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Notes on Contributors

LI Ou is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She is the author of *Keats and Negative Capability* (London, Continuum, 2009), “Keats, Sextus Empiricus, and Medicine” (*Romanticism* 22:2 (2016), 167–76), and “Keats’s Afterlife in Twentieth-Century China” (*English Romanticism in East Asia: A Romantic Circles PRAXIS Volume*, ed. Suh-Reen Han). Her research interests include Romantic poetry, especially Keats, and cultural/literary relations between China and Britain.

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Djamila Houamdi is a Lecturer in the Department of English, University of Algiers 2. She is currently working on a PhD thesis in contemporary American literature with a focus on reader-response, style and spirituality. Her research interests, as with her recent publications, revolve around the study and criticism of literature, history, society, language and writing.

Editor

Richard Donovan is an Associate Professor in comparative literature and translation studies in the Faculty of Letters at Kansai University. He has also worked as a translator at the Kyoto City International Relations Office. He obtained a PhD in literary translation studies at Victoria University of Wellington in 2012. The title of his thesis was *Dances with Words: Issues in the Translation of Japanese Literature into English*. Current research areas include stylistics issues in the translation of contemporary Japanese literature, representations of Kazuo Ishiguro's works in Japanese media, and the transmedial resurgence of *Twin Peaks*. This is his sixth issue of the Journal.

Introduction to the Issue

The sixth issue of the *IAFOR Journal of Literature & Librarianship* under my editorship exhibits precisely the kind of multilateral dialogue that the Journal was designed to facilitate. As always, it showcases the recent work of a group of literary scholars diverse in subject fields, approaches, nationalities, and stages of academic development. Not for the first time, however, it also demonstrates the kind of synergistic energies that serendipitously lead such far-flung scholars to pursue similar topics at similar times, thereby creating a kind of global conversation.

Our first contributor, Professor **LI Ou**, gave the keynote address at The IAFOR Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities in Kobe in March of this year, entitled “British Romanticism in China, Received, Revised, and Resurrected”. She has kindly allowed an expanded version of her presentation to be published here. The reception of other countries’ and cultures’ literature and other cultural artefacts has an incalculable influence on the host culture, and this has been true in both directions for the East and West. Li’s focus on China’s reception of British Romanticism is a fascinating overview of one direction of this interchange.

Our second paper presents another side of the East–West dialogue. **Halia Koo** traces Swiss author Nicolas Bouvier’s response to his travels through Japan through his interweaving of historical and personal events in *The Japanese Chronicles*. Koo shows how Bouvier both humanises historical figures and gives voice to the ‘ordinary’ individuals he encounters in modern-day Japan, revealing how inextricably linked historical and personal narratives are, and how fundamental to the nature of national identities and intercultural contact.

Alessandro Giardino also explores francophone interactions with the East in his paper about Marguerite Yourcenar, a French literary giant whose Japanese influences are little known. This article is an intimate portrait of the writer, one which argues that Yourcenar made use of Eastern literature to help her come to terms with the loss of her mother at an early age, and that many of her literary motifs have their origins in the treatment of life’s impermanence in such works.

Conversely, the Asian authors of the next two papers turn their attention to Western figures. **Elyssa Y. Cheng** treats two works by the seventeenth-century British playwrights Thomas Middleton and Ben Jonson, considering the interface of sexual politics and nascent materialism embodied in prostitution in London. Cheng critiques how the playwrights lay the blame for the corruption of public morals squarely at the feet of the women and their material desires, arguing that the plays in fact reveal male anxieties about women’s developing economic agency.

Meanwhile, **Yoriko Ishida** puts us alongside the remarkable women who defied the gender roles of eighteenth-century Europe in dressing as men and serving on naval vessels. Her exemplar is Hannah Snell, who successfully served as a marine for four years and endured

countless hardships and injuries without revealing her identity. The paper examines how such cross-dressing women were portrayed in the media and publications of the time, and the implications of such women's actions for issues of gender.

In our final paper, **Djamila Houamdi** brings a fresh perspective to William Faulkner's celebrated—and sometimes reviled—Southern masterpiece *Absalom, Absalom!* The paper focuses on Faulkner the modernist's use of language, but most fundamentally his demonstration *through* language that language itself is at once unbounded and unknowable, much like the humanity that struggles to communicate with it.

As scholars in the field of literature, we are all engaged in a struggle with language, and a multiplicity of languages, one which we hope will lead to enlightenment, but at the very least represents an attempt at communicating across different lived experiences and modes of being. The present issue's papers demonstrate the world's scholars' ongoing commitment to engaging both with language and each other.

In the spirit of engagement, I would like to mention the invaluable contribution of our Editorial Board to the enhancement of the articles in this issue. Thank you as always.

Richard Donovan

Editor

British Romanticism in China: Revised in Reception

Li Ou

Abstract

This paper first looks at the etymology and definition of the term ‘Romanticism’ in English and Chinese respectively to show their considerable disparity, and then traces the Chinese reception of British Romantic literature in the course of the twentieth century, focusing in particular on its late-Qing introduction, New Culturist proliferation, suppression in Communist China, and post-1976 resurrection. This trajectory of the afterlife of Romanticism reveals at the same time the transformation the concept of ‘Romanticism’ went through in twentieth-century China. The paper thus shows that as both a concept and a body of literature, Romanticism had been received with drastically divergent or even contradictory responses in China while conflicting ideologies took turns dominating the Chinese cultural discourse. This reception process demonstrates the predominance of the national ideology over the aesthetic values of foreign literature, which reveals the essentially utilitarian approach China had taken to foreign literature, and British Romanticism in particular.

Keywords: British romanticism, literature, China, Western literature in Asia

British Romanticism in China: Revised in Reception

The reception history of British Romanticism in twentieth-century China unfolds as a drama of vicissitude, corresponding to the tumultuous course of Chinese national history and violently shifting literary politics. While all foreign literary texts or trends are reconfigured by their interaction with the national tradition, the afterlife of British Romanticism in China is distinguished by the radically divided and polarised responses it received in the past century. This paper first looks at the etymology and definition of the term ‘Romanticism’¹ in English and Chinese respectively and draws attention to their considerable disparity. It then traces the reception of British Romantic literature in the course of the twentieth century, highlighting in particular its late Qing introduction, New Culturalist proliferation, suppression under Communism, and post-1976 resurrection. With this trajectory of the afterlife of Romanticism, this paper unveils at the same time the peculiar transformation the concept of ‘Romanticism’ underwent in twentieth-century China. Focusing on several of the key aspects of the term, namely, radicalism, self-expressiveness, and nature-ism, I shall make the case that Romanticism, as both a concept and a body of literature, had been treated with drastically divergent or even contradictory stances in China along with the conflicting ideologies taking turns dominating the Chinese cultural discourse. The opposing attitudes towards the same authors or texts may suggest the oxymoronic qualities of British Romanticism itself, but they also demonstrate the preponderant influence of the national ideology over the aesthetic values of foreign literature in the reception process. Such an overwhelming ideological predominance reveals the essentially utilitarian approach China had taken to foreign literature, and British Romanticism in particular. This paper therefore contributes to the broader discussion of the re-centring of Western literature in Asia by looking into the process in which British Romanticism was substantially revised while being received and resurrected in China.

1. ‘Romanticism’ and *langman zhuyi*: Translation and Revision

The substantial revision can be seen by a comparison of the Chinese term *langman zhuyi* (浪漫

¹ Although adopting the general term ‘Romanticism’, this paper uses it to mainly refer to British Romanticism.

主义) with the English original, ‘Romanticism’. The English term is of course notoriously amorphous and has led to numerous debates among literary historians and Romanticists who, nevertheless, agree on at least certain core aspects of Romanticism. Many dictionaries, handbooks, and anthologies, for example, note the etymology of the word ‘Romanticism’ in the prefix *roman-* and discuss the close association of Romanticism with romance. Both *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* and *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature* remind us, “the Romantic is the sole period that is named after a literary form” (Lynch & Stillinger, 2012, p. 4; Chandler, 2009, p. 2). The genre of romance, as an antithesis to the realist novel, indicates a fascination with the fantastic realm and an escapist impulse to “fade far away” (Keats, 1978, p. 280) from reality. However, the evocation of the enchanting world of romance was inspired by contemporary political happenings, which encouraged a bold vision of infinite possibilities of the actual world. In this sense, the fascination with romance paradoxically suggests an active engagement with reality. Revolutionary France, for example, was “a country in romance” for Wordsworth (1979, p. 396). The origin of the word refers not just to the genre of romance, but the Romance languages as well. These vernacular languages emerged as a reaction against the authoritative and authoritarian Latin. The very word ‘Romanticism’, rooted as it is in both the genre and the language group, signifies a radical political stance. Other than the etymology, the periodisation of Romanticism reveals its political weight as well. Scholars have contended till this day as to where to locate the starting and finishing points of the Romantic era, and almost all the different dates they have suggested are of momentous political significance. The beginning of the era, often identified as 1776, 1783, or 1789, and the conclusion, be it 1832 or 1848, bookend the historical period of Romanticism with revolution and reform (Lynch & Stillinger, 2012, pp. 3–4; Chandler, 2009, p. 1).

The political energy of Romanticism informs the quintessentially Romantic self-expressive mode. Hazlitt in his famous essay on Wordsworth describes his poetry as “a pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age”, which “partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age” (Hazlitt, 1930–4, pp. 86–7). *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* identifies the “chief emphasis” of Romanticism as “upon freedom of individual self-expression”

and describes it as a “literary rebellion” against neo-Classicism (Baldick, 2015, p. 103). Abrams’ (2015) *Glossary of Literary Terms* makes the revolutionary nature of Romanticism against Neoclassicism more evident by putting them together in one entry as “neoclassic and romantic”. He justifies his practice as “a more useful undertaking” than “single definitions of neoclassicism and romanticism”, which is “to specify some salient attributes of literary theory and practice that were shared by a number of prominent writers in the Neoclassic Period in England and that serve to distinguish them from many outstanding writers of the Romantic Period” (p. 236). Romanticism is what Neo-classicism is not.

Another signature quality of Romanticism is the prominence of nature as its poetic subject. Abrams (2015) points out in his *Glossary*: “external nature ... was described with an accuracy and sensuous nuance unprecedented in earlier writers” (p. 239). However, he reminds us, “[i]t is a mistake ... to describe the romantic poets as simply ‘nature Poets’”, because external nature is only “a stimulus” for the Romantic poet to turn to his/her internal world (*loc cit*). Romantic nature-ism, therefore, paradoxically suggests transcendentalism, which places emphasis on the power of the human mind. As Wordsworth (1979) famously puts it, “the mind / Is lord and master” (p. 430).

These core elements, political radicalism, self-expressiveness, and the prominence of nature, are among the most salient features of Romanticism. As with the English term, ‘Romanticism’ in Chinese can also be approached from its origins. The now-standard Chinese translation of ‘Romanticism’, *langman zhuyi*, started to appear together with its several other renderings, such as *luoman zhuyi* (羅曼主義), *chuanqi zhuyi* (傳奇主義), and *huangdan zhuyi* (荒誕主義), around the late 1910s in China (McDougall, 1971, p. 96).² The version that finally prevailed, *langman zhuyi*, was most likely borrowed not directly from English, but Japanese (Shi, 1997, p. 14). Many leading Chinese intellectual and cultural figures spent an important stage of their lives in Japan at the dawn of the twentieth century, when the Romantic wave in Japanese literature began to subside. Their first encounter with Romanticism almost certainly took place

² McDougall translates *chuanqi zhuyi* and *huangdan zhuyi* back into English as ‘novelism’ and ‘exaggerationism’ respectively. *Chuanqi* refers to the genre of tales of the marvellous, and *huangdan* to tales of the fantastic. Both terms, it seems, attempt to capture the connection between ‘Romanticism’ and the genre of romance.

in Japan and in the medium of Japanese.

Some of the earliest references to ‘Romanticism’ in Chinese seem to corroborate this speculation on the source of the Chinese term. Tian Han (1898–1968), a founding member of the Creation Society (*Chuangzao she*) who was then studying in Japan, discusses the problem with translating the term ‘Romanticism’ into Chinese in his long article from 1919, “The Poet and the Issue of Labour”.³ He first provides its Japanese translations both in kanji, as 浪漫主義, and in katakana, as ロマンチズム. The latter phonetic translation, he points out, is more commonly adopted in Japan. He therefore favours *luoman zhuyi*, the phonetic translation in Chinese, which, he indicates, “is disapproved of by many in today’s Chinese literary circles” (p. 23). He, however, disapproves of other current versions in China such as *chuanqi zhuyi* and *huangdan zhuyi* because they “fail to represent what the term ‘Romanticism’ involves” and easily incur misunderstanding (*loc cit*).

Tian was not alone among the Japanese-educated Chinese writers and intellectuals in using the term ‘Romantic/ism’ around the time, although not all of them preferred *luoman zhuyi* as Tian did. In several essays written in 1921, Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967), Lu Xun’s brother, who had also studied in Japan, describes himself (2000, p. 9) and his ideas (*ibid*, p. 24) as ‘Romantic’, in both cases using *langman*. In another essay, he puts *langman zhuyi* in parentheses after *chuanqi zhuyi*, indicating the two are equivalent (*ibid*, p. 32). Liang Qichao (1873–1929), who became an exile in Japan for more than a decade (1898–1912) after the failure of the 1898 Hundred Days’ Reform, calls an ancient Chinese poem by Qu Yuan (340–278 BC) *langman* in a 1922 essay (2009, p. 247).

From “A Discussion on the Translation of Literary Terms”, a column in a 1923 issue of *Fiction Monthly* (*Xiaoshuo yuebao*) edited by Xi Di (Zheng Zhenduo, 1898–1958), one can assume that the diversity of the Chinese terms for ‘Romanticism’ had by then become confusing. One of the contributors, Shen Yanbing (1896–1981), uses various Chinese versions of ‘Romanticism’ to make the point that specialised literary terms should have uniform translations (1923, p. 2). Yu Zhi (Hu Yuzhi, 1896–1986), another contributor, proposes a dictionary of

3 All translations from Chinese into English in this paper are the author’s unless otherwise indicated.

literary terms, where different translations of the same term can be provided in the order of their appropriateness. His example is ‘Romanticism’ as well: the dictionary entry should include its three translations, *luoman zhuyi*, *langman zhuyi*, *chuanqi zhuyi*, and in this order (1923, p. 4). He did not seem to be aware that two months before their discussion came to press, such a dictionary had been published. In this *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of New Culture*,⁴ the entry ‘Romanticism’ is translated as *langman zhuyi* (Tang, 1923, p. 823). The title of the dictionary, echoing its contemporary New Culture Movement, seems to suggest itself to be the dictionary of the age and thereby gives a sense of authority to *langman zhuyi*, which would indeed replace other translations by the end of the 1920s.

The survival of *langman zhuyi* over other Chinese versions of ‘Romanticism’ might very well be attributed to its hybrid source as a loanword that is nevertheless rendered in an original Chinese phrase. As a loanword of the Japanese kanji 浪漫主義, which are themselves a translation from English, the Chinese term is twice removed from the original. It is, however, also ‘the return of the native’ with the adoption of the same Chinese characters, albeit with an altered meaning. The latter half of the four-character Chinese term, 主義 (*zhuyi*), is the Japanese phonetic translation of ‘ism’ in English during the Meiji era. The kanji characters suggest a loose connection with the original Chinese term, which, in classical Chinese texts, means ‘moral principle’. The first half of the term, 浪漫 (*langman*), is returned to Chinese with its original meaning adapted. Shi (1997) cites Natsume Sōseki (夏目漱石) and Kuriyagawa Hakuson (厨川白村) as the originators of the Japanese kanji 浪漫 *rōman*, found in their respective works, *Theory of Literature* (1906)⁵ and *Ten Lectures on Modern Literature* (1912, p. 13). According to McDougall (1971), “[a]mong the Japanese writers on romanticism ... Kuriyagawa Hakuson had perhaps the largest following in China” (p. 108), Tian Han included. After a lapse of around a decade, the Japanese term was borrowed back into Chinese from its circulation among the Chinese students in Japan (Shi, 1997, p. 14).

⁴ The English translation provided by the dictionary itself puts *xin wenhua* (new culture) in its title as “new knowledge”. To highlight the echo of the Chinese original with the New Culture Movement, I have adopted the literal translation of the title.

⁵ Shi puts the date of *Theory of Literature* as 1916, but it was actually published a decade earlier.

The original Chinese phrase 浪漫 can be traced back to a poem written by Su Shi (1037–1101), a leading Song poet, titled “Visiting a Changzhou Monastery with Meng Zhen” (與孟震同遊常州僧舍): “Of late I have gradually felt that this life is but an illusion / and have again wandered in Sanwu area, *unbridled and aimless*” (年來轉覺此生浮，又作三吳浪漫遊) (2000, p. 316; emphasis added). Here *langman* means unrestrained, following one’s instinct, an attitude affinitive to the Daoist belief in the natural state of things. In modern Chinese, *langman*, similar to the lower-case ‘romantic’, means: 1) fanciful and idealistic, removed from reality; and 2) unrestrained and unconventional, especially in sexual relationships. Both meanings, rather than descending from classical Chinese, were more likely formed after Western Romanticism was introduced to China. With these elements put together, *langman zhuyi* is a double-layered loanword that at the same time taps into classical Chinese sources, hence sounding both exotic and native. The loan from the Japanese translation of the original English term suggests a progressive cultural stance that nevertheless has to be conveyed with echoes with traditional Chinese values.

Just as the formation of the term resulted from the interaction of neologism with classical Chinese language, which changed the meaning of both, so the definition of the Chinese term reveals the revision of the imported concept in its encounter with Chinese literary politics. Looking at three rather representative definitions of the term in the 1920s, 1960s, and 1990s, one will find not just their increasing departure from the original, but the drastic shift among themselves within the national context.

The above-mentioned *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of New Culture* provides one of the earliest definitions of the term. It defines Romanticism as rising from the clash with Classicism and, while noting its diversity across European nations, distils its central features into ‘subjectivism’, ‘liberalism’, and ‘emotionalism’ (Tang, 1923, p. 824). The overall definition is followed by three sections on the British, German, and French Romantic movements respectively and two sections on “Romanticism in philosophy” and “Romanticism in ethics and actual life” (ibid, pp. 825–30). In comparison with the English concept, one notes that neither the primacy of nature nor the political energy is highlighted. Instead, the focus is put on the emancipation of the

individual and recovery of the inherent, independent human spirit from the fettering traditions and classics, a focus that resonates with the tenor of the New Culture Movement.

In the highly influential 1963 *History of Western Aesthetics*, which remains a chief source of citation still today, Zhu Guangqian (1897–1986), a leading Chinese scholar on aesthetics, identifies Romanticism as having three common characteristics: subjectivity, Medievalism, and “return to nature” (1963, pp. 727–8). If the New Culturist Dictionary puts more stress on the intellectual and cultural aspects of Romanticism, then this one reviews Romanticism in a more political and ideological light. Absent in the former dictionary is a Marxist historiographical perspective from which these Romantic characteristics are seen as products of their socio-political circumstances. Subjectivity demonstrates “the individualism of the rising capitalist class” (ibid, p. 727). Medievalism reveals contemporary nationalist awareness and demands for democracy (ibid, p. 728). Nature-ism was a reaction against the capitalist urbanisation and industrialisation (loc cit).

The 1990 *Dictionary of Foreign Literature* suggests that such an ideological approach persisted to at least the end of the century. It gives two meanings for *langman zhuyi*: “1. the creative mode that is opposed to realism, characterised by its passionate language, extravagant imagination, and hyperbolic style, which has existed in literatures of all nations from ancient times; 2. the literary movement at the turn of the nineteenth century in the West” (Diao, 1990, p. 108). With the first meaning, the term can be loosely adopted to refer to the romantic elements in classical Chinese literature. This broadened meaning, however, uproots Romanticism from its historical specificity, which, as discussed above, very much defines its essence and thereby tones down its political and poetic radicalism. The second meaning in its elaboration evidently takes after the Marxist turn already found in the 1960s definition of Romanticism:

it is the consequence of the bankruptcy of the kingdom of Reason promised by the Enlightenment thinkers and the manifestation of the disillusionment with the social and political order established by the French Bourgeois Revolution. The intellectual sources of Romanticism are the detestation of the bourgeois way of life and the resistance to the capitalist mundane reality, spiritual barrenness, and egotism, the pursuit of

emancipation of individuality, and the longing for a world in harmony. (p. 108)

The Marxist vocabulary such as “the French Bourgeois Revolution” and the values engendered by ‘capitalism’ bespeak the Chinese revision of the English term. In a more recent monograph, the definition remains unchanged in its Marxist historiographical view: Romanticism is “a literary trend that developed from the rise of the bourgeois revolution and nationalist liberation movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century” (Wu, 2012, pp. 1–2). In these post-1949 definitions, all the core elements of the original term, political radicalism, self-expressiveness, and nature-ism, are there. Yet, in being subordinated to the historical context that is conceived in Marxist terms, they are essentially reduced to passive, subservient products of class struggle. This distinctively Marxist bent in the Chinese term *langman zhuyi* has to be traced back to the reception history of Romantic literature in China, in the process of which the key components of the concept ‘Romanticism’ were reframed and reinterpreted.

2. Introduction of Romanticism: Late-Qing Appropriation

Romantic literature entered China at the beginning of the twentieth century, when late-Qing intellectuals and Reformists were looking at Western learning for ways to rescue the collapsing Qing empire from its domestic unrest and threats from imperialist powers. Liang Qichao, a leading late-Qing Reformist, was the first figure who introduced Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley to China. In his essay published in *The China Discussion* (*Qing yi bao*), the journal he established in Yokohama, Japan during his exile, Liang (1900) makes a reference to Wordsworth (p. 2409). Byron’s and Shelley’s portraits first appeared in another journal Liang founded in Yokohama, *New Fiction* (*Xin xiaoshuo*), in the second (1903) and fourteenth (1906) issues respectively. In the third issue of the same journal is the translation of excerpts from *The Giaour* and “The Isles of Greece” in *Don Juan*, excerpts that Liang (1903) includes in his own political fantasy, *The Future of New China* (*Xin zhongguo weilai ji*) (pp. 42–6). In 1905, Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (*Sakexun jiehou yingxiong lue*) was published, translated by Lin Shu (1852–1924), the immensely popular late-Qing translator of many Western novels. Keats made his first entrance

into China in 1907 in an important early essay by Lu Xun (1881–1936), “On the Power of Mara Poetry” (*Moluo shili shuo*), but he is only mentioned in passing. The essay was first published in *Henan*, a radical journal established by overseas Chinese students in Japan.

