 12, 13, and 14) show that Naoko walks on the ground belonging to the ancient layer, along the edge of the tongue-shaped cape, like moving in an arc (from Yotsuya to the old castle moat). She cannot choose but to "turn right at Iidabashi" because if she continues straight, she will run into the water. Of course, she could theoretically continue this straight route, but according to the ancient maps, she would have been down in the wetlands again and again on her way to Komagome. Her route is a (ancient) shortcut to Komagome.
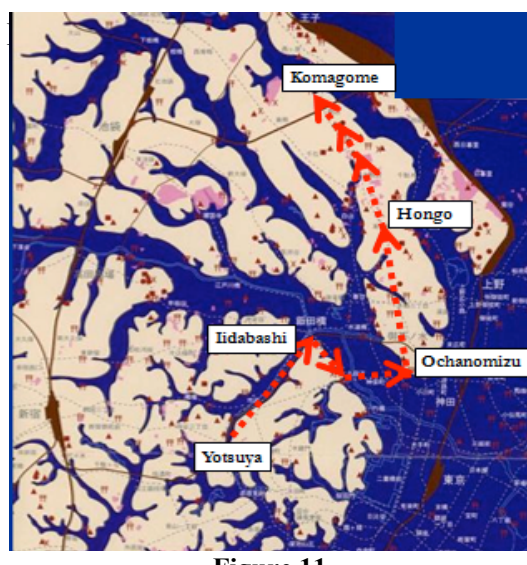
Figure 11
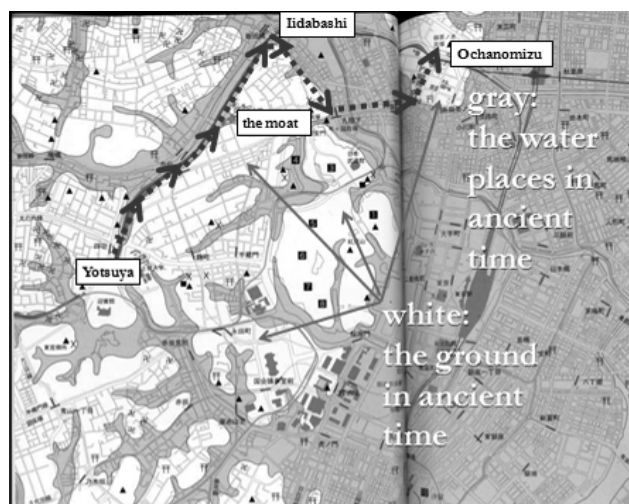
Figure 12
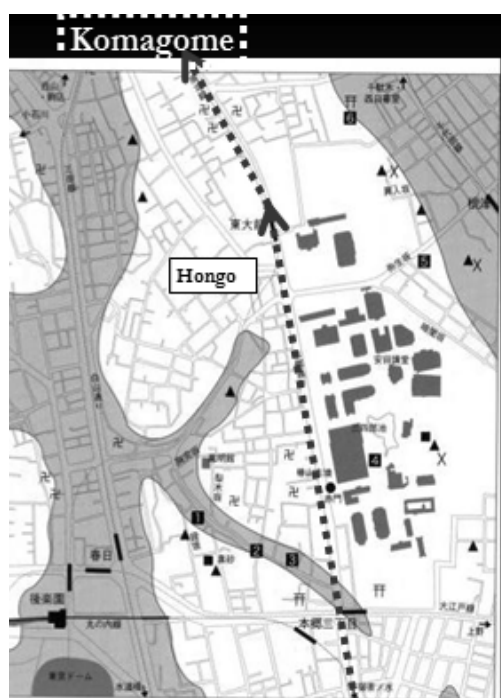
Figure 13
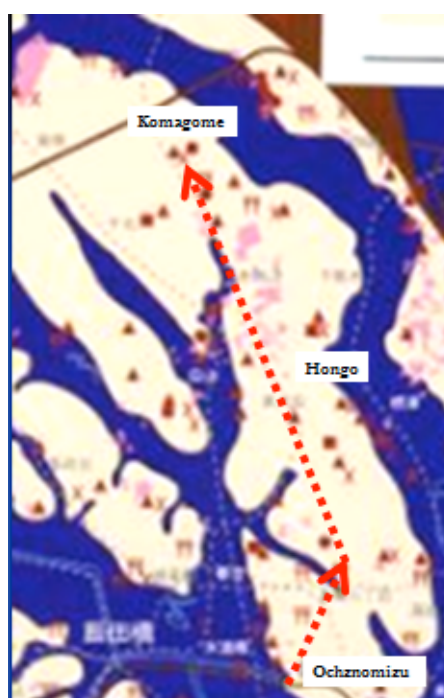
Figure 14

(●: ancient burial mound, pink: huge cemetery, ■: Paleolithic ruin, ▲: ruin in the Jomon period (the 145th century B.C. to the 10th century B.C.), ×: ruin in the Yayoi period (the 10th century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D.), 卍: temple, graveyard, 开: shrine)

In a sense, the sentence translated in English, "We made this big arc", is based on the view of just the ground. The original Japanese texts says "回ったんだよ" ("mawattandayo" or "meguttandayo") here. "回った" ("mawatta" or "megutta") is the past tense of "回る" ("mawaru" or "meguru"). When we consider the subterranean world, the "回る" means "moving in an arc" ("mawaru") and "walking some spots in order" ("meguru") as well. This sense is true because Naoko not only chooses the route on the solid land, but she also moves

in an arc along the edge of the cape and walks through certain historical spots in a particular order. The spots through which Naoko unconsciously passes are the historical places relating to the spirits of the dead from the ancient past to the modern times of Japan (figure 15).
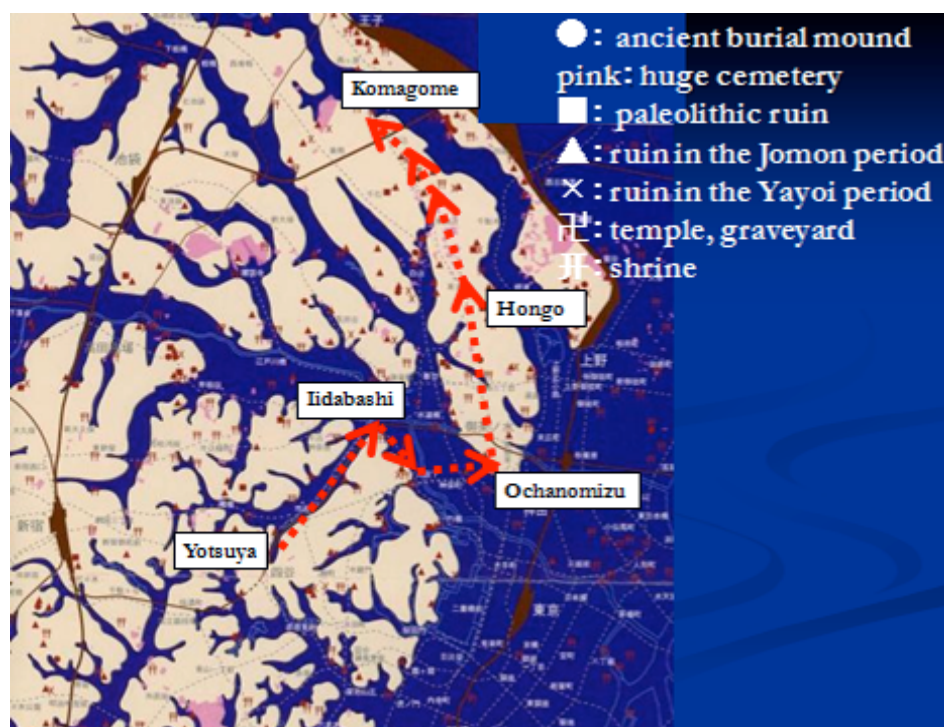
Figure 15

First, Yotsuya, the starting point of their walking, is a place known as the origin of the ghost story "Yotsuya Kaidan", which was written between the 18th and the 19th centuries. It is a ghost story about a woman named "Oiwa" who is killed by her husband who loves another woman, but she gains her revenge as a ghost. In Yotsuya there is in fact a shrine which protects Oiwa there. "Yotsuya Kaidan" is not regarded just as fiction but as a story based on a historical act of violence. In addition, many Japanese people are still fearful of Oiwa's curse. Originally, Yotsuya was a place of the dead. In the subterrane near Yotsuya Station there are several ruins from the Jomon period which can also be found in other parts of Naoko's route.

After Naoko leaves Yotsuya with Watanabe, they walk to Iidabashi. On the right side on the way is the Yasukuni shrine, which protects the people who died in the civil wars in Japan and in the wars against foreign countries: more violence. After this, Naoko and Watanabe walk through the Kudan area, which is the top of the cape. The top also has ruins from the Jomon and Yayoi (around the 10th century B.C. to approximately the 3rd century A.D.) periods. Archaeologically speaking, the top of the cape and the water's edge are contact points between the living in this world and the dead in the otherworld, and they are entrances into the world of the dead in ancient people's minds (Nakazawa 2005a, pp. 60-1). In the sense, Naoko and Watanabe walk on the land and the place of life and at the same time the area of the spirits of the dead.

On the top of the other cape, the Ochanomizu area, there are again ruins from the Jomon period. On the way from Ochanomizu through Hongo to Komagome, there are many ruins and cemeteries from ancient times. Finally they reach Komagome. Here, over 20 settlements in the Yayoi period were discovered, and near the area, there are ruins from ancient times. Moreover, one legend tells that Komagome was named by "Yamato Takeru-no Mikoto", a

mythical, celebrated man who contributed to the violent nation-building in Japan by the Yamato dynasty. He had fiery temper and was distinguished by valor. The Yamato dynasty did not exist in the ante-Christum. However, *Kojiki, A Record of Ancient Matters*, which was written after the dynasty started, tells that the dynasty stems from the mythological age, including the paleolithic, the Jomon, and the Yayoi eras. In short, Komagome directly connects to the origin of the history of Japan, which started with violence and death.

Thus, Naoko walks on the layers of violence and death toward the origin of Japan, as Table 1 illustrates.

Route (Present)	History on the ground (Modern time: after the W.W.II)	History under the ground (Ancient times: paleolithic era to 113A.D.)
Yotsuya	Yotsuya Kaidan, shrines	cape & ruin in ancient times
Yotsuya ― Iidabashi (Ichigaya)	Hosei Univ (student movement), Japanese Army (Mishima's suicide), shrines, temples	cape & ruin in ancient times
the old castle moat	Kudanshita (Yasukuni shrine)	＜the top of the cape＞ cape & ruin in ancient times
Ochanomizu	Nihon Univ (student movement), shrines, temples	＜the top of the cape＞ cape & ruin in ancient times
Hongo	Tokyo Univ (student movement), shrines, temples	ruin in ancient times necropolises
Komagome		Yamato Takeru-no Mikoto (mythological age, the beginning of Japan with violence and death), huge cemetery, ruins
【Summary】 "回った" on the spots of death and the spirits of ancient people	death & violence in modern times	death & the spirits of ancient people

Table 1

The Yamato dynasty started with violence and death. After the "dawn" of time, from Jomon period and the Yayoi invasion to the end of late-empire building of the Pacific War, Japan, like all nations, is built on blood. The Heian era ends with samurais, who are warriors fought strictly as professionals. Since then, they had killed each other, thinking of building a better society in their mind. The peak was the Age of Japanese Civil Wars, which began with the turmoil of the Onin war in 1467. In the Edo era after the summer campaign of Osaka (1615), the relative peaceful world came, but the Boshin War happened in 1868 and the Emperor

Meiji brought Japan out of the Samurai era as a modern nation with westernization and militarization with a break with old Japan and Asia. After then, Japan experienced the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), the World War I (1914-18), and caused the Sino-Japan War (1937) and went to the World War II (1939-45). In the postwar as well, violent-and-death events always happen, such as the student movement in the 1960s and the 1970s, school violence in the 1980s, the Tokyo sarin gas attack in 1995. Violence and death never stop. It is a kind of a chain linked by memory. If violent events in the postwar happened because of modernized society, the society links to memory of the defeat of the W.W.II linking to memory of the victories of the wars against foreign countries linking to memory of the beginning of modernization and imperialism in the Meiji era linking to memory of the feudal society in the Edo era linking to memory of killings in the Age of Japanese Civil Wars linking to memory of turmoil in the previous eras linking the memory of time immemorial. The trace of violence and death is continuous to ancient times and to the underworld. Though it is said that Murakami's novel includes criticism against Japanese Imperial system[5], the criticism itself trace back through history to the dawn of Japan.

In Murakami's novels, memory, the water's edge, a modernized city on the ground, and its subterranean world are all linked to death. This is a pattern from his first novel *Hear the Wind Sing*. In his second novel *1973 PINBALL* Rat goes on a date in a cemetery in Ashiya city, which faces the sea, in Hyogo prefecture. The novel ends with the scene in which Rat hears the sound of waves in the cemetery. One of Murakami's early short stories, "A Coastline in May", which has not yet been translated, even says the water's edge is a contact point between the living in this world and the dead in the otherworld. The contact points in downtown Tokyo today have disappeared because the sea level has receded; however, according to the map of ancient Japan, Watanabe and Naoko certainly walk these points. Their walk is really "a kind of magical baptism to link the world on this side with the world on the other side", as "K", one of the main characters in *Sputnik Sweetheart*, says (Murakami 2002, p. 17).

Naoko's walk is driven metaphorically by the subterranean spirits as Naoko lives with the memory of Kizuki. Her mind is occupied with him, so it is natural that she cannot remember where she walks or how she arrives at her destination. It is, however, not at all different from walking with a dead person in her internal frame of reference. In other words, the driving force behind her walking is the power of memory, which ties Naoko with the person in the past: the dead person under the ground. This walk is supported by the metaphoric topography of the novel: her obsession with the memory of Kizuki lets her traverse the route under which there are many spirits of the dead. It reminds us of Watanabe's remarks, "Death exists, not as the opposite but as a part of life" and "In the midst of life, everything revolved around death". After walking, Naoko is attacked by mental illness and eventually kills herself. This is at a point in the cycle of violence and death, and she is dragged into the subterranean world by the dead Kizuki.

The Ami Hostel, a sanatorium in Kyoto where Naoko stays until her death, also vividly links the world of ill-defined borders between the ground and the underworld. Reigi Tanaka has already identified the route into the mountain in Kyoto (Tanaka 1995, pp. 78-81), and Yoshio Inoue identified the Ami Hostel itself (Inoue 1999, pp. 52-3). Both of them actually traced the path of Watanabe in the novel, and Tanaka found that Watanabe went into Mt. Daihizan in Kyoto by bus and Inoue found that the Ami Hostel is a Japanese-style inn, Miyamasou, near

---

[5] See e.g. Shibata (2009).

the old temple Bujo in the mountain.[6] The name of Daihizan means a mountain covered by the great Deity of Mercy. The old temple Bujo is a temple for Japanese traditional religion, Shugendo. The main purpose in Shugendo is to become a living Buddha through training in the holy mountains. Near the Bujo temple is Miyamasou, which was previously used as a dormitory for the mountain priests. This former dormitory is the Ami Hostel. Naoko goes to the dormitory to become a living Buddha with help of the great Deity of Mercy, but instead, she becomes "Buddha-like". The Japanese think that people will become Buddha-like after they die: meaning they will come to nothing but absolute peace.

Why does Naoko go to Kyoto in the novel? One of the reasons lies in the fact Murakami was born in Kyoto; thus he is knowledgeable regarding the geography. Moreover, we should remember that Kyoto itself is a place where many spirits of the dead are underground. Kyoto was the metropolis of Japan for over 800 years before Tokyo. In the subterrane of Kyoto today are many ruins and sprits of the dead.

The pattern which I analyzed is true in other Murakami novels. There is considerable evidence; however, I will be brief and demonstrate this point through the maps of the subterranean. Figure 16 is the map of the route where the protagonist of *Dance, Dance, Dance* always walks. Superimposing the ancient map on that of today (figure 17), we find he also walks along the edge of the capes and passes the huge cemetery. He starts in Shibuya and returns there. Shibuya was the bottom of the valley and the bottom of the sea. The area has many ancient tombs and a huge crematorium under the ground. This also has to do with the structure of *After Dark*.

Figure 16

---

[6] Miyamasou opens. See http://miyamasou.jp/html/index.html.

Figure 17

Figure 18 is the map inserted in the revised version of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. The town is similar to the Edo castle in the era (under the ground), Aoyama, and the area surrounded by Meiji Jingu Shrine, Meiji Jingu Gaien, and Aoyama Cemetery (on the ground) (figure 19). The layers of the land remind us of traditional Japan and westernized and modernized Japan.[7]
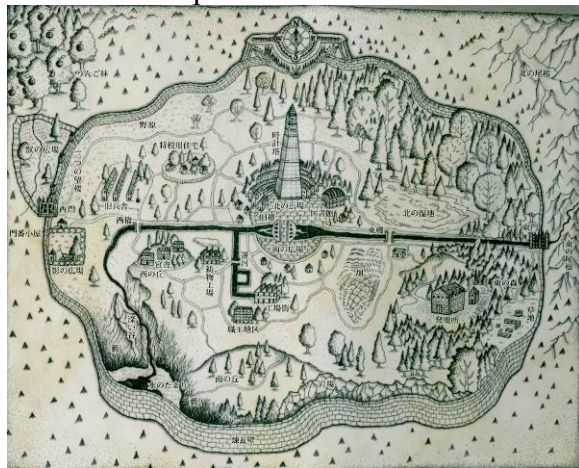
Figure 18

---

[7] The upper-right map of figure 19 is Aoyama area of today, and Murakami lived near the tower. The novel, hence, could be said to deal with Murakami himself, who is controlled by the past in his personal life and in Japanese history.
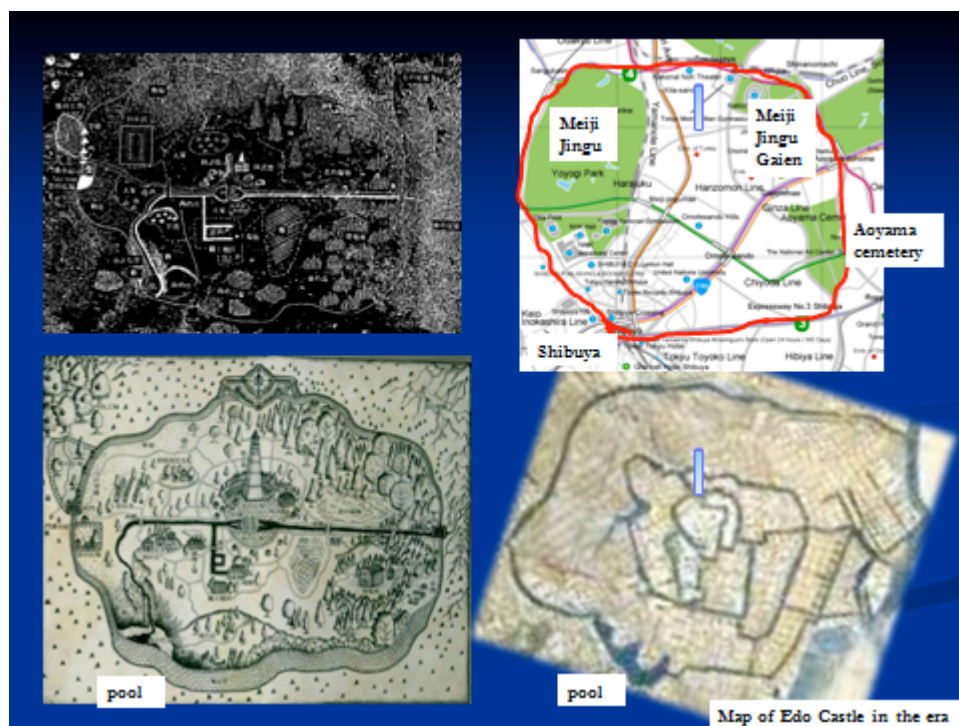
Figure 19

3. *Norwegian Wood* – **Watanabe and the Subterranean World**

Watanabe, like Naoko, also spends his everyday life in the areas of the spirits of the dead. As seen by superimposing the map of ancient Japan on the area of Waseda, Waseda University, of which Watanabe is a student, No. 3 on the map (figure 20), is on an ancient cape. Wakeijuku, the dormitory in which Murakami lived and which is the model of Watanabe's dormitory, is on the top of the cape. The cape is an immense spirit world. It has ancient cemeteries, ancient ruins under the ground, and temples and shrines on the ground. On the edge of the entrance of the cape, there are two shrines: the Ana Hachiman shrine and the Mizu Inari shrine. "Inari" is a god which protects the world of the dead, and most of the areas in Tokyo where the "Inari" shrines are located are on ancient cemeteries (Nakazawa 2005a, p. 158). Waseda University's nickname is "Miyako no Seihoku" (the northwest of the metropolis); the direction of northwest has been regarded in Japan as the place where the spirits of the dead gather. Additionally, near the Wakeijuku dormitory, there is even a slope whose name is "Yurei-zaka" (Yurei = ghost, zaka=slope).

Figure 20
(●: ancient burial mound, pink: huge cemetery, ■: Paleolithic ruin, ▲: ruin in
the Jomon period, ×: ruin in the Yayoi period, 卍: temple, graveyard, 开: shrine)

While Naoko is in Kyoto, Watanabe goes to Midori's house in Otsuka in Tokyo; he travels along the edge of the old cape again and then unconsciously passes near the huge cemetery. Between Waseda and Otsuka there are two main routes by train: the Yamanote line and the Toden Arakawa line. Watanabe chooses the latter when he goes to Midori's house.[8] Waseda Station, on the Arakawa line, is on the top of the cape (figure 21). The train goes through the tops of the old capes, which are the places for the spirits of the dead in ancient times, and through the cemetery of ancient times (figure 22). The cemetery is now Zoshigaya Cemetery. Nearby, on the old cape is the Kishibojin temple, which protects the spirits of dead babies and dead children. Then, the train reaches Otsuka.[9] Watanabe again "回る" ("moves in an arc" around) the places where the spirits of the dead on the ground and under the ground are.

---

[8] For reference, the protagonist of *A Wild Sheep Chase* also uses the Toden Arakawa line from Waseda Station.

[9] The Chinese characters of Otsuka can be read as a huge (=o) tomb (=tsuka) in Japanese, also.

Figure 21
(●: ancient burial mound, pink: huge cemetery, ■: Paleolithic ruin, ▲: ruin in the Jomon period, ×: ruin in the Yayoi period, 卍: temple, graveyard, 开: shrine)
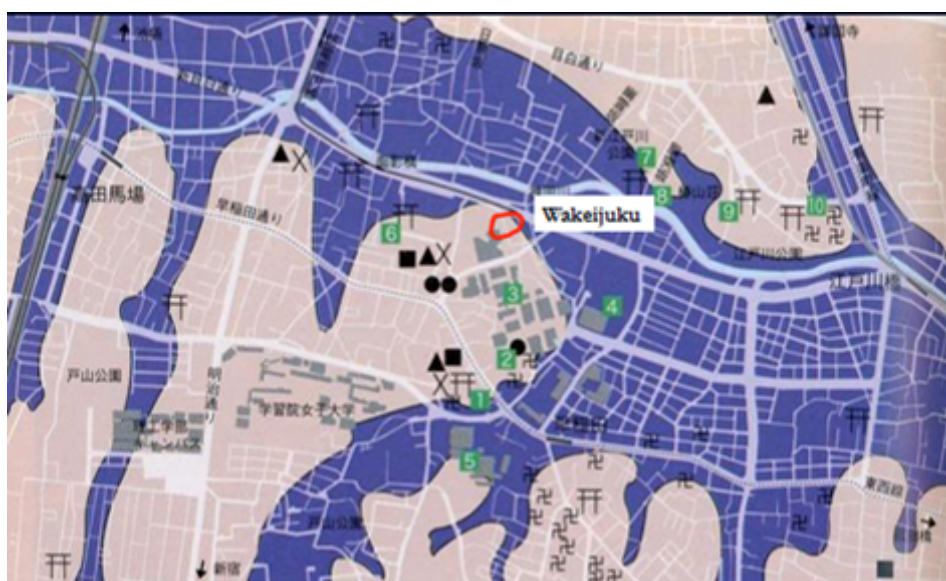

Figure 22
(●: ancient burial mound, pink: huge cemetery, ■: Paleolithic ruin, ▲ : ruin in the Jomon period, ×: ruin in the Yayoi period, 卍: temple, graveyard, 开: shrine)

There are more places where Watanabe "回る", especially the border between the water and the land. After Naoko's death, with the memory of her, he was "moving down the coast" and

"walking along the seashore" (Murakami 2003b, pp. 358-9). The seashore is a place for Watanabe to live in memory with the dead person:

The memories would slam against me like the waves of an incoming tide, sweeping my body along to some strange new place—a place where I lived with the dead. There Naoko lived, and I could speak with her and hold her in my arms. Death in that place was not a decisive element that brought life to an end. There, death was but one of many elements comprising life. There Naoko lived with death inside her (Murakami 2003b, p. 360).

In addition, he cannot remember how and where he walks, mirroring Naoko's lack of memory in Tokyo:

Where I went on my travels, it's impossible for me to recall. I remember the sights and sounds and smells clearly enough, but the names of the towns are gone, as well as any sense of the order in which I travelled from place to place (Murakami 2003b, p. 357).

When Watanabe walks with Reiko in Kichijoji in Tokyo, where he moved from Waseda after Naoko's death, he feels he is repeating the walk with the dead person. When Watanabe walks with Reiko, she is like Naoko. She even wears Naoko's clothes. Watanabe feels Reiko's "build was almost identical to Naoko's" and as for "the shape of her face and her thin arms and legs", too, "she was surprisingly solid" (Murakami 2003b, p. 370). In addition, the subterranean world of Kichijoji is also the border between the water and the land, where ancient spirits gather (figure 23).[10]

Figure 23
(●: ancient burial mound, pink: huge cemetery, ■: Paleolithic ruin, ▲: ruin in the Jomon period, ×: ruin in the Yayoi period, 卍: temple, graveyard, 开: shrine)

---

[10] Nagasawa moves to Mita, which is also the world of the dead (Nakazawa 2005a, pp. 78-9).

After Naoko's death, Watanabe lives with the memory of her. At the end of the novel, Watanabe says "Where [am] I now?" (Murakami 2003b, p. 386). He is finally driven by the underworld, like Naoko in the time before she was attacked by mental illness and died. It is a chain of death. Indeed, Watanabe says "Once upon a time, [Kizuki] dragged a part of me into the world of the dead, and now Naoko has dragged another part of me into that world" (Murakami 2003b, p. 364). He is, however, now alive, and unlike Naoko, instead of committing suicide, he writes this novel *Norwegian Wood*. Watanabe says, "Each time [the dead Naoko] appears, it delivers a kick to some part of my mind. *Wake up*, it says. […] At Hamburg airport, though, the kicks were longer and harder than usual. Which is why I am writing this book" (Murakami 2003b, p. 4). He lives in the fragile balance between the world and the underworld. He can manage to connect with the world by concentrating on writing the novel; he lives here and now, or on the ground, in touch with the past, the underworld.

The "death" of a person is a memory and a psychological violence, which suddenly assaults a person's everyday life. After Naoko's death, Watanabe cannot forget her and says "I felt sure that Naoko was still beside me" (Murakami 2003b, p. 359). Watanabe's "here and now" is always eaten away by his past, and his existence is with the dead. His world consists of ill-defined borders between the present and the past and the living and the dead; consequently the past and the dead edge into his present life. To put it topographically, the surface (the present/the living) is always eaten away by the underworld (the past/the dead) or the ground eaten away by the sea.

4. Other Characters and the Subterranean World
The power of memory also generally controls the other characters in *Norwegian Wood*. Midori is consumed by the memory of her mother and father in the subterranean world. When she remembers them, she complains to Watanabe that they should have loved her more. Watanabe sleeps with Midori in pajamas belonging to Midori's dead father. For Midori, Watanabe is the father by whom she wants to be loved. Midori's desire to be loved by a dead person is the same as Naoko's. Indeed, Midori also goes to the area of the spirits of the dead and then walks on the edge of the cape after the funeral of her father. The former is Nara, which was the metropolis of Japan before Kyoto. Nara also has many temples and tombs of ancient politicians. Contrarily, the cape where Midori goes is "Shimokita, Tappi, places like that" (Murakami 2003b, p. 292). The "places like that" are the water's edge and the cape in Aomori prefecture (figure 24).

Additionally, Ochanomizu, where her father died in the hospital, and Ueno, to which her father referred – in a trance – to Watanabe, are also on the top of a cape where numerous spirits of the dead remain (figure 25). As for Ueno, Midori remembers that her father told her "stuff he didn't usually talk about", "like about the big earthquake of 1923 or about the war" (Murakami 2003b, p. 255), that is to say, topics of violence and death.
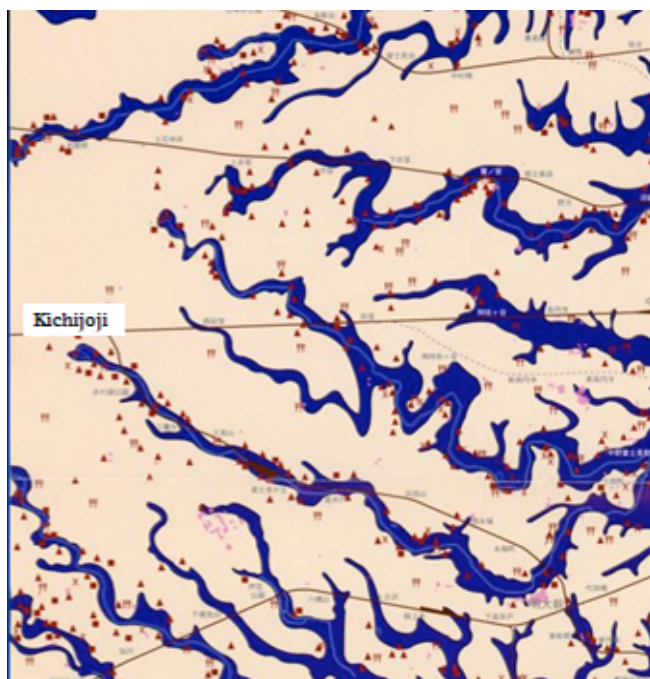
Figure 24
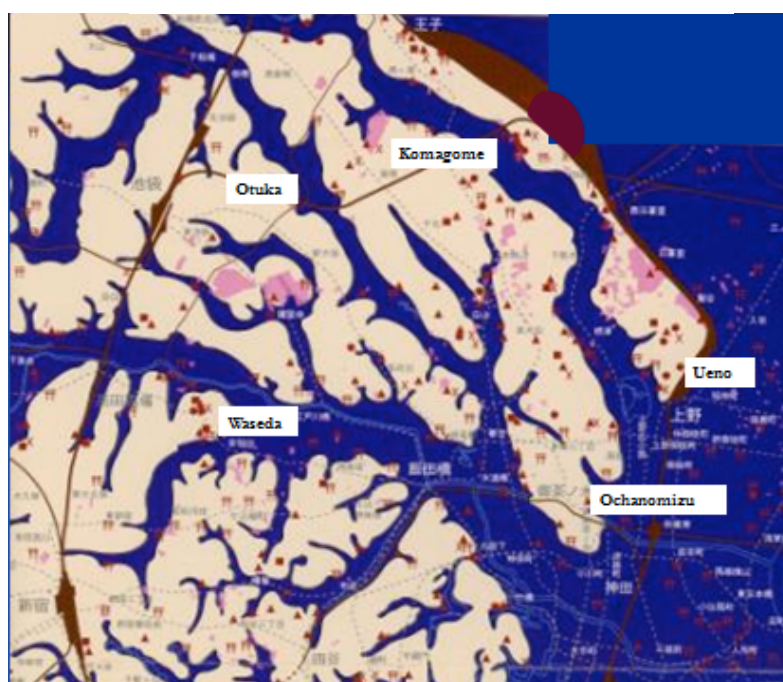
Figure 25
(●: ancient burial mound, pink: huge cemetery, ■: Paleolithic ruin, ▲: ruin in the Jomon period, ×: ruin in the Yayoi period, 卍: temple, graveyard, 开: shrine)

Reiko, Naoko's roommate in the Ami Hostel, is also mentally damaged. She expresses herself as a dead person, and she confesses that she is also driven not by her will but by the power of memory.

"I'm finished as a human being. All you're looking at is the lingering memory of what I used to be. The most important part of me, what used to be inside, died years ago, and I'm just functioning by auto-memory". (Murakami 2003b, p. 378)

The reason for her dying inside lies in her separation from her husband and child because of her piano student's lie that Reiko had raped her, which made her abhorred in her

neighborhood. Reiko was suddenly attacked by psychological violence, and she has been alone since then. Naoko supports her in the hostel. Their relationship is sometimes like a parent and child and sometimes like a couple. Therefore, Reiko walking with Watanabe in Tokyo after Naoko's death, as seen earlier, is equivalent to Watanabe's walking with the dead Naoko at that time. Certainly, what Reiko says to Watanabe in the end of the novel is exactly same as what both Midori and Naoko have said: "Don't forget me".

Thinking of the bad relationship of Reiko's student with her family, we could say that she also wants love. It is true that the student wants Reiko to love her; however, Reiko refuses the student's seduction. It is psychological violence for the student because she seeks love. Reiko's refusal drives the student to lie and in turn creates psychological violence for Reiko; it makes her lonely and forces her into the hostel in the mountain of the great Deity of Mercy. Now Reiko lives with the memory of the past, as she says, "I'm just functioning by auto-memory" (Murakami 2003, p. 378).

5. Conclusion
All the main characters in the novel want love and lose it, and the loss of love creates for them psychological violence and mental or physical death. They live with the memories of the past. It also drives them to connect with other people on the ground, by way of the past people under the ground. Memory is the bridge of everything and everybody. It is like a nest: a nest of the Yamikuro, which under the ground commit all the violence in Japan. It is impossible to disassemble the nest. Watanabe says, "[The well] was deep beyond measuring, and crammed full of darkness, as if all the world's darknesses had been boiled down to their ultimate density" (Murakami 2003b, p. 5). One's memory continues linking to the first memory in the bottom of its layer, like Naoko and Watanabe walking toward Komagome, which is a symbolic place of the dawn of Japan with violence. Japanese people live in a chain of violence and death. Watanabe says in the end of the novel, "Where was I now? I had no idea. No idea at all. Where was this place? All that flashed into my eyes were the countless shapes of people walking by to nowhere" (Murakami 2003b, p. 386). Like Watanabe and Naoko, Japanese people also might be walking now to nowhere and simultaneously to somewhere by the force of the subterranean world. Again, remember the anagram of Yamikuro: "I mark you". There is no border between the ground and the subterrane. Japanese are always controlled, through memory, by the past, and dragged into the world of death. The embodiment of this standpoint, which is expressed in the maps of the ground and the subterranean world of Japan and the spirit of place, is the world of Murakami.

I conclude this essay with the words of "K" in *Sputnik Sweetheart*, which echoes Murakami's standpoint and Lawrence's view quoted at the beginning.

After a while I started to speak. "A long time ago in China there were three cities with high walls around them, with huge, magnificent gates. The gates weren't just doors for letting people in or out, they had greater significance. People believed the city's soul resided in the gates. Or at least that it *should* reside there. It's like in Europe in the Middle Ages when people felt a city's heart lay in its cathedral and central square. Which is why even today in China there are lots of wonderful gates still standing. Do you know how the Chinese built these gates? [. . .]
People would take carts out to old battlefields and gather the bleached bones that were buried there or lay scattered about. China's a pretty ancient country—lots of old battlefields—so they never had to search far. At the entrance to the city they'd construct a huge gate and seal the bones up inside. They hoped that by commemorating the dead soldiers in this way they would continue to guard their town. There's more. When the gate was finished they'd ring several

dogs over to it, slit their throats, and sprinkle their blood on the gate. Only by mixing fresh blood with the dried-out bones would the ancient souls of the dead magically revive. At least that was the idea. [. . .]
Writing novels is much the same. You gather up bones and make your gate, but no matter how wonderful the gate might be, that alone doesn't make it a living, breathing novel. A story is not something of this world. A real story requires a kind of magical baptism to link the world on this side with the world on the *other* side [. . .]
'It's a metaphor', I said. 'You don't have to actually kill anything'". (Murakami 2002, pp. 16-8)[11]

---

[11] Koshikawa (2000) takes notice of this passages as a proof that Murakami's novels fill with metaphors to link this world and the other world (pp. 205-6).

Figures
Figures 1-8. Mapion.
Figure 9. Chiyodaku mansion.com.
Figures 10-11. Nakazawa 2005b.
Figure 12. Nakazawa 2005a, pp. 230-1.
Figure 13. Nakazawa 2005a, p. 119.
Figures 14-15. Nakazawa 2005b.
Figure 16. Web M-tabi.
Figure 17. Nakazawa 2005b.
Figure 18. Murakami (2003a).
Figure 19. Clockwise from top left, Murakami (2003a), Web M-tabi, Korejio (2007), and Murakami (2010).
Figures 20-21. Nakazawa 2005a, p. 151.
Figures 22-23. Nakazawa 2005b.
Figure 24. Mapion.
Figure 25. Nakazawa 2005b.

References

Buruma, I. (1996), *The Missionary and the Libertine―Love and War in East and West*, London: Faber and Faber.

Chiyodaku mansion.com. (http://www.chiyodaku-mansion.com), accessed on May 11th in 2011.

Inoue, Y. (1999), *Murakami Haruki to nippon no "kioku"* (*Haruki Murakami and "Memory" of Japan*), Tokyo: Shinchosha.

Korejio, ed. (2007). *Kan-ei Edo zenzu* [*Total Plan of Edo*], ca.1643, Tokyo: Korejio.

Koshikawa Y. (2000), "'Kikan' to 'senrei'―Monogatari no jankuka ni koushite" ["'Repatriation' and 'Baptism': Against Junking a Story"], *Eureka*, vol. 32-4, pp. 188-98.

Lawrence, D. H. (1964 [1923]). *Studies in Classic American Literature*, London: Heinemann.

Mapion. (http://www.mapion.co.jp), accessed on April 15th in 2012.

Miyamasou. (http://miyamasou.jp/html/index.html), accessed on October 18th in 2012.

Moretti, F. (1999), *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900*, New York: Verso.

Murakami, H. (2003a), *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, (1985) trans. Alfred Birnbaum, London: Vintage.

Murakami, H. (2003b), *Norwegian Wood*, (1987) trans. Jay Rubin, London: Vintage.

Murakami, H. (2003c), *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche*, (1997) trans. Alfred Birnbaum and Phip Gabriel, London: Vintage.

Murakami, H. (2002 [1999]), *Sputnik Sweetheart*, trans. Philip Gabriel, London: Vintage.

Murakami, H. (2010), *Sekai no owari to hardo-boirudo wandar lando* [*Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*], rev, Japan: Shinchobunko.

Nakazawa, S. (2005a), *Earth Diver*, Tokyo: Kodansha.

Nakazawa, S. (2005b), Earth diving map, a separated inserted map in *Earth Diver*.

Shibata, K. (2009), *Nakagami Kenji to Murakami Haruki―"Datsu 60nendaiteki" shakai no yukue*. [*Kenji Nakagami and Haruki Murakami: Outcomes of the Society of "the Post-1960s"*]. Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Press.

Suzuki, Y. et. al. (1995), "Murakami Haruki no sakuhin ni okeru kenchiku kuukan no gendaiteki tokushitsu―Bungaku no nakano kenchiku sono2" ["Architectural Space in Haruki Murakami's Works: Architectural Space in Literature Part. 2"], *Gakujyutu Kouen Binranshu, F-2, Kenchikurekishi, Isho* [*Summaries of Technical Papers of Annual Meeting Architectural Institute of Japan. F-2, History and theory of architecture*], 323-4.

Tanaka, R. (1995), "Noruwei no mori―Genjitsukai to takai no aida de" ("Norwegian Wood: Between This World and That World"), *Kokubungaku* (*Japanese Literature*) 40.4, 78-81.

Tokyo Kurenaidan. (1999), "Bungaku sanpo joho" ["Walking in Literary Works"] (http://www.tokyo-kurenaidan.com/index.htm), accessed on April 15th in 2012.

Urazumi, A. (2000), *Murakami Haruki wo aruku: Sakuhin no butai to bouryoku no kage* (*Walking in the World of Haruki Murakami: The Setting of His Works and The Shadow of Violence*), Tokyo: Sailyusha.

Web M-tabi. (http://www.webmtabi.jp/200911/yamanote-line11o_shibuya_en.html), accessed on November 18th in 2012.

Yomota, I (2008), "How to View the 'Haruki Boom'," The Japan Foundation, *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami around the World*, Berkley: Stone Bridge, 33-37.

Yonemura, M. (2008), "Poppu masuta to 'shinbei' shikou" ["A Pop Master and 'Pro-American' Mind"] Teruhiko Tsuge, ed. *Murakami Haruki: Tema, souchi, kyarakuta* [*Haruki Murakami: Theme, Mechanism, Character*], Tokyo: Shibunsha, 145-52.

Polysemy of the Other: Endō Shūsaku's Encounter with the West

Justyna Weronika Kasza

Abstract

The paper discusses the polysemy of the categories of otherness and the Other in selected works of a Japanese contemporary writer, Endō Shūsaku (1923-1996).

These categories, situated within Paul Ricœur's interpretative framework differentiate three figures of otherness recognisable in Endō's texts: the physical otherness (termed by Endō as "white man" versus "yellow man"); the notion of the Other as the interlocutor on the level of the cross-cultural discourse; and the third figure of otherness, termed by Ricœur the "otherness of conscience", that brings identity into question. This paper explores the significance of these categories in Endō's writing in two consecutive stages. First, in the writer's encounter with French literature and thought, and later by a transformed and expanded form of otherness found within his fictional works, particularly in his last novel, *Deep River*. Based on Endō's literary experience of encounters, exchanges and transformations, I argue that for Endō otherness is an important device in understanding of the self. Thus, the writer's approach to otherness echoes Ricœur's words: "the self could return home only at the end of long journey. And it is 'as another' that the self returned."

Introduction

The article discusses the categories of otherness and the Other[1] in the works of a contemporary Japanese writer Endō Shūsaku[2] (1923-1996). Broadly understood the "literary experience" of Endō, first as a reader of Western literature and further as a novelist, is based on constant transition from the "encounter" with what to him is foreign, distant and alien within the Western world to the definitive attempt to appropriate this otherness into his fictional works. In line with the theme of the present volume, *Interpretative Encounters,* it is legitimate to identify Endō's oeuvres as a continual interpretation and re-interpretation of his own *journey*, understood both literally and metaphorically, that led him to encounter the Other manifested in the people he met, the books he read, the places he visited, as well as his own memories and reflections.

Endō Shūsaku's encounter with the West was multi-dimensional, not limited to purely personal experiences, and it was represented by more than one literary expression. It is to emphasise such features of Endō's journey to the West that I introduce the perspective of otherness and the Other as it captures diverse and multiple encounters and exchanges.
The otherness of the West is not unfamiliar to modern Japanese literature. The works of leading writers and intellectuals of the Meiji (1868-1912) and the Taishō (1912-1926) periods – Natsume Sōseki, Mori Ōgai, Nagai Kafū, Kawabata Yasunari, Watsuji Testurō, Nishida Kitarō – testify to the multiform, multilayered encounters with various Western aesthetic and intellectual currents. The concepts of the Orient (*tōyō*) and the Western world (*seiyō*) were employed in the cultural and literary discourse as the means to define Japan's place in the world. The otherness of the West left its trace on the consciousness of the writers and intellectuals but its lasting significance was restricted to the extent to which it could be referred to and incorporated in the context of Japan. The binary oppositions of what "belongs to me" (*uchi*) and "what is foreign" (*soto*) was clearly delineated, and the point of reference always focused on Japan.[3]

While for the aforementioned writers otherness was unidirectional as it referred to the foreignness of Europe, for Endō it initiated a sense of otherness towards his own cultural background – that is Japan. This particular approach was linked to both Endō's religious background as a Christian convert and the historical and political conditions that the war-time generation (*senchū-ha*) experienced. As the critic Watanabe Kazutami argues, this generation was forced to "re-discover their proper Japan through their Western experiences". Watanabe concludes:

Before the war [. . .] it was widely believed that there indeed existed an actual Japan to return to. After the war, however, all of the myths attached to that Japan had dissolved and there no

---

[1] The paper is based on my PhD research for the thesis entitled 'The Problem of Evil in the Works of Endō Shūsaku: Between Reading and Writing'.

[2] Note that in Japanese the first name follows the family name: Endō (family name), Shūsaku (first name).

[3] See *Representing the Other in Modern Japanese Literature*. 2007. R. Hutchinson and M. Williams eds. London: Routledge.

longer was an "actual" Japan that could be shared. The postwar [. . .] students discovered this for themselves in their different experiences in Europe. (Watanabe, 2002, p. 123)

The following discussion of otherness in Endō's writings focuses not on the writer's literary identity shaped through the Western influences, rather, the ways the writer articulates the experience of otherness in his writing. This pays attention to content as well as to the forms of narrative expressions Endō chooses to render his experience: diary, essay, travelogue or fiction. The texts' narrative diversity reveals how otherness in Endō's writing takes a number of shapes and is unavoidably linked to two other important categories: the "distance" and the problem the writer's subjectivity, his cogito. Hence, the term "polysemy" introduced in the title of the article that conveys the multilayered, multiform, multivocal dimensions of the otherness.

In my discussion of the otherness in Endō's works, I refer to the category of the Other as formulated by the French philosopher Paul Ricœur (1913-2005). In his interpretative project, which the philosopher classifies as phenomenological hermeneutics, the category of otherness is included in the long and complicated process of acquiring identity.

Continuing the French tradition of reflexive philosophy, Ricœur establishes human subjectivity as the focal point of his philosophical inquiries. He refers in this way to the Cartesian tradition of thinking on subjectivity. However, Ricœurian cogito is neither the framework nor the foundation of cognition. That is why it is, as the philosopher terms the "shattered cogito" that renounces the ambition to be the foundation, the basis of cognition; it does not have pretence to direct insight and self-knowledge through auto-reflection but it is still the same cogito that maintains a relationship with the horizon of experience. The path, the journey that such a weakened, "shattered cogito" takes in the process of regaining its identity leads through a number of intersubjective and trans-historical connections, and this in turn leads to the requirement to give an account of them; to interpret them as a kind of experience. It is therefore the self-narrating subject that remains both the reader and the writer of one's story, one's life.[4] For Ricœur, our existence "cannot be separated from the account we give of ourselves. It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity. We recognize ourselves in the stories we tell about ourselves." (Ricœur, in Madison, 1993, p. 80). Thus, through the stories of life, the subject's identity becomes the narrative identity.

In the process of self-narration the "shattered cogito" encounters the figure of the Other whose characteristic feature is polysemy. For Ricœur, three figures of otherness shape the image of the "shattered cogito":

1. The otherness of one's own body that implies strangeness towards the world and towards the Other.

2. The Other that functions as the interlocutor on the level of discourse and the protagonist and the antagonist on the level of interaction. It is the Other who possesses other "stories that require to be told."

3. The "otherness of conscience," which brings identity into question.

---

[4] More on this issue in Ricœur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. 3, p. 246.

When considering the third figure of conscience in relation to the two former figures of otherness, Ricœur admits an inability to point out one single source of the third figure and at the same time, he singles out the number of factors that make up the third figure of otherness. He questions

whether this Other, the source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God – living God, absent God – or an empty place. (Ricœur, 1992, p. 61)

Ricœur's concept of the otherness offers an enlightening perspective in the exploration of the literary texts as it illuminates the *subject*—the author, the narrator, the writing persona whose presence in the process of narration is being regained and restored. The hermeneutical subject is a speaking/spoken subject that seeks to make sense of one's own experience in the form of the story. So does Endō in his encounters with the Other.

Before moving to a more detailed analysis, I am committed to make short explanation on how the terms "East" and "West" have been used throughout the article.
The use of these notions derives from the original texts written by Endō: *seiyō* (West) – *tōyō* (East). Endō uses these terms in a number of configurations, e.g. *seiyō bungaku* (Western literature) – *tōyō bungaku* (Eastern literature); *seiyō bunka* (Western culture) – *tōyō bunka* (Eastern culture); *seiyōjin* (people of the West) – *tōyōjin* (people of the East). At times, Endō would use more specific and precise expressions, for example: *Seiō sakka* (the writers from the West/Europe); *Yōroppa bungaku* (European literature) as opposed to *Nihon bungaku* (Japanese literature). It is important to maintain the binary opposition of "East"-"West" without deliberation whether the understanding of these notions is determined by historical-geographical, or aesthetical and cultural context. The generalized use of the notions "East-West" (as faithfully, as did Endō in his texts) is intentional in the article in order to render the tension that stems from the dialectical confrontation of this pair of contradictions. "East-West" is one of a number of pairs of oppositions that Endō introduced to his texts in different textual configurations. [5]

1. **Encounter with the Other**
a) **First figure of otherness: white man/yellow man**

Following Ricœurian classification of otherness, we begin with the otherness of one's body that implies the sense of strangeness towards the world and the Other. It results from the physicality that affects the most basic experiences of difference. In the case of Endō, it is his Japanese physiognomy that distinguishes him from the Europeans. Endō registers and vividly portrays this form of otherness in his early short stories written soon after his return from Europe, after having spent three years as a foreign student in France (1950-1953). The bodily experience of otherness led Endō to formulate the concepts of the "world of the white man" and the "world of the yellow man." Structurally, the narrative forms that the writer chose as a means to deliver the experiences of being the "yellow man in the white world" remains on the fringe of fiction and autobiography. Endō either opts for clearly identifiable narrator in first-person (where 'I' equals the author) or invents the imaginative 'I' that nevertheless remains in accurate relation to the author.

---

[5] I believe that the above perspective is also applicable to the analysis of the works of other Japanese writers and intellectuals, including Mishima Yukio and those affiliated with the Kyoto School, especially Nishida Kitarō and Watsuji Tetsurō.

Further exploration of the genre of writing employed by Endō in his early texts, shows a shift from the traditional and conventional use of personal experiences (as, for example, in Japanese *shishōsetsu/* I-novel with the author as the character of the plot)[6] to more flexible treatment of the self as can be observed in a contemporary type of life-writing known as autofiction, in which the discrepancy between author and character(s) with the simultaneous emphasis on the author's appearance in the narration occur.[7] This will become a characteristic feature in Endō's approach to his experiences and the selfhood reflected in numerous fictional texts including in *Deep River*.

One of the first open depictions on skin colour that determined Endō's view of the self and the others – and the self as the Other – is the story *Aden Made* (To Aden) from 1954. In this first person narrative set in early 1950s France, we encounter the Japanese student, Chiba (the narrator), who is forced by his deteriorating health to return to Japan. As he prepares to leave, he reflects on his time spent among the French, in particular to his close relationship with a white woman called Maggie. The narrator recalls how despite being treated decently and with respect, he nevertheless was not able to create the harmonious unity with the white woman he came to love. Here is how Endō, through the words of Chiba, reveals the dissimilarity between white and yellow:

She was pure white, and my body sank into the light [. . .] in a dark yellow shade unlike the brightness [. . .] of the woman. [. . .] And the two colours of our entangled bodies had no beauty, no harmony. Rather it was ugly. It was like a yellow ground beetle clinging on to a pure white flower. (Endō, in Logan, 2009, p. 33)[8]

In the further part of the story, the narrator states that:

Just by loving me, the woman would not become a yellow person, and I was not to become white. Love, theory or ideology were unable to erase the differences in the skin colour. [. . .] The white people are ready to let me into that part of their world that does not harm their self-respect and pride. They have given me a permission to wear their Western-style garments, to drink red wine, and to love their woman.
However, they categorically could not accept the fact that a white woman could love me. It was because, the skin of the white people remains white and beautiful. The yellow skin is

---

[6] I realize that the above definition the Japanese I-novel is much of a shortcut. In history of the twentieth-century Japanese literature, *shishōsetsu* has undergone much transformation and there has been not only one manner of self-narration within this particular genre.

[7] I base my understanding of *autofiction* on the definition given by a French writer Serge Doubrovsky.

See: Doubrovsky, S., 1988. *Autobiographies: de Corneille à Sartre*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France. Doubrovsky defines *autofiction* as 'fiction of truthful events'.

[8] Translation modified. All translations from Japanese in the paper are mine, unless the translator's name is provided.

vague, and indistinct. It was intolerable that a white woman could love someone who possesses such lifeless yellow face. (Endō, 2004, p. 16)

In his initial testimony to otherness of the skin, Endō emphasises the apparent dichotomy between the West represented by the white race and Japan – the country of yellow people without yet addressing more profound deliberations on the nature of the differences. Otherness remains on the level of surface. Thus, Endō discovers the meaning of the "horizon of the surface."

The bodily experience of otherness is gradually reinforced by two other experiences that accompanied Endō during his stay in Europe: Christianity and the aftermath of the war. Endō elaborates the trichotomy of his "yellow" difference to white, Christianity and war further in his writing, often replacing the issue of the skin colour by the monotheism of the West and the pantheism of the East. This enables him to explore and, with time, expand the notion of otherness of the skin to the dissimilarity on the spiritual level. As he noted in the essay 'Shusse saku no koro', (The Time of My Promotion, 1967), during his stay in France Endō realized that the Christianity he knew from Japan had an entirely different form in Europe and it was in the post-war Europe that he came to perceive himself as "haisenkoku no ichiseinen" (a young man from the defeated country). These were three features that composed the distance that separated him from the West at that time.

The axis delineated by the physical and spiritual discrepancies between East and West complemented by the consciousness of the historical and political burdens moves the writer's reflection towards the question *what is Japan?*
Okada Sumie in her study *Japanese Writers and the West* aptly points out that:

For Endō Shūsaku [. . .] it was far more significant to take note of the yellowness of his skin when he was in France than to focus on the impact of cultural differences in Franco-Japanese relationships. Indeed, the physical factor was for him the clearest indication of his national identity, a symbol of his Japaneseness [. . .] There was a conscious awareness of defeatism in the 1950s as consequence of the misery of loss in the Second World. (Okada, 2000, p. 95)

The otherness, Endō describes in his texts, progressively initiates the questions concerning his subjectivity – his place in the world. As seen in the passage below from the diary Endō kept during his stay in Europe, he was determined to define himself.

I have started to consider my place in the world. I cannot find the answer to that question, because in my world my position is not established yet [my position does not exist yet]. No, definitely I do not have the consciousness of being in the world. My world is limited to my family, friends – to all those matters that surround me. What shall I do to extend my awareness of being in the world? (Endō, 2007, p. 49)

Reading Endō's diary, we observe the changing attitude towards the self. It is the transition from the position of the observer registering the outside world as the Other (the Japanese in France) to more personal character of the account where the outside world is becoming the source of impulses for the intimate experiences. At the end of the diary, Endō awaiting his return to Japan reveals his longing for his homeland. He notes enigmatically and hastily but

tellingly: "The unbearable loneliness…the love of Japan. No matter how beautiful France could be, I still miss Japan…" (Endō, 2007, p. 432)

The concerns surrounding differences of physiognomy remained troublesome and thought provoking for Endō even in later years. As a mature writer, he published an essay with a suggestive title 'Awanai yōfuku.' (Ill-fitting Western Garments, 1967), where he created one of the most appealing metaphors that illustrate the experience of otherness: "Western garments" (*yōfuku*). In the essay, Endō elaborates the notion of "Western garments" and confesses how writing became a means that enabled him to adjust "Western garments" – literally his adopted faith (Christianity) to his Japanese silhouette.

I eventually realized that my faith was like the Western clothes I was made to wear [. . .] Those Western clothes did not fit my body at all. Some parts were too baggy and loose, other too small. Being finally aware of that, I thought I should take off my Western clothes. These were, I thought, Western clothes, not Japanese *kimono*, that would fit my body. Between my body and that Western clothes there were empty spaces, that I could not consider myself. [. . .] But I could not simply take off and abandon my clothes. (Endō, 2004, p. 395)

The above quotation demonstrates Endō's consciousness that the body is something that is one's own and, at the same time, something that is alien. As Ricoeur would say: "one's own body is revealed to be the mediator between the intimacy of the self and the externality of the world" (Ricœur, 1992, p. 322).

b) Second figure of otherness: from distance to appropriation

The second form of otherness is what Ricœur terms as the "narration of the Other" and in the case of Endō this form is present and the most pronounced in the texts which constitute the writer's dialogue with the culture and the thought of the West. Endō's initial "encounter" with the West takes place in the 1940s, when he enters the French Department at Keiō University in Tokyo. Here, under the guidance of prominent scholars Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko and Satō Saku, Endō undertakes the academic exploration of leading themes in contemporary French literature and thought: existentialism, personalism and Neo-Thomism, and in the considerations of Christianity of François Mauriac, Georges Bernanos, and Julien Green.