These three figures’ divergent, if not opposed, political and literary stances give one a glimpse of the multi-facetedness of Romanticism, which lends itself to its Chinese readers’ active appropriation that developed in diverse directions. Lu Xun, a leading figure in the following decade’s New Culture Movement and the author of the first vernacular Chinese fiction, had a very different take on Romanticism from both Liang and Lin. Lin, the monolingual translator who rendered his bilingual assistants’ oral account of the novel in classical Chinese, would be regarded as a major conservative for his adamant defence of traditional language and culture against the New Culturist sweeping tide. Even though Liang and Lin were both key late-Qing disseminators of Western literature, Liang’s chief advocacy of political literature contrasts with Lin’s choice of popular, sentimental Western novels. On the other hand, however, Liang’s “highly politicized campaign for new fiction opens the space for Lin Shu’s translation by supplying a kind of *Dao*: national salvation becomes the contemporary *Dao*” (Y. Hu, 2016, p. 61).

These rather sporadic early appearances of Romantic authors and texts suggest a lack of an overall grasp of Romanticism as both a body of literature and a literary concept in the late Qing era. If Liang noted Wordsworth’s worship of nature, he put it into the traditional Chinese cultural framework of Daoism. Both Liang and Lin found in the Romantic literature to which they were exposed a vehement expression of the national identity, not the self. Among the three key components of Romanticism, political energy was their major interest, which, however, was reinterpreted as a means of national preservation. Both Byron’s poetic passages and Scott’s novel centre on the tension between one’s national identity and the foreign conquering and ruling power, a tension that parallels the antagonism of the Han Chinese towards the Manchu conquerors and rulers of the Qing Dynasty, and at the same time evokes the similar national crisis incurred by imperialist forces in China.

In Liang’s political novel where he alludes to Byron’s lines that lament the decline of Greece

from its past glory to its present subjugation, he demonstrates an essentially utilitarian view of literature which was shared by many of his contemporaries, even though their emphasis on the socio-political dimension of literature is not incompatible with Romantic radicalism. For Liang, Byron and his texts served an exigent political function, namely to awaken in the Chinese readers a sense of humiliation of living as the colonised people and the realisation of the imminent need to reform the empire. The immense popularity of “The Isles of Greece” in China reveals the same instrumentality of the Chinese reading of Romanticism. The four Chinese translators of the song, Liang Qichao, Ma Junwu (1881–1940), Su Manshu (1884–1918), and Hu Shi (1891–1962)—all leading intellectuals and poets of their time—unexceptionally embraced it for its sublime lamentation over the decline of a once-glorious civilisation and its rebellious energy in inspiring the oppressed nationalities. None of them, however, gave any heed to or showed interest in the satirical quality of this ballad or the complexity of the overall *Don Juan*.⁶

Lin’s rendition of the title *Ivanhoe* in Chinese as “A Heroic Tale after the Saxon Crisis” betrays a similar concern about China’s plight. As Lin (1914) writes in the preface to his translation, one of the key interests of Scott’s tale is how the Saxon hero kindles his people’s grief and indignation over the demise of their old kingdom at the hands of the Normans (p. 2). Lin does not need to spell out that his own ancient, dying country was caught in a similar precarious situation and in desperate need of heroic inspiration as well. This theme fits in hand in glove with the medium of classical Chinese Lin chose, with which he could rewrite the original text into his context. As Hu Ying (2016) observes, Lin “treats the source language text as open-ended, and the act of translation enters into this open space, establishing linkage between the text and contemporary politics” (p. 61).

Even without systematic knowledge about Romanticism, the late-Qing literati recognised the political energy of Romanticism, which, however, was reframed into their own cultural tradition of the Confucian loyalty to the country. In their urge to preserve the country by seeking

⁶ The popularity of the song has been well documented and will not be expanded on here. For details on the satirical quality of this song and the overall poem, see the author’s forthcoming article, “Romantic, Rebel, and Reactionary: The Metamorphosis of Byron in Twentieth-Century China”.

an immediate remedy for its crisis, the literariness of Romanticism would probably seem far-fetched and excessive. This instrumentalist approach they had taken to Romantic or Western literature in general was in essence an extension of the Self-Strengthening Movement (1860s–90s), which insisted on the preservation of Chinese learning as ‘the fundamental structure’, whereas Western learning would merely be borrowed for its ‘practical function’.

3. The Proliferation of Romanticism: The New Culturist Enthusiasm and Division

The desperate attempt to salvage the Qing empire from its ruins while keeping the traditional Chinese culture intact soon gave way to more radical political and cultural reforming efforts that ended up in the 1911 Revolution and the New Culture Movement (1915–1920s). The attitude towards Western learning experienced a similar shift, from a cautious, partial borrowing to an enthusiastic, wholesale embrace. This tendency can already be detected in the abovementioned essay written by Lu Xun (1996), a leading New Culturist, which focuses on the Satanic Romantics such as Byron and Shelley.⁷ His essay distinguishes itself from other late-Qing introductions to Romanticism in its celebration not of these Romantics’ heroic devotion to the glorious nationalist cause such as that Liang and Lin emphasised, but of their anti-heroic and often misanthropic iconoclasm. Its subversive power anticipated the anti-traditionalist New Culture Movement that took place in the ensuing decade, during which the importation of Romantic literature flourished. One of the most important New Culturist manifestos, Hu Shi’s (1891–1962) 1917 article, “Some Modest Proposals for the Reform of Literature” (1996), is obviously indebted to the manifesto of Romanticism, Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, although Hu does not refer to Wordsworth until later. The centennial anniversaries of the Romantics in the 1920s and 1930s encouraged further popularisation of Romanticism, when introductions, translations and commemorations of Keats, Shelley, Byron, Blake, Scott, Coleridge and Lamb were published between 1921 and 1934 in some leading Republican journals such as *Fiction Monthly*, *The Eastern Miscellany* (*Dongfang zazhi*), *Poetry* (*Shi kan*), *Morning Post Supplementary* (*Chenbao fukan*), and *Literature and Arts Monthly*

⁷ Lu Xun also discusses European Romantics, namely, Pushkin, Lermontov, Mickiewicz, Slowacki and Petofi.

(*Wenyi yuekan*). Among them, the special commemorative issue on Shelley of *The Creation Quarterly* (1:4, 1923), established by the Creation Society, and that on Byron of *Fiction Monthly* (15:4, 1924), edited by the Literary Research Association (*Wenxue yanjiuhui*), are the most elaborate and enthusiastic.

The flourishing Romantic literature was buttressed with a strong sense of affinity many New Culturists found in some central ideas encapsulated in Romanticism as an intellectual trend, in particular, the unleashed self and revolutionary energy, both literary and political. With a similar Romantic spirit, the New Culturists proposed a clean break with the traditional Confucian values and a thorough Westernisation, promoting the emancipation of the individual, including the liberation of women, from the oppressive Confucian ethics. Fully conscious that this revolution in the traditional culture could not have taken place without a revolution in language, they simultaneously launched the vernacular movement to replace classical Chinese. The radicalness of this cultural and literary revolution makes it not improper to regard it as a Chinese Romantic movement. Lee (1973), for example, labels some Chinese writers of the New Culture era “the Romantic generation”, because both the Chinese and the European movements

represented a reaction against the classic tradition of order, reason, schematization, ritualization, and structuring of life. Both ushered in a new emphasis on sincerity, spontaneity, passion, imagination, and the release of individual energies—in short, the primacy of subjective human sentiments and energies. (p. 292)

A closer look at this Romantic generation’s diverse programmes of the literary revolution and the literary polemics in this era, however, reveals a more complex picture. The New Culturists’ “campaign against cultural backwardness was presented first of all instrumentally”, because they believed that this cultural revolution would “exercise a determinative influence upon political change” (Furth, 2002, p. 88). In this sense, they were no different from their late-Qing Reformist predecessors. As Denton (1996) points out, “although they uniformly denounced the didactic concept of ‘literature conveys the Dao,’ May Fourth literary theorists proposed to use literature in much the same way” (p. 116). Their ‘instrumentalist’ approach is

manifest in their treatment of Romanticism as a particularly powerful means to achieve the end of an ideological revolution.

With this predominant ideological concern, two aspects of Romanticism that the New Culturists particularly championed, political radicalism and self-expressiveness, developed into almost mutually exclusive qualities respectively appropriated by individuals and literary groups with opposing values and tenets. This can be clearly seen in the case of Byron and Shelley, the most popular Romantics in this era. While Byron remained the most idolised Western Romantic in China since the late-Qing era, his Satanic, ‘destructive’ egotism celebrated by Lu Xun was carefully distinguished by his brother Zhou Zuoren (1922b) from Shelley’s ‘constructive’ idealism for the good of all (p. 1). Even Shelley himself received divided treatments despite many New Culturists’ common admiration of him. For the leftist Literary Research Association, which espoused realism, as famously expressed by their slogan of ‘art for life’s sake’, Shelley was chiefly a fiery idealist and political activist. However, for the Creation Society—which claimed itself Romantic before its later Marxist turn, their slogan being ‘art for art’s sake’—Shelley was primarily an acclaimed self-expressive lyricist. On Shelley’s centenary, Zhou Zuoren (1922a), a founding figure of the Association, chose to translate “A Song: Men of England” (p. 2) from Shelley’s explicitly political ‘popular songs’, and the same poem was translated in the same year by Zheng Zhenduo (1921), another leading Associationist, who published it on the eleventh anniversary of the 1911 Revolution, 10 October (p. 2). In the special issue of *The Creation Quarterly*, Guo Moruo (1892–1978), a leading Creationist, selects eight less openly provocative lyrics instead, including “To a Skylark”, “Ode to the West Wind”, “Mutability”, and “Stanzas Written in Dejection” (1923, 19-39). Although the Associationists and Creationists presented a different Shelley, they both appropriated Shelley to promote their own aesthetic and ideological vision.

In comparison with radicalism and self-expressiveness, the other key component of Romanticism, nature-ism, seemed almost effaced in these ideological contentions. Instead, it was reshaped by both proponents and opponents of the New Culture Movement to be incorporated into their conflicting literary discourses. Wordsworth, the passionate worshipper

of nature, was embraced by the New Culturists not so much for being a nature poet as the prefacer of revolutionary poetics, whose celebration of nature was subsumed into his expression of “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth, 2013, p. 98) of the poet’s self. On the other hand, the more conservative *Critical Review* group (*Xueheng pai*) criticised Wordsworth’s Romantic manifesto but promoted his apparently more traditionalist poetry of nature, with which they evoked the classical Chinese *tianyuan* poetry⁸ and at the same time challenged their rivals’ thorough Westernisation and rejection of traditional Chinese culture.⁹ This group, however, was not composed of old-fashioned traditionalists as one might expect. Anglo-American educated, they mocked their radical counterparts’ shallow and crude understanding of Western culture. Wu Mi (1894–1978), a leading member of the group, studied under Irving Babbitt, whose anti-Romanticism must have influenced him. Same as the *Critical Review* group, Liang Shiqiu (1903–1987), another belligerent anti-Romantic figure and a loyal disciple of Babbitt’s as well, has penned perhaps the most militant attack on the Romantic excessiveness in China. Liang (1926) ridicules those who introduced Western literature to China as mere dilettantes who plunged the Chinese literary scene into “a Romantic chaos” (p. 59). According to him, “the New Literary Movement, as a whole, was a Romantic chaos” (loc cit). These anti-New Culturists, it seems, brought contemporary Anglo-American modernist reaction against Romanticism¹⁰ back to China, where the Romantic afterlife had just started thriving, an irony that is a consequence of the asynchronous nature of reception.

To further complicate the situation, even within the same literary group, tensions and contradictions can be found in its members’ complex stances towards Romanticism. The anti-Romantic Liang was a member of the Crescent Moon Society (*Xinyue she*), a prominent literary group during the era which had made remarkable contributions to the formation of the modern

⁸ *Tianyuan* poetry, literally poetry of ‘the fields and gardens’, refers to classical Chinese landscape poetry inspired by pastoral scenes.

⁹ For a closer discussion on the divided reception of Wordsworth, see the author’s upcoming article, “Two Chinese Wordsworths: The Reception of Wordsworth in Twentieth-century China”.

¹⁰ T. S. Eliot, the leading modernist who championed impersonality against the nineteenth-century self-expression, was once a follower of Babbitt’s.

Chinese literary tradition, especially in the realm of New Poetry (poetry written in vernacular Chinese). With many of its members returning from Britain and America, Romantic poetry was a major shaping force for their creation of the new genre in Chinese. Hu Shi, the first experimenter of New Poetry, was inspired by Wordsworth's radical poetics and tried his hand at a translation of "The Isles of Greece". Xu Zhimo (1897–1931), who discovered Romantic poetry at Cambridge, translated and wrote extensively on Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Keats. His own poetry is profuse with images that are so recognisably Romantic that in hindsight they look almost derivative. At the time, however, his importation of the English metre as well as Romantic imagery into New Poetry was bold and (paradoxically) original. He was inspired by Romanticism not just as a poet but as a man, fashioning for himself such a romantic life¹¹ that in his case, being 'Romantic' and 'romantic' become almost indistinguishable. Wen Yiduo (1899–1946), another member of the Crescent Moon Society, alludes to Wordsworth in one of his most famous poems, "Dead Water" (1984, pp. 197–8), and dedicates a poem to Keats, paying tribute to him as "The Loyal Minister of Art" (ibid, pp. 99–100). Zhu Xiang (1904–1933) was labelled 'the Chinese Keats' for his frequent references to the English poet on top of being a major translator of Keats and other Romantics.¹²

Despite the unquestionable influence of Romantic poetry on these Crescent Moon poets, however, they did not necessarily share all the ideological concerns and aesthetic values of Romanticism. As with Liang Shiqiu, both Wen and Xu reacted against the extravagant, formless free verse ushered in by the radical vernacular movement. In place of the self-proclaimed Romantic Creationists' effusive, egotistically sublime new poems, they called for formalism and introduced metrical and stanzaic disciplines into New Poetry. Their poetic experiments and stylistic concerns, however, were attacked as being disengaged from social reality by the Creation Society and, later, by Lu Xun as well, in the late-1920s fierce debate on the relationship between revolution and literature. The Crescent Moon Society's ambiguous stance towards

¹¹ Xu had several passionate love affairs, which inspired many of his poems. Like the younger Romantics, he also died young, killed in a plane crash at the age of 34.

¹² For details about Keats's influence on Xu, Wen and Zhu, see Li (2016).

Romanticism, therefore, puts into sharp focus the complexities and tensions of both the original Romanticism and the New Culture Movement, this Chinese Romantic Movement.

The New Culturist Romantic fervour started to subside from the late 1920s onward, when the nation was plunged into a deep crisis with the falling-out between the Nationalist and Communist Party and the Japanese invasion. The celebration of radical iconoclasm and self-expressiveness was overtaken by the cause of national salvation and an increasing concern with the masses. Literary revolution, as the Associationist Cheng Fangwu (1996) famously phrases it, gave way to revolutionary literature (p. 269).

4. Revolutionised Romanticism: Communist China's Suppression and Revision

Drastic changes in the reception of Romanticism took place after Communist China was founded in 1949 and forged a totalitarian literary and cultural policy that demanded all literature and art be an instrument of the party. Several violent shifts can be observed in the post-1949 attitudes towards Romantic authors and texts. Byron and Shelley were still the most discussed and translated Romantics, but Shelley won the party's favour over Byron; the evaluation of Byron became warily dualistic. While being celebrated as a relentless rebel against the ruling classes and a champion of the downtrodden people, Byron was also critiqued for his aristocratic stand on class and bourgeois, egotistic heroism. Two older Romantics, Blake and Burns, enjoyed a particularly warm reception in post-1949 China, occasioned by their bicentennial anniversaries in 1957 and 1959. On the other hand, together with Byron, some Romantics fell into disfavour: Keats was degraded to a lesser Romantic, while Wordsworth and Coleridge were labelled as reactionary or passive Romantics.¹³

These shifts took place along with numerous political campaigns launched by the Communist Party, which had a rigid control over all literary and artistic activities in China. Before the Sino-Soviet split, the party's official stance towards Romantic authors and texts basically derived from the Soviet practice of dividing them into revolutionary or active ones and reactionary or passive ones, which was based on its theory of 'revolutionary Romanticism'.

¹³ See Yang, Wu & Zhao (1964), pp. 47–73; Wu (2012), pp. 130–35.

The Soviet theory was established at the First Congress of Soviet Writers (1934), where Maxim Gorky (1868–1936), President of the Union of Soviet Writers, and Andrey Zhdanov (1896–1948), the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee Secretary, both affirmed 'revolutionary Romanticism' as the standard in evaluating Western literature. Revolutionary Romanticism, which glorifies reality and thus serves the revolutionary cause, was subsequently accepted as the official doctrine of literary creation and criticism in the Soviet Union (Gorky, 1960, p. 244), a guideline that China later faithfully abided by. By this standard, Byron and Shelley were approved as revolutionary Romantics, whereas Wordsworth and Coleridge were condemned as turncoat reactionary Romantics. Keats, although categorised into the former group, was viewed with reservation for his escapist aestheticism.

For all its borrowings from the Soviet terminology, a rather crude politicised Chinese reading of Romantic literature was developed from a far more important document in China: Mao Zedong's (1893–1976) "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art", which, though delivered in 1942, became the official cultural guideline in Communist China. In his Yan'an Talks, Mao raises the central question about the class stand of authors, most of whom came from a bourgeois background. Their stand should therefore be fused with that of the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers. Accordingly, the literary form should also cater to the masses; hence the promotion of a more accessible, popular language and style. This may seem a natural evolution from the post-New Culturalist revolutionary literature in the 1930s, but Mao's Yan'an Talks are "as much a legacy of the Chinese literary tradition as they are a product of Leninist influence of the CCP/Maoist desire for political and ideological hegemony" (Denton, 2016, p. 228).

More radically than his Soviet sources, Mao (1996) developed a literary utilitarianism that unequivocally viewed literature and art as "subordinate to the revolutionary tasks set by the Party in a given revolutionary period" (p. 474). In doing so, Mao exemplified a complex stance towards the New Culturalist legacy. On the one hand, in Mao's China, literature and art were deprived of their autonomy, while literary and artistic autonomy was what the New Culture Movement endeavoured to establish. On the other, Mao's utilitarian view of literature was

descended from Confucian didacticism as much as that of the New Culture generation, who also used the literary revolution to advance their political aims. The striking difference, however, lies in the fact that “Mao’s ideas were implemented by a state apparatus far more powerful and interventionist than any seen before in Chinese history” (Denton, 2016, p. 228).

The ‘revolutionised’ term ‘Romanticism’ experienced a more substantial revision by the state intervention during the 1958 Great Leap Forward Movement, Mao’s ambitious scheme to rapidly industrialise China that ended in failure and famine. The slogan that promoted the movement, ‘combining revolutionary realism with revolutionary Romanticism’, subsequently changed the meaning of Romanticism in China by associating the term with the Maoist romantic revolutionary zeal. Employed to legitimise Mao’s unrealistic scheme, Romanticism in China had taken a U-turn from its original political energy that challenged the powers that be. In an article published in *Poetry* in 1958 titled “We Need Romanticism”, the term, clearly differentiated from “passive, reactionary Romanticism”, means “active, revolutionary Romanticism” exclusively (Qing, 1958, p. 76). This Chinese or Maoist Romanticism gives license to “a fabricated plot”, “typical characters”, and “the most hyperbolic style”, so as to achieve its aim, to “demonstrate the great vision of our revolutionary struggle and to inspire the people to march towards a glorious future” (Qing, 1958, p. 76). The Great Leap Forward was accompanied by the New Folk Songs Movement, a cultural ‘leap forward’ Mao launched at the same time, which resulted in the mass production of ballads all over the country to eulogise the nationwide romantic fanaticism. It was in such a context that Blake and Burns became suddenly popularised, conveniently propagandised as people’s poets with their class stand as being with the masses and their use of the ballad form as an endorsement of the Folk Songs Movement.

Under this authoritarian rule, Romanticism had to be eradicated of its subversive originality in order to become subservient to the party propaganda. In turn, the key components of Romanticism—radicalism, self-expressiveness and nature-ism—underwent a drastically divergent interpretation. Prior to 1949, Romantic radicalism had been greeted as an inspiration for change, as evidenced in both the coincidence of the introduction of Romanticism with the decline of the Qing empire and the pervading call for reform, and the contemporaneity of its

heyday with the New Culture Movement that endeavoured to build a nation with a revolutionary vision. Under the Communist regime, however, Romantic radicalism became a threat to its authoritarian power and thus was rewritten into an anti-bourgeois, revolutionary class stand that served the socialist cause and advanced the party's political mission.

By the same token, Romantic self-expressiveness, completely at odds with a totalitarian power that suppresses the individual voice, was denounced as bourgeois egotism in essence. In 1964, a debate on the nature of Byronic heroism took place in a leading national newspaper, *Guangming Daily*, where an article written by Yuan Kejia (1921–2008), poet and scholar, on Byron's heroism (1964) provoked several replies by someone with the pen name of "Ye Zi".¹⁴ These replies, increasingly militant, speak with the party's authoritative voice against Byronic bourgeois egotism, which is declared to be the core of the Western literary legacy (Ye, 1965). A complete overturn had taken place since the New Culture Movement: in his "Mara Poetry", Lu Xun celebrates the iconoclastic Romantics' self-expressiveness and searches in vain for such individual geniuses in China; half a century later, Romantic selfhood, which had been embraced as anti-Confucian and emancipatory, was condemned for its dissenting power menacing the authoritarian rule.