However, already in his initial contacts with French literature and thought Endō recognizes distance, *kyorikan*, as an important interpretative feature. Distance plays a crucial role in his entire relationship with foreign literature. It is probably the very first way of speaking about otherness. In his first essay, 'Kamigami to Kami' (The Gods and God, 1947) Endō states:

When reading Catholic literature, one of the most important issues is absolutely not to respectfully sidestep the "sense of distance" that is naturally evoked in us by the different nature of these texts. Quite the contrary, we should rather start from an awareness of this distance and resist it. But what exactly is this "sense of distance"? What is the basic factor that arouses in us the "sense of distance"? I shall try to investigate this issue. (Endō, 2004, p. 20)

In Ricœurian hermeneutics, distance or distanciation is a significant element in the process of grasping and understanding the surrounding world. Ricœur sees it as a medium in an area where a complicated process of transformation takes place; a battlefield between otherness and appropriation, which assumes constant dialectical tension between that which divides and

mediates. How then did Endō comprehend the "sense of distance"? How did he manage to overcome it?

In the essay 'Ihōjin no kunō' (The Anguish of an Alien, 1973, tr. 1974), Endō finds the most appropriate term that defines his predicament: *ihōjin* (the other, alien, foreigner, non-Japanese, stranger)[9], establishing his position towards the West and Japan.

In university, I began to study French Catholic literature and to specialize in twentieth-century Catholic literature. [. . .] As I read the works of [Claudel, Mauriac, Green], I kept feeling there was a gulf between us. Their conversion accounts implied to me that they had returned to Christianity as to their own homeplace. But myself had no such feeling. [. . .] Nowhere in those authors that I studied did I discover what I felt: the anguish of an alien. [. . .] All I can say at this point is that I have stayed with the theme of anguish of an alien, which sets me apart from foreign Christian writers. (Endō, 1974, p. 179-180; 183)

Ihōjin incorporates considerable burden of emotions and at the same time it implies subjectivity, a term full of ambiguity. Adriana Boscaro describes this as the "double-foreignness" of Endō (Boscaro, 1981, p. 85). *Ihōjin* refers to the image of his self both towards Europe and towards Japan, which is, therefore, a divided self, manifest in ambivalent affiliation to one cultural sphere and hesitancy to absolutely reject the other. In his diary and essays, for example 'Watashi to kirisutokyō' (Christianity and I, 1963) Endō describes how this constant oscillation between being self and the Other consists of existing between what he specified as "Eastern passive attitude" and "Western active attitude".

The second form of otherness deeply affects Endō's identity as a writer. The question that is continuously posed in his essays and critical works is "how am I supposed to write?", "how am I supposed to deal with certain topics as a writer – as a Japanese writer?"
The Western literature that he reads and his discussions with Western thought constitute a multilayered encounter with texts narrated by the Other (the West) on the themes that interest him the most and which he further elaborates in his own writing. The significance of the figure of otherness is most evident in his relationship with novelist François Mauriac. Although they had never met personally, Mauriac was the guiding figure in Endō's wanderings through Western literature, history, and thought, particularly Mauriac's novel *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (1927). Mauriac appears in a number of Endō's critical works, starting from the earliest essays 'The Gods and God', 'Katorikku sakka no mondai' (Dilemmas of Catholic Writers, 1947) and occupies a prominent place in his diary.

In 1952 Endō wrote the travelogue 'Terēzu no kage o ō tte' (Following the Shadow of Thérèse) as an account of his trip to the south-western corner of France, the settings of Mauriac's works. In order to deepen his knowledge of French literature – to appropriate the essence of Mauriac's prose – he considered it vital to visit the places Mauriac used as settings for the novel *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. The trip enacts a Japanese mode of acquiring a sense of reality and of meaning through pilgrimage, a practice known in Japan since the Heian period (8th – 11th century), which consisted of "being here and now", physically through one's own body. From a purely compositional perspective, this text situates Endō into the tradition of poets-travellers, whose works are known in Japan as *kikō* (the diaries of journey to the places

---

[9] Takayama Tetsuo in his studies on Endō uses another term: *tasha* (another person; other; others). This is a direct translation of the Other/Autre.

related to Japanese literature). As his predecessors from classical literature, Endō records his observations and impressions from the trip through France, with the detailed topographic descriptions serving as starting point in self-reflection. These ultimately lead to ideas and questions of Endō's identity, both as a reader and as a writer. By immersing himself into the landscapes of Mauriac's Landes, such as dense marshes and pine forests, [10] Endō juxtaposes the imaginary world of fiction with the reality he sees, as he follows the path of the characters of the novels. Through the pilgrimage, Endō discovers another aspect of the distance and otherness that allows us to recognize them as tools applied in order to reconcile, to appropriate, to make more understandable. It is the feature of distance that aims at moving otherness closer, making it one's own.

Mauriac represents the Other with his own story, with his own narration, whose essence Endō struggles to appropriate. However, as a mature writer, conscious of his literary heritage, Endō assumed a more critical standpoint towards Mauriac's prose and towards his attachment the French novelist. In the essay 'Furansuwa Mōriakku to watashi' (François Mauriac and I, 1970), he openly speaks about the accompanying sense of distance that emerged from his reading of Mauriac:

[. . .] for a writer like myself, coming from as distant a country as Japan, there have been times when his literature was helpful and supportive, but at the same time, it provided dissatisfaction. [. . .] Mauriac's thought developed in France, a country with a Christian tradition, and it turned out that this kind of thinking is absolutely out of reach of the emotions of a man baptised in a country like Japan. At that point, it seems to me that I ultimately started feeling distance towards the writer. (Endō, 2004, p. 80)

Endō would challenge once again the otherness of Mauriac's prose in his later years when he publishes collection of essays *Watashi no aishita shōsetsu* (The Novel I Have Loved, 1985), which constitutes detailed analysis of *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. The topic choice testifies that the encounter with the story of the Other – Mauriac's novel – is for Endō not finished yet. Conversely, he appears to anticipate further confrontations, possibly further attempts to overcome the distance.

[. . .] saying 'I have read' and 'I have finished reading' are two different things. I have not entirely closed the book yet. The novel has given me many questions to think about and it confronted me with many problems and, at this stage of my life, it conveniently imposed on me a painful topic (Endō, 2004, p. 123).

2. Exchange
Oneself as Another: *Deep River*

Ricœur's final figure of otherness, named "the otherness of the conscience" is relevant for the study of Endō as an exchange or transformation of otherness, particularly in Endō's last novel,

---

[10] Although outside the scope of this paper, analysis of the travel essay reveals interesting issues about how his descriptions of the surrounding nature directly impact onto Endō as an individual and as a writer. I believe that this can be further elaborated and discussed in relation to other works of Japanese literature that undertake the theme of human-environmental relationships, e.g. in Kawabata Yasunari's *The Sound of the Mountain*.

Fukai kawa (Deep River 1993, tr. 1994). Comparison between his non-fictional texts and the novel discloses the internal discourses and interdependences that occur across genres. To some extent, we can say that the novelistic treatment of otherness stems from and is a consequence of previous accounts, recorded by the writer in his essays and critical works. However, *Deep River*, as a work of fiction and thus employing specific literary tools, creates more complex and equivocal portrayal of otherness than the non-fiction. Both the novel's topic and climax transpose the lived experience of biography into a literary structure, with multiple images of otherness described through the telling of various different personal and intellectual contexts.

The novel's plot can be briefly summarized as an account of a journey to India undertaken by a group of Japanese people who do not know each other. In spite of the fact that the action takes place in present-day Japan, through the characters' memories it switches back to the past and that includes the time of the Pacific War. One way of looking at the otherness is as comparable to the depiction of the encounter with the Other that Endō recorded in his essays and critical works. Certain characters of *Deep River* read and interpret exactly the same pieces of Western literature as Endō did, such as Mauriac's novels, or they embark on identical journeys to the corners of France that Endō recorded in his own diary and non-fictional works. For these characters, the otherness that stems from the encounter with the culture of the West constitutes a significant, momentous event. The narration consists of polyphony – the multiple voices of the characters that put in order the author's biography, his own experience of encounter with the Other. Endō confirms that the characters of his novels are "portions of myself" (Endō, 1993, p. 5). In the realm of fiction, the narrative identity of the writer emerges more explicitly. Ricœur says that narrative identity includes "change, mutability within the cohesion of one lifetime" (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 246).

In this last fictional work, Endō reconsiders the experience of otherness anew but his story of life, the narration remains unchanged. Indeed, Endō literally reinvents, for the sake of the fiction, his personal sense(s) of otherness. Here, Ricœur's self-narrating subject and the purpose of autofictional writing converge, as the recognition of meaningful events of life that turn out crucial in the process of re-creating and re-gaining one's identity. Thus, the novel's characters, who individually and collectively testify of the writer's encounter with the Other, compose the picture of Endō's "shattered cogito", revealing in turn the polysemical, complex and multifaceted quality of otherness.

For the characters of *Deep River*, another form of otherness emerges that initiates radical revaluations in their lives. The places that they visit in India bring to life a series of memories, feelings and experiences which are deeply traumatic. In the specific cultural context of India, and particularly in imagery of nature, darkness and dusk, otherness becomes closely linked with the tension constructed around the continuum "suffering – death – life". Although the Other appears to be culturally and historically determined, the Other encountered by the Ganges speaks of the commonality of destiny and co-sympathy in suffering, features that permanently determine human condition regardless of the cultural context. In this way, India and the Ganges River mark the transition from the level of individual questions to the problem perceived on the principle of the generic, common destiny. Thus, "[t]he holy river took not only humans, but all living things in its embrace as it flowed away" (Endō, 1994, p. 143-144). As it flows, the deep river of the novel's title meanders through features of Hindu and Buddhist religion, a certain form of animism, and Christianity that interweaves with them as consubstantial with and complementary to the moment of universality. This moment is expressed through the necessity to resign to the uncertainty, helplessness and fragility of human existence.

The category of otherness captured in Endō's last novel, collects and makes audible a certain confessional character which may have gone unnoticed in his essays and critical works. We hear the confession of Endō the writer who through his characters was able to address many of his own dilemmas scattered among his non-fictional writings. In the condition of the novel, these speak in the manner termed by Ricœur as "otherness of conscience" that result from a number of factors which in turn lead to the self becoming obliged to restrain itself and to display respect that is directed to the outside, towards the Other. An aggregate of confrontations and disintegrations, cogito is a dynamic structure that comes into being within the dialectical processes and contradictions between being oneself and being the Other. It is a result of a process of which the most significant medium and its subject was Endō himself as *ihōjin*. Ricœur would say that "the self could return home only at the end of long journey. And it is 'as another' that the self returned" (Ricœur, 1995, p. 50).

Conclusions

Otherness in Endō Shūsaku's literary experience discussed through confrontation of various literary forms enables us to acknowledge that the significance of the writer's encounter with otherness and the Other included in his texts lies in exposing an exchange between what was alien and what he recognized as his own, as Japanese. Endō's constantly expanding, changing, developing form of the otherness takes multiple shapes and forms: internal (Japan) or external (the West); spiritual or physical; textual or personal. For Endō, the otherness possesses the polysemical character and the experience of the encounter is told in a number of ways, across different literary genres, characters and settings that all configure and refigure the story of one's life, re-reading its meaning anew.

The category of otherness, as understood by Ricœur, that has been employed to investigate a number of phenomena characteristic of Endō's works – including the problem of distance and the writer's subjectivity – stimulates an approach to the oeuvre of this writer, as well as perhaps many others, in a way that does not eliminate the writing persona, the author. Ricœur's category of otherness reminds us that the subject, the human being, in the form of the "shattered cogito" that has its own story to tell, cannot be eliminated from a series of questions that emerge within cross-cultural contemporaneity.

References

Boscaro, A. (1981), The Meaning of Christianity in the Works of Endō Shūsaku. In P.G. O'Neill, ed. *Tradition and Modern Japan*. Tenterden: Paul Norbury Publications, pp. 81-90.

Doubrovsky, S. (1988), *Autobiographies: de Corneille à Sartre*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France.

Endō, S., 2004 (1954), Aden Made (To Aden). In M. Yamane, ed. *Endō Shūsaku Bungaku Zenshū* (The Complete Works of Endō Shūsaku), Vol. 6. Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, pp. 7-25.

Endō, S. (1968), Awanai yōfuku. (Ill-Fitting Western Garments). In M. Yamane, ed. 2004. *Endō Shūsaku Bungaku Zenshū* (The Complete Works of Endō Shūsaku), Vol. 12. Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, pp. 394-396.

Endō, S. *The Final Martyrs*. Translated from Japanese by Van C. Gessel. London: Tuttle.

Endō, S. (1994), *Deep River*. Translated from Japanese by Van C. Gessel. London: Tuttle.

Endō, S., 1974. Ihōjin no kunō (The Anguish of An Alien). *Japan Christian Quarterly,* Vol. 40, N. 4 (Fall 1974), 179-185.

Endō, S., 1947. Katorikku sakka no mondai (Dilemmas of Catholic Writers). In M. Yamane, ed. 2004. *Endō Shūsaku Bungaku Zenshū* (The Complete Works of Endō Shūsaku), Vol. 12. Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, pp. 20-24.

Endō, S. (1970), Mōriakku to watashi (Mauriac and Me). In. M. Yamane, ed. 2004. *Endō Shūsaku Bungaku Zenshū* (The Complete Works of Endō Shūsaku), Vol. 13. Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, pp. 79-81.

Endō, S. (1988/2007), *Sakka no nikki. 1950-1952* (Writer's Diary. 1950-1952). Tōkyō: Kōdan bungei.

Endō, S. (1985), *Watashi no aishita shōsetsu* (The Novel I Have Loved). In M. Yamane, ed. 2004. *Endō Shūsaku Bungaku Zenshū* (The Complete Works of Endō Shūsaku). Vol. 14. Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, pp. 7-123.

Kasza, J. W. 'The Cognitive Functions of *Distanciation*: The Image of Japan in the Works of Endō Shūsaku' (conference paper). In *Japan as Image*. (March 2010). Kaunas, Lithuania: Japanese Studies Centre, Vytautas Magnus University, pp. 35-50.

Kasza, J. W., 'The Hermeneutics of the Encounter with the West: the Case of Endō Shūsaku'. Paper delivered at the conference: *Japan: New Challenges in the 21st Century* organised by Oriental Institute, Japanese Studies, University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań, Poland (25th - 27th November 2010).

Logan, R. 'Endo Shusaku's *To Aden*'. In *Bunkyō daigaku bungakubu* 22, N. 2, (2009), pp. 29-40.

Madison G.B. (1995), 'Ricœur and the Hermeneutics of the Subject' in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur* In L. E. Hahn, ed. *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*. Chicago and La Salle: Open Court.

Mauriac, F. (1972), *Thérèse.* Translated from French by Gerard Hopkins. London: Penguin Books

Okada, S. (2000) *Japanese Writers and the West*. London: Palgrave.

Representing the Other in Modern Japanese Literature. (2007), R. Hutchinson and M. Williams eds. London: Routledge

Ricoeur, P. (1988), *Time and Narrative* Vol. 3. Translated from French Kathleen Mclaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ricœur, P. (1992), *Oneself As Another*. Translated from French by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Ricœur, P. (1995), *Intellectual Autobiography.* Translated from French by Kathleen Blamey. In L. E. Hahn, ed. *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur.* Chicago and La Salle: Open Court.

Takayama, T. (2007), 'Ihōjin no kunō' (The Anguish of An Alien). The postscript to Endō S. *Sakka no nikki. 1950-1952* (Writer's Diary. 1950-1952). Tōkyō: Kōdan bungei, pp. 464-474.

Watanabe, K. (2002), 'The Dissolution of Mythology: Two "Postwars"'. In D. Slaymaker, ed. *Confluences*: *Japan and Postwar France*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan.

"Braving the London fog": Natsume Sōseki's *The Tower of London*
Andreas Pichler

Abstract

Sōseki's encounters with London during his two years' stay from 1900 to 1902 were for the first time published in the English language under the title *The Tower of London* in 2005. Fog – as a material meteorological substance and as a literary metaphor – not only occurs frequently in his stories but is tied to question of darkness when depicting London on the brink of modernity at the turn of the last century. This article is guided by a form of critical literary analysis that draws on a meteorological concept in an attempt to link literature and fog, the British capital and modernity, and the innovative approach of a Japanese encountering the foggy maze of late-Victorian London. The investigation into the meteorological aspects of fog to comprehend Sōseki's "fog-like light" will shed some light upon a possible process of rendering the darkness gradually brighter.

Keywords: London fog, Sōseki, The Tower of London, cultural and geographic alienation, modernism

"I am again standing all alone thinking in the darkness" (Sōseki, p. 148): This enigmatic claim seems to capture how Natsume Sōseki was experiencing his two years' stay in London from 1900 to 1902. Sent to England on a Japanese government scholarship in 1900, Sōseki arrived in the British capital on 28 October and moved in at 76 Gower Street in the Bloomsbury District just north of the British Museum. Life in England and in London for Sōseki was characterised by profound historical and cultural changes, marked by Queen Victoria's death on 22 January 1901 and London's emergence as the world's leading metropolis.

Sōseki developed a deep admiration for the British literature and the arts during his stay: "Many things have caught my attention: how literature and the arts are flourishing in this country and how the flourishing of literature and the arts is influencing the national character" (Sōseki, p. 53). But while English literature and art exerted a positive influence on him, the sheer vastness of the cityscape fed a psychological and creative anxiety. His poor English skills were in part responsible for this anxiety, his difficulty to grasp the dimension of the urban sprawl furthermore reinforced his feeling of angst. Malcolm Bradbury points out that London "was – this was part of its essential attraction – the world's largest city, still expanding with extraordinary rapidity, generating a remarkable cityscape and a fascinating technology" (Bradbury, p. 179). In a *Letter from London* Sōseki writes: "but London is so vast that it is hard to know how far it spreads" (Sōseki, p. 65). He would only later be able to reconcile in his writing the psychological and somatic unease encountered in the British capital's infinity. As Flanagan observes: "Yet it was London that was to be the crucible and crossroads of his life, the place where Sōseki was faced with the intense cultural shock and social alienation that led to the eventual tumultuous release of his pent-up creative urges" (Flanagan 2005, p. 11).

Sōseki's alienation seems to point to a much deeper feeling of uneasiness within a renewed set of spatial and cultural contexts shaped by modernism's intrinsic relationship with materiality, science, spatiality and technology. Sōseki pictures London as "the workshop of the world" (Sōseki, p. 62) and notices "to what extent this country's development has advanced materially" (Sōseki, p. 53). It is pivotal therefore to come to terms with the origins of this uneasiness and anxiety that orient this article's focus on Sōseki's collection of autobiographical short stories entitled *The Tower of London*[1], which were put on paper upon his return to Japan in 1903. The eleven short stories dealing with his experiences in the British capital were published for the first time in Great Britain in 2005 under the title *The Tower of London* and consist of three parts: 'Letter from London' (1901) and 'Bicycle Diary' (1903) published in the magazine *Hototogisu* (*The Cuckoo*), the stories 'The Tower of London' and 'The Carlyle Museum' (1909) included in the volume *Yokyoshu* (*Drifting in Space*), and a selection of short stories such as 'A Warm Dream', 'Impression', 'Fog' and 'Long Ago' from *Eijitsu Shohin* (*Short Pieces for Long Days*) printed for the first time in 1909 in the *Asahi* newspaper.

Sōseki's textual relationship with the vastness, darkness, and fogginess of London leads to the main claim of the article. At its source lies a feeling of geographical displacement within the urban landscape: "At that time I hardly knew one direction from another and, of course, knew nothing at all about geography" (Sōseki, p. 91). Equally discomforting, the cultural differences lead to an estrangement: "rather than happy, I have a feeling of indescribable

---

[1] Natsume Sōseki's *The Tower of London* was translated from the Japanese by Damian Flanagan. All quotes are from the same edition. ISBN 0 7206 1234 9.

strangeness" (Sōseki, p. 126). In the following pages I will shed some light upon Sōseki's disorientation and feeling of deracination in the British capital.

Angela Yiu's insightful notion of "a dark, romantic voice" in *Order and Chaos in the Works of Natsume Sōseki* (Yiu, p. 1) is linked to her portrayal of chaos in Sōseki's novels. If we agree at all with this analysis, then it is logical to find strands of chaos and darkness in all of his works, including the short stories linked to the British metropolis. What Yiu terms as chaos in Sōseki's works refers to "something cavernous and amorphous, like an unidentifiable fear or a formless anxiety, that threatens to overtake reason and self-control" (Yiu, p. 2). How does this "formless anxiety" manifest itself for Sōseki in London? How did a London on the brink of modernity represent this cavernous entity? Interdisciplinary and intercultural research have not yet stressed the link between "something undefinable, energetic and powerful" (Yiu, p. 2) present in such works as *Kokoro* and *Kōjin* and his stories on London. Very little research has been done on these eleven accounts written mostly between 1903 and 1909.

His encounters with the "London fog" reside at the heart of Sōseki's cavernous fear and formless anxiety. But why the fog, one might ask. In most of his works, Sōseki does *not* depict urban landscapes in conjunction with fog, notably in the novel *Kokoro,* in which Tokyo appears under a clear blue sky: "I intended of course to visit Sensei when I returned to Tokyo. [...] The atmosphere of the great city affected me a great deal [...]. It was a lovely day, and the sky was so blue that I was filled with a sense of well-being" (Sōseki, *Kokoro* p. 8-9). The feeling of well-being conveys a stunning contrast to the oppressiveness he experienced in London. One is indeed tempted to wonder whether fog conveys more than just a material substance intrinsically linked to the topography of the British landscape. Fog, I argue – as a material meteorological substance and as a literary metaphor – not only occurs frequently in his stories but is tied to question of displacement and loneliness that characterize Sōseki's London at the beginning of last century. This article is, therefore, guided by a form of critical literary analysis that draws on a meteorological concept and focuses on the trope of fog.

Fog as a meteorological phenomenon exercises its influence on the immediate environment in that the misty mass invades human space enshrouding the local physical geography. Fog unveils its own dynamics due to its characteristics of formlessness (fog has no definite or consistent spatial form), content-lessness (apart from the water particles in the air) and site-lessness (no specific geographic location). There is no beginning nor end for fog forms and dissolves along the lines of its own fluctuation. Fog acts like a self-vibrating region with its own intensities because its substance – white, empty and colourless – relies on the vibration of the water particles constituting its own energy.

Sōseki's evocation of behaving like "water particles" unveils a first link to fog's formlessness. In the short story entitled 'A Warm Dream' Sōseki describes the grim attitude of the Londoners while strolling through the streets lined by high-rise buildings. Forms, contours and outlines of the city gradually disappear within the misty darkness: "I am the most inactive particle in the midst of those blackly moving objects" (Sōseki, p. 141). While the blackly moving objects refer to the movement of the "little people", Sōseki plays an inactive part within the foggy mass. Water particles in the air scientifically connect to each other in order to form the spatial dimension of fog in the atmosphere. Sōseki's inactive part on the other hand refers metaphorically speaking to his displacement at "the bottom of claustrophobic valleys" (Sōseki, p. 141). He remarks: "It is as though every single person's existence has been extinguished in this great darkness, and both shadow and form are no longer, and it is totally quiet" (Sōseki, p. 142). Fog has no definite or consistent spatial form. Shadows and forms simply vanish within "the midst of darkness". The story concludes: "I feel somehow

oppressed at being in this metropolis" (Sōseki, p. 141). The oppressiveness evokes the closeness and sultriness of weather with its humidity, dampness and fogginess. Sōseki is condemned to remain inactive among the water particles of this formless foggy mass.

Sōseki moreover alludes to fog's content-lessness. Fog appears without content to the human eye as it renders the environment uniform: "Only a total emptiness clogs the air" (Sōseki, p. 146). Apart from the water particles suspended in mid-air, fog appears empty and quiet. The emptiness overshadows Sōseki's impressions of London and affects his state of mind: "I have no peace of mind at present – gradually things start getting complicated" (Sōseki, p. 63). Flanagan remarks: "London was a vast, dark, foggy maze where one street and house was often indistinguishable from the next and the dizzy heights of the grey buildings seemed overwhelmingly oppressive" (Flanagan 2005, p. 14). The fog's content-less aura underpins Sōseki's feeling of mental emptiness.

Apart from formlessness and content-lessness, fog's site-lessness appears to be revelatory in 'Fog', a story in which Sōseki details the view from his boarding home window: "deeply sealed in the depths of a dense fog where the shapes of bells are invisible" (Sōseki, p. 147). The story focuses on his meandering strolls through the fogginess around damp Westminster. On his visits to the Tate Gallery, Battersea and Big Ben, Sōseki wonders whether "the world has shrunk to four yards square, and the more I walk the more a new four yards square appears" (Sōseki, p. 147). As he continues strolling through Westminster "only about four yards ahead is visible. When one proceeds four yards, another four yards ahead becomes visible" (Sōseki, p. 147). The fog's density reduces Sōseki's visibility to a four-yard square. Topographical boundaries vanish and geographical sites lose their distinctive features. Describing the garden outside his boarding home, fog appears boundless: "Now this garden, so rich in memories, is also buried in fog, and between it and the unkempt garden of my own boarding-house there is no boundary, as one seamlessly fuses into the other" (Sōseki, p. 146). Fog blurs contours, clear outlines disappear. Geographical dimensions are lost to sight: "One hour later London's grime and soot and the sound of carriage horses and the river Thames divide me from Carlyle's home, which seems like a distinct world disappearing into the distance" (Sōseki, p. 129). Fog's site-lessness exercises its immediate effect on Sōseki reinforcing a feeling of geographical displacement as distinct physical landmarks wane.

Aspects of geographical displacement owing to the London fog can also be found in the second story of the volume *Drifting in Space* entitled 'The Carlyle Museum'. The plot centres around Sōseki's visits to the Carlyle Museum in Chelsea and portrays the Scottish writer's home in London. In painstaking details, Sōseki describes the furniture on each floor of the house, the crammed book shelves and Carlyle's transformation of the attic to allow the sun shine through the newly installed glass ceiling. When approaching the site from the opposite Thames river bank, the home's distinct topography disappears: "I prop my chin on my cherrywood walking-stick and look straight ahead at the shadows of fog creeping along the road on the far distant bank as they become gradually darker until, from the bottom of the five-store terraced buildings, everything disappears little by little into the trailing mist" (Sōseki, p. 117). London's site on the Thames River evaporates behind a veil of fog. The Carlyle House in Chelsea gradually recedes from view.

Fog's formlessness, content-lessness and site-lessness lead to Sōseki's geographical displacement. But what exactly is to be found in the fog, and more significantly, what kind of psychological state of mind is provoked by London's haziness apart from a geographical displacement? First, fog seems to create impressions of invisibility to the human eye. In 'The Tower of London', Sōseki's writes: "In the midst of air saturated with sepia-coloured

moisture I vacantly stand and gaze at it. Twentieth century London gradually disappears from the back of my mind" (Sōseki, p. 93). Published in 1906 after his return to Japan, 'The Tower of London' is an account of his visits to the Tower of London portraying, as Flanagan mentions, "a withdrawal from modern life into mystical places" (Flanagan 2005, p. 16). As Sōseki strolls through the damp moisture-laden rooms of the Tower, he ponders upon the significance of the lives of all those who were imprisoned inside, including Archbishop Cranmer, "unspeakable numbers of people in the War of the Roses" (Sōseki, p. 96), Edward V, the Duke of York, and Henry VI in the "Bloody Tower". Linking fog to the murderous and mysterious aspects evokes the nineteenth century literary portrayals of London. But more importantly, the twentieth-century Tower increasingly becomes invisible to Sōseki's eyes due to the fog: "Droplets of drizzle so fine that they could pass through the eye of a needle are melting the dust and smoke of the whole city, dimly closing up heaven and earth" (Sōseki, p. 112-113). Fog's moisture laden air reduces the visibility and empties London's cityscape of its geographical features. Similarly, in 'The Carlyle Museum', "nothing was visible" (Sōseki, p. 122). When looking out of one of the windows on the upper floor of Carlyle's home, "neither Westminster nor St Paul's are visible" (Sōseki, p. 123). The space created by the fog appears to be suspended between the earth and the sky: "Tens of thousands of houses, hundreds of thousands of people, millions of noises are standing, floating and moving in the space between me and the cathedrals" (Sōseki, p. 123). London's distinctive skyline dissipates leaving the city invisible to Sōseki's eyes. An impression of bleak and dismal emptiness, an utterly wretched desolation results from such concealment.

Another psychological consequence of fog is a feeling of isolation. In 'Impression' Sōseki illustrates his isolation as he loses himself among London's indistinguishably similar rows of houses. He finally ends up at a large square with a "pole-like column" not knowing what it is. The story evolves around his saunters through the endless lines of houses as he struggles to come to terms within the city's foggy reality. An escape from this urban desolation is not likely to happen: "Yet if offers no escape. If I turn to the right, the way is blocked. If I look to the left, the way is closed" (Sōseki, p. 144). Amid the "quietly moving sea of humanity", Sōseki experiences "unspeakable loneliness" in the fog. If the fog symbolizes a homogeneous medium effacing all notions of physical urban qualities, it delineates a psychological state of isolation in which social contacts are absent: "London is so vast that once one begins socializing it takes up all one's time" (Sōseki, p. 57). Not one person can be distinguished from another in the foggy darkness rendering his isolation even more precarious: "There are many thousands of people here, but now they are buried in darkness, not a single voice is heard. It is as though every single person's existence has been extinguished in this great darkness" (Sōseki, p.142). Sōseki's isolation literally starts befogging his mind: "I felt like being a Gotenba rabbit suddenly set loose in the heart of Nipponbashi. Thinking I might be swept away in a human wave when I went outside, [. . .] I had peace of mind neither day nor night" (Sōseki, p. 91). The reference to the dislocation of the Mt Fuji rabbit within Osaka's most commercial district, the Nipponbashi, called *Nagamachi* during the Edo period, alludes to the fogging of the mind and places Sōseki out of time and space. He is isolated and lost in London, geographically as well as culturally.

Yet, Sōseki's psychological state mirrors a much deeper moral dimension to fog. In *London: A Book of Aspects*, Arthur Symons writes: "There is nothing in the world quite like a London fog, though the underground railway stations in the days of steam might have prepared us for it and Dante has described it in the 'Inferno' when he speaks of the banks of a pit in hell, [. . .]. Foreigners praise it as the one thing in which London is unique. They come to London to experience it. It is as if one tried the experience of drowning or suffocating" (Symons, p. 62-63). Symons underlines London's historical relationship with the material principles and

literary values of fog. Since the age Dante, fog has enjoyed an intrinsic relationship with the British capital. Later, the Industrial Revolution added smoke to the fog to create the new compound word 'smog'.[2] In the latter half of the nineteenth century fog was a negatively connoted image of hiding and covering up by authors such as Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde. The image of fog is used to shroud specific and rational settings in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "In this fog, my dear Basil? Why, I can't even recognise Grosvenor Square. I believe my house is somewhere about here, but I don't feel at all certain about it" (Wilde, p. 167). Wilde's use of fog to blur the clear contours of Grosvenor Square in central London is similar in its metaphorical depiction to Doyle's covering up of the murder in *The Hound of the Baskerville*: "I have said that over the great Grimpen Mire there hung a dense, white fog" (Doyle, p. 189). And Dickens' London in *Bleak House* is nothing but fog: "Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights" (Dickens, p. 13). Texts by such literary greats contributed significantly to the body of literature written about the city, in which the fog is as intrinsic as the River Thames and many famous monuments. Sōseki anticipates the weather in his visit, and is anxious to see it: "I had been thinking I would never witness such weather in London" (Sōseki , p. 55). His experiences with London however are all but foggy.

Far from existing merely as a literary trope or symbol of the Industrial Revoution, fog is—and has probably always been—a part of the geographical area of the Greater London area, between the Chiltern Hills to the North-East and the Kentish Downs to the South. Meandering through the London area, the River Thames adds humidity to the moisture brought from the West by the Gulf Stream. It is also useful to differentiate between fog's various meteorological forms. It may dissolve into lesser degrees of humidity giving rise to mist, haze or clouds.[3] Sōseki's depiction of fog is attentive to these variations. Fog is gradually being transformed into mist as "everything disappears little by little into the trailing mist" (Sōseki, p. 117). Light and brightness intensify when haze appears in 'A Warm Dream': "The haze suddenly clears beneath my eyes. Far below, beholding a sea glowing warmly in bright light, a handsome man wearing a yellow coat and a woman in long, purple sleeves are clearly visible on green grass" (Sōseki, p.142). The warm, bright light associated with the clear view of the sea stands in opposition to depressive depths of darkness shrouded by the dense fog. And the outlines of objects increasingly offset themselves against a background becoming more visible in 'Fog': "Braving the fog, I jump on and look down, but the horse's head has already become slightly hazed. When the bus comes across another vehicle, I think at that moment how pretty the scene is" (Sōseki, p. 147). The horse's head, a symbol of strength and of direction as it leads the carriage, is no longer obscured by fog. From fog to mist to lighter haze, Sōseki emerges from the deep dark depths in order to appreciate the prettiness of such a luminous scene.

---

[2] Smog, a compound word coined from smoke and fog in 1905 by Henry Antoine in the July 26 edition of the London newspaper *Daily Graphic*, had not appeared in literature until the Georgian period.

[3] The *Dictionary of Physical Geography* defines fog as "confined to situations where visibility falls below 1 km" (Whittow 2000, p. 195). Mist is referred to "the degree of atmospheric obscurity midway between haze and fog, with visibility officially recorded as being within 1 and 2 km" (Whittow 2000, p. 339. Haze is officially classified "when visibility falls below 2 km" (Whittow 2000, p. 241) and, finally, cloud is "a visible mass of tiny particles of water and ice held in suspension by vertical motion of air" (Whittow 2000, p. 93).

Respecting the fog's meteorological variations means acknowledging its dissipation. This is the case in 'A Warm Dream'. As the title suggest, an agreeable and pleasant dream might finally brighten up his desolation and disorientation when suddenly "a section to the front, cut out into a square, seems raised up in the midst of the darkness, and has suddenly started to faintly brighten" (Sōseki, p. 142). When fog evaporates it scientifically goes through the various stages of relative humidity in the air leading to its final evaporation. Sōseki's fog follows a similar pattern: "By the time I have ascertained that it is indeed being softly lit, I have made out in the midst of the fog-like light some turbid colours, yellow, purple and indigo. [. . .] The haze suddenly clears beneath my eyes. Far below, beholding a sea glowing warmly in bright light" (Sōseki, p. 142). The story finishes with the enticement of a breeze blowing from the south of "warm Greece". The warm bright light has finally replaced the fog's obscurity. The resemblance to Virginia Woolf's experimental novel *Jacob's Room*, in which the protagonist Jacob leaves the London fog to embark on a trip to warmer Greece, is strikingly similar: "And surveying all this, looming through the fog, the lamplight, the shades of London, [he] decided in favour of Greece" (Woolf 1992, p. 64). Although Sōseki's story was written about ten years earlier than Woolf's novel, the dissipation of the fog as a literary metaphor in his short stories foreshadows a British modernist tradition.

While fog as a meteorological phenomenon abounds in London until the 1960s, literary modernists shake off the Victorian stuffiness of fog. Fog increasingly becomes absent in English literature from around 1910 onwards and authors like T.S. Eliot, E.M. Forster, James Joyce, Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf no longer link London to its fogginess. Forster for example observes in *Howards End*: "London was beginning to illuminate herself against the night. Electric lights sizzled and jagged in the main thoroughfares, gas lamps in the side-streets glimmered a canary gold or green. The sky was a crimson battlefield of spring, but London was not afraid. Her smoke mitigated the splendour, and the clouds down Oxford Street were delicately painted ceiling, which adorned while it did not distract" (Forster, p. 104). London's nights come to light. A bright, spring-like sky scattered with clouds broods over Oxford Street decorating the cityscape like a colourful modernist painting. Imaginary urban spaces belong to the Victorian past. Modernists portray London's physical reality. Peter Brooker observes in *Geographies of Modernism* that "the distinction between the physical and imagined city proves important [. . .] and is closely related to the distinction between literary or artistic modernism and social modernity" (Brooker, p. 5). In Woolf's *The London Scene* a crystalline clear transparency reigns over London's roofs: "The charm of modern London is that it is not built to last; it is built to pass. Its glassiness, its transparency, its surging waves of coloured plaster give a different pleasure and achieve a different end from that which was desired and attempted by the old builders and their patrons, the nobility of England" (Woolf, p. 31).

Sōseki shakes off fog as a literary trope in a similar fashion. In the last of his stories 'Long Ago', bright sunshine, clear visibility and colourful vistas replace fog: "My house stands on top of a small hill, well suited for gazing at the clouds and the valley. From the south the sun shines over all the walls of the house. [...] At my feet the hill sinks into the Vale of Pitlochry, and everything I see far below is uniformly filled with colour. Rising up the opposite mountain, the yellow birch leaves overlap one on top of another, creating many shaded inclines" (Sōseki, p. 149-150). From the Vale of Pitlochry, in the county of Perth, Scotland, Sōseki enjoys gazing at the clouds and the autumnal valley below. Sōseki's short stories close with an urban-rural, city-pastoral contrast. This contrast is common to both English and Japanese modernism. The Scottish valley 'uniformly filled with colour' contradicts the fog he left behind in London. "Braving the London fog" finally pays off. The drying up of fog as a

literary metaphor as well as meteorological phenomenon in literature allows the Japanese visitor to finally overcome anxiety, isolation and deracination.

References

Bradbury, M. (1976), *Modernism 1890-1930*, Penguin: London.

Brooker, P and Thacker A (2005), *Geographies of Modernism*, Routledge: London.

Dickens, C (1853/2003), *Bleak House*, Penguin: London.

Doyle, A C (1902/2007), *The Hound of the Baskerville*, Penguin: London.

Eliot, T S (1922/2010), *The Waste Land*, Penguin: London.

Forster, E M (1910/2000), *Howards End*, Penguin: London.

Joyce, J (1914/2000), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Penguin: London.

Sōseki, N (1901/2005), *The Tower of London,* Owen: London.

--- (1914), *Kokoro*, (2010) Owen: London.

Strachey, L (1918/1986), *Eminent Victorians*, Penguin: London.

Symons, A (1909/2012), *London: A Book of Aspects,* Forgotten Books: London.

Whittow, J (2000), *The Penguin Dictionary of Physical Geography,* Penguin: London.

Wilde, O (1890/1992), *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* Random: New York.

Woolf, V (1922/1992), *Jacob's Room,* Penguin: London.

--- (1932/1988), *The London Scene*, Snowbooks: London.

Yiu, A (1998), *Chaos and Order in the Works of Natsume Sōseki*, UP Hawaii, Honolulu.

Spatial and Sexual Disorientation in the Films of Tsai Ming-liang

Nicholas de Villiers

Abstract

Malaysian-born Taiwanese filmmaker Tsai Ming-liang is known for his films about encounters between strangers in disorienting urban environments. His films are also often tinged with nostalgia and a sense of temporal disorientation in the modern world. In this paper, I examine Tsai's film *The Hole* along with his earlier *Vive L'Amour* in terms of his motifs of disorientation, in both the temporal and spatial senses, adding another dimension that I will call "sexual disorientation" drawing from Michael Moon and Sara Ahmed. Sexual disorientation unsettles our assumptions, our "knowingness," about sexual identity, resulting in uncanny and queer effects on our reading of desire in cinematic narratives. Queer in this sense challenges the fixity implied by the logic of sexual orientation. My reading of Tsai's films as having queer effects is in part a way of understanding his statement that he is "sick of people labeling my films as 'gay films'." I argue that both *Vive L'Amour* and *The Hole* perform a deconstruction of sexual identity, in that they treat sexuality and desire as performed without cohering in an identity. Tsai's framing of how bodies are oriented in space also manages to "queer" space. I end with a coda on the transnational queer encounters in his recent film *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone.*

Keywords: TSAI Ming-liang; Taiwan; Sexuality; Queer Theory; Cinema; Diaspora

Tsai Ming-liang's short film *The Skywalk Is Gone* (2002) functions as a coda to his feature film *What Time Is It There?* (2001). In the earlier film, Hsiao Kang (Lee Kang-sheng) and Shiang-chyi (Chen Shiang-chyi) meet briefly at Hsiao Kang's stall where he is selling watches on a skywalk atop the Taipei train station, and she buys his "double time-zone watch" before she leaves for Paris. In *The Skywalk Is Gone*, Shiang-chyi has returned to Taiwan and the audience expects that she will finally rendezvous with Hsaio Kang after each have undergone a similar sort of temporal and spatial dislocation shown through parallel storytelling in *What Time Is It There?* Our expectations are frustrated along with Shiang-chyi however as she finds that the skywalk is now "missing" (it has been torn down), and she is ticketed for jaywalking as she tries to cross the street where the skywalk once was. In regard to this scene, Brian Hu has argued that this sense of absence and longing reflects a kind of nostalgia in Tsai's work that is both spatial and temporal, and results in a unique form of disorientation and dislocation:

The two objects of nostalgia are the city of Taipei, which transforms so continually that Shiang-chyi does not even recognise it after returning from vacation, and the cinema itself, particularly the culturally Chinese cinema of the past and the local Taiwanese cinema of the present. (Hu, 2003)

Nostalgia literally means homesickness and thus suggests longing for a lost place. Hu argues that the nostalgia for the urban landmark is in some senses interminable:

we realise that in an era of continuous dislocation through urban construction, the disappearance of a landmark leads to a search that cannot end: if a skywalk is gone, how does one possibly look for it? Shiang-chyi travels to where she thinks it ought to be, only to be led around it, in front of it, or on the other side of it altogether. The nostalgia for an industrialising city is thus by definition never ending. (Hu, 2003)

Hu thus suggests that the hopeless search for a place that is gone results in a feeling of dislocation that is also stretched out in time.

Like the character Hsiao Kang—who in *What Time Is It There?* is constantly adjusting clocks all over Taipei to read Paris time instead—Tsai himself is hyper-aware of his own temporal dislocation. Indeed, nostalgia is more commonly defined as a wistful affection for a period in the past. Hu's reading of Tsai's "retro" desire emphasizes how the past is mediated through film and music. Cinematic nostalgia and temporal dislocation are activated by the seemingly kitsch or camp Mandarin pop song from the 1960s with which Tsai ends the film. Tsai has declared a great fondness for this sort of song in opposition to the American-influenced pop music currently predominant in Asia, which he sees as a result of what he calls the "terrifying phenomenon" of globalism (Tsai qtd in Berry, 2005, p. 386). While globalism represents a kind of homogenizing effect for Tsai, certainly his films use transnational and cross-cultural relations as a way of reflecting on the contingencies of both place and time. This is evident, for example, in *What Time Is It There?*, a French/Taiwanese co-production which critically reflects on Asian tourism in France, French *nouvelle vague* film, and the significance of "time zones." In an interview with Michael Berry entitled "Tsai Ming-liang: Trapped in the Past," Tsai clarifies:

It is not that I am setting out to introduce sixties culture to a new generation; it is just that my own life, or at least my ability to accept popular culture, is stuck in that era. And it is only natural that my films are a reflection of what's going on in my life. (2005, p. 387)

Hu explains the historical significance of these now unpopular forms of popular musical songs:

As in *The Hole* (1998), *The Skywalk is Gone* communicates with 1960s Chinese cinema through popular song. Famous outside of Asia for its martial arts films, 1960s Hong Kong cinema also saw a flourishing musical genre. Among its most popular stars were Lin Dai and Grace Chang, the latter's songs appearing prominently in *The Hole*. Tsai has cited these early musical films as direct influences on his own filmmaking. (Hu, 2003)

I would like to examine *The Hole* along with Tsai's early work *Vive L'Amour* (1994) in terms of these motifs of disorientation, both in the spatial and temporal sense already established, but also adding another dimension that I will call "sexual disorientation." I draw from Michael Moon's (1998) application of this concept to David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* in my argument that sexual disorientation unsettles our assumptions, our "knowingness," about sexual identity, resulting in uncanny and queer effects on our reading of desire in cinematic narratives.

Queer in the sense used in this paper challenges the fixity implied by the logic of sexual orientation. The sexual orientation model understands desire as a sort of compass with a magnetic north aligned according to gender polarity, with sexual difference therefore determining whether "opposites attract" or whether homosexuality is thought of as same-sex attraction or gender inversion (where a man desiring another man must do so "as" a woman). Moe Meyer argues that unlike the identities labeled "gay and lesbian,"

Queer sexualities become, then, a series of improvised performances whose threat lies in the denial of any social identity derived from participation in those performances. As a refusal of sexually defined identity, this must also include a denial of the difference upon which such identities have been founded (Meyer, 1994, p. 3)

In other words, queer involves the "deconstruction of the homo/hetero binary" (Meyer, 1994, p. 3). My reading of Tsai's films as having queer effects is in part a way of understanding why he has insisted that he is "sick of people labeling my films as 'gay films'" (Berry, 2005, p. 385). I will argue that both *Vive L'Amour* and *The Hole* perform a deconstruction of sexual identity, in that they treat sexuality and desire as performed without cohering in an identity, but also in the way that they understand how bodies are oriented in space, in other words, how they "queer" space (de Villiers, 2008).

In her book *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed extends Moon's concept of sexual disorientation to think about what happens when space is made queer:

What does it mean to think about the "nonresidence" of queer? We can consider the "affect" of disorientation. As I have suggested, for bodies that are out of place, in the spaces in which they gather, the experience can be disorientating. You can feel oblique, after all. You can feel odd, even disturbed. Experiences of migration, of becoming estranged from the contours of life at home, can take this form [. . .] At the same time, it is the proximity of bodies that produces disorientating effects, which, as it were, "disturb" the picture [. . .] queer moments happen when things fail to cohere. In such moments of failure, when things do not stay in place or cohere as place, disorientation happens. The question becomes how we "face" or approach such moments of disorientation [. . .] Queer would become a matter of how one approaches the object that slips away—as a way of inhabiting the world at the point in which things fleet. (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 170–72)

Ahmed's remark here about "the object that slips away" would certainly apply to Hu's understanding of nostalgia in Tsai's *The Skywalk Is Gone*. Furthermore, Tsai's love of songs considered camp might be thought of as a queer way of inhabiting the world at the point in which things are fleeting. But I would first like to consider her very promising connection between the "nonresidence" of queer and the affect of disorientation, which is considered a hallmark of the New Taiwan Cinema movement.

In a familiar plot pattern of "synchronous monadic simultaneity" identified by Fredric Jameson (1994) in relation to urban Taiwanese cinema, Tsai's *Vive L'Amour* observes the convergence or coincidence of three individuals: a young realtor May Lin (played by Yang Kuei-mei), and two street vendors Ah-jung (Chen Chao-jung) and Hsiao Kang (Lee Kang-sheng). May Lin repeatedly fails to rent a large upscale apartment, and the three characters are shown variously occupying the vacant apartment like squatters: Hsiao Kang steals the key to the apartment and surreptitiously uses it as a sort of experimental space like a child might "play house": he unsuccessfully attempts suicide, takes a bath, washes his clothes in the bathtub, tries on women's clothing and does cartwheels in the hallways, makes out with a watermelon with holes cut in it, which he then uses as a bowling ball in one of the hallways. While he is bowling, he is caught by Ah-jung who demands to know how he got in, despite the fact they he also has a dubious right to be there since he was merely brought there for a one-night-stand by May Lin. They form a sort of "buddy" relationship, however, and Ah-jung offers to drive Hsiao Kang anywhere he wishes. They go to a crematorium where people purchase funerary drawers, in a comic parallel with the real estate theme of the film.

Again in a rather childlike or adolescent moment, Hsaio Kang masturbates in the empty apartment but is interrupted by the sound of Ah-jung and May Lin once again coming back to the apartment for a quick tryst, so he quickly hides under the bed, and proceeds to masturbate as they have sex on the bed above him. Once May Lin leaves, Hsiao Kang silently joins the sleeping Ah-jung in bed and gives him a rather coy kiss on the lips. It is for this reason that Hsiao Kang is identified as "gay" in the promotional literature for the film, but I would agree with Angelo Restivo's demurral: Restivo finds the film "to be ambiguous on this point" (2002, p. 193 n. 16). This is where I think the concept of sexual disorientation is helpful, not only for making sense of a romantic triangle established by the film, but for understanding that Hsiao Kang's "performances" in the apartment have a destabilizing effect on how we read his gender and sexual identity. As Ahmed argues "queer moments happen when things fail to cohere" and Tsai manages to challenge the coherence of the audience's perception of the sexual identities of his characters. This disorientation effect also helps explain a rather coy lesbian kiss in *What Time Is It There?*: Shiang Chyi meets a fellow Chinese woman in Paris, and spends the night at her apartment, but their potential sexual encounter, like most in Tsai's films, is missed or cut short at a kiss. Tsai thus highlights multiple forms of spatial, cultural, and sexual disorientation.

Ahmed also usefully draws attention to the sense of being "oblique" that she identifies in relation to the contours of "life at home." Specifically, domestic space is disoriented by Tsai's film: each character is shown appropriating real estate. Examples include Ah-jung quickly rolling up the clothing he is selling on a blanket in the streets of Taipei, May Lin waiting around in various vacant buildings for potential buyers, and Hsiao Kang "playing house" in a queer fashion. As Ahmed suggests, Tsai depicts bodies that are out of place even as he emphasizes the idiosyncratic ways in which they use the space of the empty apartment. In this way, his film is "queer" in both its treatment of space and its treatment of sexual desire and behavior.

Tsai's foray into the dystopia or disaster film genre, *The Hole*, refines Tsai's concern for the uses of domestic space and his disorienting approach to sexual desire. As Ahmed notes, it is both the sense of estrangement and the proximity of bodies that can result in an oblique or queer relation to space. Tsai constructs a situation in which proximity and social communication are rendered anxious and suspicious through a vague but omnipresent fear of viral infection, in this case by the "Taiwan fever" which causes people to act like cockroaches. The interactions between characters in the film are thus mostly oblique and phobic. In an interview with David Walsh (1998), Tsai explains the concept behind this film that he was commissioned to make as a vision of the new millenium:

I thought the end of the century was too close to describe a future predicament, so it's actually a reflection of contemporary society. And being so dark, and full of disease, I think it's my observation of people also being so lonely, existing in their own solitude. (Walsh, 1998)

The interviewer remarks that this alienation is fairly universal at this point. Tsai agrees:

I think that although I invented a disease called "Taiwan fever," there are similar situations happening in many parts of Asia. There are a lot of strange diseases developing. Ever since AIDS there are all sorts of unprecedented diseases. In terms of the cockroach symptoms [. . .] a lot of people live in poverty, and try to adapt to the role, to the living environment they have, and acquire the characteristics of a cockroach. Being adaptable to a bad situation. Living purely on survival instinct, with a lack of any dignity. (Walsh, 1998)

Like another allegorical and uncanny genre obsessed with infection and survival instinct, namely the modern zombie film, such as Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* [1978], set in a shopping mall, Tsai uses the established genre of the disaster film to in fact throw the realities of modern life into stark relief. In particular, through the character of the woman in the downstairs apartment, he highlights the interconnection of germ phobia and social phobia. As a counterpoint, Tsai reveals the woman's fantasies of contact through rather disjunctive musical sequences using the songs of Grace Chang mentioned earlier in connection with 1960s Hong Kong musicals. It could be argued that the conventions of the song-and-dance musical are now not only camp but are also uncanny to modern audiences. Their appearance is increasingly highlighted as a moment that breaks with the diegesis. Examples include Lars von Trier's *Dancer In the Dark* (2000) or Royston Tan's *15* (2002), with its music video pastiche moments of the boys singing violent Singapore gang anthems. In *The Hole*, Tsai hybridizes two genres—the disaster film and the musical—in a way that is deliberately disorienting.

Reading the desire of *The Hole*'s musical sequences might seem straightforward in that they are about the desire of a woman for a man. But the "alienation effect" which Tsai achieves through such a jarring aesthetic juxtaposition renders the scenes all the more "queer." Certainly, the film is structured by sexual difference, but this sexual difference is problematized and rendered uncanny along with the conventions of romance. For example, the interactions between the man and woman take place around a gaping hole in the floor, with the man above the woman, but if the hole is a sexual metaphor, it is complicated by the fact that both parties "penetrate" it: he through dangling his leg and vomiting through it; she with bug spray that floods his apartment. They also interact on two levels of a courtyard, another hole in the middle of a building, in a way that highlights their missed encounters and renders them each oblique to the other. One could argue that the film demonstrates Jacques Lacan's (1982) assertion that "there is no sexual relation," in other words that fantasies of

overcoming sexual difference and lack are illusory. Yet, rather than Lacan's transcendentalization of heterosexual sexual difference, this obliqueness of gender and sex is "queer." This reading follows Eve Sedgwick's suggestion that queer refers to the "gaps" of meaning where elements of gender, sex, sexual orientation, sexual preference, and sexual identity refuse to line up monolithically (1993, p.8). The camp musical sequences help highlight this non-straight understanding of sexual differentiation and disorientation, and Tsai takes this up again in his "porn musical" *The Wayward Cloud* (2005) which features the same characters as *What Time Is It There?* and *The Skywalk is Gone*. Tsai's skewed or queer handling of genres (romance, comedy, *nouvelle vague*, disaster, musical, pornography) is also disorienting for his critics, perhaps especially with *The Wayward Cloud*, but that is precisely what makes his films so ripe for queer reading: they challenge our orientation to normative plots of heterosexual difference and to normative rules of genre.

Tsai's more recent film *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (2006) is in some ways a continuation of the kind of queer love triangle explored in *Vive L'Amour*. In this case, the triangulation is between a migrant Bangladeshi laborer Rawang (Norman Bin Atun), a battered Chinese homeless man he rescues and nurses back to health, Hsiao-Kang (Lee Kang-sheng), and a domestic servant (Chen Shiang-Chyi). They all share the same building owned by Chyi's older woman boss (Pearly Chua) in Kuala Lumpur. This time there is much more clear expression of jealousy by the man who so lovingly cared for Hsiao Kang's bruised and frail body. However, although he threatens to cut his throat, he is unable to carry out further violence to this body, and Lee strokes away his tears in a moment pregnant with both possibility and loss. This film marks Tsai's return to his native Malaysia.[1] However, like Ahmed's remarks about feeling oblique, and queer, through the disorienting effects of migration, Tsai's relationship to "home" is complicated. Ian Johnston notes that

the personal roots of this disconnectedness are broader than simply those of Tsai's sexuality. In Taiwan, he is a *huaqiao,* an overseas-born Chinese, someone simultaneously of the culture and outside it; which is a reflection of and variation on his shifting outsider status, growing up in Malaysia, as a Chinese in an officially-sanctioned/mandated majority Malay culture. So, in this return to his country of birth, his identification with migrant labourers — the most despised and discriminated-against portion of the population in wealthier Asian countries (Filipina maids in Hong Kong, Thai labourers in Taiwan etc) — is most appropriate. (Johnston, 2007)

Tsai uses his ambivalent or oblique relationship with his homeland to critically comment in his film on both environmental and political aspects of contemporary Malaysian culture. In terms of the environment, in *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* "a smoky haze settles on the world of the film, just like the apocalyptic rain of *The Hole* and the drought of *The Wayward Sky*, enveloping the characters in a cocoon that is frustrating and then finally embracing." Johnston notes "[t]his haze has a realistic basis in the annual forest fires in Indonesia that cause such havoc to the air quality in Malaysia. But in a radio broadcast we hear the blame for this shifted onto migrant workers and the supposed illegal fires that they light in Kuala Lumpur" (Johnston, 2007). Like *The Hole*'s environmental disaster/disease that is introduced and politicized through radio announcements and interviews with distrustful civilians about

---

[1] Tsai was born in Kuching, Malaysia, but moved to Taiwan to pursue his studies.

garbage and how to sterilize tap water, Tsai uses an environmental problem to comment on the political problem of xenophobia and racism.[2]

It is therefore important to my discussion of Tsai's sense of dislocation that the film's most tender relationship is between a Bangladeshi laborer and a Chinese homeless man without a passport. Johnston notes that "[t]here's no overt sexuality to Rawang's care for Hsiao Kang. It's a tender act of love, a selfless giving of himself to another" (Johnston, 2007). This underscores the significance of sexual disorientation in Tsai's films. Yet Tsai also uses *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* to comment on the role of homophobia in Malaysian politics, specifically through the Chinese title of the film and the prop of the discarded mattress on which Rawang nurses Hsiao Kang back to health. Johnston explains how the political aspect of Tsai's film

comes not only in the allusions to the xenophobia and discrimination that the migrant workers suffer, but also in the film's Chinese title. "Hei yan quan" translates literally as "Black circles round the eyes" and means both "Shadows under the eyes" (from lack of sleep) and "A black eye." Tsai has himself stated how through both this title and the mattress of the story he is referring to the case of Anwar Ibrahim, the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, whose political downfall was orchestrated by Malaysian Prime Minister Mathahir Mohammad in a patently faked court case. One aspect of the court case was an accusation of sodomy (a crime in Malaysia) where a stained mattress was brought as evidence into the courtroom and where Anwar appeared nursing a black eye. Yet Tsai's own take on this is not so politically orientated but rather developed in a more generalised statement that fits in with his own concerns in the film, namely that "you could really be somebody and be brought down to being nobody"— down, in other words, to the level of *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone*'s three main protagonists, Hsiao Kang, Rawang, and Chyi. (Johnston, 2007)

Johnston's suggestion that Tsai's film is less politically "orientated" might be complicated by an attention not only to homophobia as a political problem, but also how queerness and sexual disorientation factor into Tsai's intervention in local political problems of xenophobia and racism as well as that of South-South migration and labor.[3] Tsai's concerns are both general and local, his characters figure in problems that are both romantic and political. By calling attention to his own sense of spatial and temporal disorientation in relation to globalization that is also experienced by his migrant characters, Tsai demonstrates the political and critical value of a queer diasporic lens.[4]

Like Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together* (1997), Tsai focuses on transnational migration and labor, and like Wong, Tsai manages to make a cheap color-changing fiber-optic toy into a kind of poetic yet ironic image of romantic fantasy. The final shot of the film shows a dream-sequence image of the three main protagonists sleeping on Chyi's bed in the middle of a reflecting pool in a vacant building under construction/demolition. The fiber-optic toy rather comically floats by as another bittersweet nostalgic Mandarin song accompanies the fade to black and credits rolling. But like *The Hole*, Tsai also juxtaposes the rather destitute reality of

---

[2] Tsai's use of radio announcements is similar to the foregrounding of government broadcast media misinformation in Romero's zombie films.