Nature-ism was similarly denounced by this official discourse as escapist from the class struggle in reality and therefore politically regressive. The Lakers, Wordsworth in particular, were labelled as turncoat reactionaries, who first welcomed the French Revolution but later, frightened by Jacobinism, stood against the revolutionary cause. Their return to nature was decried as turning away from revolution and ridiculed as a consequence and sign of political spinelessness, which ended up in their indulgence in the feudal country life and glorification of the Mediaeval past. Before 1949, although not as admired as Byron and Shelley, Wordsworth was one of the most popular Romantics because of his affinity with the classical Chinese *tianyuan* poetry—misplaced as this affinity partially was. In the Communist rejection of nature-ism as reactionaryism, he was essentially dismissed and fell into oblivion. Translation of

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of this debate, see the author's forthcoming article, "Romantic, Rebel, and Reactionary: The Metamorphosis of Byron in Twentieth-century China".

Wordsworth's poetry practically disappeared until the 1980s.

5. Whither Romanticism: Post-1976 Resurrection and Counter-currents

Other Romantics besides Wordsworth had to wait till the late 1970s before they could be read again after the Cultural Revolution had suppressed all Western literary works. The post-Cultural Revolution decade saw a voracious readership eagerly embracing the republication of the translations of Romantic works as well as other Western literary classics. Among them, translations by Zha Liangzheng (1918–1977), pen-named Mu Dan, stood out with the poet-translator's remarkable prolificity and unimaginable perseverance. A major translator in Communist China of Blake, Keats, Shelley, Byron and Pushkin, he completed his masterly rendering of *Don Juan* while working under surveillance; he was charged as a 'historical counterrevolutionary' for his enlistment in the Chinese Expedition Force for Burma to aid the British against the Japanese during the Second World War.

Romantic studies, on the other hand, moved ahead more slowly, still haunted by the preceding decades' formulaic discourse, which continued well into the 1990s. An important achievement was made by Zha's fellow student at the National Southwest Associated University and lifetime friend, Wang Zuoliang (1916–1995), who authored *History of English Romantic Poetry* (1991), the first Romantic study in post-1949 China that is finally rid of the official sloganeering language. With the passing of this last generation of Chinese scholars who were versed in both classical Chinese and Western literature, the twenty-first century began to be taken over by younger generations of scholars who had more access to the current state of scholarship in the West. Many of them, however, have shown a greater interest in the more recent critical theories in the West than Romanticism, an apparently well-established field. Within the field of Romanticism, comparative studies on Romantics and Chinese writers have become a major area of interest. Both tendencies suggest a tension between an anxiety to catch up with the West and a keen awareness of one's own national identity, a consistent tension that has existed ever since Romantic literature was first introduced to China.

The reception history of Romanticism in China was essentially a continuous process of

recentring in the significant reconfiguration of the original authors and texts by the readers' constantly changing horizon. One wonders whether in the near future, further recentring will end up decentring Romanticism and other fields of Western literature in China. Today, with humanities in the West facing considerable difficulties and Western literary studies in China caught in a drastically shifting global and national order yet again, we can only "[look] at each other with a wild surmise" (Keats, 1978, p. 34).

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**The (Hi)story of the Encounter:
The Historical and the Personal in Nicolas Bouvier's *The Japanese Chronicles***

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Abstract

The Japanese Chronicles is a travel narrative by Swiss writer Nicolas Bouvier (1929–1998), who uses a narrative strategy blending the historical and the personal. Bouvier's style favours the exploration of the 'Other' through the anecdote of the encounter. The (hi)story of the encounter constitutes the framework of *The Japanese Chronicles*, a book organized in significant historical episodes. It is characterized by the juxtaposition of past and present-day travels: indeed, the stories of Japan's encounters with the Western world are interspersed with personal anecdotes describing the author's experience of today's Japan, and this constant interaction between the two levels of encounter helps initiate a reflection on the intercultural contacts between East and West. In his narrative, Bouvier refers to several "chronicles" relating to Japan, e.g. the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) and the *Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan), historical records of the first Westerners in Japan, a courtier's diary, memoirs of missionaries, annals of the Meiji era, and contemporary imperial edicts. Bouvier's personal chronicle incorporates all these diverse historical accounts and intertwines them with his recollections, in order to tell the story of his own personal encounter with Japan, therefore marking the transition from history to the personal story. This unusual perspective also restores the individual voices of ordinary Japanese people—including a Hiroshima survivor whose spoken account is "chronicled" by Bouvier—effectively converting historical facts and dusty archives into living anecdotes that highlight the status of the personal story or narrative within the larger frame of events.

Keywords: Nicolas Bouvier, travel literature, Japan, history, personal narrative

Introduction

In a book review written in *The Guardian* in 2007, journalist Rory MacLean hailed the publication of the English translation of Nicolas Bouvier's travelogue *L'Usage du monde* (*The Way of the World*) as "the most important event in travel literature this year", calling Bouvier "Switzerland's answer to Jack Kerouac".¹ *The Japanese Chronicles* is another travel narrative by Bouvier (1929–1998), a French-speaking Swiss traveller, writer and photographer, who at the age of 24 journeyed through Europe and Central Asia to Afghanistan with his childhood friend and painter Thierry Vernet, driving a small, slow second-hand vehicle, reaching Afghanistan after a year and a half. This transcontinental adventure inspired him to write *L'Usage du monde*, which has been described as a remarkable voyage of self-discovery, and has now become a classic in twentieth-century Francophone travel literature. *L'Usage du monde* ends with the traveller reaching the Khyber Pass, but Bouvier continued his journey on his own to India, Ceylon and Japan, the last being the inspiration for *The Japanese Chronicles*. In this narrative, Bouvier shares his impressions and observations of a country he has visited several times, first as a young man in 1956, then with his wife and child in 1964, and on his own again in 1970. The distinctive feature of this book is a narrative strategy that blends the historical and the personal, a technique that allows Bouvier to perfect a style which favours the exploration of the 'Other' through the anecdote of the encounter, or what I call in my book "l'anecdote de la rencontre" (Koo, 2015).

Narrating Japan: From Official Document to Personal Testimony

The (hi)story of the encounter constitutes the framework of *The Japanese Chronicles*, a book that is not written in a chronological manner, but is rather arranged as a patchwork of instalments, structured in several sections and organized in significant historical episodes. Its main feature is the juxtaposition of past and present-day travels. The table of contents indicates this approach, which weaves together the threads of both histories and stories about Japan:² chapters dealing with historical or mythical benchmarks, with relevant dates ("Year Zero", "Genoa, the Year 1298", "Le Temps retrouvé, 1854–1944", "Washington, 1944–1945")

¹ Rory MacLean, "On the Road Again", *The Guardian* (Thursday 31 May 2007), <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2007/may/31/rorymaclean.travelbooks> (consulted on 20 June 2017).

² All quotations in English are taken from *The Japanese Chronicles* (Bouvier, 2008). Unattributed page numbers cite this text.

mingle, in no particular chronological order, with chapters describing the author's personal milestones ("The Year of the Monkey, 1956", "The Pavilion of the Auspicious Cloud, 1964", "The Village of the Moon, 1965", "The Island without Memory, 1965–1970"). In addition, personal notes taken from the author's "Grey Notebook" punctuate the text on six occasions.

In this narrative, Bouvier refers to several 'chronicles' relating to Japan, starting with those dealing with the founding myth of the Land of the Rising Sun, as they are documented in the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) and the *Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan), and including the Chinese Han Dynasty's annals, which give a detailed account of China's first diplomatic relations with "the Island of the Wa" (the first recorded name of Japan), then with the "Kingdom of Yamato"; the *Book of the Marvels of the World* by Marco Polo, who knows about the "island of Zipangu" only from hearsay, but who makes his European readers aware of this faraway country; the diary of Sei Shōnagon,³ lady-in-waiting at the Imperial Court, which gives an idea of the poetic and affected atmosphere that prevailed in the year 1000 A.D.; the 1543 official report written on the order of the governor of the island of Tanegashima (in southern Kyushu); historical records of the first Westerners in Japan; memoirs of Saint Francis Xavier that give an account of the Jesuits' first missionary efforts; annals of the Meiji era, and contemporary imperial edicts that provide an insight into the spectacular rise and decline of a militarist empire; then concluding with *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) by Ruth Benedict, an ethnological study that attempts to define the Japanese culture and mentality from an American perspective. These stories of Japan's encounters with the Western world are interspersed with personal anecdotes describing Bouvier's intimate experience of Japan. His personal chronicle incorporates all these diverse historical accounts and intertwines them with his own recollections, in order to tell the story of his own personal encounter with Japan, thereby marking the transition from history to the personal story.

This constant interaction between the two levels of encounter helps initiate a reflection on the intercultural contacts between East and West. Indeed, these intertwined chronicles allow Bouvier to travel back in time and to develop variations on the theme of the encounter and also of the missed encounter, in order to analyze the meetings between Japan and the West—unsuccessful encounters that ended in a bloodshed or a misunderstanding.

³ Lady-in-waiting to Empress Teishi during the 990s and early 1000s. She is the author of *The Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi*), a collection of personal thoughts, poetry, memorable events and anecdotes gathered during her time at the Imperial Court.

The diplomatic mission of eight Japanese scholars sent to China in the 7th century is a model of its kind, because those envoys were chosen with the utmost care for their character, their commitment to study and their virtue: “You can imagine the contacts Europe would have established with the ancient and the new world if the navigators of the sixteenth century had been chosen in this manner. It is true that they were not sent to study but to plunder” (p. 15). Very soon, with the growing arrogance, greed, and expansionism on both sides, the earlier ideal of humility and respect for one another gave way to competition and conflict. The Papal Bull of 1493 divided up, between Spain and Portugal, the new lands of the Planet already discovered or to be discovered, turning their inhabitants into potential subjects of the Kings of Portugal and of Spain. For their part, Japan and China were both convinced of the divine origin of their power, and considered that it was their responsibility to ensure that the whole universe benefit from their benevolent protection: “It is intoxicating to dream of this tight-woven fabric of ignorance and pretensions to hegemony that intertwine, superimpose on one another, and cancel each other out. On the whole, little has changed” (p. 37), Bouvier writes, putting things into a temporal or historical perspective in order to demonstrate that then as now, in the 15th century as in the 20th century, it is just as difficult to step outside one’s self and reach out to the Other.

Indeed, most of these first contacts with the Other sometimes have appalling consequences. After describing (with supporting historical evidence) the scene where Portuguese traders land for the first time on the shores of Kyushu Island, Bouvier continues with a decisive episode that has huge implications for the future relationships between Japan and the West: the sale of the first harquebus (a long-barrelled gun) to the natives. What is remarkable in this sequence is the highly visual quality of the text, and the narrator’s personal involvement in the description.

Personally, I see this transaction in the little port of a little, lost island as a curtain rising on a drama in which the protagonists don’t realise the importance of their roles and play them carelessly. On one hand, there is the governor, full of maxims, so courteous, so determined to be ‘correct’ and of course to keep anything useful from escaping his grasp. On the other hand, the three voluble Portuguese, astounded at the great deal they have made, and most likely very dirty under their lace collars. I feel like yelling at them: “Stand up straight, a little dignity, less bragging”—they declared that Portugal was bigger than China—“and fewer grimaces. And don’t blow your garlic breath into the nose of your interlocutor, choose your words well, and make a good impression...”[.] (pp. 41–42)

By inserting himself in this historical scene like a stage director, the narrator establishes, through his (imagined) personal intervention, an intimate connection with the past. But also, using his visual and episodic perspective, the narrator takes a historical fact from some dusty archives and transforms it into a living anecdote recorded down to the smallest detail, as if he had been an eyewitness. This is a process that Bouvier considers as the cornerstone of his book: “Tonight, I saw all of the events of Japanese history in a dream, lined up like a series of images from popular culture,⁴ in acid colours, here and there a close-up of a bit player, of a sorrowful or stupefied face. A little like a child looking at a magic lantern” (p. 52). Using a vocabulary borrowed from theatre, the narrator adopts the perspective of a spectator and of a stage director. In fact, Bouvier writes as if he were putting himself in the frame of this historical encounter, translating it into a theatrical scene, trying to supervise the characters’ acting and bearing onstage, even though there is little one can do to rectify the situation. “But in the end it doesn’t matter; they are no more than puppets, their role is modest. It is the gun that holds centre stage, and it is perfection” (p. 42): because what comes out of this event, Bouvier concludes, is neither the fascination caused by the first intercultural contact nor the negotiation of an agreement, but the purchase of an instrument of destruction.

Indeed, no later than the following year, the Japanese managed to take possession of the secret of the weapons’ manufacture, and they were soon mass-produced throughout the country. Barely twelve years later, at the Battle of Kawanakajima, “the air is already totally black with gunpowder” (p. 41). Bouvier concludes in a deliberately casual tone: “So! Now they have been introduced” (*loc cit*). He gently makes fun of this memorable encounter, which, instead of bringing friendship and mutual enrichment, started inauspiciously with the exchange of a firearm. Further in the narrative, Bouvier explores the psychological outcomes of another deadly encounter between Japan and the Western world, namely, the attack on Pearl Harbor and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, as if to remind the reader that, today as in the past, the relationship to the Other poses a challenge: “we can hardly progress further today in the art of destruction, but there are still roads to build in the art of understanding” (p. 79).

Mutual understanding is indeed an elusive art, as exemplified by another historical encounter, the rapid spread of Christianity in Japan in the 16th century. This episode starts with

⁴ In the original French text: “une suite d’images d’Épinal” (Bouvier, 1989/1991, p. 84), or *Épinal* prints, a series of naïve depictions of everyday life or traditional subjects, rendered in bright sharp colours, that were sold in France in the nineteenth century.

the arrival of Saint Francis Xavier, who saw in this country “some undefinable quality, born of a tradition of which the West is ignorant and which his Western vocabulary cannot define” (p. 45). This strict and passionate priest was captivated by the Japanese people’s stoicism and high moral standards, but he was lost in a society whose strengths and weaknesses he knew little of. Moreover, in his missionary zeal, he had not yet mastered “the art of compromise, that flexibility so often attributed to his order; for the most part, compromise is a lesson of the Orient, and the Jesuits bravely struggle to learn it” (p. 44). However, his ground-breaking efforts opened the way to the golden age of the Portuguese Jesuits, a period which saw mass conversions of the Japanese people—to the point of threatening the nation’s political integrity. “It is the beginning of a strange adventure founded on enthusiasm, opportunism, good faith, and misunderstandings. To use a term dear to the Japanese today, you can call it the *Kiristan Boom*” (p.45). This phase was followed by drastic measures put in place to reduce the foreign influence and interference in internal affairs, such as persecutions and massacres that led to the eradication of Christianity in Japan. “Things are not going well. Things couldn’t have gone well. The Jesuits and the Japanese were in love without understanding each other” (p. 49). Once the crisis was over, Japan decided to entrench itself behind protectionist decrees, “meditates on the failure of a business that had begun so well, and transforms the foreigner into a scapegoat or a scarecrow” (p. 51), pledging that never again would it have anything to do with the West.

The Chronicling of a Living Anecdote

Japan kept its word and maintained an isolationist and protectionist policy during the Edo period, until the advent of the Meiji Restoration and the opening up of the country to foreign influences. In 1853, when Commodore Perry’s American warships forced a country that had been isolated for more than two centuries to open up to external trade, the West and Japan had little memory of their previous encounters: “For now, the West’s trajectories don’t match Japan’s: with a few slight exceptions, they know nothing about each other” (p. 59). In a matter of a few decades, Japan entered the Meiji period (enlightened government) in 1868, embarked on an aggressive industrialization agenda, and prepared its revenge. In the 20th century, Japan emerged as an increasingly militarist and expansionist country, and in 1941 became embroiled in a fight to the death with the attack on Pearl Harbor. As the war progressed, Japan was cornered in a dead-end situation: although it refused to admit it, the end was near, and the eleventh chapter of *The Japanese Chronicles* closes on a question mark: “Surrender or a fight

to the death? ... How is the country coping with the bombings? What will the Japanese do?” (p. 70).

Everyone knows what happened next—at least from an official, historical perspective. But what Bouvier strives to do is to stage this confrontation between Japan and the Allied forces from an intimate viewpoint. This is where chapter XII comes in: titled “Yuji Speaks, or a Lesson in ‘Nothing’” (p. 71), it marks the transition from the historical anecdote to the personal anecdote. The time and place of the historical event, as well as that of the personal expression in the present tense, are put together at the beginning of the chapter: “Hiroshima, August 1945 / Tokyo, October 1955” (loc cit). The narration is taken over by Yuji, a journalist and translator who becomes Bouvier’s friend and colleague during the latter’s first stay in Japan, and who tells him his story. Yuji’s father, a respected academic, died during a bombing, and his elder brother was killed during the Pacific War. His younger teenage brother, who was still in full growth and constantly irritated by the wartime scarcity of food, persuaded their already weakened mother to travel on foot to a nearby city to obtain some sugar for him. The point of intersection between the historical anecdote and the personal anecdote occurs soon after Yuji’s mother’s fateful departure for a city located sixty kilometres away, which happens to be Hiroshima.

Two days later, around noon, there was a strange glow in the sky to the north. We learned that a disaster had hit Hiroshima. There were all sorts of rumours about it. We arrived in the city on foot, my brother and I. Before we even reached the outskirts, the sky was grey with suspended soot. The earth was still warm. ... In the heart of the ruins, you could hear the humming of crickets and cicadas that, much more resistant than we, died singing. (p. 72)

The hospital where their mother was supposed to meet their physician uncle to barter for food is razed to the ground, and not a single body can be found. A few days later, the grieving families are given a portion of the bones and ashes collected on site, and the two brothers head home, too overwhelmed to cry, devastated by this sinister tragedy of fate that conspired to send their mother into the midst of a burning inferno for the price of three kilograms of sugar. Yuji’s brother is overcome by guilt and disappears shortly after, leaving a note saying that he has decided to follow their mother. In the whole episode, Yuji’s narrative is characterized by a remarkable restraint, and the simple and understated tone that is used further emphasizes the

intensity of a family drama created by the unfortunate convergence of history and fate. This perspective restores the individual voices of ordinary Japanese people—including this survivor whose spoken account is ‘chronicled’ by Bouvier—effectively converting historical facts and dusty archives into living anecdotes that highlight the status of the personal story or narrative within the larger frame of events.

The interdependence between the historical anecdote and the personal anecdote is once more demonstrated by this story about remorse, broken lives and a long process of healing: with an understated dignity, Yuji tells of his “rebirth”, and describes himself “as light as a cinder and as hard as bamboo that has passed through a fire—nothing for regrets, hypocrisy, or melancholy to cling to. ... Every day we reinvented a little bit of life” (p. 75). Appropriately enough, the chapter closes on the portrait of this invited narrator, the teacher of this initiation to ‘Nothing’, a lesson in humility that the travel writer receives like an illumination likely to fill in “that central inadequacy of soul” that one drags around like a burden: “Yuji, he is a small man, dry and musical, as transparent as a snowflake. He has the look of an ether addict who enjoys himself and dances, with the pale and troubling lightness of someone who has passed through fire. ... When you meet a truly free person, you suddenly feel so silly, with all your travels and projects...” (p. 77). As someone who has learned to lighten himself of useless regret and the weight of sorrow, Yuji is a mentor who teaches the Western traveller the way to true serenity. He is a character who puts a human face on the horrors of war, an innocent victim of a major global confrontation who brings to life the history of his country. In addition to being a living connection to Japan’s recent past, he is also the link to its present, a native who includes Bouvier in his family life, gives him an insider’s view of Japanese society, and guides him through the trials and tribulations of everyday life in a bustling metropolis. Through him, Bouvier shares the life of “small people, small debts that a person forgets and then finds again: Japanese Dickens with an ineffable sweetness” (p. 77).

Likewise, photography plays a central role in Bouvier’s process of approaching and comprehending the average Japanese. In a post-war Japan where ordinary people still struggle for a living, Bouvier is a foreigner who speaks only a few words of Japanese and relies on odd jobs to survive. In the working-class neighbourhood of Araki-cho where he lives in a rented room, the locals are careful and circumspect, hesitant to form a connection without really knowing what to expect from this shabby and eccentric newcomer. Not that they would be

exactly xenophobic, but their guarded attitude stems from a number of misconceptions about Westerners: as Bouvier explains,

they attribute a number of exotic habits to a foreigner, incongruous appetites and whims, sources of problems and puzzles. Several months passed while they observe me without lowering their guard. Relations here are rarely born of individual whim; they are almost always the result of sponsorship, of adoption, of group consensus in one form or another. (p. 98)

Bouvier happens to be an avid photographer who enjoys taking pictures of his travels, and of everyday Japan in particular.⁵ He is the only one in the neighbourhood to “possess a decent camera, and [he is] often asked for a favour” (p. 101): in the closed, impenetrable environment of Araki-cho that is not always inviting to outsiders, Bouvier often uses his device to break the ice and endear himself to his neighbours, and the resulting pictures underline once again the importance of the visual, the theatrical and the imagery in the structure of his narrative.

“The Foot of the Wall”, and the Allegory of the Encounter

Bouvier’s simple and modest black-and-white photographs reveal a less conventional and glamourized image of the country, as his models include shopkeepers of Araki-cho, schoolchildren playing, street entertainers, elderly couples visiting from the countryside, exhausted commuters on a train, members of a rustic travelling troupe, and young Buddhist monks who are as curious about Bouvier as he is interested in them. These pictures are genuine and unpretentious portraits of ordinary people that capture all shades and degrees of human feelings and expressions, from shyness, loneliness or innocence to shrewdness, wisdom and mirth, showing the faces of intensely private people who open up and reveal themselves to the traveller’s gaze. Appropriately, Bouvier’s writing is influenced to a large extent by his interest in photography: his style displays a tendency to imitate the photographic process, and his narratives are often structured like an album of snapshots or a collection of illustrations.⁶

Throughout his versatile career, Bouvier described himself as a photographer, iconographer and picture editor as much as a traveller and writer, and there is indeed a close affiliation

⁵ Bouvier’s photographs have been published in albums such as *L’Œil du voyageur* (Paris, Éditions Hoëbeke, 2001), and *Le Japon de Nicolas Bouvier* (Paris, Éditions Hoëbeke, 2002).

⁶ See Koo, 2015, chapter II.

between his travel photographs and his travel narratives. His pictures are an exhibit of world images, of colourful environments teeming with life and crowded with average people going about their daily business. The photographs Bouvier brought back from his first travel across Eastern Europe and Central Asia form a diverse picture gallery of farmers, mountain-dwellers, tradesmen, artists, barbers, camel drivers, porters, and beggars. In a series of interviews, he argues that while he may lack some technical skills as an amateur photographer, his genuine and earnest approach give his pictures an undeniable emotional and human value.