[3] There is obviously much more to say here, but I want to thank Sim Wai Chew for his comments pointing me in this analytic direction.

[4] See the website for the International Conference on Queer Diaspora: http://140.112.180.209/qd/index.php

urban labor in Malaysia with the Bollywood-style musicals that entertain the migrant workers, and he uses the romantic fantasy elements of the lyrics to these musicals to comment ironically on the decidedly un-idealized vision of sexuality and desire his film depicts. The final disorienting shot of the bed floating off on black water in the midst of ambiguous urban demolition/construction signifies—to twist a phrase from Roland Barthes (1977, p. 142)—the "drift far from that all-too-pure pair" hetero-homo. Tsai's films and characters thus depict both disturbing experiences of dislocation and productive forms of spatial, temporal, and sexual disorientation that ultimately encourage in his audiences a queer way of inhabiting a fleeting and shifting world.

Works Cited

15, 2002 [DVD, 2010]. Directed by Royston Tan. USA: IndieFlix.

Ahmed, S. (2006), *Queer Phenomenology: Orientation, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Berry, M. (2005), *Speaking in Images: Interviews with Contemporary Chinese Filmmakers*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Barthes, R. (1977), *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Dancer in the Dark, 2000 [DVD, 2001]. Directed by Lars von Trier. USA: New Line Home Video.

de Villiers, N. (2008) Leaving the Cinema: Metacinematic Cruising in Tsai Ming-liang's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* [e-journal] 50. Available at: <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc50.2008/DragonInn/index.html> [accessed 30 April 2012].

Happy Together, 1997. [DVD, 2003] Directed by Wong Kar-wai. USA: Kino Video.

The Hole (*Dong*), 1998 [DVD]. Directed by Tsai Ming-liang. USA: Fox Lorber.

Hu, B. (2003), Goodbye City, Goodbye Cinema: Nostalgia in Tsai Ming-liang's *The Skywalk is Gone*. *Senses of Cinema* [e-journal] 2003. Available at: <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2003/feature-articles/skywalk_is_gone/> [accessed 30 April 2012].

I Don't Want to Sleep Alone (*Hei yan quan*), 2006 [DVD]. Directed by Tsai Ming-liang. USA: Fortissimo Films/Strand Releasing.

Jameson, F. (1994), Remapping Taipei. *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics*, edited by Nick Browne, Paul Pickowicz, Vivian Sobchack, Esther Yau. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.117–50.

Johnston, I. (2007), Butterfly Dream: Tsai Ming-liang's *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone*. *Bright Lights Film Journal* [e-journal] 57. Available at: <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/57/sleep.php> [accessed 30 April 2012].

Lacan, J. (1982), God and the *Jouissance* of [The] Woman. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, translated by Jacqueline Rose. New York: W.W. Norton, pp. 137–48.

Matsumura, T., 2004. Internal Borders, or De-translating the Construction of Male Homosexuality: Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole* and the Imaging of 'Okama' in Contemporary Japan. Paper presented at the *QGrad* Conference, UCLA, 16 October 2004.

Moon, M. (1998), *A Small Boy and Others: Imitation and Initiation in American Culture from Henry James to Andy Warhol*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Meyer, M., ed. 1994. *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*. London: Routledge.

The River, 1997 [DVD, 2001]. Directed by Tsai Ming-liang. USA: Leisure Time.

Sedgwick, E.K. (1993), *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Vive L'Amour (*Ai qing wan sui*), 1994 [DVD, 1996]. Directed by Tsai Ming-liang. USA: Strand Releasing.

The Wayward Cloud (*Tian bian yi duo yun*), 2005 [DVD, 2008]. Directed by Tsai Ming-liang. USA: Strand Releasing.

What Time Is It There? (*Ni neibian jidian*), 2001 [DVD]. Directed by Tsai Ming-liang. USA: Wellspring Media.

Restivo, A. (2002), *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Walsh, D. (1998), An Interview with Tsai Ming-liang, director of *The Hole*. *World Socialist Web Site* [e-journal]. Archived at:

<http://www2.ups.edu/faculty/velez/flfilm/html/Chinese%20Film/tsai-o07.shtml>   [accessed 30 April 2012].

Likay Aka Oni Red Demon: Encounter and Exchange of Intercultural Performance

Sukanya Sompiboon

Abstract

This paper investigates the possibilities of cultural exchange between a Japanese contemporary play and a Thai *Likay* performance.[1] This paper focuses on the process of inter-Asian cultural exchange between Thai and Japanese in terms of East-meets-East dialogue, cultural flows beyond the boundaries of two countries and cultural issues in the art of the theatre. Furthermore, it illustrates the process by which Pradit Prasatthong,[2] a Thai playwright, adapted *Aka Oni*, a Japanese play-script in his work after he had collaboratively worked with Hideki Noda[3] in the original version of *Aka Oni* in 1997. This paper also exposes Japanese audiences to *Likay*, a Thai traditional-popular theatre form. Prasatthong[4], the director of *Likay Aka Oni*, a new version of Noda's play, has endeavoured to make a contribution to intercultural communication and to produce a performance that can be appreciated by both Thai and Japanese audiences.

Keywords: Cultural Encounter and Exchange, Intercultural Performance, Aka Oni, Red Demon, Makhampom Theatre Troupe, Contemporary Likay

---

[1] This performance is called *Likay Aka Oni* (Japanese), *Likay* Red Demon (English), and *Likay Yak Tau Daeng* (Thai).

[2] Pradit Prasatthong (b.1960) trained as a sociologist and is an actor-director-playwright in a contemporary and tradition-based contemporary performance, and a former member of the Makhampom Theatre Troupe. He is the first Thailand's Silapathorn Award Winner (2004) in performing arts. The Silapathorn Award was founded in 2004 by the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Ministry of Culture. The Award is given to contemporary Thai artists aged between 30 to 50 in five branches, including visual arts, literature, music, movie and performing arts. Pradit Prasatthong is currently a director and actor of Anatta Theatre Troupe which was founded by him in 2012.

[3] Hideki Noda (b.1955) is a renowned Japanese playwright, director, and actor. He is also an art director of Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre (TMT).

[4] According to English translation of sounds from Thai, the director's surname 'Prasatthong' can possibly be written as 'Prasartthong'.

Likay Aka Oni, a Japanese play performed in Thai *Likay* style, is a tradition-based contemporary performance of a story of cultural differentiation and of communication breakdown. Makhampom Theatre Troupe performed *Likay Aka Oni* at Jim Thompson Art Centre, Bangkok (2009), Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space (2009) and Esplanade's Theatre Studio in Singapore (2010), as part of the 2009 Mekong-Japan Exchange celebration held by Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre (TMT). Discussion in this paper mainly focuses on the Tokyo production, performed between 19 and 23 November 2009, where I joined the production as a staff member of documentation. This paper first identifies the frameworks of intercultural theories which were utilised in *Likay Aka Oni*. I then discuss the creation process in the text, rehearsal, and performance techniques, in order to demonstrate how the production crafted a piece that crosses cultural and national boundaries in terms of theatre adaptation and hybridisation between Thailand and Japan.

Collaborative Exchange in Theatrical Adaptation and Hybridisation

Patrice Pavis, in his concept of intercultural theatre, argues that the hybridisation of the intercultural process often results in the original forms being no longer distinguishable (1996, p. 8). *Likay Aka Oni,* however, is not such a case. Rather, the intercultural theatre in this project is "a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions" (Lo and Gilbert, 2002, p. 36). The production integrates performance elements of different cultures into a form that aims to retain the cultural integrity of the specific materials used in forging a new text and theatre practice (Lo and Gilbert, 2002, p. 5). This cultural exchange process can be seen as

> the transmission of theatrical troupes and gags between actors and playwrights; the exchanges of actors, playwrights, and theatrical culture [. . .] the representation of foreign identity [. . .] that communicated across national and regional boundaries, and allowed for both material and symbolic exchange (Henke and Nicholson, 2008, p. 1).

Noda points out that although any interchange might threaten the special qualities of a particular culture, without such an exchange, nothing new would be initiated (Parivudhiphongs, 2009).

In *Likay Aka Oni*, the exchange between the two different cultural motifs exhibits a two-way communicative approach, drawn from Rustom Bharucha's pendulum model which presents reciprocity of intercultural theatre and its two-way exchange. Bharucha asserts that

> interculturalism evokes a back-and-forth movement, suggesting the swing of a pendulum rather than a downward movement through the narrow trajectory of filters by which the 'source culture' is emptied while the 'target culture' is filled. (Bharucha 1993, p. 241)

This model challenges Pavis's "hourglass" model (1992, pp. 4-5) which is seen as the cultural flows between the "source" and "target" cultures where a foreign or source culture passes from the upper bulb through the narrow neck of the glass and into the lower bulb of the target culture. This process is considered as a one-way communication (Lo and Gilbert, 2002; Daugherty, 2005).

Likay Aka Oni production, therefore, is the result of an encounter followed by a process of exchange between equals. The production was created based on cross-cultural negotiation at both dramaturgical and aesthetic levels. The "in between" of collaborative exchange occurred when the practitioners "created a true hybrid and a powerful piece of performance"

(Daugherty, 2005, p. 55). Prasatthong maintains *Likay* form and its essential elements but he combines them with universal social issues in which his *Likay* productions can present contemporary content through a popular-traditional form. In other words, Prasatthong brought *Likay* form to a Japanese audience through a story with which many of its members might be familiar. Although the Thai *Likay* form was strange for Japanese theatre audiences, they were able to follow the plot synopsis and relate the performance to their preconceptions of the story, which provided a means of understanding and appreciation.

Working with Thai, Working with Japanese: Cultural Encounter and Exchange

As an actress in Prasatthong's contemporary *Likay* performance in more than ten productions since 2003, I have learned to understand his approach of mixing theatrical materials from two worlds, namely "contemporary" and "traditional," as well as his ability to work well with traditional artists. Prasatthong maintains *Likay* form and its essential elements but he combines them with universal social issues so they can present contemporary content through a popular-traditional form. Noda utilised the same approach in his contemporary *Noh* production, *The Diver*, which I saw in October 2008 in Tokyo. *The Diver* was derived from the ancient Japanese *Tale of Genji* but was reinterpreted and performed as a contemporary stage play by three British cast members and Noda himself, featuring conventional *Noh* stage props, such as a fan, together with a *Noh* musical ensemble. In the first interview I conducted with Noda in 2009, he raised the issue of how necessary it is to know, understand, and adapt when working with artists from different theatrical fields. He explained:

> I am now rehearsing a *Kabuki* play. When I met the traditional actors, I introduced them to new things. When I work with modern actors, I always think about [their] traditional way. When I lived in London working with British, I introduced them [to] Asian styles. A culture is always appearing new things (Noda, Interview 2009).

In Noda's opinion, as cultures develop, new things appear in them, as inter-cultural interaction prompts reworking from traditional bases. This cultural-exchange approach was also used when Noda and Prasatthong collaboratively worked together with other Thai practitioners on the *Aka Oni* production (1997-1998); both of them made efforts to learn about each other's culture when working together. Their cultural cooperation, combined with their similar attitudes and approaches to making theatre, is clear in the final production. The cultural exchange between them resulted in not only a new style of theatre, but also manners, attitudes, and working styles of the actors from both national traditions.

Noda adjusted his approach to working with Thai artists and this greatly impressed Prasatthong. Japanese and Thai dramatists have different attitudes to the working process, particularly in theatre practice. The Japanese consider each aspect of contributing to a dramatic production as "serious" work, while Thais regard the same process as "a fun experience." As Prasatthong explained in an interview:

> As the word 'play' implies, Thai actors never forget to enjoy themselves in their work, even though working on a production is a job. We believe that a performance is something that we should enjoy acting in, and we don't like to look at productions simply as jobs that must be done. When the Japanese do a play, they work seriously in rehearsal and are much disciplined about being on time and obeying the rules of conduct. But that is not the case with Thai actors. Often we aren't on time and we haven't learned our lines completely. We always approach a play with a spirit of fun. And sometimes we play around too much, which can be a problem too. (Sentoku 2009, p. 4)

In response to such different work attitudes and reflecting his understanding of cultural exchange, Noda conducted ice breaking activities at the start of sessions, such as playing football, basketball or some traditional Japanese game (Sentoku, 2009, p. 4). While Noda adapted his approach to work with Thai practitioners, Thai practitioners also learned from him as a representative of Japanese culture, and tried to adopt a great number of useful disciplines such as being punctual and more serious while rehearsing, but more relaxed when taking a rest. Thirty Thai applicants took part in the workshop in 1997, and fifteen of them, including Prasatthong, were chosen to perform *Aka Oni* in 1998.

Originally scripted and directed by Noda as a NODA MAP production, *Aka Oni* was first staged in 1996 in Japan with Japanese performers alongside a British actor playing the character of the Red Demon. The following year, the Japan Foundation's Asian Performing Arts Exchange and Research Program was launched with the purpose of bringing together Asian and Japanese theatre people to create joint productions. In 1997, Noda held a workshop with Thai actors from Bangkok and to create and perform a Thai version of *Aka Oni*. This Thai version, with Thai cast members and Noda himself playing the demon's role, was performed in Bangkok in 1998 and re-produced in Tokyo in 1999 (Sentoku, 2009, p. 1). In 2003, Noda directed and staged an English-language version of his *Aka Oni* in London using British cast members.

Principally, *Aka Oni* deals with racism and the difficulties of intercultural communication, particularly of discrimination towards people from outside Japanese culture. When villagers on an unknown island meet an odd-looking creature who is washed ashore, speaking an unfamiliar language that nobody can understand, they view him as a monster and fear him. Called *Aka Oni* (Red Demon) by the locals, he is exiled from the village. The villagers decide to kill him, but the heroine, referred to in the play as "that woman," tries to help him, which results in terrible consequences (Ayako, 1999). When performed in the Setagaya theatre, Japan, the production used Thai cast members and Thai language with Japanese narration via headsets for Japanese audiences. The performance was well received by both Japanese and Thai audiences. When it came to choosing a work by Makhampom Theatre Troupe to be performed collaboratively in the Mekong Festival in 2009, this story was again selected.

Adapting the text: Juxtaposition of Thai *Likay* Elements and Japanese Text

In the adaptation of the original to the Thai *Likay Aka Oni* production, Prasatthong describes the two crucial aspects of how to reinterpret the story and how to present it in a new form as a cultural transformation. For the first point, Prasatthong rethinks the old version which emphasised equality among humans in the world. The story shows the conflict between the local people—who can be presumed to be Asian, Japanese or Thai people—and Europeans, for instance, in the aftermath of World War II. Although this theme is still relevant today, Prasatthong, as a Thai artist, is interested in finding some more specific idea which effectively reflects the Southeast Asian and Thai situation. The second aspect was about how to get the *Likay* form to fit well with this content.

Based on the play *Aka Oni*, *Likay Aka Oni* tells the tale of the inhabitants of an unknown island who doggedly believe that there is no land on the other side of the ocean. The play features four main characters: three humans and one demon. The human characters' names are

Thai: Kmuki, Kini, and Paglan.[5] Kmuki means 'fierce male giant', Kini means 'female giant', and Paglan means 'strong, big-bodied male giant'. Red Demon, the role of stranger, is named Kasi, the Arabic word for 'giant' used by many Muslims. Prasatthong points out that this Muslim name refers to the religious conflict between Buddhist and Muslim in the three southern frontier provinces of Thailand (Interview, 2010).

Kmuki, a dimwitted man, Kini, his sister, whom the villagers call "that woman" and whom Kmuki calls "you" – she symbolises a nameless woman subject to the lust of men, and their friend Paglan, meet the stranger, Kasi, and they all try to be friends. However, their attempt at friendship fails because the villagers disapprove of the stranger and try to drive Kasi away. This is because none of the villagers can communicate with Kasi, and assume that Kasi, whose appearance is different from their own, is a monster and cannibal and will eat them. Since Kini wants to help Kasi, Paglan has to help Kini, because he has fallen in love with her. Hence, after being banished, Paglan, Kini, Kasi and Kmuki leave the village by boat. On their journey across the sea, Kini loses consciousness due to malnutrition. She comes to after eating shark fin soup provided by Kmuki and Paglan, but she finds out later that the soup is not, in fact shark fin at all: as Kasi has disappeared, Kini realises that she has eaten him, so she runs away and commits suicide by jumping off a cliff.

With the universal content of social concern about discrimination and miscommunication among different nationalities in the globe, Prasatthong brought in this theme and used it as the backbone of his invention. The original text of *Aka Oni* relates the images and stories of homeless people, refugees, and those banished from their hometowns across the world. Reinterpreting this text, in which "different traditions and contexts are found in a new context and situation," Prasatthong refocused it on the continual political and religious turmoil in the three southern frontier provinces of Thailand. *Likay Aka Oni* can be also seen as highlighting the way in which "the original meanings of the different traditions in their original contexts [. . .] are now [. . .] supplanted by different meanings" (Preez, 2011, p. 159).

In Thailand, some Buddhists and Muslims look at one another as enemies. This is largely due to ignorance, as Prasatthong explained: "[We] consider our people as strangers. Anyone who talks or thinks differently will be the opposite side" (Yi-Sheng, 2010). In addition, "the pain here belongs not only to the victims of discrimination, but also to those who benefit from others' ignorance and those who remain ignorant" (Amranand, 2009, p. 8). In this sense, Prasatthong has pointed out that

> If this world was *Likay* theatre, we could not distinguish performer from audience members. In particularly, we live in the world in which 'otherness' is basically imposed to strangers. So, a demon can exist everywhere, not only a *Likay* theatre. I wish *Likay Aka Oni* would remind audiences about this point and encourage them to look at their neighbours, strangers, and other people as friends not demons. (Chaipanha, 2009, my translation)

Moreover, in *Likay Aka Oni*, the Red Demon or Kasi can be seen either good or evil. While Kasi sends messages to his friends at sea, these messages are inaccessible. No one knows about how good or bad Kasi and his friends are, but they all represent otherness. It is unnecessary to present the Red Demon as a furious or fierce character, because he will always

---

[5] In the Japanese version, names of characters are: Tombi, Mizukane, and 'That Woman' for Kmuki, Paglan, and Kini in Makhampom's *Likay* performance. Additionally, *Aka Oni* was named as Kasi in the latter version.

be looked on as an alien, no matter his manner or behaviours. Accordingly, Prasatthong emphasises in *Likay Aka Oni* the notion that giants and demons are not always dangerous and should not always be avoided. Sometimes human beings are more dangerous than these characters. Reflecting this idea, Kini recites a very important line to Kmuki, Paglan, and the villagers at the end of the performance. Before running away, she asks her brother and the villagers if it is not the truth that they ate the Red Demon's flesh to survive, rather than the Red Demon eating them.

Prasatthong started this production by repeatedly reading the original script and dividing all main sequences. Music, songs, rhyme, verse and other *Likay* elements were written into the performance. Since a *Likay* version performed in Japan had to be finished within one hour, some scenes and sub-plots were cut out, particularly those in which Paglan laments his unrequited love to Kini, whom he has lost to the uprooted stranger, Kasi. While Thai audiences tend to like this kind of love or sad scene, it might cause Japanese audiences to feel apathetic because those scenes were quite slow and delicate. In another major change, Prasatthong skilfully translated and adjusted the original prose text of *Aka Oni* to the verse and song of *Likay*. The revised text fit the melodramatic and comedic style of *Likay*. It is worth noting that *Likay* performance can do justice to the content of the original version of *Aka Oni*, allowing performers to appropriately link the written to the spoken word and rhythmic, physical, emotional, and symbolic stylisations to one another. This adjustment in the production manifested "the pendulum" between Japanese play and embodied *Likay* in motion which swings between the unfamiliar (new) plot and the familiar performance techniques (Daugherty, 2005, p. 65; p. 67).

Although the play represented a shortened version, Prasatthong kept a stylised *Likay* scene in which Kasi has painted a cave's walls with a paradisiacal landscape that reflects his search for a celestial land and in which his ship has left, assuming that Kasi is dead. In this scene, Kini and Kasi perform a classical Thai dance, accompanied by beautiful instrumental music, performed by the troupe's musical ensemble, and a choral performance given by the other performers offstage. To audiences, this scene suggested Kini and Kasi's close, perhaps even romantic, relationship. By contrast, in Noda's original version of *Aka Oni*, the nature of the two characters' relationship was unclear. Prasatthong developed it further, adding new elements and presenting them in a contemporary *Likay* style.

Finding a Form in Performing Hybridity

Likay is a popular performance style of Thai folk musical theatre or Thai folk opera. Type-characters generally improvise dialogues, *ranikloeng*, free verse, and song lyrics during the performance which follows a scenario provided by a story teller or a director, extending the storylines and stock rhymes. It is accompanied by *piphat*, the Thai classical orchestra, and combined with Thai classical dance and modern songs. *Likay*'s symbols include elaborate sparkling costumes, glittering headdresses with crystal crowns and ornaments, and a glamorous stage. The *Likay* style was used for *Aka Oni* because the Mekong project's organiser was impressed by its form after watching *The Message*[6], another Makhampom contemporary *Likay* performance in 2008 and asked Prasatthong to contribute another *Likay*

---

[6] *The Message*'s theme was based on the sufferings of people, again living in the Kong River Area in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. They have miserable lives due to changes resulting from a dam project in China. *The Message* was performed in Thailand between 2007 and 2008 and it was also invited to play in Yokohama, Japan in 2008.

production using Japanese text. Prasatthong himself also wanted to present Noda's *Aka Oni* in *Likay* version as he explained:

> *Likay* is an art form that has developed along with Thai society, it is one of the few arts that has maintained traditional aspects but also kept relevance to contemporary life, so it does not become outdated. When Mr.Takahagi made me the offer of directing a Noda play, I immediately thought that if I were to direct it myself I would do it in the *Likay* style. *Likay* is originally a Malay art form, which means it emerged from Islamic culture. Therefore, I thought to set the play in southern Thailand where many people of Malay descent live. So, I thought that it should be set in a seaside village in southern Thailand and use music that sounds exotic to the Thai ear. (Sentoku, 2009, p. 7)

Additionally, Prasatthong was informed by Thai audiences, who saw *Aka Oni* in a contemporary stage play in 1998 that, although the performance was admirable, they could not follow it well, due to its swift dialogue and quick pace. Therefore, Prasatthong has affirmed that *Aka Oni*'s text is excellent but has added that the addition of *Likay* elements such as song, rhyme and verse, to *Likay Aka Oni*'s repertoire, might enhance a Thai audience's appreciation of the story (Interview, 2009a). Therefore, the very swift spoken dialogue was replaced by song and dance that was designed to cover the entire conversation of a contemporary stage play version. *Likay Aka Oni* can also had the potential to open up the worlds of audience members who did not care much for traditional art forms and to impart a sense of the contemporary, through the use of a different kind of performance language.

Furthermore, Japanese audiences can compare *Likay* performance to their *Kabuki* or *Tai shu eng keki* in terms of a traditional-popular play. *Tai shu eng keki* means the theatre for people or masses, and it is also called a working-class *kabuki*. Noda pointed out that they are examples of Japanese local and popular performances, consisting of simple stories that can make the audience emotional and cry and laugh (Interview, 2009). Indeed, many interesting theatrical motifs that appear in *Likay* are also present across other Asian popular theatre traditions. Thailand's *Likay* and other kinds of traditional-popular performance in Southeast Asia, such as Laos' *Lamleong*, Cambodia's *Yike*, Malaysia's *Bangsawan*, and Indonesia's *Ludruk*, can be seen as common performances within the region which have similar attributes and elements.

Stage and Presentation: Dual performing Style on a Transnational Performance

A *Likay* performance consists of several crucial elements. Protagonists and antagonists usually introduce themselves directly to the audience. In each scene, a character or characters will sing *ranikloeng*[7] song or another Thai classical tune while performing a monologue or dialogue that presents their objectives and what they will do next. Although adjusting *Aka Oni* to a variety of the *Likay* performing style, Prasatthong maintained the fundamental *Likay* structure and elements, employing an adapted conventional approach in his reinterpretation of the original *Aka Oni* text. Starting with *ok khaek*, the opening scene in traditional *Likay*, two female characters and one male character sang the Thai tune *mari suekariya*, used in a *ronggeng* performance, followed by a rapper, sung in English by the male character in the middle of the song. While dancing and singing, the three performers asked the audience to clap their hands with the drum beat. After this dance revue which prepared the audience to see *Likay*, Kmuki,

---

[7] *Ranikloeng* verse lib is a trademark of *Likay* in which characters introduce themselves and express their feelings, or narrate a story line and situation. The ending verse of each rhyme contains a punch line to make the rhyme sound eloquent.

the foolish character who is able to communicate both to other characters and to the audience, introduces himself and a story:

> Hello ladies and gentlemen, my name is Kmuki, I am an idiot. I have never asked my parents why they named me Kmuki, because I have not seen them before since I was born. Never mind. Today, I will tell you a funny story about a shark fin. Yes, it is about a delicious shark fin soup that you all love eating. But the shark fin in this story is a top secret; it would have been kept a secret forever, if only there had been no storm that night. (*Likay Aka Oni*, my translation)

Fictitious supposition or imaginative exercising is a *Likay* convention that is agreeable both to audiences and performers. In *Likay Aka Oni*, an empty bottle that served as a hand prop[8] was also an important symbol of the other side of the sea. It was used not only as a fictitious prop, but as a mock microphone, by Kmuki, who spoke through it to the audience. An echo coming from the bottle represented Kmuki's belief that the microphone was alive. When Kmuki's sister commits suicide, however, the bottle stops echoing. The lack of echo reflected Kmuki's hopelessness about life and people, although he kept saying to the audience that he was fine.

> I don't know much about this world. That's why I can continue to live. Sometimes I think of my sister and Red Demon laughing together in the boat. At that time, I thought she was laughing, but perhaps she was despairing. Whenever that image comes to my mind, little by little, I begin to understand the meaning of despair. *(Likay Aka Oni*, in Amranand, 2009, p. 8)

His introduction about the funny story of shark fin was later presented as the story's tragic ending; the echo of the bottle stopped when his (funny) imagination was destroyed, and the real world was revealed.

Prasatthong departed from conventional *Likay* staging in this production, with a unique seating and stage arrangement used both in Thai and Japanese performances. The audience sat in a U-shape space surrounding the performance area with the musical ensemble was set at the back of the stage and hidden with lighting, except for at the opening and the end of the performance. In order to adapt to this new stage set-up, the Thai actors needed more rehearsals and had to adapt their cues. Some typical *Likay* stage elements were missing, such as the *Likay* symbol of a bench, used to represent the highest throne in a throne hall. Similarly, rather than use the traditional entrance and exit, characters were able to enter at any spot on the stage. With no bench centre-stage, the opening scene featured an ensemble dance, in which the villagers danced around the stage, while Kasi made his first appearance in conventional *Likay* style, sporting a glittering red costume and a giant mask.

---

[8] The props in *Likay* are close-at-hand materials that are easily found; for example, a new-born baby is created by a towel rolled around a doll; a loincloth covering a body can be a sign of disguising and hiding; and a broomstick can be ridden as a horse.

Figure 1: A thrust stage is surrounded by the audience on all three sides, projecting Japanese subtitles.[9]

Figures 2 and 3: Lighting and block marking in a dress-rehearsal

---

[9] All photos courtesy of the author unless otherwise indicated.

Figure 4: The finale

As Kasi makes his first appearance in traditional *Likay* style, his slow and delicate hand actions and body posture present classical Thai theatre movements, and also indicate his major role in the performance. In terms of stylisation, *Likay* often toys with the meaning through exaggerated action, depicted through lights, sounds, costumes, expressions, graceful movements, and speaking. *Likay Aka Oni* demonstrated the uniqueness of this traditional-popular Thai theatre form by presenting diversified ranges of voice and tone in a performance. Additionally, characters used strong eye expressions, a different communication from Noda's staging, in which eye expression as well as inner thought and sentiment are minimised.

Along with *ranikloeng* song and other types of *Likay* music such as *hongthong* and *songmai, Likay Aka Oni* employed Thai classical tunes with Javanese tones and Malayan ethnic melodies. Furthermore, musical genres influenced by the Dutch and related to the Java and Malaya music cultures, such as *Batavia*, were adopted, as were Muslim melodies from the southern part of Thailand and Malaysia.

Figure 5: *Piphat*, or a music ensemble band, is positioned at the back of the stage.

Figure 6: Performers warm up their voice by using a voice projection technique.
(Photo Courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)

Typically, a conventional *Likay* performance uses stock-written verses and improvisation, adapting from performers' stock verse through a situation in each scene as a major method. Prasatthong's production of *Likay Aka Oni*, on the other hand, principally relied on a full-script and rehearsal process. Prasatthong allowed his performers to improvise some minor lines, occasionally in Japanese, which contributed to the hilarity of the play. The sole use of improvisation might have rendered the content of the production inappropriate and led to loss of control over the play's running time. Moreover, it would likely have confused the Japanese member of the crew who managed the Japanese subtitles, although she was able to communicate in Thai.

Costumes in *Likay Aka Oni* were adapted from a conventional *Likay* costume. In the past *Likay* performers wore costumes according to a character's nationality, such as Chinese, Burmese or Javanese. Today *Likay* actors usually wear only Burmese style on their lower body: a loincloth and covered skirt, while actresses wear the Victorian style gown, decorated with glittering ornaments, such as fake diamonds or crystals. Since Prasatthong wanted to concentrate on the problems faced by the three southern provinces of Thailand in *Likay Aka Oni*, he employed Javanese images and costumes in the play. Male characters wore Javanese-style glittering silver jackets with loincloths, decorated with *sabu*, the hanging ornate fabric along their waists, as well as Malayan-style cloth wrappings around their heads and long-haired wigs. Female characters wore glittering silver gowns in slightly different designs and decorated their hair with glittering ornaments and artificial flowers.

Audience Perceptions and Interpretations

According to Anya Peterson-Royce, audiences of different cultures or nationalities may have different expectations of performances. She points out that "American audiences want to know what is happening at very short intervals, while French audiences can let almost an entire number be presented before they need to have some closure" (2004, p. 156). Similarly, Thai and Japanese audiences' perceptions and demands of *Likay Aka Oni* may have differed. Thai audiences may have liked seeing how Prasatthong used the *Likay* form to present Noda's masterpiece, while Japanese audiences may have been curious to know what would happen when Noda's play was presented in a Thai *Likay* form. When *Likay Aka Oni* was performed at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space, sub-titles were displayed on screens on both the right- and left- hand sides of the stage. Before each performance, the audience was shown a short video on how to watch *Likay*. The video asked audiences to express their emotions during the performance, including by interrupting it with shouted suggestions on what the actors should do in scenes. This guide on how to watch *Likay* was offered because the troupe had unpleasant

experiences performing *Likay* in Yokohama, Japan in 2008. In Yokohama, audiences did not want to interrupt performances, due to their perception that audiences should be well-behaved. Thus, they were restrained in their emotions and interactions, holding back on laughing and talking while watching the performance. What is more, they did not respond to characters when asked to. Since *Likay* requires audience interaction, this made the performance tedious.

Figure 7: After talk, from left: Hideki Noda, translator, Nat Nuanphang (Mizukane in *Aka Oni* 1998's version), translator, Pradit Prasatthong

The question of the extent to which the arts speak a universal language, and thus whether the Thai language in *Likay Aka Oni* impeded audiences' appreciation of our performances, is pertinent. The main points of feedback given by Japanese audiences, collected from forty questionnaires, which I gave out and collected on my own after each performance finished, concerned their comprehension and appreciation of the play. Around sixty percent said that their understanding depended on the facial expressions, emotions, and interactions of the actors, rather than on spoken dialogue. However, a large proportion also considered familiarity with the original story before seeing the production necessary. They expressed such opinions as:

> Facial expressions and gestures help the audience understand the story. Subtitles were very helpful in understanding the story in detail.

> There are many expressions in this performance that do not rely on spoken language. I could understand the performance, even though I could not see the subtitles from my seat.

According to Japanese audiences, the most impressive motifs in *Likay Aka Oni* were live music, singing, and acting talent. Surprisingly, the beautiful stylised dresses, together with the fake but splendid diamond earrings, necklaces, and decorative headdresses were regarded as unimportant.

Providentially, two informal talks were given after each show by Japanese theatre practitioners and scholars whose comments were very useful. They opened by noting that some of the Japanese sub-titles were inaccurate. For instance, most of the characters in *Likay Aka Oni* said "*sinwang*," hopeless in Thai. The Japanese translator chose instead the word for "desperate," which, as one of the theatre critics commented, is inappropriate because "hopeless" is more precise than "desperate" in this context. Furthermore, the scholars added that the audience's understanding relied on their beliefs, religions, and experiences. Regarding comprehension, Prasatthong had intended to add to the dialogue Japanese words, articulated in Thai accent, in order to demonstrate the effort made by the characters in *Likay Aka Oni* to communicate with

Japanese audiences and to enhance the play's hilarity. However, this was disallowed by the Japanese project's art director, who did not believe that the use of out-of-tone Japanese language would be necessary to create comedy. In fact, he really thought that Japanese audiences preferred to listen to the entirely beautiful and harmonious Thai language both verse and songs (Prasatthong, Interview 2009b).

Conclusion

The cultural exchange between Thai and Japanese theatre elements can raise further questions about intercultural theatre in terms of East-meets-East cultural exchange. This phenomenon is a continuing process in the wide and complicated crossroad of interculturalism in terms of "addressing the pervasive phenomena of cultural hybridity and cross-cultural exchange" (Henke and Nicholson, 2008, p. 9). In the process of theatre exchange, Prasatthong and Noda used a collaborative approach, adapting, adjusting, and inventing theatrical elements from Japanese's play text performing in Thai *Likay* form, providing an illustration of performing techniques and aesthetic transformation. Knowing and understanding different working cultures, therefore, was crucial in making the smooth process of encounter and exchange of the different traditions of the two cultures (Bharucha, 1993, p. 241 as cited in Daugherty, 2005, p. 66). Performing *Likay Aka Oni* for Japanese audiences whose viewing culture is to some degree dissimilar to Thai *Likay* was another aspect that Thai practitioners should bear in mind when contributing to an East-to-East intercultural and international piece of performance.

Reference

Amranand, Amitha. (2009). 'Venturing the dark side of *Likay*: Thai comedic folk music performance that exposes the ugly side of humans'. *Bangkok Post*, 18 November. P.8.

Ayako, Ishida. (1999). Speaking In Tongues: Why Thai-language version of a Japanese play is a hit – in Tokyo. *Asiaweek.com Magazine*, [online] Available at: http://edition.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/magazine/99/1015/akaoni.html. [Accessed 28 April 2012].

Bharucha, Rustom. (1993). *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Chaipanha, Aphirak. (2009). 'From Yak Tua Daeng to Sao Chao Na: The Intercultural Learning between Thai and Japanese, *Madame Figaro*, 75 (7) October.

Daugherty, Diane. (2005). 'The Pendulum of Intercultural Performance: Kathakali King Lear at Shakespeare's Globe'. *Asian Theatre Journal*. 22(1): 52-72.

Henke, Robert and Nicholson Eric (2008). *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theatre*. Hampshire: Ashgate.

Lo, Jacqueline and Gilbert, Helen. (2002). 'Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis.' *The Drama Review*. Vol. 46, No. 3, pp. 31-53.

Noda, Hideki. (2009). Intercultural and Transcultural Performance. [Interview] Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space with Sukanya Sompiboon (20 November 2009).

Parivudhiphongs, Alongkorn. (2009). *Universal language*. Available at: http://bangkokpost.newspaperdirect.com/epaper/viewer.aspx. [Accessed 1 December 2009].

Pavis, Patrice. 1992. *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Pavis, Patrice. (1996). 'Introduction: Towards a Theory of Interculturalism and Theatre'. In Pavis, P.ed. (1996). *The intercultural performance reader*. London: Routledge: 1-26.

Peterson-Royce, Anya. (2004). *Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artisty, Virtuosity*, and *Interpretation in a Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Prasatthong, Pradit. (2009a). Makhampom's Contemporary Likay Praxis. [Interview] Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space with Sukanya Sompiboon (20 November 2009).

Prasatthong, Pradit. (2009b). Music, Songs and Costumes of Makhampom's Contemporary *Likay* Performances. [Interview] Narita International Airport, Tokyo with Sukanya Sompiboon (25 November 2009).

Prasatthong, Pradit. (2010). Makhampom's Contemporary Likay Productions between 2001 and 2010. [Interview] Bann Makhampom (Makhampom House), Inthamara Soi 3, Bangkok with Sukanya Sompiboon (13 October 2010).

Preez, Petrus Du (2011). 'The Tall Tale of Tall Horse. The Illusion (or manifestation) of

African Cultural and Traditional Aesthetics in Hybrid Performance'. In Igweonu, K.ed. 2011. *Trends in Twenty-first Century: African Theatre and Performance*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V: 139-170.

Sentoku, Miho. (2009). *Presenter Interview: Bangkok Theatre Network, An organization sparked by a Thai version of Akaoni*. The Japan Foundation, Performing Arts Network Japan, 11 November 2009. Available at: http://performingarts.jp/E/pre_interview/0910/1.html [Accessed 20 January 2010].

Yi-Sheng, Ng. (2010). *Pradit Prasartthong, Director of 'Red Demon'*. Available at http://singartsfestival.wordpress.com/2010/06/08/pradit-prasartthong-director-of-%E2%80%9Cred-demon%E2%80%9D/. [Accessed 12 July 2010].

Relocating Tagore's Binodini: New Spaces of Representation in Rituparno Ghosh's *Chokher Bali*

Chandrava Chakravarty

Abstract

The paper explores how the interface between a literary text and its cinematic rendering underscores the possibilities of meaningful exchanges and encounters between different art forms, historical moments, and ideological values. Cinematic adaptation of canonical literary texts of the nineteenth century offers an effective platform for the discussion of the post-Victorian event. Rituparno Ghosh's film *Chokher Bali*, based on Rabindranath Tagore's novel bearing the same title, is a retro-Victorian working of colonial history. Ghosh offers an exploration of the spatiality of woman's selfhood/identity, and its complex interface with the historical and the social. Here, I have used the word 'Victorian' both historically and culturally. Culturally, the resonance of the word "Victorian" extends beyond historical specificities spilling to the postmodern era, and revealing an in-depth engagement with history which enriches the postmodern present considerably. The impact of the 'Victorian' is not only true for those in the West, but also for people who had been under British rule for long two hundred years. Rituparno's adaptation of Tagore is a reminder that our postmodern condition should not blind us to our status as post-Victorian/nineteenth century. The cinematic reworking of Tagore provides a palimpsestuous vision of what is present but not conspicuous enough.

Keywords: Woman, body, spatial-subjectivity, colonial history, retro-Victorian, adaptation, intertextuality.

I

This essay intends to contribute to the theme of "interpretative encounter" by exploring how the interface between a literary text written in the nineteenth century and its postmodern cinematic rendering produces possibilities of meaningful exchanges and encounters between different historical moments, values and art-forms. My paper studies the representations of the disruptive widow Binodini in Rituparno Ghosh's adaptation of Tagore's novel *Chokher Bali.* Cinematic adaptation has always occupied an ambiguous position, caught between an original work of art and its subjective reinterpretation by a film director. For long the debates on cinematic adaptations of works of literature centred on the question of fidelity to the source text while the work of adaptation was looked upon as secondary or derivative, and therefore inferior to the original. However, in the last decade a notable shift "from a moralistic discourse of fidelity to a less judgmental discourse of intertextuality" (Stam 2002, pp. 209-210) has taken place. Adaptations are valued today as creative endeavours "caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin" (Stam 2002, pp. 209-210). It is a work of interpretation that offers an original vision of a literary work, a process that embeds the literary text in a complex web of intertextual and interpersonal exchanges. A comparative analysis between the source text and the adapted film version of *Chokher Bali* brings out the value of a dialogical approach to the intersection of literature and film.

As against the simplicity of an individual author creating a narrative, the "complex material infrastructure of cinema" (Stam 2000, p. 56) produces an altered discourse. Moreover, Robert Stam rightly points out that a literary text comprising of a series of verbal signs can generate several meanings: "[t]he literary text is not a closed, but an open structure (or, better, structuration, as the later Barthes would have it) to be reworked by a boundless context. The text feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation" (Stam, 2000, p.57). I posit Rituparno Ghosh's film *Chokher Bali,* based on Tagore's novel, as an instance of the altered discourse on Indian womanhood, an exploration of the spatiality of woman's selfhood/identity, and its complex interface with the historical and the social. A retro-Victorian reworking of colonial history, the film makes potent statements, in its digressions from the source, on the ideological complexities underlining the "gender question" in colonial Bengal. Here I use the word "Victorian" both historically and culturally. Historically it stands for the nineteenth century as "a major warehouse of historical commodities and evidence, and a period still almost within living memory in which culture we feel we have strong roots" (Giddings, cited in Cartmell & Whelehan, 1999, p.12). These words are not only true for those in the West, but also for people who had been under British rule for over two hundred years. Culturally, the resonance of the word "Victorian" extends beyond the historical

specificities spilling to the postmodern era, and reveals an in-depth engagement with history, which enriches the post-modern present considerably.[1]

II

Tagore claimed *Chokher Bali* (*Eyesore*), published in the year 1903, to be an unprecedented piece of writing in the context of contemporary Bengal. A daring exploration of the complexities of man-woman relationship on the one hand, and of the homosocial bond developing between the three major women characters on the other,[2] the novel presented an avant garde theme. Tagore's *Chokher Bali,* set between 1902 and 1905, recounts the story of Binodini, a beautiful, educated woman, trained in Western learning under the tutelage of an English governess and then subjected most unjustly to the cloistered, unenlightened life of the Bengali women of her day. She is selected by Rajlakshmi to be the bride of her son Mahendra. As Mahendra refuses to marry Binodini, the fuming mother approaches Mahendra's closest friend Bihari hoping that Bihari would not let her down. However, much to her consternation, Bihari also refuses to marry Binodini. She is then married off and sent to her husband's place in rural Bengal. Widowed within a year of marriage, Binodini moves into Mahendra's house as a companion to his mother. There she meets Mahendra's wife Ashalata, an uneducated and inexperienced woman. As Binodini watches the doting couple, the intense love between Mahendra and his wife inflames her repressed sexuality. She starts comparing herself with Asha and feels that her rejection by Mahendra has been unjust. Her frustration grows as she realizes that this heaven of marital affection and security could have been all hers, if only Mahendra had been more judicious in his choice of partner. Binodini becomes intimate with Asha in order to get access to Mahendra. The two women become great friends, and start calling each other *chokher bali*, literally meaning "sand in the eye". These are words of endearment

---

[1] The word "Victorian" is a periodising concept no doubt, but it also refuses to be bound to a chronological range. The word has been diversely interpreted: often it has been associated to a colonial past or seen as a continual colonial presence. Victorianism is a cultural phenomenon that defines our postmodern present. Sadoff and Kucich noted that the Victorian age is "historically central to late-century postmodern consciousness" (2000, p.xi). We need to make a nostalgic return to our past even at the height of our postmodernity in order to understand how we have emerged. The "Victorian" then stands for certain sets of cultural values, practices, beliefs and systems which are deeply embedded in our present. Krueger rightly remarks that "we are in many respects post-Victorians, with a complex relationship to the ethics, politics, psychology, and art of our eminent—and obscure—Victorian precursors" (2002, p.xi). The simultaneous pulls of distance and proximity with the nineteenth century is truer in relation to gender as the past discourses still dominate our perception of heteronormative roles. In India where gender configurations are transnational, formed by the curious intersections between the East and the West, cultural predominance of Victorian values, that impacted our colonial past, continues to overshadow our postcolonial present.

[2] It needs to be clarified that there is no lesbian subtext in the novel, nor are the women characters aware of it. Here, we have three deprived women—a mother, and two daughter-like figures- thwarted by fate and the man they all love in their individual capacity. The root of deprivation being the same, these women develop a close, often ambivalent bonding.

chosen by Asha in place of *soi* meaning "friend" as she learns that Mahendra was earlier offered Binodini's hand in marriage. Ironically, the apparently innocent words of endearment suggest rivalry, rather than friendship, between the two women. Binodini then starts seducing Mahendra with Asha's help. Asha, in her simplicity and innocence, is unable to gauge Binodini's strategies. When realization dawns, she is incapable of extricating her husband from Binodini's clutch. Not only Mahendra, but Bihari also becomes Binodini's target. She starts playing a dangerous game by provoking Mahendra's jealousy through her frequent indulgences towards Bihari. Strange interplay of human passions make Asha and Binodini struggle for their possession of Mahendra on the one hand, and Mahendra and Bihari contest for Binodini on the other. Binodini finally manages to alienate Mahendra from his wife, mother and friend, and fully captivates him. Mahendra, who has left his ancestral home with Binodini, is brought back by Rajlakshmi's terminal illness. After Rajlakshmi's death Binodini shows a sudden transformation of heart. She turns down Bihari's proposal for marriage, asks for Asha's forgiveness and departs for Benaras to live an ascetic life.

Through Binodini Tagore explores the consequences of the abysmal life and the sexual frustrations of a young Hindu widow. However, the end of the novel shows a disappointing acquiescence to societal demands in dispensing with the character of Binodini. Tagore himself was thoroughly dissatisfied with the novel's ending: "[e]ver since *Chokher Bali* was published I have always regretted the ending. I ought to be censured for it" (Tagore, 24 June, 1910).[3] The novel evoked various kinds of responses. When it was serialized in *Bangadarshan*, the Hindu Brahmins criticized Tagore for making Binodini crave for life and sexual fulfillment. Being a Brahmo, Tagore decided not to interfere with Hindu sentiment and restored Binodini to the conformist, Hindu life that society demanded. Later, a few months before his death, Tagore claimed to regret banishing Binodini to an ascetic life. Seen in its historical context the novel offers valuable insights into the difficulties of configuring gender as an Indian endeavour under the aegis of British imperialism. The configurations are transnational, produced from the confluence of the East and the West, and engendered by the conditions of colonial rule in India. Although specific dates are not mentioned in the novel, peripheral references help to situate the incidents in late nineteenth-century Bengal. Despite several reformist movements aimed at improving the abject conditions of Indian women, widowhood remained a curse. Although the re-marriage of Hindu widows received legal sanction, Hindu society was yet to shed its inhibitions against widow remarriage. In a colonial setting the portrayal of potentially subversive female sexuality brings out the clash between the ideal and the real. The articulation of feminine consciousness in Tagore's text explodes the hypocrisy of colonized patriarchal society with its overt nationalist agenda, and brings to surface a dialogised heteroglossia between the hegemonic and marginal voices.

---

[3] The film starts with these words of Tagore.

Made into a film in 2003, one hundred years after the publication of the novel, *Chokher Bali* re-explores the possibilities of the widow's marginality in the colonial context, and represents through Binodini how violations of human rights initiate problematic areas of human agency, particularly the spatial dimension. [4]
In his film Binodini's search for her own space from where she can resist the invisibility forced upon the widow in Hindu society, is also the quest of the postmodern Indian woman. Located at the problematic juncture of the colonial past and the post-colonial present, women in today's India are forced to go through an uneasy negotiation between the values of bygone days and the demands of present society. The parameters, which had shaped the notion of womanhood in India in the nineteenth century, are very much a part of the collective subconscious, so much so that any resistance against sexual/social discrimination has to begin with the negation of past values. That Ghosh was consciously speaking to his postmodern audience, who are made to see and hear what the director intended for them, is undeniable. His re-evaluation of these cultural discourses by entering into a dialogue with the past offers a different perspective. This is testified by the fact that apart from being nominated for the Golden Leopard at the 2003 Locarno International Film Festival, *Chokher Bali* was screened at the Asia Society on April 9, 2005, as part of the Third Annual South Asia Human Rights Film Festival. Although thematically the cinematic text invokes typical Victorian concerns over sexuality, national/cultural identity and morality, the *Chokher Bali* film was largely received as a protest against the oppression of women in society and an appeal for the recognition of human rights.

For Fredric Jameson, the post-modern is a "periodizing concept" which correlates to a new socio-economic order that "is often euphemistically called modernization, post-industrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism" (Jameson 1998, p. 3). Cinema, which Jameson sees as one of the pre-eminent postmodern forms, has a predominant role in structuring cultural experience in this new socio-economic order as "sight" becomes something of supreme value. Cinematic adaptation of canonical literary texts of the nineteenth century offers an effective platform for the discussion of the post-Victorian event.[5] According to Sanders, adaptation does not efface the source text with

---

[4] In *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Edward Soja draws heavily upon Henri Lefebvre and explains the notion of the "Thirdspace": "For Lefebvre, reductionism in all its forms, including Marxist versions, begins with the lure of binarism, the compacting of meaning into a closed either/or opposition between two terms, concepts, or elements. Whenever faced with such binarized categories (subject-object, mental-material, natural-social, bourgeoisie-proletariat, local-global, center-periphery, agency-structure), Lefebvre persistently sought to crack them open by introducing an-Other term, a third possibility or 'moment' that partakes of the original pairing but is not just a simple combination or an 'in between' position along some all-inclusive continuum. This critical thirding-as-Othering is the first and most important step in transforming the categorical and closed logic of either/or to the dialectically open logic of both/and also" (Soja, 1996, p. 60).

[5] As Kirchknopf has rightly noted, the postmodern engagement with the nineteenth century works "critically with the Victorian age and its narratives" (2008, p. 53). Animated images are never accidental or ideologically neutral.

its own images, but the endurance of the source in our memory enables the "process of juxtaposed readings that are crucial to the cultural operations of adaptation" (Sanders 2006, p. 25). Gender, class and other social differences are inevitably ideologically reconstructed in our own image with reference to values of the past.[6] Ghosh's adaptation of Tagore is a reminder that our postmodern condition should not blind us to our status as post-Victorian/nineteenth century.

---

[6] Mark Llewellyn's observation about the benefits of the palimpsest is relevant: "The importance of the palimpsest lies not in its writing of new texts over old ones, but in the simultaneous existence of both narratives on the same page occupying the same space, and speaking in odd, obscure and different ways to one another. For it is important to remember that, as the neo-Victorian text writes back to something in the nineteenth century, it does so in a manner that often aims to re-fresh and re-vitalise the importance of that earlier text to the here and now. The contemporaneous historicism present in text thus becomes the key to its neo-Victorian classification" (Llewellyn 2008, pp. 170-71).

III

In colonial India constructions of gender, fostered by the idiom of reform, emerged as a predominant cultural category. The process involved several factors: the relation of the rising middle class to colonialism; the issue of governance; economic changes; sexual divisions; and the nature and function of the private and the public spheres. Such ideological formulations encapsulated the affinities and differences between the colonial masters and the governed, and determined the nature of anti-colonial and nativist discourses and actions. As the confluence of contradictory values resulted in the re-formation of patriarchy in India, literature, constituted by "the processes of political colonization, the formation of class and the re-formation of patriarchies in the first half of the nineteenth century" (Sangari 1999, p. 97) also acted as a constitutive agent in these histories. The new gender constructs enabled a re-orientation of patriarchal control and provided discursive support in transforming the effeminate, subjugated subjects of colonial rule into the all-powerful patriarch at home. As the home turned into the main site for controlling the disruptive potentials of women, the idea of the female as incarnation of spirituality gained currency and obtained social approval.[7]

Unlike Western patriarchal thoughts in which all modes of control and hegemony were ascribed to the rule of a father, Indian symbolism is dominated by the feminine. The relation of the feminine with power is, nevertheless, problematic for Indian patriarchy, provoking deeply ambivalent responses towards womanhood. In a matri-focal culture, the feminine principle governing the natural world is both benevolent and capricious, in the form of the treacherous, destructive mother. Any human negotiation with such an unpredictable deity is bound to be accompanied by a sense of insecurity. Ashis Nandy rightly observes that this feeling of insecurity in man's response to woman became a part of the psychic make-up of the Indian male. In everyday life the psychological burden of the traditional image of *shakti* or power forces the Indian male to identify with the passive and distant masculine principle in the cosmos. In the familial front the same psychological ambivalence characterizes man's relation to woman, whether the relation of the son with his mother, or that of the husband with his wife. An urge to look up to woman for protection, security and nurture is always accompanied by the fear of betrayal.[8] Whatever the real experience of women might be (as many of them bore twelve-fifteen children) the notion of woman as spirituality incarnate had great appeal for the Bengalis who were familiar with the images of *Durga, Kali, Lakshmi* and later, the oppressed *Deshmatrika,* the Nation as Mother. Even the evocation of female power or *Shakti* implied the existence of a sacred domain that needed to be protected

---

[7] See for a detailed discussion Dipesh Chakravarty's "The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal." Subaltern Studies VI. Eds. David Arnold & David (Hardiman. New Delhi: OUP, 1996). ; Partha Chatterjee's "The Nation and Its Women" in Partha Chatterjee Omnibus (New Delhi: OUP, 1999, rpt. 2009).

[8] See Ashis Nandy's essay "Woman Versus Womanliness in India: An Essay in Cultural and Political Psychology" in *Exiled at Home* (NY: OUP, 2005): 32-46

with tireless vigilance. Such a larger-than-life representation not only projected a desexualized image of woman but also led to a glorification of the deprivation, sacrifices and abstinences she was forced to undergo in a highly oppressive patriarchal system.[9]

While the dangers of female sexuality were contained by the institution of marriage, the young, attractive widow, unaccommodated and outside the control of a husband or father, remained a serious problem. *Sati*, the custom of burning a widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband, raises moral, cultural and ideological issues of gender, religion, and the treatment of the body. Colonial discourses on *Sati* posit the woman's body as the abode of all danger.[10] The discourses on widowhood and *Sati* in colonial Bengal repeatedly emphasized the desexualization and dehumanization of the female body. In both the novel and the film *Chokher Bali* the figure of the widow, Binodini, rehearses the vexed issue of widowhood in multiple ways. In her efforts to carve out a new domain for herself, Binodini corresponds to Gayatri Spivak's positioning of women as subalterns caught between tradition and modernity. In her famous essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak argues that the most abject version of the colonized cannot represent herself, as she can only be represented by someone with more power. This is the predicament of Tagore's Binodini, who despite all her recalcitrance to societal demands, is eventually robbed of her power to "speak". Ghosh, on the contrary, crowns Binodini's individuality by enabling her to discover her own *desh* without the support of either Mahendra or Bihari. The theme of India's freedom struggle, conveyed in the forms of slogans, banners and Bihari's patriotism, brings to the fore the troubled connection between woman and nation. Although nationalism devalues both women and body as source of desire, variations of struggle for power are played over the feminine space of the nation and actual female bodies. This is all the more true for India where the nation did occupy a feminine space in nationalist iconography: the nation deemed as *deshmata (a female deity)* in bondage under the colonial yoke, ravaged and tortured by foreign aggressors. While women are treated as the symbol of the purity of the nation, they are vulnerable to contamination, and remain homeless

___

[9] Srimati Mankumari Basu writes to her friend Hem about the virtues of Masterbabu's wife Kamala Devi: "Even a heart of flint melts on seeing the devotion of Masterbabu's wife. You will be surprised to know that she embraces all sorts of dangers and sorrows with this faith: Whatever God gives is good for man. Let His will be fulfilled." [translation mine] (Ray 2002, p. 121).

[10] The "Translation of a Conference between an Advocate for, and an Opponent of, the practice of Burning Widows Alive" presents a debate for and against the issue, which highlights the problematics of accommodating the widow's body within Hindu patriarchy. The advocate for the practice describes the rewards in store for a sati, literally a chaste woman: "That woman who, on the death of her husband, ascends the burning pile with him, is exalted to heaven, as equal to Uroondhooti" (Roy 1999: 114). The debate progresses in an interesting manner as the opponent tries to counter the above arguments by referring to the words of a Puranic authority called Munoo: ' Let her emaciate her body, by living voluntarily on pure flowers, roots, and fruits, but let her not, when her lord is deceased, even pronounce the name of another man. […] Here Munoo directs, that after the death of her husband, the widow should pass her whole life as an ascetic' (Roy 1999: 115).

themselves. For both Binodini and Asha, *desh* or one's own country/nation remains an intriguing idea. If it means a concrete physical location and also an "imagined community"[11] then Asha, though temporarily dislodged, finds her own *desh* in Mahendra's house. Binodini constantly moves from one location to another, of which none belongs to her, nor does she belong to any physical space she comes to inhabit. And yet it is Binodini, not Asha in the film, who discovers *Bharatvarsha* as her own sacred space. This is a position of empowerment: Binodini eventually discovers and occupies the centre of her own space (*desh*) in her own right. Caught in subject/object binarism, Spivak does not take into account the possibility of the third space from which the subaltern can challenge and subvert the hegemonic discourse. Rituparno Ghosh's Binodini exploits the openness and possibilities of the margin as a third space.