Despite my lack of experience, these were very beautiful images because real life was beautiful. They were taken in the Bazaar of Tabriz, and I took a long time to get to know the people before photographing them: they would never have accepted it from a stranger. (1992, p. 101)⁷

Photography creates a trusting relationship in which the Other agrees to open up to the observer's gaze. In that sense, photography, according to Bouvier, is "a very interesting door opener" (ibid, 104)⁸ which provides the traveller with an opportunity to engage and connect with people, to dispel their suspicions, and to tame them. Photography is also an art that requires humility and self-denial: in order to let the native's face speak for itself, "the photographer must step aside completely" (ibid, p. 102).⁹ These brief encounters captured by the camera lens produced portraits of anonymous faces, smiling and merry, wistful and contemplative, tormented or disillusioned, some of them marked by the vicissitudes of life, and others holding on to the hope of a better future.

Bouvier's narratives bear the mark of these typically photographic features. *The Way of the World* stands out with its montage of sharp, vivid and moving portraits and quick sketches that are enhanced by the acuteness of Bouvier's perception. Despite the massive scale of his journey, his writing is surprisingly light, airy and luminous. As the traveller and poet Jacques Meunier (1987) points out, Bouvier "is to exotic literature what the *haikai*, the limerick or the *fatrasie*

⁷ "Malgré mon inexpérience, c'étaient de très belles images parce que la réalité était très belle. Je les ai prises dans le bazar de Tabriz, avec des gens dont j'ai dû longuement faire connaissance avant de les photographier: de la part d'un inconnu, ils ne l'auraient jamais accepté". This and all subsequent quotations taken from Bouvier's work (other than *The Japanese Chronicles*) and critical studies are my own translations from the original French.

⁸ "[U]n sésame très intéressant[.]"

⁹ "[I]l faut que le photographe s'efface complètement[.]"

are to the heaviest symbolist poetry” (p. 243).¹⁰ In a straightforward style that is episodic rather than epic, Bouvier writes about his remarkable transcontinental odyssey, all the while managing to remain understated. “Bouvier’s journey is never majestic. It is the sum of countless small journeys” (ibid, p. 244).¹¹ Rather than striving to be a monumental masterpiece, Bouvier’s text is arranged in a series of scenes, episodes and portraits: his narrative is presented as “slivers of travel” (Laporte, 2002, p. 8)¹² and “fragments of a world puzzle” (ibid, p. 9),¹³ and reveals a style of writing that copies the photographic process. Accordingly, this is how Meunier (1987) describes *The Way of the World*: “This travel diary is made of scenes and tableaux, and looks like a photo album that has been saved from a disaster” (p. 244).¹⁴

Bouvier’s anecdotal form of writing is built around these portraits: this approach is already outlined in his first travelogue *The Way of the World* and further asserts itself in *The Japanese Chronicles*. The episodic vision of the world, which is dependent on the author’s photographic vision, allows the exploration of Otherness by singularizing and amplifying the individual through the anecdote of the encounter. His episodic style, which is a product of this fragmented visual perspective, reinforces the association of past and present, favouring the singular over the generic, the individual over the universal, the story over history.

With a compassionate perspective and a warm, gentle touch, Bouvier practises the art of the individual portrait and of the personal anecdote and establishes them as the foundations of a better understanding of the Other. Intimate photography as a window into the soul of a country is a recurrent theme in *The Japanese Chronicles*, for example when the narrator is invited to Japanese homes and flips through family albums:

These albums (I have seen a good hundred at least) have taught me more about this country than the works of the greatest photographers. ... Turning the pages, I see life stretching the skin of these faces, which get thin and taut, charged with a look that suggests a Japan that is frugal, introverted, and pathetic, certainly not the Japan of the brochures. (p. 100)

¹⁰ “[E]st à la littérature exotique ce que le haïkai, le limerick ou la fatrasie sont à la plus lourde des poésies symbolistes[.]”

¹¹ “Le voyage chez Bouvier n’est jamais majestueux. C’est la somme de mille et un petits voyages[.]”

¹² “[D]es éclats de voyage[.]”

¹³ “[F]ragments du puzzle du monde[.]”

¹⁴ “Fait de scènes et de tableaux, ce journal ressemble à un album de photos qui aurait réchappé d’un désastre[.]”

This frugality, or the essence of Yuji's lesson in 'Nothing', points to the process of self-denial that the traveller must go through to gain awareness of the Other: the denial of one's own self is an essential motif in Bouvier's work, and it means that a meaningful meeting with the Other can only take place after one has surrendered one's ego and forsaken his comfort and well-being.

This is where the chapter "The Foot of the Wall" (pp. 103–09) comes in. The title is an appropriate one: this section is indeed about a wall, but it is also the translation of the original French "au pied du mur", an expression meaning "to be forced into a corner". And it is indeed an episode about Bouvier's particularly difficult position at the time: alone and penniless in a foreign country, he is working odd jobs to support himself, struggling to make ends meet, and is about to learn what hunger really means. "I had begun to understand how to eat Japanese-style; all that was left was to learn how to not eat at all" (p. 104). Bouvier discovers what he calls "the wall theatre" at this point when he has given up hope of establishing a positive contact with Japan. He is walking in a back alley in the scorching heat, hungry and confused, when he comes across a wall, which turns out to be the ideal set for a street theatre, or a theatre of life.

I sat on a garbage can to rest, and raising my eyes, I saw: a long, stone wall festooned like a theatre curtain by the summer mould and saltpeter fungus. For the length of this 'set', the pavement is raised, providentially forming a kind of stage, and all who passed by it were transformed into 'characters', amplified by an echo, projected on the comic or the imaginary. I said to myself: it is my fatigue. I closed my eyes a moment. When I reopened them, it continued to happen, like a story told in a foreign language. (p. 105)

Fascinated by this real-life stage, Bouvier ends up spending several days hidden behind a trash bin, waiting in ambush with his camera lens pointed at this wall theatre, hoping to capture unexpected 'encounters' of characters from all walks of life, to see them meet or even bump into each other within the frame of his lens. The result is a series of candid snapshots which represent everyone from the young and the elderly, all of them unsuspecting actors in an intimate, domestic drama, but who, in their own way, illustrate and enhance the theme of the encounter.

Just as Bouvier had inserted himself in his description of the Portuguese traders' arrival in Japan to create a connection with the past, he is now putting himself in the ordinary situation of a Tokyo street to forge a connection with the present. In the same way as he had acted as a

stage director in the previous historical episode, he is now a photographer-observer looking out for passing protagonists, and hoping to see them come together within the frame of his lens. “This evening I have finished my last roll of film. Fortunately. In four days, I was becoming a mythomaniac. The simple passersby weren’t good enough anymore. Before my wall, I wanted some action, a quarrel, an assassination ... the emperor” (p. 107).

This propitious wall theatre—which is a powerful allegory of the encounter—is the turning point in the book. This symbolic episode allows Bouvier to sell his pictures to a Tokyo magazine and to earn the equivalent of half a return ticket to Europe, resolving a desperate financial situation. It also leads to a moving connection with a sick Japanese student who sends him some unexpected fan mail from his hospital bed: in his simple yet heartfelt letter, the young man expresses his admiration, and his regret at not being able to travel and explore faraway lands like Bouvier, and sends him his hard-saved money to encourage the budding author.

Restoring a Broken Continuity

This kind of authentic encounter is a privilege that is not granted to just anyone, and Bouvier makes it clear in his narrative that such an awareness and enlightenment may take place only after a learning process during which the traveller’s resistance and humility are put to the test. Bouvier notes that his personal experience of Japan is itself the outcome of an age-old historical quest, and is the result of an evolution of attitudes and behaviours, and also the product of a series of successes and blunders. This long maturation of intercultural relationships is marked by highs and lows, and goes through several stages of mistrust and lack of understanding, uninformed fascination, and armed conflict and *détente*, leading eventually to an easing of tension and the initiation of a dialogue that offers hope for a fresh start. This is why the photographic and episodic style that underlies the narrative structure of *The Japanese Chronicles* can be distinguished on several levels: legendary and historical, political and religious, ethnological and economic, official and emotional.

The visual and anecdotal approach that underlies the structure of *The Japanese Chronicles* allows Bouvier to elevate the mundane and the prosaic to something memorable and extraordinary, whether it is in a striking scene expressed in a single sentence like a sketch, or a portrait outlined in a few words like a haiku. His anecdotes are constructed and assembled like freeze frames of moments and memories, or what he calls the “crumbs” of his trip (“les

miettes”).¹⁵ His travel narrative is a historical and personal journey that collects the pieces of a larger human mosaic, and restores a broken continuity between past and present, between the fragment and the whole, in order to reconcile the notions of diversity and unity. His tale brings together segments of real-life encounters, moments of intimacy etched in his memory, and nuggets of wisdom collected along the way to arrange them in a portrait gallery or a series of anecdotes: by capturing these fleeting moments of empathy or insight, he makes the humour, the pathos and the humanity shine through.

Accordingly, the personal stories in the book are enacted in a figurative style: instead of being presented in a logical fashion, they are arranged in an analogical manner. Their value cannot be defined in an argumentative mode: rather, Bouvier explains that meeting the Other has little to do with theoretical knowledge, but must be achieved empirically, through hands-on learning. As he explains: “Even when you look through a kinetoscope or magic lantern, you should not kid yourself: the most essential connections are formed beyond the rational mind and are only rarely expressed in books” (p. 79). While stressing again in this quotation the visual nature of his narrative strategy in *The Japanese Chronicles*, Bouvier concludes that such “essential connections” are built through the hardships of day-to-day life, chance encounters, and the warmth of human relationships.

More than anything, Bouvier’s purpose in *The Japanese Chronicles* is to go beyond stereotypes and a certain image of Japan shaped by various cultural references, whether fanciful or fabricated. Recounting how his earliest perceptions of Japan were inevitably rooted in childhood memories of Christmas toys, his reading of adventure novels, and his appreciation of Italian opera and Impressionist art, he seeks to learn how to discard those preconceived ideas and misconceptions about Japan, and to start afresh. He accomplishes this by shifting from the historical to the personal, from the public to the private, from the general to the intimate, in order to turn what could have been an average, conventional journey into a unique experience.

To that end, Bouvier reminds the reader that in human history, not only do intercultural contacts have a tendency to degenerate into conflicts, they may sometimes be the result of a huge misunderstanding, as when Christopher Columbus left on his first voyage across the Atlantic, searching for a western trade route to the Orient and looking for Zipangu (as Japan

¹⁵ From Nicolas Bouvier’s introduction to the original French version of *The Japanese Chronicles*: “Le voyageur est une source continue de perplexités. Sa place est partout et nulle part. Il vit d’instant volés, de reflets, de menus présents, d’aubaines et de miettes. Voici ces miettes” (back cover of *Chronique japonaise*, Éditions Payot, 1989).

was known then), described by Marco Polo as an ‘Island of Gold’. Bouvier describes the moment Columbus and his crew landed on the Caribbean islands while believing they had reached Asia, an episode that is a perfect example of how the West’s first encounter with Japan was based on a mistake and a miscalculation.

The next day, real land, which they take for Japan ... and which is only America, or actually the Bahamas.

There, and later on the coast of Mexico, all the Spanish had to do to gather gold was reach down. So history doesn’t say that they were disappointed to find America while searching for Japan.

Today, a good many tourists, having just arrived the day before in the Tokyo of department stores, all-aluminium elevators, neon signs, taxis with televisions, the cleanest and most modern subway in the world, have the vague feeling that someone has played the same trick on them. (p. 34)

Bouvier humorously concludes that even today, modern visitors to the Land of the Rising Sun are not immune from the confusion and perplexity that must have filled the minds of the first explorers. Through the combination of rapid westernization, vigorous capitalism, rampant consumerism and the growth of the tourism industry, the traditional representation of Japan nurtured by the Western imagination has been distorted: Bouvier’s experience of an unrecognizable, modern-day Japan goes against all conventional expectations and challenges his assumptions, forcing him to adjust his plan of approach.

Such a plan, naturally, excludes the touristic path, which is a superficial way of looking for a convenient shortcut in a country that will only open up after the traveller has gone through a lengthy, patient, and attentive learning process. Observing a group of Western ladies visiting Kyoto’s temple of Ryōan-ji, a garden which is one of the most perfect examples of Zen aesthetic, Bouvier laments their lack of awareness and their cultural self-centredness, which make them totally insensitive to the significance of what they are seeing: “I truly fear, like Kipling, that this West and this East will never meet” (p. 26). Later, he encounters another group of dissatisfied tourists who complain about everything on the trip and yet “demand that before they leave, someone should wrap up the ‘soul of Japan’ for them”, and who feel that “suddenly through a simple mental process, their ignorance should be transformed into knowledge, clear-cut and precise please, so that they can discuss it when they get home” (p. 28). While criticizing the cultural short-sightedness that renders the Western traveller blind to the complexity and depth of Japan, Bouvier does not delude himself: he admits he is

occasionally guilty of the same offense, that of wanting to reach an exhaustive understanding of the Other instantly and effortlessly.

I judge them, but I, too, would sometimes like to find my meal set in front of me, and fast. We come to this thin and frugal country with our greedy metabolisms: the whole West is that way. The golden dishes, the maharajahs, the rubies as big as duck eggs—that is what struck our first explorers, that's what they wanted to see, not the frugality that is truly one of the marks of Asia. ... Here, anyone who doesn't serve an apprenticeship to frugality is definitely wasting his time. (pp. 28–29)

Going against the greedy and conquering attitude towards the Other inherited from colonialist expectations of times gone by, Bouvier advocates in his encounter with Japan a philosophy of the less and a wisdom of nothingness borrowed from Zen Buddhism, as well as an aesthetic of asceticism and restraint that take centre stage in his travel narratives, with a special attention to that 'moment' of wonder and the amazement which translates into a subtle, profound detail of everyday life pointing to a larger, deeper truth.

Such unexpected, suspended moments of grace and harmony are therefore presented by Bouvier as flashes of revelation guiding him to a more truthful, if still incomplete, understanding of Japan. "Japan and especially the Japanese summer blunts the attention you bring to things. ... But small moments of brotherhood break through occasionally. And you have to start with the small moments before thinking of the big ones" (p. 198). More eloquent than any commentary or analysis, a quiet, humble scene is observed by an exhausted traveller in an isolated bus station: in the morning half-light, an ice cream vendor and a lemonade man are leaning on the counter and listening, enraptured, to the recording of a traditional Japanese drama that has the "power to transport you to a different world" (*loc cit*). Ultimately, "the Japanese culture that we try to wrap up in discussions and explanations is only as impressive as it is spontaneous and 'of the moment'. This morning we were far from the erudite swooning that would ruin it" (*loc cit*).

Bouvier's travels to Japan leave him with a complex mix of euphoria and humility, a sense of serenity and fulfilment tempered by a feeling of inadequacy and lack of knowledge. Towards the end of his stay, he is captivated by the exquisite marvels of Kyoto, the heart and soul of Japanese culture, and expresses his fascination for its delicate, hushed intellectual atmosphere: "a subtle and aphoristic humour, ... a crystalline liberty, a lesson of all and nothing that I have

learned very poorly. It is time for me to pick up my knapsack and go live somewhere else” (p. 201). Still, the general underlying message of *The Japanese Chronicles* is an encouraging one, for it conveys the hope of a restored connection with the Other, across the centuries and across the divides: “Courage. We are much closer than we think, but we don’t always remember it” (p. 80).

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**Marguerite Yourcenar, from Japan to the Motherland:
The Oceanic Lack and the Wave of Time**

Alessandro Giardino

Abstract

Marguerite Yourcenar's reputation was built on philologically inspired novels featuring heroes of the Western tradition, such as the emperor Hadrian in *Mémoires d'Hadrien* and the partly invented figure of Zénon Ligre in *L'Oeuvre au noir*. Less known is Yourcenar's interest in Japanese culture, which, far from being limited to her late travels, she cultivated from an early age by reading all genres of Japanese literature. Not only are Yourcenar's Japonist writings undervalued, but they are normally treated by scholars as just another example of her universalism. In the existing scholarship on Yourcenar, short stories such as "Le dernier amour du prince Genghi," in *Nouvelles Orientales*, as well as "Basho sur la route," in *Le tour de la prison*, are often read as affirmation of her literary inclination to the philosophical aloofness of old age. Contrary to this interpretation, I will argue that Yourcenar's passion for Japanese culture was propelled by her desire to expand her epistemological schemes, while finding coping strategies for the unaddressed lack of her mother. In other words, Yourcenar was not only describing cultural differences but internalizing Eastern ideas on memory, loss, and the decaying body that would allow her to reclaim her past. These ideas, as well as Yourcenar's Japanese-inspired understanding of temporality and the afterlife, manifest themselves in her literary work in frequent images of rivers, sea waves, and tides with symbolic connotations.

Keywords: Yourcenar, Japan, waves, time, the afterlife, memory, the body, loss, motherhood

Introduction

Internationally acclaimed for her best-selling novel *Mémoires d'Hadrien*,¹ Marguerite Yourcenar remains a tutelary deity in the pantheon of French literature. To literary critics she is known as a formidable connoisseur of Western classics and antiquity, yet Yourcenar was also a fervent Orientalist and a meticulous scholar of Japanese culture, literature and philosophy. Home-schooled by an extremely liberal father, she began reading Japanese novels in her teens and appreciated the juxtaposition of Western and Eastern values. This is because, in advance of many of her contemporaries, Yourcenar understood that Japanese culture had approached the great existential themes of love, death and beauty from a psychological angle alternative to the European one. As she wrote herself, “I have thought more than once that my sensitivity would have been different if happenstance had not seen to it that I became acquainted with *Atsumori* and *Sumidagawa* at the same time as *Antigone*” (Yourcenar, 1981a, p. 346; as cited in Savigneau, 1993, p. 648). In examining such claims, previous critics had the tendency to convey an image of Yourcenar as a writer solely interested in “la pâte humaine” (the human “fabric”)² regardless of geographic boundaries. I will instead argue that the author’s positions on human nature were inspired by her early Oriental readings, as well as by an original appropriation of Japanese literature and philosophy that should help mitigate the critical tenet of Yourcenar’s universalism. Indeed, it is this paper’s objective to demonstrate how Yourcenar’s fascination with Japanese literature was not only directed toward the celebration of a particular type of human fabric, but also entailed a frequent recourse to images of rivers, sea waves and tides, in their connection to Buddhist ideas on temporality and loss. In their turn, these images foregrounded a coping mechanism that would allow Yourcenar to reclaim her motherland, as much as her own experience with motherhood.

¹ While in my analysis I will adopt the original titles of Yourcenar’s writings as well as the original names of her characters, I will use the official translations for quotations or excerpts, unless the translation is missing or not fully satisfactory for the purposes of this study. In such a case, I will provide my translation.

² The expression is used by Yourcenar herself (1980a, p. 217). It is then mentioned by various scholars with different connotations. Sperti (1988) connects the expression to what she defines as an autobiographical impossibility. Viala (2008) puts the emphasis on Yourcenar’s desire to situate her characters against a large historical background (p. 108). See also Bonali-Fiquet (1999, p. 81); Aleo, Campagne, & Puleio (1992, p. 468).

Japonism in Yourcenar

Yourcenar originally read Japanese texts of all genres in French and English translations, as her interests as a young writer were not selective. She approached a variety of works spanning Noh theatre and haiku poetry, and yet it was *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu that captivated her imagination more than anything else.³ In a fundamental passage of her long interview with Matthieu Galey that would be published as *Les yeux ouverts* (Yourcenar, 1984), Yourcenar confessed:

Whenever I am asked what woman novelist I admire the most the name Murasaki Shikibu comes immediately to my mind. I have extraordinary respect, indeed reverence, for her work.... [S]he was the Marcel Proust of medieval Japan: a woman of genius with a feeling for social gradations, love, the human drama, and the way in which people will hurl themselves against the wall of impossibility. Nothing better has ever been written in any language. (p. 87)⁴

Reflecting on her fascination with Murasaki, Yourcenar wrote that she particularly admired the way in which accidents, heartbreaks and deaths were, in the stories of this eleventh-century female writer, at once “tragic, delicious, and ephemeral” (ibid., p. 116; my translation).⁵ It thus comes as no surprise that these same emotional qualities would often coalesce in her own novels. In fact, Murasaki’s ability to express the ineffable constituted a constant point of departure for Yourcenar, who endeavored to emulate the author from her early writings to her late novels and essays.

Traces of Japonism can be found in Yourcenar’s early writings and experiments, and more evidently in *Nouvelles Orientales*, where readers find her first incontrovertible tribute to Chinese and Japanese culture. In particular, her two oriental tales set in the Far East—namely “Comment Wang-Fô fut sauvé” (set in China) and “Le dernier amour du prince Genghi” (set in Japan)—address the themes of death, beauty, and the decaying body in ways that anticipate

³ Savigneau (1993) highlights Yourcenar’s passion for the Japanese literary tradition, as well as her alignment of Noh Theatre and Greek tragedy (p. 346).

⁴ For this passage, I have used Goldhammer’s translation.

⁵ The original wording of Yourcenar, “à la fois tragiques, délicieux, et fugitifs” has been translated by Arthur Goldhammer “as combining tragedy, delight and a certain fugitive quality.” I propose a translation closer to the text in order to show how the three emotions are meant to overlap.

what would become Yourcenar's trademark approach to life.⁶ As well, there are striking similarities between the inner reflections of Yourcenar's successive Western heroes, Hadrien (*Mémoires d'Hadrien*) and Zénon (*L'Oeuvre au noir*), and those of Wang-Fo and Genji in the *Nouvelles*, so that even Yourcenar's presumed devotion to the Mediterranean must be reconsidered in light of its Japanization.⁷ What is more, in her monograph *Mishima, et la vision du vide*, Yourcenar (1980b) drew several analogies between the suicidal character of Zénon and the twentieth-century Japanese writer Yukio Mishima. Spanning fifty years, emotional patterns would thus resurface cyclically in the writer's works. Indeed, as Yourcenar herself wrote in the afterword to *Anna Soror* (Yourcenar, 1982), the human sensibility is not necessarily changed by time, and, in her writings at least, themes and emotions returned after several years like waves of an ever-present consciousness.

Temporality

Japanese Buddhism influenced the development of Yourcenar's most complex characters both within and outside her texts.⁸ By drawing on Yourcenar's belief in immutable sensibilities, it is possible to address her perception of temporality and her ambivalent relationship to motherhood, two topics often observed by critics yet seldom put into conversation. Within the context of this analysis, I would like to suggest that Yourcenar's internal sense of time was determined by the impossible trauma of losing her mother at birth, thus informing a visual imagery of sea waves and tides cyclically bringing wreckage to the shore. It is in fact no

⁶ It is important to clarify that, while the stories comprising the *Nouvelles* were collected and published in a single volume in the early 1960s, the two aforementioned stories had previously appeared in *La Revue de Paris*, in 1936 and 1937 respectively.

⁷ Catinchi (1995) relays Yourcenar's theory by which the Eastern world (L'Orient) creates a vivifying and erotic myth of life that the Western world (L'Occident) turns into tragedy. According to Catinchi, "Yourcenar found at a Mediterranean crossroad ... the trace of a line of descent by which the West attempted to reconnect with the founding East" (p. 227; my translation). Further, Real (1995), referring to Yourcenar's essay "L'Andalousie et les Hespérides," observed: "The Mediterranean is, in Yourcenar's view, an oriented space, magnetized by a positive polarity, the East—Greece.... In the East, there is an opening towards the Eastern world, that is towards a transcendental and magic way of thinking" (p. 195; my translation).

⁸ Commenting on the lack of substantial changes in the second edition of *Anna Soror* (Yourcenar, 1982), Yourcenar wrote: "If I insist on the essentially unaltered content of those pages, it is because I see them as the ultimate proof of that relativity of time whose obviousness has slowly dawned on me" (p. 242; my translation).

accident that in *Soleil noir* Julia Kristeva has coined the expression “oceanic lack”⁹ to describe this incapability of reckoning with the loss of one’s mother, as well as the ensuing emotional blockage. I will show how this archetypal imagery substantiates her descriptions of old age, as well as death, as disappearance. The modulations of this pattern and the function played by Japanese culture in its determination are therefore central to my reading of Yourcenar’s texts.

The main element of cultural dissonance that Yourcenar noticed in Japanese literature was a different perception of time.¹⁰ This Oriental temporality first struck Yourcenar in the Murasaki saga. She then corroborated her intuition through in-depth studies of Oriental philosophies and Japanese theatre, and ultimately through the examination of Yukio Mishima’s tetralogy *The Sea of Fertility* (Yourcenar, 1980b). When she finally appropriated this aspect of Japanese culture and made it her own, time in her fiction became circular—as opposed to progressing along a straight line—and also oscillated between density and rarefaction. Indeed, there is a marked difference in narrative structure between *Mémoires d’Hadrien* (Yourcenar, 1951), a novel unfolding primarily in chronological order, and the spatiotemporal circles run by Zénon in *L’Oeuvre au noir* (Yourcenar, 1968). *Le tour de la prison* (Yourcenar, 1991b), meanwhile, a collection of travel diaries and other impressions that Yourcenar penned in the last years of her life, is meant to mimic and evoke the circularity of Zénon’s journey away from and back to Bruges (which also echoes Yourcenar’s relation vis-à-vis Belgium, as her native land).¹¹ On the verge of suicide, Zénon observes “that the spiral of his travels had brought him back to Bruges, that Bruges for him had been reduced to the area of a prison, and that his destiny was ending on this narrow rectangle” (p. 351).

Afterlife

An obligation of current scholarship is to re-evaluate the role played by Yourcenar’s Japanese studies in refining her ideas on the afterlife, so as to curb the critical tendency to associate her Japonism with a specific phase of her career. For instance, Jan Walsh Hokenson (2002) has

⁹ The exact translation of the French “vide océanique” would be “oceanic emptiness”; yet “lack” seems to better render in English both the traumatic loss and the ensuing sense of emptiness.

¹⁰ In-depth studies of time throughout Yourcenar’s oeuvre can be found in Gaudin (1994). A concise yet effective analysis of the topic is in *Blot* (1984). Yourcenar herself addressed the topic in a number of essays that appeared separately and were then collected posthumously in a single volume (Yourcenar, 1993).

¹¹ As the author makes clear herself, the title is a quotation from *L’Oeuvre au noir* (Yourcenar, 1976) where Zénon exclaims: “Who would be so foolish to die without having at least done the tour of his prison” (p. 16).

argued that Yourcenar's familiarity with Noh Theatre from a very young age informed the imagery of early writings such as *Dialogue dans le marécage* by welding together Western and Eastern medieval traditions and infusing this play with the wisdom of both Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Japanese spirituality. More specifically, in Hokenson's view, the two lives of Yourcenar's Pia, her life of imprisonment and her after-life of revenge, and more importantly the way in which these two lives are tied to a specific location—that is, the tower where her jealous husband Sir Laurent imprisons her—recall the narrative structure of Noh. For Hokenson, however, the influence of Noh would subside in Yourcenar's later works. While agreeing with Hokenson on the impact exerted by Noh theater on 1930s France and on Yourcenar's treatment of death, I believe that the feeling of the “phantasmatic” derived from Noh was for Yourcenar more than a juvenile infatuation. Indeed, throughout her *oeuvre* the “phantasmatic” appears in either anthropomorphic or natural forms, with a particular insistence on images of waves or rivers: natural symbols of that eternal return which Yourcenar learned from Japanese Buddhism.

In Yourcenar's early Oriental tale “Le dernier amour du Prince Genghi,” the writer imagined a conclusion to Murasaki's eleventh-century saga *The Tale of Genji* by elaborating on the death of Prince Genji, which had been left unaccounted for by the Japanese writer. Notably, she designed a conclusion whose content could have stemmed from eleventh-century culture, but she also recreated the rhythm and sensibility of Murasaki's writing, all the while reflecting on Buddhist reincarnation. In the story, we read of Genji's last days when, having been forced to leave the court and adopt the life of a hermit, the old man is blessed with the love of a younger woman whom he eventually decides to reject. However, as the narrative continues, we learn that this woman is not the peasant she pretends to be, since she had previously served as the fifth lady-in-waiting of the prince and, importantly, as one of his many mistresses. Incapable of renouncing the prince's love and attention, she returns to him under various disguises, and finally convinces him to accept her in his company. But the story concludes with a gust of tragic irony. In the hours preceding his passing, Genji commemorates and celebrates all his past loves (including the two different women his old mistress has pretended to be) but inexplicably forgets the name of the fifth lady-in-waiting.

While readers remember “Le dernier amour du prince Genghi” for its salacious nature and the cynical irony of its ending, the story also offers evidence of Yourcenar's robust attempt to

incorporate Buddhist ideas on the afterlife within a Japanese setting. On his deathbed, Genji exclaims:

I cannot complain of a destiny I share with the flowers, the insects, and the star.... I am not sorry to know that objects, beings, hearts are perishable, because part of their beauty lies in this misfortune. What pains me is that they are unique.... Other women will blossom, as striking as those I once loved, but their smile shall be different, and the beauty spot that was my passion shall have moved along their amber cheek barely an atom's width. (Yourcenar, 1985, p. 67)

Having been drawn to Buddhist theories connecting life and afterlife through the return of the ever-changing as early as 1937, Yourcenar was still relying on physical clues such as the “beauty mark” in her attempt to illustrate the successive lives of the “same.” This is because, at this stage, her knowledge of Buddhism was grounded in Japanese folklore and literature. However, when readdressing the topic of Buddhist reincarnation within the context of her critique of Mishima’s tetralogy fifty years later, Yourcenar would rebuke the Japanese author for his use of the “beauty mark.” Indeed, by the late 1970s, Yourcenar had more thoroughly studied Buddhist philosophy and had consequently learnt to see this choice as a vulgarization of the former. Yourcenar (1986) affirmed that “[the] insistence throughout the four volumes of the *Sea of Fertility* on the three beauty spots which appear at the same place on the pale skin of Kiyoaki, the swarthy skin of Isao, and the golden skin of the Thai princess irritates rather than convinces” (p. 65). Far from being a question of resurfacing physical appearances, for Yourcenar the “fantasmatic” had now to represent the resurgence of an attitude or behavior which serendipitously threw the observer back to a significant moment of his or her past life. This was, according to Yourcenar, what Buddhist theory predicated, and this was the effect she had tried to conjure up in her works from the mid-1960s on. A now more erudite Yourcenar could in fact specify that the Buddhist denial of “being” and its emphasis on the notion of “passage” had to be considered in terms of conservation or dispersal of energy (ibid., p. 60). It was this more ethereal representation of Buddhism that Yourcenar would integrate into her late work.

Memory and the Suffering Body

As she continued to contemplate the return of the ever-changing, Yourcenar’s great themes of memory and loss progressively acquired depth but also levity. The loss of memory which had

led to tragic consequences in her early work generated lighthearted existential interrogations in her late productions. For instance, whereas in her Genji tale the fifth lady-in-waiting had reacted to her obliteration from the list of mistresses with a theatrical expression of emotional and physical pain, in writing on Mishima's *The Temple of Dawn* several years later, Yourcenar (1986) celebrated the Japanese characters' subdued acceptance of oblivion. By focusing on the conclusion of Mishima's novel, Yourcenar not only depicted a Satoko incapable of remembering her connection to Kioyaki and Honda, but also ended her analysis with Satoko's quote, "memory is like a phantom mirror. It sometimes shows things too far distant to be seen, and sometimes it shows them as if they were here" (p. 92). For Yourcenar, time had thus acquired the quality of dreams, so that what we remember is nothing but fragments of life cyclically and somewhat creatively brought to the surface. Based on these philosophical ideas, then, in *L'Oeuvre au noir* Yourcenar (1968) would build the character of Zénon as, arguably, the most "Japanese" of her Western protagonists. At the end of his life, Zénon claimed: "Life itself ... as regarded by a man who was about to leave it, was also acquiring the strange instability of dreams, with their peculiar sequence of events" (ibid., p. 307). In fact, having been deprived of all teleological hopes, including the hope of being remembered, Zénon, just as Honda, Genji, and the majority of Yourcenar's characters, ended up with nothing left but a decaying body—that is, a body for which pain represented the only gateway to knowledge.

In "Basho sur la route," an essay dedicated to the famous seventeenth-century poet and included in *Le tour de la prison*, Yourcenar defends a type of knowledge derived from the passive experience of life, as opposed to the active experience of learning. She explains, "[to] suffer is a Japanese faculty, pushed sometimes to masochism; yet the emotion and the knowledge in Basho are born from this submission to the event or the accident" (1991b, p. 15; my translation). Similarly, in treating Yukio Mishima as a modern Basho and by focusing in particular on the rigor of his daily training, Yourcenar suggests that for the Japanese writer the body was intellectualized to a high degree—that is, it was seen as an instrument of knowledge. Besides, as Yourcenar underlined, this principle was already valued in Greek and Latin cultures as "ou mathein, alla pathein" or "non cogitare, qui non experitur," two expressions she translated as "ne pas s'instruire, mais subir (Yourcenar, 1980b, p.87; "not to learn, but to experience" (my translation)). Interestingly, when meditating on the concept of passivity in relation to her own life, Yourcenar (1984) described it once again with an aquatic metaphor:

“One must toil and struggle to the bitter end, one must swim in the river that both lifts us up and carries us away, knowing in advance that the only way out is to drown” (p. 260).¹² For Yourcenar, *subir* (to suffer) means accepting death rather than pursuing it. Hence, in examining Mishima’s final resolution, she adopts the perspective of the Buddhist priest who, at a distance of centuries, walks among the ashes of the forty-seven Ronin who killed themselves by ritual *seppuku* and reflects upon the absurdity of dying over a question of etiquette—though she also admits “everything is absurd” (ibid., p. 75; my translation). For the same reason, the severed heads which outlive Mishima and his companion after their suicide appear to Yourcenar more heroic than the two men since, through their stolid existence, those heads give themselves naturally to their inevitable fate of consumption, disappearance and oblivion. The image of the wave (*vague*) that has so distinctly marked the visual art of Japan—hence Yourcenar’s imagery¹³—returns here once again as the agent of ultimate annihilation. In the conclusion of her monograph on Mishima, Yourcenar (1986) writes: “Two heads placed one next to the other as skittles, almost touching each other.... Two stones,¹⁴ rolled along by River of Action, which the immense *wave* has for a moment left upon the sand, and which it then carries away” (pp. 151–52; my emphasis).

Conclusion

In an apparently unrelated episode in her travel diary *Le tour de la prison*, Yourcenar once again utilized the image of the wave to reiterate, *mutatis mutandis*, her theory of death as disappearance. In the passage, Yourcenar is distractedly leafing through an old number of the weekly magazine *Life* found in an American motel, when she notices “[a] snapshot of a woman seen from the back” (1991b, p. 40)—a picture, she added, presented by the magazine without

¹² Peyroux (2003) underlines that Yourcenar learned this code of conduct from Buddhist monks and Japanese gardens.

¹³ The visual component of Japanese and Chinese culture plays a very significant role in Yourcenar’s writings. As reported by Bérangère, Yourcenar showed her a book of Japanese paintings which occupied a central place in her study, by confessing, “Hokusai has as much to show us as Piranesi does.... I would have been a painter ... had I not got into my head in the 1920s to write all these books” (Deprez, 2009, p. 157). It is of particular significance that the famous painting *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Hokusai was on the first page of the book in Yourcenar’s study.

¹⁴ In my view “wreckage” would be a better translation of the French word “épaves.”

any caption or explanation, and uniquely chosen for its beautiful, exceptional, captivating nature. And yet the writer knows the choice was not casual. She explained:

This picture, undoubtedly taken during a trip to California by a husband or a son further back on the beach, had gained the honors of the week because, following the click, a huge tidal wave had taken away the woman, together with the hat she had bought at a department store, the jacket, the bag, the identity papers with the portraits of her children and grand-children. What had been a recognizable shape, cherished or maybe despised ... had merged into the sea in one fell swoop.... I have returned to this woman in my mind several times. I think of her still. At the present time, I am possibly the only person on earth who still remembers who she once was. (ibid., p. 42; my translation and emphasis)

Yourcenar herself first saw her mother's image at the age of thirty-four through a fortuitously found picture, and it is therefore possible that this apparently insignificant tale of memory and oblivion represented an unconscious tribute to the author's own experience of loss and retrieval. On the other hand, just as in the case of the unknown woman made famous by *Life* magazine, Yourcenar—herself in the process of dying, herself disappearing—was probably the only person who still held the memory of who “she” (her mother) once was. Eventually, as this memory had been brought to the surface by a fortuitous encounter, a tenuous and somehow paradoxical hope for reminiscence arose.

In *Yourcenar, ou le féminin insoutenable*, Doré (1999) argued that following the classic pattern of denial, Yourcenar repeatedly insisted on the insignificance of her mother's death both in her childhood and later in life. Doré also suggested that wrecked objects silently convey a sense of loss. He wrote: “The absence of objects of affection belonging to the mother is affirmed, confirmed and acknowledged by means of a lexicon that brings together erosion, depreciation, and dispersion” (p. 21; my translation). According to Doré, then, writing itself came to substitute for maternal relics for Yourcenar. It is my opinion, instead, that Yourcenar's imagery of “wrecked” objects, waves, and sea tides situated mourning at the very origin of her sense of temporality and memory. In her *Essais et mémoires*, when referring to the plethora of objects left behind by the mother at the moment of her death, Yourcenar (1991a) wrote:

We know that these knick-knacks have been dear to someone, useful even, precious especially in that they helped to define or elevate the image that this person made for herself. Yet the death of their owner made them as vain as those accessories or toys that one finds in tombs. Nothing can better prove the

insignificance of the human individuality we hold so dear than the expediency with which the few objects supporting and maybe symbolizing that individuality have either perished, deteriorated, or gotten lost. (p. 748; my translation)

However, by a twist of fate—and also by a paradoxical twist of her system of thought—Yourcenar proved that such a loss is never definite. As for the woman swept away by the wave, oblivion can always be undone. It suffices for that same wave to come again, leaving on the seashore of consciousness wreckage or traces of what once was,¹⁵ whether those traces are objects of affection, a mother lost, or a writer on the verge of extinction. Starting off from the oceanic lack determined by the premature death of her mother as well as from phantasmatic memories of uterine life, Yourcenar found in Japan the ultimate escape from her present condition, but also a philosophical strategy enabling her to reckon with the past by recasting and reappropriation. Equipped with this new sense of temporality, Yourcenar would then return to more familiar shores, that is, as a wave in full circle, to the sea, to the womb, and to her mother.

¹⁵ In rehashing the circumstances of her meeting with Jeanne de Reval—her mother’s best friend and a paradigmatic example of motherhood—Yourcenar wrote (1991a): “Some big splashes are scattered through the land at low tide, as the fragments of an infinite broken mirror” (p. 1273; my translation). Once again the tidal wave is used to symbolize the action of time.

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**Green Gowns and Crimson Petticoats:
Prostitution and the Satire of Material Desire in Middleton and Jonson**

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Abstract

This paper explores representations of prostitution and the satirical criticism of material desire in Thomas Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* (1604) and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613) and Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). In *Michaelmas Term*, a "pestiferous pander" lures a beautiful country lass to the city where she is overwhelmed by the fashionable clothing and material delights that prostitution offers and agrees to become a wench. In another Middleton play, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, a couple agrees to prostitute the wife in exchange for an extravagant life far above their designated social class. In Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, the pig-woman, Ursula, along with her pimps, draws city wives into prostitution by tempting them with sumptuous clothing. This paper argues that although Middleton and Jonson approach the cultural phenomena of prostitution and conspicuous consumption differently, both of them blame the propensity to consume exotic fashion and luxuries on women and focus on how women's material desire seduces them to enter the sex trade. Past critics have never directed their attention to the men's vanity toward wealth-conferred status and their anxiety toward women's agency under the mercantile market economy in these works. As revealed in Middleton and Jonson's plays, the male resistance not only illustrates the early modern Londoners' fear of acknowledging themselves as active participants in the emerging proto-capitalist economy, but also discloses their apprehension in losing patriarchal control, especially in a society where women's chastity is no longer sacrosanct.

Keywords: material desire, prostitution, conspicuous consumption

In medieval London, prostitution was deemed a threat but tolerated by the civic administration. As Ruth Mazo Karras (1989) observes, although prostitution was considered to threaten the patriarchal social order in this period, brothels were seen as “a necessary evil” and recognized by municipal authorities as a sexual outlet to ensure that sinful men would not corrupt chaste women or even turn to sodomy (p. 399). By the end of the sixteenth century, due to the enactment of the enclosure movement, the changing market economy, and rapid population growth, England suffered unprecedented economic depression (Amussen, 1988, pp. 64–67; Kinney, 1990, p. 19, pp. 24–25; Singh, 1994, p. 25; Underdown, 1985, pp. 20–33). Owing to the enclosure movement, significant numbers of poor, dispossessed women were compelled to migrate to London for employment opportunities (Underdown, 1985, pp. 20–33; Kinney, 1990, p. 19).¹ Therefore, as Jean E. Howard (2007) notes, by the end of the sixteenth century bawdy houses were widely spread throughout London, and prostitution became one of its most serious social problems (p. 126).²

While the sex trade allowed women to acquire economic independence, it threatened to disrupt, or even subvert, the established patriarchal hierarchy. Frederick Engels (1942) argues that primitive family was primarily matriarchal (pp. 42–43), but as society advanced and wealth increased, men overthrew women’s supremacy in the family to secure the inheritance rights of their children. Men took command in the home, degrading and reducing women to servitude (*ibid.*, pp. 49–50). Keith Wrightson (2000) maintains that early modern society was primarily male-dominated, and women were simply taken as helpmates (pp. 30–68). The Jacobean city comedies that I will discuss in this paper delineate early modern women’s acquisition of economic independence through the sex trade; in the meantime, they also reflect early modern

¹ Previous Renaissance historians and literary critics have considered poverty as the primary reason for early modern women to become prostitutes. For example, Ruth Mazo Karras and Paul Griffiths contend that many young women became prostitutes in London because they were unskilled and came to the capital without any interpersonal connections (Karras 1989, p. 420; Griffiths 1993, pp. 50–51). Jyotsna Singh (1994) argues that the high unemployment rate, population displacement, and the early modern tendency to devalue women’s labor (such as spinning) all contributed to women’s selling their bodies in the capital (pp. 28–29). Jean E. Howard (2007) notices that the Elizabethans experienced serious economic infringement in the 1590s. During that moment of economic depression, many women migrated to London for employment opportunities, only to find themselves being excluded from most of the guilds, and were forced to become prostitutes out of financial necessity (p. 126).

² In his research on early modern prostitution, Wallace Shugg (1997) finds that crimes committed in the brothel districts had, by 1546, reached a threshold where Henry VIII had to issue a proclamation to close all establishments of prostitution; however, the eradication of the suburban brothels did not suppress prostitution. Instead, it helped spread the prostitutes around the city and led to serious social problems (pp. 294–99).

men's anxiety that they would lose patriarchal dominance.³ In Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* (1605–06), a country girl is seduced to London by a “pestiferous pander” in the hope that she can shed her humble country origins for social advancement in the city. Tempted by a glamorous satin gown, she agrees to become a prostitute to enjoy a luxurious city life. In Middleton's other play, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613), a husband allows his wife to be the mistress of a degenerate gentleman in exchange for a costly life far above their social class. In Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), the Puritan husbands (as represented by Proctor John Littlewit) and the city administrators (as represented by Justice Overdo) neglect their husbandly duties and patriarchal control so as to let the bawds and pimps seduce their wives through the promise of wearing sumptuous clothing and the enjoyment of comfortable city life. By examining the discourse of whores, pimps, and bawds in these plays, I argue that due to the emergence of proto-capitalism, the early modern Londoners were greatly tempted by their material desires but fought with their consciences about obtaining and enjoying luxuries. The city comedies I research reflect their struggle to possess and enjoy luxuries and their ambivalence about surviving in a transitional world where wealth was beginning to displace hereditary rank. These plays, as a whole, reveal strong male resistance toward the mercantile market economy. Such resistance not only illustrates the early modern Londoners' fear of acknowledging themselves as active participants of a proto-capitalist market economy, but also discloses their apprehension about losing patriarchal dominance. Before I closely examine the plays, I will explain why clothing became a luxury in this period and how the playwrights criticized women's material desire, extending it to satirize women's trafficking their bodies to acquire sumptuous apparel. While the emerging proto-capitalist economy awakened women's materialistic desire, women's new search for financial independence provoked male anxiety that they would lose patriarchal control.