Tagore's text surely provides an alternative space where the contradictions within the discourses on gender are exposed. The silences in the text are, therefore, most significant in enabling posterity to look for a dynamic model for differentiating between interpellated subject positions and marginal consciousness. Gillian Rose quotes key passages from Teresa de Lauretis's *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* to describe these silences as "spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions, and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparati" (1993, p.140). In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, bell hooks positions herself in the margin to detach purposefully her subjectivity and identity from the hegemonic order, a "site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination [. . .] which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world" (hooks 1990, p.153). The postmodern, postcolonial concept of "third space" has created a cultural politics of difference that has engendered creative and enabling responses, especially from women of colour. Unlike Tagore's Binodini, Ghosh's character discovers her liminal status as a position of power from where she can challenge her interpellated status in social hierarchy. Ghosh explains his change of focus thus:

> Today, when you read the novel, you can make out that this *cannot* be the ending. A lot of people wanted Binodini to get married to Behari. I think that would have been a solution 30 years ago when people were propagating widow remarriage, they would have been content if she were given another marital home. But in today's time, I think a woman can live on her own completely. (*Rituparno Ghosh and the "Intellectual Film*," 2005)

The film highlights the need to reformulate a new existential space for Binodini, who suffered three-fold marginalization: as a colonized subject, as victim of a repressive patriarchy, and finally as the victim of widowhood. The ending of Ghosh's film shows a

---

[11] The word is borrowed from Benedict Anderson

radical departure from that of the novel. He effectively uses the cinematic medium to create a different visual and ideological register.

IV

Unlike in Tagore's novel, Ghosh makes conspicuous Binodini's enticing, disruptive sexuality. Following Henri Lefebvre's argument, the whole social space proceeds from the body, and involves the complex working of power and knowledge. The representation of Binodini's body turns into the most crucial site for witnessing the production and reproduction of power. The representation of the body and of feminine identity is a social space involving the complex workings of power and knowledge.[12] Across this new spatial plane a deconstruction and reconstitution of the old modernist binaries of public/private, outside/inside, margin/centre take place simultaneously. Ghosh uses the marginal space of the widow's body as source of both sexual titillation and threat, and his representation conflates the use of the female body both as material object and as a discursively produced entity. We are not allowed to forget for once that the body of Binodini is a problematic social entity. She is consciously projected as a voluptuous sex symbol, as the site of a counter-hegemonic discourse, and as the location of resistance.

Ghosh generates a complex ambivalence towards Binodini, the seductress, to make the discourse on the Binodini-issue dialogic. An unabashed avowal of her disruptive potential is made through the background music played as Binodini appears on the screen: *"Mora jale sthale kato chhole maya jaal ganthi"* (Land and sea echo with our spells and wiles).[13] The song was sung by a group of enchantresses called the *Mayakumari* in Tagore's dance drama *Mayar Khela* (*The Game of Illusion*). Like the Mayakumaris, Binodini casts a spell on Mahendra, Asha and Bihari the moment she enters Mahendra's house. She uses all her intellectual and physical charms to capture Mahendra and Bihari. In fact, Mahendra's mother describes Binodini as *mayabini*, enchantress, on learning how she has ensnared Mahendra. Ghosh's thoughtful use of the song raises the question whether Binodini herself is an illusion or *maya*. After all, she hails like a tempest from nowhere to wreck havoc in the lives of Mahendra, Asha and Bihari, and then disappears without leaving an address behind. While the narrative space of Ghosh's film enables Binodini to play on the voyeuristic fantasy of the spectators, her elusiveness reinforces the impression that she is the denizen of an illusory world. Along with endorsing her enigmatic status in contemporary society, this also points to the fact that Binodini herself is, in a way, a pathetic pursuer of a space that can never belong to her. The opera glasses through which she sees the world voyeuristically is a pointer to her distance from the world she craves to occupy. Just as Binodini remains an enigma for society, her surrounding world is also a *maya* or illusion for her. The film, however, indicates that the unchartered territory of *maya* is also the domain of unpredictable

---

[12] Hooper's views obtained from her unpublished manuscript "Bodies, Cities, Texts: The Case of Citizen Rodney King" is cited in Soja: 111-119.

[13] Translation mine.

and indefinable possibilities. The presence of the enigmatic Binodini on the fringes of the ordered domestic space defines its territorial bounds, and threatens to undo the binarism of the centre and the periphery. Binodini is not outside the exclusive logic of the centre/margin but very much a part of it as the margin defines the centre and also invades its apparently fortified precincts. Tagore's *Chokher Bali* never explores the possibilities of self-actualization for Binodini; instead the novel chastises her individuality by banishing her to a life of penance.

Figure 1.Binodini and Asha – two intimate friends

In the film the scopophilic pleasure evoked by Binodini's physical representation is deliberately deployed to highlight her difference from Mahendra's wife Ashalata. Figure 1 offers a visual contrast between Asha and Binodini: the former wears a red sari, the colour associated with the bliss and fulfillment of the married state; the latter wears a white sari, the typical attire of the Indian widow and a mark of the renunciation of worldly pleasures. Yet, Binodini's eyes and body language clearly exude a seductive charm, as does the white sari worn to show off her voluptuous body. She starts teaching Asha how to resist Mahendra's brute force during their love-making. The scene (figure 2) in which she teaches Asha to wear a blouse, is the first indication of Binodini's desire to usurp Ashalata's legitimate social space by literally clothing herself in a wife's attire. As Binodini wistfully looks at Asha's ornaments and vermillion smeared forehead, her passion is ignited. This accomplished widow also becomes an enigma for the inexperienced Asha, for whom Binodini's subtle strategies of usurpation are beyond comprehension.

Figure 2. Binodini teaching Asha to wear a blouse

Although Binodini follows the strict religious observances of widowhood, Ghosh reminds us, through the patch of menstrual blood Binodini leaves behind in front of the prayer room, that no matter how much society tries to see her as a desexualized being, her body refuses to be tamed. Binodini's sexuality and intense passions are in sharp contrast to the traditional image of Indian widowhood as incarnate renunciation (see note 9).[14] It needs to be borne in mind that the entire discursive and legal sanction on widow remarriage in nineteenth century Bengal unleashed unprecedented social anxieties. First, it made sexual desire appear as a female expression and initiative. This brings to the fore the next disturbing question: that of female agency. The widow, without a guardian, that is a husband and/or a son, was autonomous. Her autonomy made her occupy a dangerous marginality which was subversive for the domestic order. A symbolic act of sanitizing the domestic space is undertaken by Mahendra's mother Rajlakshmi when she drives away Binodini from the house for alluring her son. Though chastised bitterly for her disturbing sexuality, Binodini is above gross carnality. Her awareness of the incorrigible double standards by which society treats a widow's body makes her a keen judge of her situation:

---

[14] The Widow Remarriage Act was passed in 1856: Act No. XV, July 1856, An Act to Remove All Legal Obstacles to Marriage of Hindoo Widows, cited in Tanika Sarkar 'Wicked Widows', p. 121. For a detailed discussion on widow remarriage see Tanika Sarkar's 'Wicked Widows: Law and Faith in Nineteenth-Century Public Sphere debates' in *Rebels, Wives, Saints,* p. 121-152.

she mildly reprimands Bihari's false sympathy for a chopped tree because his love for the living world excludes any sympathy for the suffering widows.

After being thrown out of Mahendra's house, Binodini reaches Bihari's place. She adorns herself with bridal ornaments hoping that Bihari would be easily drawn to her beauty, but again miscalculates her move. The screen representation, shown in figure 4, is menacingly subversive as Binodini's white sari is incongruously juxtaposed with her gold ornaments. In the days when widow-remarriage was introduced, the scene is a strong comment on the actual state of affairs. Binodini is clearly posited as an unaccommodated being—a widow, who is bedecked in bridal ornaments, and has cravings for marital bliss. Binodini's proposal for marriage seems so outrageous to Bihari that he bursts into laughter and refuses to accept her. She even pleads to serve Bihari as a maid in lieu of shelter. Bihari, who had borne some respect for this woman, is tormented to see that Binodini could degrade herself to this level and points out that they are living at a time when people are talking about freedom and not servility.

Figure 4. Bihari refusing to marry Binodini

However, Bihari's words mean nothing to Binodini who has little exposure to the outer world of political action. Moreover, struggle for freedom on the political front is very different from the personal battle Binodini is fighting within herself. Her insult is manifold this time because apart from the pangs of repeated refusals, she also realizes that she has fallen in the eyes of Bihari, her last and only resort. Binodini has no alternative but to return to her husband's village where she has always been looked upon as an aberration. She

writes an apology to Bihari and prepares for death by drowning herself, a common predicament for errant young widows of her day. The two letters written by Binodini in the film are Ghosh's invention, and these clearly foreground the director's agenda:

> [. . .] I have three identities in society—a widow, an anglicized lady and a young woman. My true self was always buried under these because society refuses to accept that a young widow is a human individual of flesh and blood. I can boldly confess that you have given me the courage to discover my fourth identity. You have showered all your pity on Asha because she is naive, simple and a pathetic victim of circumstances. I will never acquire the first two virtues possessed by Asha. [. . .] [So] I am destined to suffer the usual fate of widows in this country. Unfortunately, Jagadish Bose has never shown any concern for these hapless creatures. [translation mine]

Binodini, however, fails to commit suicide. As she prepares to leave her village home Mahendra arrives to live with her for good, a courage he had failed to show when earlier requested. Binodini realizes that after being deserted by his wife and mother, cohabiting with her is now no more but a penal state for Mahendra. She makes him vow celibacy during their stay together, and both reach Benaras to live in a *bajra*[15] on the Ganges. The bajra marks Binodini's new space, built on flowing water, fluid and uncertain -- a symbolic location and a deviation from the novel. This new location is a significant space for Binodini that offers release and leads to a new cognitive growth. The ghats of Kashi, with its myriad activities and people, open up a new world for her and she hungrily devours all the details of this variegated life around with her opera glasses. It is on these ghats that Binodini sees Annapurna, Ashalata's aunt, accompanying the pregnant Asha for a bath in the river. This is a moment of severe defeat and anguish for Binodini. She realizes that she has finally failed as Asha's rival: after all, it is only Asha who can bear Mahendra a legitimate child. While this moment of severe agony brings home the realization that Binodini should never aspire to be a wife and a mother, it also signals the dawn of a new self-awareness. It marks a point of release from the confines of stereotypical roles that women play in society. This moment in the film *Chokher Bali* signals the birth of a woman who recognizes her worth as a human individual and not as an interpellated social being.

In conceptualizing the end of the film, Ghosh had the criticisms of the novel in mind: some demanded the marriage of Bihari and Binodini as a fitting end for the novel. After Mahendra is restored to domesticity, Bihari comes with a marriage proposal to rescue

---

[15] A vessel, almost like a house boat, floating on the river in which people can stay

Binodini from a life of further humiliation. Unlike the other widows, Binodini has always displayed a forbidden love for life, and flouted social norms; she has repeatedly pleaded for love but suffered rejections. When Bihari finally comes to offer her a home, Binodini has already found a space which is larger than what marriage can offer. She has discovered a new *Bharatvarsha* which is not the country Bihari is fighting to free from the British. It is a *Bharatvarsha* of her mind, an endless space of immense possibilities and self-realization. Finally, Ghosh's Binodini disappears, leaving behind a letter for Asha and her opera glasses. Now that she has discovered a new world within herself, she no longer needs her glasses to see the outside world. Binodini's last letter is epiphanic:

> Dear [Chokher] Bali,
> [. . .] Do you remember asking me what desh means. [. . .] Is Biharibabu's desh same as ours? After I was estranged from you, these questions haunted me. [. . .] I realized that our cloistered life in Darzipara Street prevented us from seeing the outer world. That is why we tried to fulfill all our desires with the only man we had come across. But our desires remained unfulfilled and our small world (which you can call 'desh') was also shattered. If Lord Curzon succeeds in partitioning Bengal, then you and I will be in two countries. While living in two different countries if we only think about the insults, deprivations and sorrows we had suffered, then it would mean that we have accepted defeat. Actually our desh is in our mind. [. . .] I came to realize what desh means the day I stood on the ghats of Kashi. [translation mine]

A postmodern reworking on the colonial discourse on gender and identity, Ghosh's Binodini is a new creation. She opens up the immense possibilities of a powerfully symbolic space of representation emerging from a cultural politics of difference and identity, from an awakening to the spatial dimension of human subjectivity. This is a new position of empowerment and self-actualization that the Indian woman in the twenty-first century also needs to explore and consolidate. Ghosh enunciates the relevance of *Chokher Bali* as a contribution to the present day discourse on the nature of liberated womanhood in India: "a woman does not have a country of her own, just as she has no surname of her own [. . .] But a woman can have a space [. . .] For an independent woman, therefore, I would wish to define it as space or domain. And that is what Binodini speaks of at the end." (Ghosh 2005, n.p.). It is not possible to discover this new space without a dialogue with the past that looms so large over our consciousness, and shapes our knowledge of who we are.

Works Cited:

Anderson, Benedict 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso.

Cartmell, Deborah and Imelda Whelehan eds 1999. *Adaptations: From Text to Screen. Screen to Text.* London & New York: Routledge.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh 1996. "The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal." *Subaltern Studies VI.* Eds. David Arnold & David Hardiman. New Delhi: OUP.

Chatterjee, Partha 2009. *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus.* New Delhi: OUP.

Ghosh, Rituparno 2007. *Chokher Bali.* DVD. Shemaroo Entertainment Pvt.Ltd: Mumbai.

Ghosh, Rituparno 2005. Interview, *Rituparno Ghosh and the "Intellectual Film" in India—* Asia Society. http://www.asiasociety.org/arts-culture/film/rituparno-ghosh-and-intellectual-film-india// Last accessed 2009.

Hooks, Bell 1990. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics.* Boston: South End Press.

Jameson, Fredric 1998. *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1998.* London: Verso.

Kirchknopf, Andrea 2008. "(Re)workings of Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Definitions, Terminology, Contexts." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 1,1 Autumn, pp. 53-80.

Krueger, Christine L (ed) 2002. *Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time.* Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP.

Kucich, John and Dianne F. Sadoff (eds) 2000. *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.

Llewellyn, Mark 2008. "What is Neo-Victorian Studies?" *Neo-Victorian Studies* 1,1 Autumn, pp.164-185

Nandy, Ashis 2007. *Exiled at Home.* New Delhi: OUP.

Ray, Bharati ed 2002. *Nari o Paribar: Bamabodhini Patrika.* Kolkata: Ananda Publishers

Rose, Gillian 1993. *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Roy, Raja Rammohan 1999. *The Essential Writings of Raj Rammohan Roy.* Ed. Bruce Carlisle Robertson. Delhi: OUP.

Sadoff, Dianne F. and John Kucich eds. 2000. "Introduction: Histories of the Present." *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Sanders, Julie 2006. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. London: Routledge.

Sangari, Kumkum 1999. *Politics of the Possible: Essays on Gender, History, Narratives, Colonial English.* New Delhi: Tulika.

Sarkar, Tanika 2009. *Rebels, Wives, Saints: Designing Selves and Nations in Colonial Times.* Ranikhet: Permanent Black.

Soja, Edward 1996. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places.* MA: Blackwell.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty 2009. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" http://www.uni-graz.at/aya/archive/spivak%20-%20can%othe%20subaltern%20speak.pdf. Last accessed Oct. 9.

Stam, Robert 2000. "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation." In *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP , pp. 54-76

Stam, Robert 2002. *Film Theory. An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Tagore, Rabindranath 2008. *Chokher Bali.* Trans. Sukhendu Ray. New Delhi: Rupa.

Translating the Translator: Identity and Revision in Trungpa Rinpoche's Buddhism(s)

Enrique Galván-Álvarez

Abstract

By exploring how the literal and metaphorical aspects of the teaching/translating activities of Chögyam Trungpa overlap and feed into each other this paper analyses a highly original process of re-inventing tradition against various forms of criticism and censorship, both in the target and the source cultures. This analysis will be articulated along three axes, which correspond to the three Buddhist roles Trungpa was meant to have played: *guru* (teacher), *siddha* (accomplished practitioner) and *tertön* (treasure revealer). The three roles are all concerned with different processes of mediation and, thus, can be thought of as metaphorical translations. Looking at linguistic and cultural translation in terms of those three traditional categories can provide us with a meaningful framework for understanding how *Vajrayana* Buddhism, and particularly the Tibetan *Vajrayana* tradition*,* imagines and conceptualises translation.

Keywords: Tibetan Buddhism, Translation, Counterculture, Crazy Wisdom, Terma, Tibetan Exile

The histories of Buddhism cannot be fully understood without taking into account the notion of translation, both as a literal act of mediation between languages and as a metaphor for transformation. As a system originating in the Gangetic plains in the sixth century BC, which spread all over South, Central, East and South East Asia and, in the last fifty years, throughout Europe and America, the Buddhist teachings have, naturally, undergone countless translations. These many translations into many different target languages/cultures, along with the somewhat rhizomatic fashion in which Buddhism developed, especially after the rise of the Mahayana in the second century BC, produced the vast array of schools, ideas and practices that we call nowadays Buddhism. Thus, it is not inappropriate to refer to the many forms of Buddhism as Buddhisms, as sometimes applied in Buddhist studies. Moreover, it should not be assumed that each linguistic realm, for example, Tibetan, has a single form of Buddhism or, in other words, that every translation into a new language produced a single new Buddhist school. In this sense, although we might use constructs such as Tibetan or Japanese Buddhism, they should not be understood as referring to acutely defined schools, but as a number of often variegated lineages of transmission that share a common language and cultural background.

Therefore, those entrusted to express, spread and pass on the Buddhist teachings play a key role in the fluid development of the many Buddhisms (Williams 2009, p. 1). In this sense, teachers play a role analogous to that of translators, since they re-express ideas in a different context. Furthermore, Buddhist translators are often also teachers, a combination of roles that places such a person in a position to reformulate the tradition to which he or she belongs. For the translator to be an effective translating agent he or she needs to be first a translated subject. By this it is implied that this person will not be a mere mediator between two languages and cultures, but also someone who has actualised the meaning of the teachings that are about to be translated/re-expressed. The translator is meant to be soaked in the teachings, first by studying them thoroughly and then by practising them for a number of years. Such a process of immersion tends to happen in the source language, which the translator needs to have mastered beforehand. Later, this translated subject who has mastered not only the language of the teachings but also their ultimate meaning is expected to re-formulate them in the target language, which in most cases, though not always, corresponds to his or her mother tongue.

In this way the translator fulfils a double process of translation: a literal one between two languages and a metaphorical one in terms of his or her mastery of the teachings. This particular conception of the translatorial role, based on the inseparability of Buddhist practice and translation, is particularly relevant to the Tibetan-speaking forms of Buddhism, their history being intimately linked to the histories and stories of those teacher-translators who contributed to the creation of specifically Tibetan forms of Buddhism.

Buddhism was transmitted to Tibet in different waves of translations, through which the *lotsawas* (Tibetan for translator, though literally "eye of the world") reformulated Indian Tantric Buddhism in a Tibetan context. Most *lotsawas* were Tibetans who went to India to study Buddhism, stayed there for many years, learnt the languages, received the teachings, gained mastery in their practice and then returned to Tibet to teach and translate them. These was the case for Vairotsana (eighth century) (Jinba, 2004) and Marpa (eleventh century) (Trungpa, 1982), possibly the most important figures in the first and second wave of translations respectively. In fact, the training of a *lotsawa* is not so different from the making of a teacher (Sanskrit, *guru*), only that in the case of the former the language and culture in which he receives the teachings and the one in which he expresses them are different. By showing the similarities between the *guru* role and the training and work of a *lotsawa* we can appreciate how the latter were not only translating agents but also translated subjects. In fact,

their condition as translated subjects, that is to say, as affected and modified by the teachings, legitimised and validated their translating agency in the way they reformulated the teachings.

In Tantric Buddhism the *guru* plays a central role, perhaps analogous to those who recorded the scriptures in the religions of the Book; Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Like those figures, it is not unusual to find the *guru* being construed as an embodiment of the teachings, a living symbol of the essence of all Buddhist scriptures. As Rigdzin Shikpo points out, for a student practising at the tantric level, "[t]he teacher becomes the living embodiment of the path and the fruition. The teacher as living inspiration is more important than the teacher as instructor of practical techniques" (2005, p. 229). This particular way of understanding the teacher role places the teacher above the scripture by turning him or her into a living and dynamic text which stands for the ultimate expression of the Buddhist canon. Interestingly enough, this is not only applied to the teacher's words but to every aspect of his or her life. However, for someone to play such a role it is not enough to be surrounded by a group of followers or students who construe his or her words and actions in the way described above. The teacher needs to undergo a process of training before he or she can claim to embody the teachings. This process includes studying and practising certain cycles of philosophical and liturgical texts, and also a need to regard his or her teacher as an embodiment of the teachings—as a model.

These two parallel processes pervade the history of Tibetan Buddhism(s), but they can be said to be particularly intense at three historical moments: the two waves of transmission mentioned above, and during Tibetan exile, generally dated as beginning in 1959 after the Lhasa Uprising.[1] Whereas the first two waves of transmission and translation had India as a source and Tibet as a target, the third wave reverses such a pattern: Tibet becomes the missing source and a vaguely defined "West" becomes the target. This last wave, motivated by the threat posed by the Chinese takeover to the Tibetan religious and political elites, presents us with a new process of translation, substantially different from the two previous ones. In this case the target culture did not go out looking for the Buddhist teachings in a given source culture: rather, the source culture approached the target because of a political accident. This is not to say that there was no interest in the target culture, but simply to highlight that the transmission of the Tibetan schools to the West happened in the context of Tibetans fleeing their land for reasons other than transmitting the Buddhist teachings.

The fact that many highly learned and accomplished Tibetan teachers fled Tibet and settled in Western countries further complicates seeing Tibet as the geographical embodiment of the source language and culture. As explained above, the most common pattern in Buddhist translations and transmissions is that the target culture journeys towards the source one, which is located in a somewhat stable physical abode. Even though the position of exiled Tibetan Buddhist teachers as the source language and culture in this process of transmission seems unquestionable, the various representatives of Western target cultures did not have to journey

---

[2] Although Tibetans started fleeing their homes much earlier in the 1950s—as soon as the PLA started taking over Tibetan-speaking areas in the early 1950s—the Lhasa Uprising is generally considered a landmark since it caused the flight of the Tibetan government headed by the Dalai Lama. A detailed account and analysis of these events can be found in Shakya 1999.

to Tibet to receive the teachings, nor, often, did they even have to learn Tibetan. This unusual social context signalled by dislocation has enabled the emergence of a new kind of translator that responds to the needs of the new situation.

A good example of this new type of teacher-translator was Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939-1987), who was instrumental to the transmission of the Tibetan Tantric tradition to the West, particularly to the English-speaking West. Trungpa was one of the first *lamas* (Tibetan for the Sanskrit *guru*) to teach directly in English, first in the United Kingdom (1965-1970) and later in the United States and Canada (1970-1987), setting a precedent that many other Tibetan teachers would follow. The aims of this paper are tripartite. It first explores how Trungpa was a translated subject and a translating agent and how those two narratives that construct him as a *guru*-text interact before moving on to consider the censorship and criticism directed at the processes of translation he developed. Finally, I show how his mediation in the transmission of Buddhism to the West led to the forging of a new religious identity. For this purpose, I shall first discuss the notions of *guru*, *siddha* and *tertön*, three roles based upon processes of translation which are very relevant to Trungpa.

One of Trungpa's main accomplishments was to re-express his Buddhist heritage in the English language. In this respect, he has been credited with having "created a Buddhist-hybrid English, an actual Dharma English" (Bercholz 2004). This is no easy task, since, as Freemantle acknowledges, "[t]ranslations of Buddhist texts into English present entirely different problems than those faced by the early translators of Sanskrit into Tibetan" (2003, p. xviii). Naturally eighth-century Tibetan was not exposed to as many influences as twentieth-century English. Whereas this makes the translation process more difficult it also opens it up to a wider horizon of nuances and subtleties. It would seem natural that such a task would be taken up by a native English speaker and not by someone who learnt the language in his twenties. However, in the histories of Buddhism in Tibet we also find a figure that might be deemed to be the reverse of the *lotsawa*, the figure that Trungpa embodied. Although there is no particular name for it, we have the examples of teachers like Padmasambhava (eighth century), Atisa (eleventh) (Dhargyey 2003) and Padampa Sangye (eleventh-twelfth) (Molk 2008), who, despite being originally from India, journeyed to Tibet and taught the Dharma in Tibet's own language(s) and cultural context(s). Therefore, it is not surprising that Trungpa is often compared to Padmasambhava, whose reported appreciation of Tibetan culture (Trungpa 2001, pp. 175-178) runs somehow parallel to Trungpa's fondness for classical music (Hayward 2008, p. 172) and English poetry.

The paradigms of translation inform understanding of Trungpa's work. Trungpa was a *guru* who was also said to be a *siddha* and a *tertön*. As a *guru*, he was someone authorised and encouraged to teach by his own teachers. The roles of *siddha* and *tertön* are, however, far more slippery, since they are not related directly to factual appointment but with a somewhat fluid process of narrative construction. The role of the *guru* is not so much to transmit but to re-express the teachings in context: in other words, to, metaphorically translate them. From this perspective, Trungpa was first "translated" to the realm of the teachings during his early education in Tibet, and then empowered to be a "translator" of those same teachings, which he had mastered by means of immersion, study and practice.

Following a structurally similar path, the *siddha* also undergoes some sort of epistemic transformation. Thus, a *siddha*, a Sanskrit word that refers to someone who has attained *siddhi* (accomplishment), is a practitioner who has reached the fruition of the Buddhist path by forsaking the limits of conventionality and then returns to society in order to teach in abrupt and unconventional means. The *siddha* is thought to be an embodiment of "wisdom

gone wild" (Tibetan *yeshe cholwa*), a form of insight that, because of its depth, does not necessarily conform to societal norms and expectations.[2] *Siddhas* were usually prone to censorship and criticism as their shocking ways were not particularly welcomed by society. Not unlike a *guru*, the *sidhha*'s function is to transmit the fruition of the Buddhist path, which is often regarded as being beyond conceptualisation, by disrupting the conceptual patterns that keep individuals in existential bondage. This might include going beyond social norms and displaying a playful and, sometimes, even irreverent attitude towards Buddhist institutions and conventions (see Dowman 1985 and Samuel 1995).

Although *siddhas* are not appointed by other *siddhas*, some highly regarded teachers might hint that a particular individual and his or her unconventionality responds to the *siddha* paradigm, as was Trungpa. Labelling Trungpa a *siddha* is a way of saying that he did not conform to societal expectations and was also regarded to have mastered the Buddhist teachings (see Ray 2005). The *siddha's* mad way of behaving is structurally similar to the process of translation. The *siddha* is a thoroughly "translated" individual, one that has traversed the whole of the Buddhist path. In this sense, he or she has been fully modified and transformed by the teachings and, following the inspiration of the Bodhisattva, aims to bring the same transformation to all living beings. Such a wish to translate other beings manifests in the *siddha*'s activity as the continuous disruption of people's expectations and conceptual frameworks. For this purpose, *siddhas* use words and concepts, but only as tools of deconstruction, their aim being to dismantle their students' preconceptions, or those of whoever they encounter.