In her introduction to *Michaelmas Term*, Gail Kern Paster (2000) notes that in Elizabethan England, clothing distinguished social rank, but after the repeal of the sumptuary laws in 1604, clothing came to mark wealth rather than social status (p. 35). Historian Lawrence Stone (1967)

³ Prostitution-related material was ubiquitous in late-Tudor and early-Stuart plays. I chose these three plays because they tend to reinforce a moralistic, patriarchal world. However, there are other plays that portray prostitution from different socioeconomic perspectives. For instance, Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's collaborative work, *The Roaring Girl* (1611), describes the historically notorious whore, Moll Cutpurse, who often cross-dressed as a man and led an economically independent life as a prostitute. Thomas Dekker's plays, *The Honest Whore, Part I* (1604) and *The Honest Whore, Part II* (1604–05) delineate the converted whore Bellafront, portraying her conversion from a courtesan to an honest city wife.

remarks that clothing was originally “a status symbol” of the aristocracy, but it gradually evolved into “a vehicle for conspicuous consumption” for Londoners, and their pursuit of sumptuous clothing was so zealous that even foreign observers were shocked by their fashion consciousness (p. 257). Historian F. J. Fisher (1948) found that by the early seventeenth century, Londoners were so obsessed with fashion that they sometimes sold their land in exchange for fashionable apparel (p. 46). Howard (2000) discovered that by the early seventeenth century, Londoners started to be fascinated with foreign imported fashions and fantasized about lavish lives far above their designated social classes (p. 151).

All the above-mentioned references display a close connection between the Londoners’ zest for extravagant clothing and conspicuous consumption, but Ian W. Archer and Karen Newman clearly illustrate the link between women’s material desire and their conspicuous consumption of clothing. In “Material Londoners,” Archer (2000) argues that the increasing consuming power of women and youth evoked male anxiety and was considered a threat to the patriarchal social order (pp. 184–86, esp. p. 184). As Archer’s research shows, this evocation propelled the early modern moralists to conflate the desire for luxuries with women’s sexual desire and their disobedience (ibid., p. 186). Newman (1991) argues that consumption was seen as an activity to which women were conspicuously as well as dangerously prone, and she claims that early modern Englishmen, especially those pamphleteers, blamed imported luxuries and sumptuous clothing for stimulating women’s material desire and luring them to traffic their bodies for luxurious material enjoyment (pp. 131–43). This early modern male anxiety toward women’s insatiable material desire and their propensity to conspicuous consumption is also revealed in Middleton’s *Michaelmas Term*, in which a country girl is seduced by sumptuous clothing to enter the city’s sex trade.

In the play, a country girl is inveigled to London by a pander, Dick Hellgill, and is immediately taught that material ornaments, such as “wires and tires, bents and bums, felts and falls” outweigh her virginity (1.2.15).⁴ As Howard (2007) notices, this country girl is given no name except “the generic one” of Country Wench, and as one of Middleton’s habitual dramatic designs in crafting symbolic names for his urban characters, “Country Wench” is a constant pun to remind his audiences that this woman is brought to the city explicitly for “country

⁴ Subsequent citations of the play are taken from *Michaelmas Term*, edited by Gail Kern Paster (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000).

matters” (p. 131). Hellgill first instructs the country girl that if she wants to live in the city like a “gentlewoman” (1.2.7) and to gain “better advancement” (1.2.20), she should become a prostitute. The pander clearly tells the Country Wench that “Virginity is no city trade; / You’re out o’th’freedom when you’re a maid” (1.2.45–46), and attempts to use a prostitute’s elaborate costumes to seduce the girl. The Country Wench initially resists but cannot hold on when the pander lays before her a satin gown. For her, to shed her “servile habiliments” (humble country clothes) (1.2.6) and to assume a prostitute’s elaborate costumes is simply a change of wardrobe, but for Middleton as well as his contemporary audience, her change of clothing indicates not only an erasure of her past, but also her degeneration from a chaste maid to a corrupt whore.⁵

In an aside, Hellgill comments: “So, farewell wholesome weeds where treasure pants, / And welcome silks where lies disease and wants” (1.2.53–54). The pander’s remarks pointedly capture the connection between a prostitute’s sumptuous clothing and her eventual contraction of venereal disease and dying in foreseeable poverty. As Paster (2000) observes, for a whoremonger such as Hellgill, the Country Wench is merely a piece of marketable commodity—as “man’s meat” to be fed to satisfy man’s carnal desire (p. 28).⁶ Her value as a commodity far outweighs her maidenhead. For the Country Wench, the city represents a world of fashionable clothing and material luxuries, and she readily abandons her simple and virtuous life in the country to explore a more exciting life in the city. However, her exchange of humble country clothes for the city whore’s elaborate costumes resembles the allegorical figure Michaelmas Term’s doffing of his white cloak of the country to don the black gown of a lawyer or a city official in the play’s Induction (1–5). Similar to the Country Wench, when Michaelmas Term arrives in the city, he immediately discards his conscience to opt for the evil and cunning city life. Here, Middleton presents the city as a man-devouring and conscience-erasing world to which simple and virtuous country folks are lured and where they lose their conscience.

In Act III, scene i, the Country Wench undergoes a total makeover by a tailor and a tirewoman.⁷ As one would expect, the whole scene is replete with bawdy, sexual innuendos.

⁵ For the cultural connotations of clothing and the constructions of social identities, see Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000); Mathew Martin, “[B]egot between tirewomen and tailors’: Commodified Self-Fashioning in *Michaelmas Term*,” *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 5.1 (1999): 21–36; and Paster’s discussion in the introduction of *Michaelmas Term*, especially pp. 20–32.

⁶ The phrase “man’s meat” is actually delivered by The Country Wench in the play. See 1.2.58–59 in Paster, 2000.

⁷ According to Gail Kern Paster, a “tirewoman” here refers to “one who assists at a toilette, especially at

The tirewoman, Mistress Comings, suggests that the Country Wench adopt a hairstyle “still like a mock-face behind” because “[t]is such an Italian world, many men know not before from behind” (3.1.18–20). Howard (2007) points out that Mistress Comings’s suggestion alludes “knowingly to the supposedly Italian vice of anal intercourse” (p. 132). The Country Wench’s transformation after her total makeover can be best shown via the way she readily adopts the lewd discourse of a city whore, as she replies to Hellgill, “Out, you saucy, pestiferous pander! I scorn that, i’ faith” (3.1.28), and the pander joyfully comments: “Excellent, already the true phrase and style of a strumpet” (3.1.30).

Deeply impressed by the Country Wench’s transformation, Hellgill cannot help but exclaim over clothing’s power to erase one’s humble origins and its potential to construct new social identities: “You talk of an alteration; here’s the thing itself. What base birth does not raiment make glorious? And what glorious births do not rags make infamous? Why should not a woman confess what she is now, since the finest are but deluding shadows, begot between tirewomen and tailors?” (3.1.1–5). Hellgill’s quasi-moralizing comment reminds Middleton’s audience of the Induction, where the metaphysical dramatic figure Michaelmas Term discards his white country cloak of conscience to don the lawyer’s black gown. Indeed, the Country Wench’s abandonment of her virginity and humble country clothes and her adoption of a city whore’s sumptuous costumes illuminate a pathetic moral corruption hidden beneath her beautifully refined exterior. In the play, this makeover is so total that even her father fails to recognize her, but his brutally honest comment discloses this inside–outside discrepancy in the very same woman: “Thou fair and wicked creature, steeped in art! / Beauteous and fresh, the soul the foulest part” (1.3.290–91). To defend her degeneration into the sex trade, the Country Wench argues:

Do not all trades live by their ware and yet called honest livers? Do they not thrive best when they utter most and make it away by the great? Is not wholesale the chiefest merchandise? Do you think some merchants could keep their wives so brave but for their wholesale? You’re foully deceived, an you think so. (4.2.11–16)

hairdressing.” See note 24 in Paster (2000), p. 56.

Playing with the pun between “wholesaling” and “hole selling,” the Country Wench explicitly renders her sexual services as a “trade”—selling holes—which is no different from any other city trade.

In the final courtroom scene, the Scottish gentleman Lethe is forced to marry the Country Wench as his deserved punishment for pandering sex in the city. In the play, the Country Wench uses a whore’s attire to erase her humble origins in the city and elevate herself from her modest country birth to a respectable gentlelady-ship. Here, sumptuous clothing has helped obscure or even liquidate female identity in the urban milieu. For the Country Wench, clothing not only erases her humble social origin, but also constructs a new social identity for her. In this play, she manages to elevate her social status via trafficking her body. Middleton shows how the city degrades and demoralizes innocent folks with its materialistic lures. His work reflects a world undergoing rapid socioeconomic changes—a world where conventional value judgments of the middling sort seem to be obscured and distorted by people’s desire for material luxuries, a world where men only care for the ostensible appearances and display of women no matter whether they are chaste or not.

In another Middleton play, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (written in 1613, published in 1630), the playwright portrays a willing cuckold who pimps his wife for material enjoyment. At the beginning, the cuckold Mr. Allwit details the pleasure of pimping and extracting his wife’s sexual labor for material wealth over the course of the previous ten years:

I thank him, he’s maintained my house this ten years;
Not only keeps my wife, but ’a keeps me
And all my family. I am at his table;
He gets me all my children, and pays the nurse
Monthly or weekly; puts me to nothing,
Rent, nor church duties, not so much as the scavenger.
The happiest state that ever man was born to!
I walk out in a morning, come to breakfast,
Find excellent cheer; a good fire in winter;
Look in my coal house about Midsummer Eve,
That’s full, five or six chaldron new laid up;
Look in my backyard, I shall find a steeple

Made up with Kentish fagots which o'erlooks
 The water house and the windmills. I say nothing,
 But smile and pin the door. (1.2.16–30)⁸

From his discourse, we find this complacent cuckold pleased to have his wife's adulterer, Sir Walter Whorehound, fulfilling all his husbandly duties for him: furnishing a good table, rent, church and childcare duties, fire in winter, and even childbearing. We also come to realize that with Sir Walter's maintenance, the Allwits lead an extravagantly opulent life, much above their middle-class origins.

In the play, via his elaborate dramatization of Mistress Allwit's lying-in scene, Middleton displays the extravagance of a private mistress's life. At the beginning, Mr. Allwit catalogues the luxurious material ornaments and supplies in Mistress Allwit's lying-in chamber—the product of the sale of Mistress Allwit's body:

When she lies in—
 As now she's even upon the point of grunting—
 A lady lies not in like her: there's her embossings,
 Embroid'rings, spanglings, and I know not what,
 As if she lay with all the gaudy shops
 In Gresham's Burse about her; then her restoratives,
 Able to set up a young pothecary
 And richly stock the foreman of a drug shop;
 Her sugar by whole loaves, her wines by runlets.
 I see these things, but like a happy man
 I pay for none at all, yet fools think's mine;
 I have the name, and in his gold I shine. (1.2.30–41)

This catalogue of rich textiles and tapestries hanging on the walls and the fully stocked restoratives in his wife's lying-in chamber displays the material wealth that the Allwits enjoy

⁸ This and subsequent citations of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* are taken from Bevington et al., 2002, pp. 1453–1514.

by prostituting Mrs. Allwit. In this passage, we find that Mr. Allwit does not feel ashamed of pimping his wife; on the contrary, he is happy that he can enjoy the material luxury but does not have to pay for it.

As Janelle Day Jenstad's (2004) research shows, in early modern England, lying-in offered a venue for the pregnant woman and her husband to display their wealth and social status. The construction of a lying-in chamber involved the family's ability to show off their household space and to purchase sumptuous furnishings (p. 375). Due to the lying-in chamber's social and material signification, Jenstad argues that "lying-in must not be constructed as a private event"; the material display in the lying-in chamber "constituted a material system of signs through which social meanings were registered" (ibid., pp. 375–76). During a pregnant woman's lying-in period, the bedchamber was turned into a communal space where midwife, female friends and neighbors, and relatives visited, especially at the gossips' feast that followed the christening of the newborn baby. These women had ample opportunity to compare every aspect of the material display of the lying-in chamber, from furnishings (textiles, linens, bedding, curtains, hangings, and carpets) to food supplies (restoratives, spices, wine, and comfort food). At the bastard's christening, Mistress Allwit invites her neighbors and girl friends as gossips to her lying-in chamber. The luxurious display of her childbirth chamber evokes an implicit equation between the Allwits' wealth and the desirability of Allwit as an ideal candidate for husband (Jenstad, 2004, p. 390). From analyzing Middleton's lying-in scene and comparing it with the Countess of Salisbury's lying-in chamber,⁹ Jenstad concludes that Middleton was acutely aware of the differences between the mercantile standard of property-conferred status and the aristocratic standard of hereditary rank (loc. cit.). Living in a time of rapid social flux and reconfiguration, Middleton displays the contradiction between the two ways of conferring ranks in his portrayal of the lying-in scene.

Jenstad's research not only offers the audience a platform to think about Middleton's attitude toward wealth and hereditary rank, but also helps us further consider Middleton's attitude toward the sale of women's flesh for material enjoyment. For the Allwits, their household is a brothel in which Mistress Allwit sells her sexual favors to a single patron, Sir Walter Whorehound. In exchange for her sexual services, Sir Walter supports Mistress Allwit, her husband, and all their bastard children. As readers, we have to be aware that although Sir

⁹ The Countess of Salisbury was the wife of William Cecil, the second Earl of Salisbury and son of Robert Cecil.

Walter appears to be the titular supporter of the household, in reality it is Mistress Allwit who uses her body as an instrument of labor to support her family.

In the past, critics have pointed out that women are treated as marketable commodities in this play. Newman (2006) contends that in it women are “ware made up for commercial transactions” (p. 244). Swapam Chakravorty (1996) notes that Mr. Allwit takes his wife as his “personal capital” (p. 99). Rick Bowers (2003) asserts that Mr. Allwit pimps and extracts his wife’s sexual labor for his selfish ends and considers prostituting his wife as service-providing (para. 21). Arthur F. Marotti (1969) observes that although Sir Walter’s relationship with Mistress Allwit is illicit, he thinks of her as his “rightful possession” (p. 70), and he even condemns the willing cuckold for having sex with her: “I heard you were once offering to go to bed to her” (1.2.96–97). Both Mr. Allwit and Sir Walter consider Mistress Allwit a commodity, especially Mr. Allwit, who is not ashamed of prostituting his wife, but also converts the familial relationship and marital bonds with his wife into a business partnership. He takes prostitution as a trade like any others: “butchers by selling flesh, / Poulters by vending conies, or the like” (4.1.216–17), and allows his wife to go to bed with Sir Walter in exchange for a luxurious material life.

Here, Middleton focuses on how material desire erodes a couple’s conscience so as to let the husband pander his wife for an opulent life far above their social status. At the end of the play, when Sir Walter is hurt in a duel, the announcement of his supposedly fatal wound ends this unnatural parasitic relationship. At first, Mistress Allwit and her bastard children are all summoned to help Sir Walter restore his senses, but only to provoke his last “will” in curses. Seeing that there is no way to recoup Sir Walter’s benefits, Mr. Allwit and his wife decide that they are going to desert their “benefactor” in his hour of need. Here, Middleton further accentuates this couple’s moral depravity and their greed for material wealth by revealing their plan to move to the Strand and use the money Sir Walter left to them to establish a brothel there. Middleton definitely enlivens a couple whose conscience had been totally blinded by their material desire. For him, the lack of moral direction in family life is the bitterest satire of the proto-capitalist society. While Middleton delineates women’s fall from innocence to prostitution, showing a stark contrast between the country and city life, Jonson depicts the complete lack of innocence in city life and ridicules especially the Puritans and the middle class for their greed for money and luxuries. In *Bartholomew Fair*, he overlaps sexual desire with

material desire and singles out the Puritan and middle-class husbands' hypocritical negligence of religious, juridical, and patriarchal control.

In this play, Jonson harshly critiques his contemporary Londoners' zeal for imported foreign goods and extravagant clothing, especially for luxuries far above their designated social classes. Even the Puritan Proctor, John Littlewit, is proud that he can afford to buy a velvet cap and Spanish high shoes for his wife, who has the name of Win, and he is not shy to display his personal wealth and pride to Winwife, his mother-in-law's suitor (1.1.18–25).¹⁰ Winwife joins Littlewit to praise Win for her fine clothing and expresses his admiration for Littlewit's financial affluence (1.2.3–8). Here, Jonson does not glorify Littlewit's economic success and his ability to afford his wife conspicuous imported foreign fashions. Instead, he shows that in pursuing luxuries, this middle-class couple are leaving behind values of patriarchy and prudence, and considers Littlewit's indulgence as negligence of husbandly duty. However, the Littlewits are not the only characters in the play who are lured by their material desire. Justice Overdo, Jonson's allegorical figure for civil administration, is so preoccupied with scooping out the enormities (criminal behaviors) in the city that he also allows his wife, Mistress Overdo, to stray by herself in Bartholomew Fair, and subsequently be seduced by Ursula's prostitution ring via the promise of a city whore's sumptuous clothing and a comfortable city life.

If material desire tempts women to fall, then Jonson's pig-woman, Ursula, is a modern-day representation of Eve, the first woman who tempted man to fall, and her roast-pig booth is extended to represent the main harbor for all criminal activities. Previous literary critics such as James E. Robinson, Jonas A. Barish, Renu Juneja, Ian McAdam, and G. M. Pinciss, have noticed Ursula's association with Eve (Robinson, 1961, p. 71, 80; Barish, 1959, p. 5; Juneja, 1978, p. 342; McAdam, 2006, p. 428; Pinciss, 1995, p. 353).¹¹ In the play, Ursula is corpulent and works in an extremely hot environment. She claims to the thief and ballad singer Nightingale that her heavy sweat makes her like a garden pot and people can follow the S-shaped drips she makes to find her (2.2.47–55). This severe working condition propels Ursula to smoke and drink heavily (2.2.79–87). Her booth is not merely a commercial site where overpriced roast pigs are served; beer and ale are sold in false measures, and tobacco is

¹⁰ Subsequent citations of *Bartholomew Fair* are taken from Bevington et al., 2002, pp. 961–1066.

¹¹ In "Dramatic and Moral Energy in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*," Joel H. Kaplan (1967) furthers this association and argues that Ursula does not simply arouse people's appetite by the aroma of her roasted pig, but she also serves as "a purveyor of punk" that drives people's appetite to "lust and prostitution" (p. 146).

audaciously adulterated. It is also a hotbed for various criminal activities: it receives the purses that Edgeworth and Nightingale steal; it houses Whit's and Ursula's prostitution rings; and it covers for Knockem's audacious thievery. Ursula's arch-enemy in the play is named Justice Adam Overdo, who is Jonson's allegorical figure for corrupt juridical administrators. Overdo claims that he has been combating Ursula's prostitution and theft rings for the past twenty-two years (2.2.74–77). Suspecting that Ursula uses her roast-pig booth as “the very womb and bed of enormity,” he assumes a disguise in order to uncover underground crimes (2.2.109–10).

As Joel H. Kaplan (1967) points out, Bartholomew Fair serves as a base for the bawds, Captain Whit and Jordan Knockem, to lure honest city wives Win Littlewit and Mistress Overdo into the sex trade through the promise of material enjoyments, especially fashionable clothing above their social class (p. 147). Knockem seduces Win with a city whore's elaborate apparel—“wires,” “tires,” “green gowns,” and “velvet petticoats” (4.5.35–39)—while Whit lures Win by reminding her that if she turns into a prostitute, then she does not have to spend any money for all the comfortable and luxurious city delights in which she can partake—coach riding, playgoing, supper with gallants, and drunken revelry (4.5.37–38). However, luxurious clothing not only seduces honest city wives into becoming whores but also attracts potential customers and triggers business competition among prostitutes.¹² Fearing the richly dressed Mistress Overdo will challenge her market, the common whore Punk Alice harshly beats Mistress Overdo and angrily complains that “[t]he poor common whores can ha' no traffic for the privy rich ones. Your caps and hoods of velvet call away our customers and lick the fat from us” (4.5.67–69). Punk Alice's words, no doubt, demonstrate the fierce competition between city whores, especially in their competition over luxuriously elaborate costumes with a garish taste for color combinations.

In the final scene of *Bartholomew Fair*, when the Puritan husbands (John Littlewit and Justice Adam Overdo) discover their wives wearing the city whores' elaborate costumes among the puppet-show audience, they finally come to realize that their negligence of husbandly duties has left their wives subject to the seduction of sumptuous clothing and propelled them to turn into prostitutes by following their material desires.¹³ As Paul A. Cantor (2001) maintains, to

¹² Gustav Ungerer's (2002) research shows that prostitutes spent a significant amount of money on costly garments as “provocative signifiers of commodified sex” (p. 141).

¹³ Rene Juneja (1978) notes that at the end of the play, John Littlewit finally comes to realize that his wife is not simply a display idol, “the little pretty Win,” but a woman of flesh and blood and of desire. His negligence of her

epitomize Bartholomew Fair as “the new world of capitalism in a nutshell,” Jonson “makes prostitution as an integral part of the fair,” showing that “everything has its price in money and everything is up for sale”—even human flesh (p. 31). The wives’ willingness to sell their bodies in exchange for luxurious city delights demonstrates their desire for material wealth in a world of changing economic values.

The satires as revealed in Middleton’s and Jonson’s plays reflect how London underwent rapid socioeconomic changes in the early Jacobean period.¹⁴ Although whores, pimps, bawds, and brothels were perceived as sites and emblems of urban ills,¹⁵ these plays illustrate how London was changed as well as challenged by emerging proto-capitalism. In *Michaelmas Term* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, Middleton presents a world where wealth has surpassed moral censure, religious discipline, and juridical surveillance. In Middleton’s dramatic world, not only women, but also men, are ensnared by the allure of material enjoyment. Middleton’s prostitutes escape social censure and legal punishment, and their husbands do not fear to pimp their wives for luxuries. In *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson demonstrates the early modern male anxiety toward women’s proclivity for foreign fashion and imported luxuries. He presents a world where women are easily tempted by extravagant clothing and comfortable city lives, asserting that it is the husbands’ negligence of their duties as well as the lack of juridical control which allow the honest city wives be tempted by their material desire and fall into whoredom.