Finally, a *tertön* is literally a treasure-revealer of Buddhist texts "buried" in the *tertön*'s own mind and occasionally in some other locations as cryptic formulas. The revelation of these treasures (Tibetan, *terma*) consists of very intricate and complex procedures (Thondup 1997; Gyatso 1996). Although the texts might manifest through dream-visions or similar experiences, they are regarded as hidden in the author's subjective sphere. As Gyatso explains at length in relation to the *tertön* Jigme Lingpa, what the discoverer discovers is neither fully part of him nor completely other (1998, pp. 145-206). There is a tension between the treasure being a gift from a *guru* of the past and the treasure being obtained through the revealer's mastery and effort. Such tension is in fact expressed in the word choice "discoverer/revealer". If we focused on the more active aspect of the *tertön* role, he or—less frequently but also— she would be some kind of translator, a decisive mediator who turns visionary experience into texts. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten, as Freemantle points out, that only

[o]ccasionally, full-length texts are found, but they are usually fragmentary, sometimes consisting of only a word or two, and they are encoded in symbolic script [. . .] They are simply the material supports that act as a trigger to help the tertön reach the subtle level of mind where the teaching has really been concealed. It is the tertön who actually composes and writes down the resulting text, and so may be considered its author. [. . .] Trungpa Rinpoche emphasized the importance of the tertöns' role. (2003, p. 17)

---

[2] The *siddha's* madness should not be imagined to be a mere divinisation of ordinary insanity, since in the Buddhist cultures where *siddha*-like figures exist ordinary madness is also acknowledged to exist, as Samuel points put in his discussion of the role of holy madmen in Tibetan societies (1995, p. 290-309).

Following Trungpa's emphasis, a *tertön* fulfils the role of a translator, being the person with the skill of transforming dream-visions or encoded formulas into fully articulate texts. The translation of the *tertön* is less metaphorical than that of the *guru* or the *siddha*, since the *tertön* produces, at the end of the process, a literal text. However, the *tertön* cannot be said to mediate between two different languages, but rather between two modes of communication and experience.

Trungpa's emphasis on the active aspect of the *tertön* role is relevant, since some of his writings have been considered to be *terma*. The issue of which texts are to be considered *terma* is similar to the issue of who is a valid recogniser of a *siddha*. The only way of finally ascertaining whether a liturgical text is *terma* is by testing its efficiency in terms of bringing about certain positive states of mind and its capacity to inspire its reciter. Also, a new treasure-text needs to be in accordance with previous teachings, which are meant to be reformulated in the new text but never contradicted or forsaken. As Lopez remarks,

the authenticity of a *terma* is difficult to judge, and the behaviour of the discoverer is explicitly excluded from the criteria. False discoverers may be of good conduct and have harmonious relations with their community, and true discoverers may indulge in all forms of reprehensible behaviour, thereby taking onto themselves obstructions that would ordinarily beset others, while demonstrating that all experience is ultimately of one taste (*ro gcig pa*). (1998, p. 107)

Thus *tertöns* are likely also to be considered *siddhas* since their ways rarely conform with societal expectations.

Although these three roles are generally concerned with processes of metaphorical translation that happen within a single language and culture, they can also overlap with a process of literal translation. In such a context, the *guru-siddha-tertön* would not only be translating between two modes of experience and communication, but also between two languages. This overlapping of metaphorical and literal translation is by no means exclusive to the recent context of Tibetan exile: teachers like Atisha (980-1054), Marpa (1012-1097), Padampa Sangye (d. 1117) and Longchenpa (1308-1363) (Jamyang, 2006, p. 98) could be said to stand for such a combination in variously nuanced ways. Also, although Marpa was not a *tertön* he certainly behaved in the manner of a *siddha* and was a very important *lotsawa* who translated many teachings from Indian languages (Trungpa, 1982).

The combination of roles that involve literal translation and metaphorical translation is far from new. Nonetheless, what is novel about the new kind of *guru-siddha-tertön-lotsawa* that emerges with Tibetan exile is the amount of information we have about them. This means that in the case of Trungpa and his contemporaries we can study the interplay of various forms of translation in more detail, appreciating how traditional roles map processes of cultural and linguistic translations. Not only the *guru* role plays an important part in translation, the disruptive aspect of the *siddha* and the archeological aspect of the *tertön* are also very present in Trungpa's particular translation methodology.

An example of how the *tertön* role is interwoven with translation is Trungpa's archaeological concern with language. Such concern can be appreciated in the way he excavated layers of meaning, mainly through the Oxford English Dictionary, in order to get closer to the etymological meanings of words in search for some lost nuance that he found useful. Hayward, one of his students, mentions how he was frequently seen browsing through the pages of the OED. He would also use certain words in ways that would shock even his more

articulate students, and to their "astonishment he was using the word in exactly the way it was meant in earlier times, sometimes going as far back as its original Latin or Greek meaning" (Hayward, 2008, p. 56). In a similar vein, he also used Sanskrit words, instead of Tibetan ones, when introducing Buddhist concepts to English-speaking audiences. This choice is also an archaeological return to the etymologies, privileging the first context in which these notions were shaped—in India—instead of the way they later developed through the Tibetan translations. This sets Trungpa apart from other Tibetan *lamas* who started teaching in the West in the 1960s and 1970s and who naturally used Tibetan rather than Sanskrit terms.

Another interesting aspect of Trungpa's linguistic self-presentation was his choice of Oxonian accent when speaking English. This tendency is understandable, since he spent some of his early years in Britain as a student of Comparative Religions at Oxford University. However, the importance he gave to imitating the pronunciation of Oxonian English in his late years in America is surprising. Around 1983 he developed elocution exercises for his American students to speak with a deliberate Oxonian accent (Hayward 2008, pp. 294-296). The purpose was to develop some sort of mindfulness of speaking, rather than making everyone sound as if they were students at Oxford. The underlying irony was, of course, that the *guru* asking his students to speak in this way did not sound Oxonian at all. Although in his last talks his attempt to imitate this peculiar way of speaking can be identified, Trungpa's accent in English might be best defined as a combination of Tibetan, Indian and American. The playful concern with accent also relates to Trungpa's strong conviction that the English language and the culture that it had produced were perfectly suitable for expressing the Buddhist teachings. Unlike other Buddhist teachers who would recommend their students to learn an Asian language and inmerse themselves in its culture, Trungpa did exactly the opposite by immersing and translating himself as a cultural and linguist subject. In this sense, he simultaneously reformulates Buddhism and Western culture as he tries to present the former in terms of the latter. Like a *tertön* he unearths ideas and customs that allegedly forgotten and re-introduces them in a fresh way.

As well as cultural adaptation and transformation Trungpa also literally translated Buddhist texts to a non-Asian context. In a sense, translation might be thought of as the axis of the whole process as Midal points out when he explains that

what [Trungpa] wanted was a change in how his students experienced language [. . .] In a context of transmitting Buddhism to the West it was necessary to open up a space so that the word could take root within language itself—so that English could start to be spoken dharmically [i.e. in a Buddhist manner].
(2004, 97)

With the purpose of making many Tibetan Buddhist texts available in English, Trungpa set up in 1975 the Nalanda Translation Committee. The constitution of this committee resembles the group translation model chosen by Padmasambhava in the eighth century (Nyima Öser, 2004, pp. 75-97). By working with translation in a collective way, one-upmanship was avoided and a sense of negotiation was brought into the transplantation of the tradition. The translation group was made up of Buddhist practitioners who were also native English speakers, thus reproducing the model of the *lotsawa* in which a translated subject makes a good translating agent. Since some of the (especially liturgical) texts required not only to be rendered into English but also be chanted in a particular way, an applied method developed to accomplish this challenging translation. Mermelstein, one of the translators involved, describes how

[Trungpa] sometimes spent hours in the shrine room with a handful of us, experimenting with different sytles of chanting, drum patterns, gong ringing, and so forth. It was a very creative and fluid process of adapting Tibetan ritual tradition to a new land and vocabulary. (2005, pp. 322-323)

Apart from the liturgies of the Kagyu and Nyingma lineages Trungpa translated life-stories like *The Life of Marpa* (1982), esoteric texts like *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (2003) or the poems and songs of his spiritual predecessors, collected and published as *The Rain of Wisdom* (1999).

Parallel to all these literal processes of translation Trungpa's own transformation in terms of life and teaching style was also taking place. In fact it is this progressive path of translation that has generated more controversy, debate and censorship. Although his literal translations and overall accomplishment in transmitting the Tibetan Tantric tradition is generally praised, his behaviour is also often regarded with reservation, if not open disapproval. In academic works references to Trungpa often feature adjectives like "notorious" (McMillin, 2001, p. 184), "bizarre" (Samuel, 1995, p. 348) or "controversial" (Lopez, 1998, p. 266). Nonetheless, Trungpa's morally questionable behaviour is very relevant to this discussion on translation, since he often presented it for communicative effect. Perhaps the first event that might be regarded as a small translation in itself is Trungpa's disrobement as a monk in 1969, after a severe car accident. He saw the accident as a powerful message that expressed his "hesitation" concerning whether he was "to continue teaching by unmasking and also do away with the 'exotic' externals which were too fascinating to students in the West" (Trungpa 1966, p. 281) or to follow the more socially acceptable lifestyle of the monk. He thus abandoned his monk's robes in favour of formal English attire, including suit and tie. While this shocked many (Gimian, 2005), more outrageous was his renouncement of the monastic lifestyle. This was not only regarded as heresy but also as cultural betrayal by the Tibetan religious elite, of which Trungpa was part, at a very sensitive time, in the 1960s and early 1970s, when the preservation of old Tibet was the main concern of the Tibetan exiled establishment.

Even though Trungpa's disrobing and "madness" could well be seen as part of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of *siddhas* and *tertöns*,[3] his choice to give up the robes was not a very popular one at a time when the milder ideal of monasticism was identified with the recently disembodied nation. Also, shortly after disrobing, Trungpa eloped with a sixteen-year old English woman, which caused further stir in the small Tibetan community living in Britain at the time. An example of how Trungpa's actions seem to have been construed as cultural betrayal surfaces in a letter he sends to a lawyer at a time when his situation at Samye Ling, the Tibetan monastery he had co-founded with Akong Rinpoche, was precarious. The conflict between Akong's and Trungpa's approaches is evident: "He [Akong] feels that my 'becoming Western' is a 'disgrace to Tibet'" (Mukpo 2006, p. 29-30). Trungpa not only exposes the censorship to which he has been subject but also provides a passionate defence for his position, which relies more on the language of cultural translation than in that of traditional paradigms of holy madness:

my role is far deeper one than a mere cultural mission, a representative of the East in the West. I am not Tibetan but *Human* and my mission is to teach others as effectively as I can in the world in which I find myself. Therefore, I refuse to be bound by any "national" considerations

---

[3] Some members of the establishment certainly did see Trungpa in this way, for example, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, see Khyentse, 2010.

whatsoever. And if Akong wishes to work effectively now he too must have the courage to break through his Tibetanness, to stop hiding behind our national background. (Mukpo 2006, p. 30)

When legitimising his own choices, Trungpa regards shedding national identity as an important step in transmitting Buddhism to the West. Whereas for Akong, Trungpa is both a "disgrace" to his Tibetan and Buddhist heritages, Trungpa considers them irreconcilable once Tibet has been forsaken. His choice is to transmit Buddhism to the West and to plunge into a process of cultural translation, rather than to stick to the paradigm of cultural preservation, which is still today prevalent in Tibetan exile.[4] Trungpa's divergent approach, later to be followed by both Buddhist teachers and artists in the Tibetan exiled community, posed a threat to the central narrative of the Tibetan elites. Although he described in the same letter quoted above that his "very existence becomes an enormous threat to them because I am utterly without fear in this world of violent change" (Mukpo 2006, p. 26), more in the spirit of the *siddha* tradition, his project can also be seen as threatening to the cultural agenda of Tibetan exile. By disrobing, drinking heavily and having many affairs, Trungpa was debunking the stereotype of Tibetans as peaceful and abstinent monks, which was largely a Western fantasy, albeit affirmed and perpetuated by many exiled and pre-exiled Tibetan elites during the twentieth century.[5]

Such tendency to privilege the monastic over the non-monastic and certain forms of Buddhism over others was very much present in pre-1959 Tibet; however, with the Tibetan exile they acquired a new nuance, legitimated in the name of patriotism and cultural presentation. A certain image of Tibetanness was enshrined, one in which the holy madmen whose footsteps Trungpa was following were not precisely at the centre. Nonetheless Trungpa was skilful enough to gain the recognition of key figures in the Tibetan establishment. An absolutely crucial event in this process of obtaining acknowledgement was the visit of the Karmapa, the head lama of the Karma Kagyu school equal in rank to the Dalai Lama, to Trungpa's centres in 1974. The Karmapa was both favourably impressed by Trungpa's success in gathering and training students and somewhat reassured that his eccentricities were in line with tradition, if not with convention.[6] At the same time, Trungpa also made great economic and organisational efforts to show the Karmapa that despite the fact that "traditional Tibetans [. . .] proclaimed that he had gone off the rails" (Hayward 2008, p. 119) he had not forgotten to show respect for and devotion to his teachers and abide by the formalities of the *Kagyu* lineage. The visit seems to have had quite an impact on Trungpa's following, since it was one of the first occasions on which they were asked to dress formally. This was meant to show the Karmapa that Trungpa had not been dragged into hippy debauchery but instead had transformed his hippy students by introducing them to the formalities of Tibetan Buddhism.

---

[4] A very relevant analysis of how this paradigm has become dominant in the Tibetan exile can be found in Harris 1999, p. 197. Although Harris's analysis is applied to the artistic exilic scene, her conclusions are also very relevant to other forms of cultural expression such as the transmission of Buddhism to the West.

[5] For an interesting explanation of how a certain image of Tibet was maintained and confirmed by both Tibetans and non-Tibetans in film, see Hansen 2001.

[6] For more detail on Karmapa's trip and its influence on Trungpa's projects, see Mukpo 2006, pp. 177-183; Hayward 2008, pp. 110-119; Midal 2004, pp. 295-304.

Trungpa's students were dressed formally and attended an important figure in the Tibetan hierarchy with complete devotion by using Western elements, such as tuxedos instead of *chubas* and motorbikes and cars instead of horses and mules. Even the Dalai Lama visited Trungpa's centres in the USA in 1981, further confirming his work and his position in the Tibetan religious hierarchy (Midal (ed.) 2005, p. viii).

Although he eventually gained the Tibetan elites' approval, Trungpa's behaviour was not spared the disapproval of American writers and journalists. A criticism ironically resonating with that of the Tibetan elites can be found in Asher's "When Hippies Battle: The Great W. S. Merwin / Allen Ginsberg Beef of 1975" (2005), which, like Clark's *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars* or Butterfield's *The Double Mirror*, expose a lot of Trungpa's activities often silenced in the more hagiographical discussions of his life. Asher's critique resembles that of Akong's as his remark on Trungpa being "drunk on some sort of spiritual libation that probably did not come from Tibet" and his behaviour's being sarcastically deemed "all very Tibetan" instantiate. Asher's scorn hints at the fact that Trungpa's ways are far from being "Tibetan", that is, they do not conform to the stereotype of Tibetans as peaceful and abstinent monks.

Thus Asher's otherwise valid criticism falls into a problematic cultural essentialism. From this cultural perspective Trungpa could be said to be successful in disrupting stereotypes and pre-conceptions about Tibet; his behaviour certainly undermined the "pastoral" image of Tibetans,[7] as encouraged by Tibetan elites and as maintained in the Western imagination. Such disruption seems to express the deconstructive spirit of the *siddha*. However, unlike the historical *siddhas* whose stories were set in India or Tibet, Trungpa's unfolds in the United Kingdom and the United States. This is a context where there was no conceptual pigeonhole for the *siddha*'s madness, no set of expectations or preceding stories to help interpret Trungpa's eccentricity (Samuel 1995). Such a unique situation presents Trungpa as a doubly translated and translating subject: on one hand a *siddha* disrupting convention and on the other a Tibetan expressing his Buddhist heritage in a non-Tibetan way and context. These two parallel narratives are in a sense inseparable, since they expressed themselves at once in a single context, in the various non-Tibetan settings where Trungpa taught in unusual ways. Thus, to think that Trungpa behaved unconventionally in order to connect with the unconventional ways of the American Counterculture is to regard him as some sort of exception, ignoring the eccentric tradition in which his example is inscribed. Similarly, to construct him as an archetypical *siddha* devoid of any context is equally short-sighted, since it ignores the all-important setting that makes the *siddha*'s madness meaningful. After all, the mad *guru* is not mad *per se*; his or her madness functions as a translation device to communicate deconstructively with those who surround him or her.

To conclude, Trungpa's double journey of translation, faced with criticism at both ends of the equation, can be said both to negotiate and disrupt the two spaces it engages. Reformulating

---

[6] I paraphrase here Alex McKay's appropriation and application of Caplan's notion of the "pastoral mode" to a Tibetan context. In McKay's words this representational mode is "a discourse in which subordinate peoples in the imperial process are represented in approving terms" (2001, 84). This is certainly true of the image of Tibetans as peaceful and well behaved monks, which was forged by British colonial agents but which is still at work today thanks, partly, to the interest of some Tibetans in maintaining such representation.

the Tibetan Buddhist tradition in a way that might be called post-Tibetan and re-interpreting Western cultural forms in order to express a Buddhist message, Trungpa's project could rightly be called hybrid. His various translations, both literal and metaphorical, can be seen as the "founding of a new culture" (Midal 2004, p. 305), inspired in certain Buddhist principles developed in Tibet but incorporating a number of cultural elements from all over the world. Midal regards England, Japan and Tibet as the three main sources of this new culture, which aims to construct "a Buddhist for the West" (2004, p. 305), although not necessarily or exclusively Western Buddhism. Thus in Trungpa's case the reformulative intent of the *tertön* who discovers or reveals old teachings in new ways becomes a cross-cultural process in which the teachings are translated into a new language and manifest through new cultural forms. Such an approach to teaching Tibetan forms of Buddhism in a non-Tibetan setting was highly innovative, since Trungpa is possibly the first—but by no means the last—*lama* to dissociate the transmission of Buddhism to the West and the politics of cultural preservation of Tibetan exile (Lopez 1998, pp. 198-199; Norbu 2001, p. 377).

Trungpa's aim did not seem to be to preserve Tibetan culture and religion by making his students Tibetan, but rather to dis-embed Buddhist ideas from a certain Tibetan context and re-embed them in a non-Tibetan context. The result of this process is the birth of a new Buddhist identity, which speaks English and expresses itself through a number of eclectic conventions. This new form of English-speaking Buddhism is nonetheless aligned with the hierarchies of Tibetan Buddhism(s), who, in turn, recognise its legitimacy as a valid outcome of some *Kagyu* and *Nyingma* lineages. Needless to say the role of translation is all-important in the forging of this new identity. In fact, Trungpa's legacy might be regarded as the combination of the metaphorical translating aspects implicit in his roles as *guru*, *siddha* and *tertön* and in his more literal translating activities concerning the English language and Western cultural forms. Both the literal and the metaphorical aspects of his translations seem to inform each other, in a constant feedback that makes Trungpa's teachings distinct and unique. Through this mutual interaction and interpenetration of Buddhist roles and translation practices, both the target and the source cultures are modified and hybridised, resulting in a new formulation that introduces innovation while negotiating alignment with tradition.

Works Cited

Butterfield, Stephen. (1994), *The Double Mirror: A Skeptical Journey into Buddhist Tantra.* Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books.

Clark, Tom. (1980), *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars.* Santa Barbara, California: Cadmus Editions.

Dowman, Keith. (1985), *Masters of Mahamudra. Songs and Histories of the Eighty-Four Buddhist Siddhas*. Albany: State University of New York.

Freemantle, Francesca. (2003), *Luminous Emptiness. Understanding the* Tibetan Book of the Dead. London: Shambhala.

Gimian, James and Kidder Smith. (2005), "A Buddhist Military", in *Recalling Chögyam Trungpa*, ed. Fabrice Midal (Boston: Shambhala), 101-109.

Gyatso, Janet. (1998), *Apparitions of the Self. The Secret Autobiografies of a Tibetan VIsionary. A Translation of Jigme Lingpa's* Dancing Moon in the Water *and* Dakki's Grand Secret-Talk. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Gyatso, Janet. (1996), "Drawn from the Tibetan Treasury", in *Tibetan Literary Studies in Genre,* eds. José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger Jackson. (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications), 147-169.

Hansen, Peter. (2001), "Tibetan Horizon: Tibet and the Cinema in the Early Twentieth Century", in *Imagining Tibet. Perceptions, Projections and Fantasies,* eds. Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther. (Boston: Wisdom Publications), 91-110.

Harris, Clair. (1999), *In the Image of Tibet. Tibetan Painting after 1959.* London: Reaktion Books.

Hayward, Jeremy. (2008), *Warrior King of Shambhala. Remembering Chögyam Trungpa.* Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Jamyang Dorje Nyoshul Khenpo. (2006), *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems: Biographies of Masters of Awareness in the Dzogchen Lineage: a Spiritual History of the Teachings of the Great Perfection.* Trans. Richard Barron. Junction City, California: Padma Publishing.

Jinba Palmo, Ani. (2004), *The Great Image: The Life Story of Vairochana, the Translator.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Lopez, Donald S. Jr. (1998), *Prisioners of Shangri-La.* Chicago: The University of Chicago pres.

McKay, Alex. (2001), "'Truth', Perception and Politics. The British Construction of an Image of Tibet", in *Imagining Tibet. Perceptions, Projections and Fantasies,* eds. Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther. (Boston: Wisdom Publications), 67-89.

McMillin, Laurie Hovell. (2001), *English in Tibet, Tibet in English: Self-Presentation in Tibet and the Diaspora.* New York: Palgrave.

Mermelstein, Larry. (2005), "Chögyam the Translator", in. *Recalling Chögyam Trungpa,* ed. Fabrice Midal. (Boston: Shambhala Publications), 317-328.

Midal, Fabrice. (2004), *Chögyam Trungpa. His Life and Vision.* Boston: Shambhala.

Molk, David and Lama Tsering Wangdu Rinpoche. (2008), *Lion of Siddhas. The Life and Teachings of Padampa Sangye.* Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications.

Mukpo, Diana and Carolyn R. Gimian. (2006), *Dragon Thunder. My Life with Chögyam Trungpa.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Norbu, Jamyang. (2001), "Behind the Lost Horizon. Demystifying Tibet", in *Imagining Tibet. Perceptions, Projections and Fantasies*, eds. Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther (Boston: Wisdom Publications), 373-378.

Nyima Öser, Nyang Ral. (2004), *The Lotus-Born. The Life Story of Padmasambhava.* Boudhanath: Rangjung Yeshe Publications.

Ray, Reginald. (2005), "Chögyam Trungpa as a Siddha" in, *Recalling Chögyam Trungpa*, ed. Fabrice Midal. (Boston: Shambhala Publications), 197-210.

Rigdzin Shikpo. (2005), "The Highest Maha Ati Teachings. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche in Great Britain" in, *Recalling Chögyam Trungpa,* ed. Fabrice Midal. (Boston: Shambhala Publications), 221-241.

Samuel, Geoffrey. (1995), *Civilized Shamans. Buddhism in Tibetan Societies.* Washington D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Shakya, Tsering. (1999), *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*. *A History of Modern Tibet since 1947.* London: Pimlico.

Thondup, Tulku. (1997), *Hidden Teachings of Tibet. An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism,* Ed. Harold Talbott. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Trungpa Rinpoche, Chögyam and the Nalanda Translation Committee, trans. (1982), *The Life of Marpa.* Boulder: Prajña Press.

Trungpa Rinpoche, Chögyam and the Nalanda Translation Committee, trans & comp. (1999), *The Rain of Wisdom.* Boston & London: Shambhala Publications.

Trungpa Rinpoche, Chögyam. (2001), *Crazy Wisdom*. Boston: Shambhala.

Trungpa Rinpoche, Chögyam and Francesca Freemantle, trans. (2003), *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Boston: Shambhala publications.

Trungpa Rinpoche, Chögyam. (2004), "Born in Tibet" (1966) in *The Collected Works*, ed. by Carolyn Rose Gimian. Vol. 1. (Boston: Shambhala Publications) 1-287.

Williams, Paul. (2009), *Mahayana Buddhism: the Doctrinal Foundations*. New York: Taylor and Francis Group.

Webs Cited

Bercholz, Samuel. "Reflections on the Life and Teachings of Trungpa Rinpoche". *The Chronicles of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche*. August 2004. http://www.chronicleproject.com/stories_131.html. Last accessed: February 24th 2012.

Asher, Levi. "When Hippies Battle: The Great W.S. Merwin / Allen Ginsberg Beef of 1975". *Literary Kicks*. November 17th, 2005. http://www.litkicks.com/MerwinNaropa. Last Accessed: February 24th 2012.

Dhargyey, Geshe Ngawang. "The Life of Atisha". Oral Translation by Sharpa Tulku. Edited and Revised by Alexander Berzin. *The Berzin Archives*. November, 2003. http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/approaching_buddhism/teachers/lineage_ma sters/life_atisha.html. Last Accessed: February 24th 2012.

Khyentse, Dilgo Rinpoche. "The Light of Blessings. Supplication to the Eleventh Trungpa Chökyi Gyatso." Translated and Commented by the Nalanda Translation Committee. *Nalanda Translation Committee*. 2010. http://nalandatranslation.org/offerings/notes-on-the-daily-chants/commentaries/light-of-blessings-supplication-to-the-eleventh-trungpa-chokyi-gyatso. Last Accessed: February 24th 2012.

Mermelstein, Larry. (2005), "Chögyam the Translator", in. *Recalling Chögyam Trungpa,* ed. Fabrice Midal. (Boston: Shambhala Publications), 317-328.

Midal, Fabrice. (2004), *Chögyam Trungpa. His Life and Vision.* Boston: Shambhala.

Molk, David and Lama Tsering Wangdu Rinpoche. (2008), *Lion of Siddhas. The Life and Teachings of Padampa Sangye.* Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications.

Mukpo, Diana and Carolyn R. Gimian. (2006), *Dragon Thunder. My Life with Chögyam Trungpa.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Norbu, Jamyang. (2001), "Behind the Lost Horizon. Demystifying Tibet", in *Imagining Tibet. Perceptions, Projections and Fantasies*, eds. Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther (Boston: Wisdom Publications), 373-378.

Nyima Öser, Nyang Ral. (2004), *The Lotus-Born. The Life Story of Padmasambhava.* Boudhanath: Rangjung Yeshe Publications.

Ray, Reginald. (2005), "Chögyam Trungpa as a Siddha" in, *Recalling Chögyam Trungpa*, ed. Fabrice Midal. (Boston: Shambhala Publications), 197-210.

Rigdzin Shikpo. (2005), "The Highest Maha Ati Teachings. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche in Great Britain" in, *Recalling Chögyam Trungpa,* ed. Fabrice Midal. (Boston: Shambhala Publications), 221-241.

Samuel, Geoffrey. (1995), *Civilized Shamans. Buddhism in Tibetan Societies.* Washington D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Shakya, Tsering. (1999), *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*. *A History of Modern Tibet since 1947.* London: Pimlico.

Thondup, Tulku. (1997), *Hidden Teachings of Tibet. An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism,* Ed. Harold Talbott. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Trungpa Rinpoche, Chögyam and the Nalanda Translation Committee, trans. (1982), *The Life of Marpa.* Boulder: Prajña Press.

Trungpa Rinpoche, Chögyam and the Nalanda Translation Committee, trans & comp. (1999), *The Rain of Wisdom.* Boston & London: Shambhala Publications.

Trungpa Rinpoche, Chögyam. (2001), *Crazy Wisdom*. Boston: Shambhala.

Trungpa Rinpoche, Chögyam and Francesca Freemantle, trans. (2003), *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Boston: Shambhala publications.

Trungpa Rinpoche, Chögyam. (2004), "Born in Tibet" (1966) in *The Collected Works*, ed. by Carolyn Rose Gimian. Vol. 1. (Boston: Shambhala Publications) 1-287.

Williams, Paul. (2009), *Mahayana Buddhism: the Doctrinal Foundations*. New York: Taylor and Francis Group.

Webs Cited

Bercholz, Samuel. "Reflections on the Life and Teachings of Trungpa Rinpoche". *The Chronicles of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche*. August 2004. http://www.chronicleproject.com/stories_131.html. Last accessed: February 24th 2012.

Asher, Levi. "When Hippies Battle: The Great W.S. Merwin / Allen Ginsberg Beef of 1975". *Literary Kicks*. November 17th, 2005. http://www.litkicks.com/MerwinNaropa. Last Accessed: February 24th 2012.

Dhargyey, Geshe Ngawang. "The Life of Atisha". Oral Translation by Sharpa Tulku. Edited and Revised by Alexander Berzin. *The Berzin Archives*. November, 2003. http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/approaching_buddhism/teachers/lineage_masters/life_atisha.html. Last Accessed: February 24th 2012.

Khyentse, Dilgo Rinpoche. "The Light of Blessings. Supplication to the Eleventh Trungpa Chökyi Gyatso." Translated and Commented by the Nalanda Translation Committee. *Nalanda Translation Committee*. 2010. http://nalandatranslation.org/offerings/notes-on-the-daily-chants/commentaries/light-of-blessings-supplication-to-the-eleventh-trungpa-chokyi-gyatso. Last Accessed: February 24th 2012.

international
intercultural
interdisciplinary
interprofessional

iafor