Although Middleton and Jonson approach the cultural phenomena of prostitution and burgeoning material desire differently, both of them blame the propensity to consume exotic fashion and luxuries on women and focus on how women’s material desire is what seduces them to enter the sex trade. In the meantime, they understate the Puritan and middle-class men’s

has almost let her “drift toward prostitution” (p. 353). Ian McAdam (2006) observes that Overdo’s fantasies about omnipotent control are finally “silenced” by his own wife’s affinity with whoredom. For McAdam, the unveiling of Win Littlewit and Mistress Overdo as whores re-establishes “the need for effective patriarchal control” and reminds the Puritan husbands of their more “mundane” (social and sexual) responsibilities (pp. 428–29).

¹⁴ For a comprehensive study of the socioeconomic exchanges in this period, see Wrightson, 2002.

¹⁵ Previous early modern historians and literary critics had shown that prostitution was considered a crime and social ill. Ian Archer (1991) points out that prostitution was seen as promoting social instability and sedition because brothels harbored runaway apprentices and vagrants (pp. 204–56). Jyotsna Singh (1994) argues that although under ostensible surveillance and restriction, prostitution was perceived as a crime in early modern England, and prostitutes were often associated with the criminal underworld (p. 11). Steven Mullaney (1998) lists the facilities that were deliberately kept apart from the city of London and argues that these brothels were put in the Liberties of London and under civil surveillance because they were potential sites for social disruption, and brothels were on the list (pp. 26–60).

vanity of showing off their financial affluence by displaying their wives with elaborate foreign clothing and even in prostituting their wives to enjoy a life far above their designated social status. All in all, living in the transitional world of emerging proto-capitalism, both playwrights are highly resistant to a world where women acquire agency and financial independence, a move that would be vividly and colorfully illustrated through the sex trade. By understating Puritan and middle-class men's hypocrisy in acknowledging their own material desire and monetary greed, Middleton and Jonson display a world where prostitution is harshly blamed underneath a misogynistic view that women are more easily lured by pretty things than men. In doing so, the satire of both playwrights relegates the roles of women and thereby reinstates patriarchal exploitation and commodification of women.

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Body and Gender Expressed by the Cross-Dressing of Hannah Snell
in Eighteenth-century Naval Culture
in *The Female Soldier; Or, the Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell*

Yoriko Ishida

Abstract

Hannah Snell is arguably considered the most famous woman who embarked on warships as a marine in men's clothes. Astonishingly, she was able to be involved with missions as a seaman for more than four years without anyone discovering her true identity. Although her experiences were portrayed in some magazines, such as *Gentlemen's Magazine* and *Scots Magazine*, and books published in Holland and England, her life entered history as fact through *The Female Soldier; Or, The Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell* by Robert Walker, a London newspaper printer. This paper addresses Walker's first edition as a primary source because it was written after hearing directly from Hanna Snell, which means it can be recognized as being closer to the truth than the expanded edition. I examine the significance of female cross-dressing aboard male-dominated naval ships by analyzing the body of Hannah Snell as depicted in *The Female Soldier*.

Keywords: Hannah Snell, cross-dressing, naval vessels, masculinity, femininity, women marines

Introduction

Hannah Snell can be considered the most famous woman to embark on warships as a marine dressed in men's clothes. Amazingly, she took part in missions as a seaman for more than four years without her true identity being discovered. Although her experiences appeared in *Gentlemen's Magazine* and *Scots Magazine*, and books published in Holland and England, her life entered history as fact through *The Female Soldier; Or, The Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell* (hereafter referred to as *The Female Soldier*) by Robert Walker, a London newspaper printer. The first edition of Walker's biography of Snell was published in 1750: a booklet of 46 pages rather than a book. However, a revised edition was published several months later, which was expanded to a 187-page book. While Robert Walker recorded Snell's testimonies so that most of her episodes can be recognized as historical facts, we cannot declare Walker's book a historical document because of the potential for her overstatements and Walker's overdrawing in order to provide added excitement to his book. However, Snell's episodes in *The Female Soldier* should be considered to approximate her real-life experiences as the only source telling us accurately about Snell's life. Having said that, I can mention *Hannah Snell: The Secret Life of a Female Marine 1723–1792* by Matthew Stephens as Snell's biography, published in 1997, which was informed by Walker's text.

This paper addresses Walker's first edition as a primary source because it was based directly on Hanna Snell's testimony, and thus may be interpreted as more of a valid version of the truth." I examined the significance of female cross-dressing aboard male-dominated naval ships by analyzing the body of Hannah Snell as expressed in *The Female Soldier or the Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell*.

Cross-dressing in Feminist Thought

Cross-dressing indicates that a person clothes him- or herself in the clothes of the opposite sex as generally understood in a given culture. Most cultures determine clothing rules depending on gender, and if a person fails to conform to these rules, he or she may be called a "cross-dresser." Cross-dressing is most commonly confused with a sexual proclivity. Certainly, from the viewpoint of fetishism, cross-dressing may be broadly interpreted as a sexual preference because some people are sexually aroused by cross-dressing. However, this paper argues that cross-dressing may be seen not only as a sexual preference, but also a phenomenon resulting from social, economic, and cultural environments.

The tradition of women's cross-dressing can be traced back as far as medieval times, but it was in the sixteenth century that there appeared a definitive notion of cross-dressing (Dekker & Pol, 1989). Dekker and Pol point out that it was not uncommon for women to disguise themselves as men in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and present as many as 119 examples of women who lived as men in Holland (ibid., p. 2). Moreover, they indicate that numbers of cross-dressing English women are comparable to those in Holland, corroborated by 50 examples from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (loc. cit.). Dekker and Pol state in their book *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* that

such women should not be categorised as incidental human curiosities, but that their cross-dressing was part of a deeply rooted tradition. In the early modern era passing oneself off as a man was a real and viable option for women who had fallen into bad times and were struggling to overcome their difficult circumstances. (ibid., pp. 1–2)

Furthermore, in *Cross-Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (1993), Vern and Bonnie Bullough define cross-dressing as an aggressive means to invade enemy territory, as it were, which has been detached from gender bias, and trace the history of cross-dressing men and women from various countries, times, cultures, and societies. Additionally, they reveal that cross-dressing is necessary to avoid the restrictive status of women in all periods of history (ibid., p. 116).

That is to say, women's cross-dressing enables social mobility, providing the ability to gain greater freedom and the opportunity to start something new. Therefore, while cross-dressing has the surface characteristics of a fetishism, it can extend far beyond sexual preference, showing a person's principles—that is, a sense of sufficiency gained by playing the role of the opposite sex.

When cross-dressing is mentioned as a means to play the role of the opposite sex, behind it we can notice how women were subjected to sexual discrimination during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To understand the advantages gained by women disguised as men, it is necessary to examine how women were restricted at that time. Whatever their class, women were confined to a domestic setting and were not permitted to be educated other than being trained in domestic duties. Women were not permitted to conduct trade, and, if they held jobs, their wage could be substantially lower than men's. Suzanne J. Stark (1998) declares that "it was beyond the imagination of most eighteenth-century men to think of a woman as a

responsible adult, capable of managing her own life” (pp. 94–95). For women, taking on a masculine role by cross-dressing meant improvement of their economic situation. As I have mentioned, women were controlled by men ashore, and they could not freely spend money, but through cross-dressing they could free themselves of such disadvantages. Even if such a manly role were hard work, women could carry on living on an equal footing with men by cross-dressing. For women at that time, cross-dressing was a sort of experiential policy to escape from social constraints, and it was an effective option to liberate them from being females.

Hannah Snell as a Marine in the Navy

a. Social and personal background of cross-dressing on naval vessels

As I mentioned in the previous section, in feminist thought, cross-dressing may be interpreted as a way of asserting that women ought to have the same rights which have been imparted only to men. In this context, Hannah Snell’s cross-dressing is one of many striking examples. Snell was born in Worcester on the 23rd of April, 1723. Her parents passed away when she was twenty years old, and, after that, she moved to London (Walker, 1989, pp. 3–4). She met James Summs, a Dutchman, and they married in 1744. Soon their marriage ended, when she became pregnant. She gave his daughter the name of Susanna, but she died just seven months after being born (ibid., p. 6). After her daughter’s death, woman though she was, Snell went to sea as a marine in men’s clothes in 1745. The reason was not just to play a manly role but as a kind of revenge on her ex-husband, who left her and made her and her daughter miserable. Understandably, it was impossible for women to join the crew of naval vessels, which meant that she had to rid herself of the cultural signals of her womanhood in order to be a “man.” She referred to herself as James Gray, the name of her brother-in-law (ibid, pp. 6–7).¹ Hannah Snell as James Gray joined Colonel Guise’s 6th Regiment of Foot in Coventry in 1745, the year after her husband died. In 1747, she enlisted in Colonel Fraser’s regiment of marines in Portsmouth and boarded the sloop Swallow (ibid, pp. 6–9).

Dekker and Pol (1989) state that many cross-dressed women in Holland became soldiers, especially in the marines, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries:

¹ Snell’s revenge was not satisfied in the sense that her husband remained ignorant of it until his death: she was informed by an Englishman in Lisbon that her husband was in jail on a murder charge (Snell, Lacy & Talbot, 2010, p. 5).

Of the 93 women we know had their professions as men, eighty-three were—or had at one time been—sailors or soldiers. Many of the soldiers were marines or were transported overseas to serve with the East or West India Company; a majority served with the navy. So more than half of the disguised women practiced a trade at sea. (p. 9)

The same is true of England. Stark (1998) points out that many disguised women were aboard warships, such as Anne Chamberlyne, William Prothro, and William Brown.² Interestingly, although male seamen tried to escape from warships if the opportunity arose, female marines in men's clothing never left ships of their own accord despite the hard labor and adverse environment aboard. At that time, it was not so difficult for young women to join naval ships in men's clothing. European countries, including England, were at war, and always short of marines in the Royal Navy. Higher officers did not examine the young volunteers' history in a careful manner because they grasped that most of them were people from the bottom of the social strata (Stark, 1998, p. 88). Stark states that "it is difficult for us today to appreciate how casually recruits were accepted into the navy. There was seldom any physical examination upon entry, nor was proof of identity required. Neither volunteers nor impressed men were 'sworn in' or 'signed on'; many were illiterate and unable to sign their names" (ibid, p. 89).

Needless to say, it was impossible for women to masquerade as men by cross-dressing and changing names in the communities where their identities had been revealed. The navy never required proof of identity and proved an ideal place to which women could escape. As the examples of William Prothro and William Brown as well as Hannah Snell indicate, when cross-dressed women tried to board naval ships, they used fictitious names, and it was because of the lax checks that most of them could succeed without discovery.

² Here I should briefly mention the other women marines cited. Anne Chamberlyne is the earliest-known woman marine. She joined her brother's ship and fought with the French in 1690. Although most women marines were from the lower classes, she came from the nobility. William Prothro served on the thirty-two-gun *Amazon* from 1760 to 1761. Her name as a marine appeared in the captain's log, the ship's muster, and a personal journal only with her male alias. The captain's log dated 20th of April, 1761, states that "one of the marines going by the name of Wm. Protherow was discovered to be a woman. She had done her duty on board nine months." William Brown was a black woman who served in the navy for over 12 years during the Napoleonic Wars. Her true name was unknown. She joined the navy around 1804 and left in 1816 or later. At that time, most black seamen were slaves and taken aboard naval vessels by slaveholders, but Brown was not a slave and voluntarily went to sea in consequence of a quarrel with her husband. After 1826, when she left the navy, she was never heard from again (Stark, 1998, pp. 8–88).

b. Paradoxes embodied in cross-dressed Hannah Snell's body on naval vessels

Beyond doubt, cross-dressed women were not always able to board warships and be qualified to work as marines. Such women's cross-dressing was always accompanied by risks of discovery. It is needless to say that their figure and other physical features exerted a significant influence on the effect they were able to achieve. Dekker and Pol point out that, while boarding ships was considered a perfect method of escape for women who were in men's clothes and performing manly jobs, at the same time, shipping was full of the risk of discovery:

So more than half of the disguised women practiced a trade at sea—precisely where, in fact, the chance of discovery was greatest. Privacy was at a minimum on ships and one lived for extended periods of time with the same group of about 150 to 400 men in a crowded forecabin.... The risks to a woman in disguise were many and varied: lack of privacy, illness, punishment, or an inadvertently bad performance could easily mean the end of the cross-dressing.³ (pp. 19–20)

On the other hand, Stark's interpretation is the opposite of Dekker and Pol's with regard to the risk of discovery. Dekker and Pol are negative and Stark is positive about the limited risk of discovery on board.

Once a woman had taken her place among the crew on the lower deck of her ship, there was no routine situation in which she was required to undress. Seamen seldom bathed, and they slept in their day clothes.... Reports of women seamen do not tell how they managed to deal with urination and menstruation, but it was not as difficult as it might seem. To urinate a woman could go to the "head" (the toilet facilities at the bow of the ship overhanging the water) when no one else was there.... The very fact that a ship was so crowded, and crowded with such a motley collection of people having various physical complaints, meant that the men tended to keep a psychological distance from one another. Their philosophy was to live and let live. They ignored, if they could, any strange behavior or evidence of sickness in their mates. Such circumstances aided a woman in hiding her menstrual periods. If someone noticed that a woman seaman was menstruating, he probably assumed that she was suffering from venereal disease, a common complaint of seamen. It is also possible that in some cases a woman's periods stopped because of the bad diet and strenuous physical activity on board. (Stark, 1998, pp. 89–90)

³ The few cases show how women sailors disguised as men were discovered as females as follows: "Watched by a boatswain" in the case of Anne Jans; "seen sleeping nude in her bunk by the cook's mate" in the case of Annetje Barents; "detected by a sailor while pissing, drunk" in the case of Claus Bernsen (Dekker & Pol, 1989, pp. 21–22).

Above all, Stark interprets crowded conditions on ships as advantageous for disguised women, unlike Dekker and Pol. While the latter argue that one's privacy in crowded places is virtually non-existent, the former insists that the very fact that a ship was so crowded meant that the men tended to keep a psychological distance from one another. This could keep disguised women safe from discovery.

Although we can grasp from the existing historical documents some examples of cross-dressed women on warships who were discovered in the end, we have no means of determining whether the number is large or small. However, considering the fact that judicial records or newspaper accounts were the media that informed us that many women in men's clothes went to sea, it is logical to think that Dekker and Pol's interpretation must be rational: in modern times we could not have known that many disguised women had been aboard warships if their true identities were not discovered during their duties. As Dekker and Pol (1989) mention that "this relatively great risk of discovery may have led to an overrepresentation of seafaring women" (p. 9), we can observe the paradox that a high risk of discovery onboard let us know that cross-dressed women went to sea.

It was not only daily activities, such as menstruation or urination, or carelessness, that expose disguised women's true identities. As mentioned in the previous section, there is a wide divergence of opinion about the risk of discovery, but commentators are in agreement about the risk of discovery in extreme situations. These include cases of being flogged or injured in combat, which could produce a fatal result for women marines in men's clothes, and, thus, their identity being discovered. Also, when they were wounded in combat women were also discovered during treatment (Dekker & Pol, 1989, p. 21; Stark, 1998, p. 89). That is, it matters little whether the odds were high or low that they were discovered to be a woman in daily life onboard. What is important here is the discovery in emergency situations. It could be important the extent to which they mentally identified with manly characteristics rather than simply the appearance of men's clothes. When women were aboard warships in men's clothes in the hope of avoiding disadvantages ashore, such as gender discrimination and poverty, it was requisite for them to have substantial qualifications for success as a marine: that is, to be equal to men in strength and bravery. In this sense, it was indeed extraordinary for Hannah Snell, who embarked on a naval ship in men's clothes, to risk death to show her strength and bravery.

There are two interesting episodes in *The Female Soldier* by Robert Walker which underscore Snell's masculinity: her experiences of flogging and of being wounded in combat,

in both of which cases most cross-dressed women marines could not have avoided being discovered. In 1746, a sergeant, who belonged to the same regiment as Snell's, tried to make sexual advances on a young woman during his embarkation, for which he ordered Snell to help him (unaware of her sex). However, she warned the woman of his plot, and Snell's action became known to him. The sergeant made a false charge by accusing her of neglect of duty as his revenge against Snell, which resulted in her being sentenced to receive 500 lashes (Walker, 1989, p. 8).

According to *The Female Soldier*, an example was made of her, with her arm extended and tied to the city gates and the lashes being administered on her bare back (ibid, p. 10). David Cordingly suggests that it should be fatal to receive only 200 or 300 lashes even for a man with a strong body (2007, p. 71). Despite his suggestion, Snell endured the 500 lashes, and she avoided discovery of her sex, which means that she possessed extraordinary bravery and strength in the same way as a man. Snell's masculinity shown by the flogging was to be further highlighted by her wounds in combat:

This Wound being so extreme painful, it almost drove her to the Precipice of Despair; she often thought of discovering herself, that by that Means she might be freed from the unspeakable Pain she endured, by having the Ball taken out by one of the Surgeons; but that Resolution was soon banished, and she resolved to run all Risques, even at the hazard of her Life, rather than that her sex should be known ... and her Pain being so very great, that she was unable to endure it much longer, she intended to try an Experiment upon herself, which was, to endeavour to extract the Ball out of that Wound.... She prob'd the Wound with her Finger till she came where the Ball lay, and then upon feeling it, thrust in both her Finger and Thumb, and pulled it out. (Walker, 1989, pp. 35–36)

In 1747, she joined the sloop *Swallow* as a marine and set off for India. In 1748, she took part in the siege of Pondicherry, where “she received six shot in her right leg, five shot in her left, and another shot in the groin” (Cordingly, 2007, p. 71). Not only did she bear these dreadful wounds, but, more amazingly, while the male wounded would have seen doctors, she did not allow them to treat the wound in her groin because she wished to avoid discovery of her sex, and she managed to extract the musket ball by herself. In the eighteenth century, when medical technology was still underdeveloped, such a serious injury may have been fatal. Yet Snell was able to recover enough to return to the naval ship as a marine in only three months.

The account of her wounds should be considered true because the Royal Hospital admission book contains a brief entry on the 21st of November, 1750, from which we can grasp the fact that Hannah Snell was “[w]ounded at Pondicherry in the thigh of both legs” (Cordingly, 2007, p. 71).⁴ Moreover, it is also described in the diary of Reverend James Woodforde as follows:

I walked up to the White Hart with Mr. Lewis and Bill to see a famous Woman in Men’s Cloths, by name Hannah Snell, who was 21 years as a common soldier in the Army, and not discovered by any as a woman.... The forefinger of her right hand was cut off by a sword at the taking of Pondicherry. (Woodforde, 1981, p. 224)

According to Reverend Woodford’s account, Snell was not only wounded by musket balls but also lost her right forefinger. Since his diary has been recognized as a well-authenticated historical document, we should be able to assume that the amputation of her forefinger was not fictitious.

Both of these accounts of injuries, along with the story of her flogging, show her remarkable strong body and emotional strength. Although such emergency occurrences could easily expose the true identities of disguised women onboard, in the case of Hannah Snell, the musket ball injury and the finger amputation rather served to highlight her masculinity instead of revealing her true gender.

Judging from the above, Snell’s masculinity is expressed not only by her cross-dressing but by her extraordinary strength and bravery, through which she could achieve success in playing the role of a man onboard. However, this leads on to another interesting question: whether she could “be” a man through her cross-dressing and her strength and bravery. Naturally, cross-dressing cannot enable an individual to transcend biological barriers of gender, but it seems that Hannah Snell was able to maintain a masculine persona, and her avoidance of her original identity to the end made her masculinity appear genuine. There is, however, more to it than this. A careful scrutiny of her strength and bravery leads to the conclusion that, behind her masculinity, we catch a glimpse of the secret purpose in concealing her true sex. Elizabeth Wilson (2003) offers her interpretation of cross-dressing as follows:

⁴ The Royal Hospital was founded by King Charles II in 1682 for treatment of veteran soldiers. Hannah Snell is one of two women who received a pension from this institution. The other was Christian Davis, who was also disguised as a man and fought in Marlborough’s campaigns as a foot soldier.

For one thing, women remain unequal, so while the trouser for women might symbolize a myth in western societies that women have achieved emancipation, it can hardly be interpreted as unproblematic of their status. If it were interpreted in this literal way it would certainly lead us to believe what many feminists believe is the case, that in so far as women have made progress in the public sphere of paid work, this has been on male terms and within the parameter of masculine values. (p. 165)

We can see a paradox behind Snell's strength and bravery that Wilson points out. Wilson insists that no woman could have success in breaking into the male-dominant world through their cross-dressing, emphasizing that they had no choice but to receive masculine values. Furthermore, Ackroyd (1979) also suggests that "female cross-dressing actually enhances the putative superiority of male culture" (p. 77).

The important point to note here concerns Hannah Snell's body as expressed in *The Female Soldier*, where we should not overlook the paradox that she could never escape her true sex however strong and brave she might be. She made many efforts to avoid her sex being discovered other than through her appearance, efforts described as punishing and torturing her body to its utmost limits. The more she shows her strength and bravery, the more her true sex became prominent. Herein lies a paradox, which is, as mentioned above, her masculinity as means to conceal her true sex should be rather considered to be highlighting it.

Although the principles of all feminist thought have the same goal, complete equality between men and women, feminists have evolved into webs tracing two contradictory attitudes: the sameness and difference of the sexes. In feminist thought, while it is orthodox attitudes that claim absolute sameness between men and women as a prerequisite to attaining complete gender equality, there is another stance that strongly stresses the characteristics of each sex—the difference between men and women—for gender equality (Firestone, 1970, pp. 6–15). These attitudes are seemingly in conflict with each other, but can be viewed as actually two sides of the same coin. Hannah Snell's cross-dressing onboard shows the two attitudes contained in feminism thought. Projecting "sameness attitudes," Snell was disguised as a man, behaved with bravery, and rejected all of her feminine characteristics in order to serve on naval ships, a male-dominated world, which can symbolize an assertion of the sameness between men and women in feminist thought. This sameness thus becomes an ideological ground for minimizing sexual difference. On the other hand, however masculine she seemed to be, she only masqueraded as a man through cross-dressing, so that it is self-evident that she was not

the same as a man, which can symbolize an assertion of the difference between men and women. That is, cross-dressing to eliminate gender difference resulted in highlighting it. Therefore, while cross-dressing for women was used as a means to acquire advantages permitted only to men, it simultaneously illuminates cross-dressers as females. This contradiction is embodied in Snell's cross-dressing, serving as a reminder of the two attitudes in feminist thought.

Hannah Snell in Her True Gender after Disembarkation

Interestingly, women disguised as men were judged completely differently from men passing as women. While men dressing as women were often subjected to criminal action, viewed as they were as displaying outrageous conduct demeaning men's dignity, women disguised as men were looked on with tolerance up to a point. The same is true of the naval ships. Above all, in England, the public tended to ignore women joining the navy in men's clothes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with some exceptions, and, even when the women were discovered, most of them were not found guilty of criminal action.⁵ Even if it was unavoidable for them to leave a ship after their discovery, their courage was sometimes praised in newspapers after their disembarkation (Stark, 1998).

As already mentioned in the previous section, Hannah Snell's cross-dressed identity was not discovered for more than four years. According to *The Female Soldier*, she voluntarily revealed her secret to a fellow marine around 1750:

Now upon receiving her Pay, and all her fellow Adventurers then present, she thought that was the most proper Opportunity she ever could have, for disclosing her Sex, seeing they could then testify the Truth of all the Fatigues, Dangers and other Incidents of her Adventures, and that her Sex was never discovered, which if then omitted, she might never have an Opportunity of seeing them all together again, and by that

⁵ Charles Wadall traveled from Hull to London after her lover. She got information that he was onboard the Oxford in Chatham, which made her decide to embark on the same ship in men's clothes. However, she was informed that he had fled. After that, she also tried to escape but failed and was ordered to be flogged. When she was discovered to be a woman, her sentence was rescinded. Moreover, surprisingly, she even received admiration and money from her superior. Margaret Thompson was disguised as a man under the name of George Thompson and was on board a warship in Deptford. There was a robbery aboard, and she was suspected of it because women's clothes were found in her sea chest, resulting in the ordering of a punishment of thirty-six lashes. She was able to escape the flogging by confessing her true gender (Stark, 1998, pp. 111–12). On the other hand, in the Netherlands, when women in men's clothing were discovered on warships, they were harshly punished. Dekker and Pol (1989) state that "the sentence for women who inadvertently betrayed themselves soon after actually entering service varied from some weeks to a year in a workhouse or prison, or they were condemned to exile, the pillory, or whipping" (p. 77).

Means, the Account of her Adventures as aforesaid, might be looked upon by the Public as fictitious. (Walker, 1989, pp. 38–39)

Additionally, *The Penny London Post* on the 27th of June, 1750, reported that she appealed to the Duke of Cumberland, her Naval Commander, for her pension as a marine, which was granted at £30 per month (Cordingly, 2007).

Now upon the Discovery of her Sex, her Relations, and some of her intimate Friends, advised her to apply by a Petition to his Royal Highness the Duke of *Cumberland*, not doubting but that his highness would make some proper Provision for her, as she had received so many Wounds. Upon which a Petition was drawn up, setting forth her Adventures, and the Hardships she underwent, together with the many Wounds she received, which she was the Bearer of herself, and coming where his Royal Highness then was in his *Laudau*, accompanied by Colonel *Napier*, she delivered her Petition to his Royal Highness, and upon his perusing it, gave it to the Colonel, desiring him to enquire into the Merits. So that it is not doubted but his Royal Highness will make her some handsome Allowance, exclusive of *Chelsea* College, to which she is entitled. (Walker, 1989, p. 40, original emphasis)

It is recorded that Snell was admitted as a veteran receiving a pension in an account of the Royal Hospital in Chelsea. It seems strange that Snell was permitted to receive a pension rather than punishment, since she cheated her superiors and colleague marines by assuming a false name and misrepresented her gender to be aboard the naval ships. However, her case supports Stark's position that disguised women onboard were not charged even if they were discovered. Furthermore, some newspapers reported that Hannah Snell appeared in theaters, commencing with the New Wells Theatre in London, as a singer after her retirement, through which she was catapulted into fame, especially by her sales point—"a woman marine in men's clothes"—and her fame spread throughout London (Cordingly, 2007).

However, what we should notice here is that, even if she was met with applause from the public, it does not always mean that she was welcomed as a hero. Stark's suggestion that although the public was interested in cross-dressed women marines they did not seriously respect them could be valid in the case of Snell. They decided that disguised women could not be equal with men, believing that the inferior were just imitating the superior (Stark, 1998). We can notice a sense of security behind the notion that the public did not feel threatened by disguised women. In other words, they liked to believe that disguised women would revert to

their “true” gender in the end. Indeed, almost all disguised women had no choice but to revert to their biological sex despite whether they exposed their identity by choice, like Snell, or were discovered against their will.

Snell reverted to her true gender after her retirement, which is indicated via two of her marriages. According to *The Universal Chronicle*, on the 3rd of November, 1759, she married Richard Elyse, a carpenter, and had sons George and Thomas with him. It was rumored that she was widowed by his death, but there is no historical record. After that, she re-married Richard Habgood on the 6th of November, 1772. Her second marriage can be recognized as a historical fact because Reverend James Woodforde was an observer at it, noting it in his diary (Cordingly, 2007). Even if Hannah Snell temporarily identified with males onboard, her two, later marriages suggest that she embraced her “natural” gender as female. As mentioned in the previous section, we can notice her purpose in concealing her femininity behind her cross-dressing, strength, and bravery, which became more apparent when she signaled herself as female through her marriages. The temporary admiration she received as a marine can function as an analogy for her temporary male identity. The scene where the public gives applause to a temporarily disguised women reminds us of an audience clapping a monkey’s performance. Because of the lack of threat to social norms, cross-dressed women were not abominated as were cross-dressed men, who were to be harshly punished as a threat to men’s dignity.

It was to be proved in her twilight years that Hannah Snell’s life as a marine and her seeming masculine nature were affirmed by her thorough commitment to concealing her true gender. She was taken to the Bethlem Royal Hospital, a notorious lunatic asylum, in August of 1791.⁶ We have no way to know exactly what affliction led to her being taken to the asylum, but, undoubtedly, she suffered from a psychiatric disorder. Finally, she ended her eventful life there on the 8th of February, 1792. Considering her spectacular life as a cross-dressed woman marine, it was a miserable end. Given her stressful life as a “pretend” marine, in which she was constantly obsessed with the possibility of having her identity discovered, it seems that there is a causal relationship between her cross-dressing and her psychiatric disease in her later years.

⁶ David Cordingly (2007) gives his explanation that her disease was syphilis. According to him, she picked up syphilis from her first husband, Jame Summs, who had many sexual encounters. Syphilis was supposed to be particularly infectious among the population, so it was the most feared disease of all in the days of no antibiotics. Cordingly explains that it incubates for twenty to thirty years, and, when it becomes symptomatic, it destroys the brain and nervous system uncontrollably (p. 75). However, as mentioned in this paper, it is more reasonable to suppose that she did not catch her disease from someone other than her husband, but she suffered from it as a result of terrible stress caused by the tension of cross-dressing and straining her body.

It is not Hannah Snell alone who lost mental her stability after being discovered. For example, Christian Davis, who disguised herself as a soldier to search for her missing husband, also was taken with illnesses such as scurvy and rheumatism through straining herself body and soul, and died in the end. In the Netherlands, Dekker and Pol's (1989) research states that not a few disguised women suffered from mental diseases or committed suicide, and they mentioned Maria van Antwerpen as the most eminent example. It seems that Maria suffered from neurasthenia, also known as melancholia. Dekker and Pol analyze that her hidden apprehension over the years after being disguised as a man caused a resulting misery (*ibid*, p. 24). Of course, their analysis resonates with the life of Snell. It can be interpreted that, like Maria, Snell's mental disease resulted from her fear and psychological burden during her cross-dressing.

It is easy to imagine that cross-dressed women experienced stress from fear of discovery, and the longer they were disguised as men, the more they needed their strength, bravery, and acting ability. Moreover, as stated in the previous section, no matter how skillfully they could play a role of a man, they could never be a man. As far as Hannah Snell's later years are concerned, her abuse of her body and soul made it difficult for her even to spend her life as a woman in her later years. Viewed in this light, it is apparent that women's cross-dressing complicates matters other than appearance.

Conclusion

In some forms of communication, it is impossible for a person to communicate with another without recognizing the other's gender. In other words, sex, male or female, is first acknowledged prior to every such communication and provides a foundation. In this sense, sex is the fundamental meaning of human existence. However, it can be said that sex should be understood more intricately than we expect. That is to say, it seems to be common sense that we tend to judge sexual difference by surface appearance, but the nature of sex is importantly related to inner qualities rather than appearance. If sex in appearance is everything, disguised women would equate to being men. But this is not true. Although Hannah Snell tried to be a man, she could not escape her true sex. In her case, we can see a paradox that the radical intention to achieve sexual equality expressed by cross-dressing instead highlighted the femininity of the cross-dresser. And considering their returning to their "true" sex after being exposed, this paradox must be true of almost all cross-dressing women of the period in question, not only for Hannah Snell. We should face the simple fact that—putting aside the issues of

transgender and gender fluidity that help define present-day discussions of gender—when a woman is “disguised as a man,” this woman is not a man but just pretends to be a man. This is why sexual nature is irrelevant to appearance.

To put it another way, if a woman is born with a “masculine” nature, it is not necessary for her to be disguised as a man. For example, because Bonny and Read were in women’s clothes in their daily lives onboard, they did not need to conceal their sex, and wore men’s clothes when needed in emergency situations. For them, the most important thing was their individual qualities, not cross-dressing, which was just a means to partake in combat. On the other hand, for Hannah Snell, her appearance as a man through cross-dressing took precedence over everything else, and her qualities of strength and bravery were nothing more than a means to conceal her sex. Comparing the cases of Bonny and Read with that of Snell, we must notice that there is a gendered nature within regardless of biological sex. If Hannah Snell had been born with a masculine nature, like Bonny and Read, she might not have suffered from an emotional illness caused by the stress of cross-dressing in her later years.

Bonny and Read were recognized as leaders of their pirate ship despite being women, so they could conquer the gender bias in pirate ships and become a model of liberal feminism. However, Hannah Snell was far from gender-free at the time of her intention to conceal her sex. Rather, she indicated that the naval ships were completely male-dominated and part of a gendered world. The case of Bonny and Read and that of Snell function as contrasting examples of gender consciousness on pirate ships and warships.

However, there is not an entirely negative aspect to the paradox in Hannah Snell’s cross-dressing. Ironically, Snell’s femininity demonstrates that some women were qualified to act as marines on warships, and the fact that the Navy was dominated by men was nothing more than prejudice against women. In this sense, Hannah Snell’s cross-dressing critically raises a fundamental doubt about gendered warships.

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**William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*:
A Narrative of Inexhaustible Word and Unfathomable Past**

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Abstract

The purpose of the present paper is to cast light on William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* in terms of its linguistic and communicational woes. A proliferation of research has been done on the novel, yet little heed has been paid to the verbal underpinning of its narration, which is associated with certain social and cultural interrogatives. Faulkner, who avows to be telling the same story repeatedly (the story of the Old South), voices through his literary work the anxieties and uneasiness he feels towards language. Long taken for granted as a mere tool of articulation, language proves to be an entity that is neither fully exhaustible nor communicates a message that is readily fathomable. The textual analyses of the characters' narrative language and their relation to it mirror the author's own meditations over the "word" and his endeavor to bring the reader into that arena of verbal and mental wrestling. Communication thus becomes an ongoing struggle, with the self, the word and the world, one that might be dreadful or futile but never escapable.

Keywords: communication, language, William Faulkner, the Old South

Introduction

It is often believed that language is to literature what marble is to sculpture (Sapir, 1921, p. 237). While words are the sole raw materials at the hands of writers, the crafted works of poets, for instance, may be the epitome of language's most exalted beauty. Unsurprisingly, such a relationship has been subject to various ponderings which marked the critical and literary works of many, yet the issue is particularly regarded by modernists with a denser and sharper earnestness. The theory and the practice of the literature of the twenties sees "the Logos, the Word" as an incarnation of "the Divine" (Watkins, 1971, p. 77). Hence, the modernist perspective probes into an unprecedented awareness of the real world, the literary world and the linguistic medium which converges the two. Hinging on a sense of skepticism towards the dichotomy of soul and flesh, word and world, the modernist urge to reconsider, and thus reconstruct, the conceptualization of language puts the world—at least semantically and semiotically—onto a new self-searching pathway. T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner and others were among the first to bring forth a new awareness of language. Their literature, however, does not offer some substitutive "awareness" on a silver platter. Readers are called to engage in a fraught struggle for a new awareness of not only literature but the world as a whole.

Esoteric, poignant, allusive, void, fragmented, and chaotic ... these are but a few of the many descriptions that attempt to account for the fluid perception of language that surfaced with modernism. The social breakdown and the overall decay that swept the world by the end of WWI were mirrored through the works of novelists and poets who delved into the recesses of the human psyche, raiding the past, suing the present (not necessarily for a redress but rather a probing inquest) and suspending the future on the edge. As the "holy"—and holey—foundations of Western civilization were brought to ashes by a rapacious war, the old conventions and mores failed to sustain their accuracy and validity; and thus new pathways were sought. A not-entirely unjustified over-generalization pigeonholes all modernists in the fields of arts and humanities into a nonconformist stance which disapproves of all that reeks of old dogmatic notions. Yet, exceptions exist. It is not to be imagined, for instance, that modernist literature is a set of homogeneous works that built up insurmountable fences between pre- and post-modernism. Such heterogeneity can be best exemplified in T.S. Eliot's oxymoronic essay "Tradition and Individual Talent," which indicates the modern poet's rebelling instinct against the imitation of the traditional, though not wholly overthrowing that which is established, such

as forms, genres and language itself. “Making it new,” thus, does not stand for “unmaking” but for an urge to “become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning” (as cited in Watkins, 1971, p. 13). Being at once motivated by a quest for rigor and genuineness instead of ostensible uniqueness or outlandishness, modernist writers, poets and playwrights experimented with style, form, syntax and genre in varying levels, each according to his or her literary dauntlessness and individual talent. The Lost Generation—as they are aptly referred to—sing together more like a meaningful cacophony than an alliterative chorus. Therefore, language became the primary subject of several experimentations, both prosaic and poetic. The word metamorphosed into much more than an ornamental object but a semantic entity in its own right. William Faulkner’s use of language is one such example of a multilayered entity.

Faulkner’s Southern prose has placed him among the most renowned and revered literary figures in the history of literature. His Yoknapatawpha compilation traces the intertwining histories of a number of Southern families whose fate seems bound to the region’s past. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, which was published in 1936 and has had a seemingly inherent ability to generate criticism and controversy over successive epochs, Faulkner tells the story of the Sutpen family. The family’s eventual downfall results from the racist social mores prevailing in the Antebellum South. Thomas Sutpen, so deluded by the age-old plantation dream, “dragged house and gardens out of virgin swamp, and plowed and planted his land” through the unscrupulous exploitation of black slaves (Faulkner, 2005, p. 40). As he is no more than a poor and ragged man from the West Virginia mountains, he seeks “the shield of a virtuous woman, to make his position impregnable” in a southern society that cherishes appearances and ostentatiousness over anything else (ibid., p. 15). The Civil War erupts when he is halfway through realizing his design of a dynasty. His tainted dream is demolished once his “half negro” son returns from New Orleans to reveal his father’s secret and unforgivable past to a society obsessed with racial discrimination. Many years after the Sutpen family is obliterated, the story is still repeated by those who survived such times to those who did not witness them.

Apart from its intricacy at the thematic level, the novel poses further problems at the stylistic and linguistic levels. Faulkner’s elaborate and yet somewhat peculiar and formless style has been subject to various queries. In answer to these, he states in a correspondence with Malcolm Cowley that “I am telling the same story over and over which is myself and the world.... I am trying to say it all in one sentence between one Cap and one period ... not only the present but

the whole past upon which it depends and which keeps overtaking the present second by second” (Cowley, 1966, p. 14). As such, his narrative language is heavily laden with a sense of inarticulateness that lies at a stone’s throw from utter impotency in regard to the narration itself. This powerlessness to communicate a past which seems to transcend the grasp of the present or even language itself is nowhere more apparent than in the writer’s use of *the word* itself. If his mastery of language is beyond questioning, his view of it is not quite so. His stance seems to hover above voicelessness and beneath voicefulness; he neither cherishes the illusion of fully communicating the past nor repudiates the wording of it in the present. In a similar vein, Judith Lockyer asserts that Faulkner “has no easy relation to his medium [language],” a relation which he unveils through such novels as *Light in August*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Go Down Moses*, where he “locates his own anxieties about the possibilities and limitations *in language*” (Lockyer, 1991, p. 6, emphasis added). This uncertainty in regard to “the medium” (which is almost akin to an epistemological decentredness) takes different shapes in *Absalom, Absalom!*: sometimes it comes out as an outright distrust of words, at other times it is manifested as a denial to decipher whatever language encodes, and elsewhere as a proclivity to deem communication senseless and futile.

1. The Inexhaustible Word

A little more than a casual acquaintance with *Absalom, Absalom!*’s narration is enough to confirm one’s hunch that its author appears to be in a constant struggle with words at every turn of a sentence. This struggle, however, is not to be mistaken for difficulty, as Faulkner could write about a South that many were unable—or unwilling—to even imagine at the time. While many of his predecessors and some of his brilliant contemporaries (like Margaret Mitchell) were writing of the Antebellum South in a docile tone full of lilacs and magnolias, Faulkner wrote about all that was uneasy to imagine about it. This could be one important reason behind the struggle with and for words. The heavy—almost despicable—content of the novel, if inadequately wrought, would have amounted to no more than a wicked tale. Yet, Faulkner’s tale is for many no less than a magnum opus. In writing such a monumental but also hugely reviled work, Faulkner, as Douglas Mitchell (2008) states, “challenged the plantation legend by creating a different sort of planter archetype” (p. 140). It is such a challenge to the plantation tradition which frees the author from the necessity to confirm other southern narratives, while the desire to write about his people’s history and the thirst to experiment with the full potential

of his language remain. His thirst for narration and language seems unquenchable, as if the more he learns of its particularities the more he is unsatisfied with his own handling of it. The word simply seems to be inexhaustible.

1.1. A distrust of the word

The opening of *Absalom, Absalom!* is a fourteen-line sentence. This can be taken as a cautioning note to readers of what they are about to face. Faulkner's use of long sentences (often paragraph-length) cannot be discarded as mere "narrative prowess" that intends to puzzle readers. For instance, Ellen, the mistress of Sutpen's Hundred, is described as

a woman who had vanished not only out of the family and the house but out of life too, into an edifice like Bluebeard's and there transmogrified into a mask looking back with passive and hopeless grief upon the irrevocable world, held there not in durance but in a kind of jeering suspension by a man who had entered hers and her family's life ... with the abruptness of a tornado, done irrevocable and incalculable damage, and gone on. (Faulkner, 2005, p. 60)

This single sentence "recapitulates" a story which is not even yet unfolded. In its density it captures the nexus of the entire narration in a manner that induces the reader to search for a deeper—maybe less befuddling—understanding of the character, the unrevealed plot twists, the region and time in which such mishaps occurred, and most importantly the glimpse of life portrayed by the statement. To readers unfretted by the length and compactness of such statements, the seeming impenetrability is but an indication of humans' helplessness in the face of the world they live in, both its past and present. This sense of disability creates a separation between the world, the word and the consciousness which attempts to communicate the first through the second. Blame could be laid on the medium, i.e., language, yet the utmost struggle against such helplessness is inescapably manifested in the form of words. Faulkner, who was part of the movement called the "Southern Renaissance" or "renaissance" (1930–55) along with Ellen Glasgow, Thomas Wolfe, Katherine Anne Porter, and Erskine Caldwell, contributed to that "outpouring of history, sociology, political analysis, autobiography, and innovative forms of journalism" through a fictional south which bears a "true" resemblance to the "real" south (King, 1982, p. 5). Such "outpouring" is a both a collective and individual endeavor to come to terms with the old south. That is why Faulkner's morbid tales come along with an unavoidable

loss of trust not only in the world but in the word as well. Very telling is Olga Vickery's delineation of Faulkner's struggle to surmount a distrust of both:

Truth must eventually be fixed by words, which by their very nature falsify the things they are meant to represent. This distortion inherent in language is the reason for the tortuous style of *Absalom, Absalom!* ... [T]he long sentences bristle with qualifications and alternatives beneath which the syntax is almost lost. (Vickery, 1964, p. 86)

Interestingly, this distrust of the word and its aptitude to fully carry meaning does not generate a "writerly abnegation" of the word but rather an excessive use of it. That is why several qualifiers, adjectives, adverbs and descriptive phrases are employed each time a narrator claims to provide an accurate account of what "really happened." Back to the first sentence, for instance, one cannot help noticing the unusual detailed description of the establishing scene. Beginning "from a little after two o'clock" until the first period, we find a "long still hot weary dead September afternoon," "a dim hot airless room," "blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers," "latticed with yellow slashes full of dust motes," and "flecks of the dead old dried paint" (Faulkner, 2005, p. 7). This is the result of an apprehension, if not an anguish, that utterances would go unnoticed, mistaken or not fully perceived; yet it often does little to elucidate a "truth."

Another example is, Thomas Sutpen, the figure around whom the story revolves. Though he barely cares to introduce himself by name to people in Jefferson he is given so many names as if his character transcends simple or unilateral characterization. Particularly, Miss Rosa Coldfield seems to exert huge efforts in search of a way to describe him; that is why she uses horrid words such as: "man-horse-demon," "Faustus," "Beelzebub," "ogre," "beast," and "demon" when telling Quentin Compson about the ghost figure which dominates her tale. Powerful as these words are, they still fall short of accounting fully for "the long-dead object of her impotent yet indomitable frustration," and so remains a phantom in Quentin's conception (ibid., p. 7). Despite the fear, outrage and hatred which haunts Rosa's memory and pushes her to extensively speak about Thomas Sutpen, she can only "evoke" a fading image of him. For Quentin that figure is no more than a ghost from the past. This is because he sees even her, the narrator, as a "ghost" who is "telling him about old ghost-times" (ibid., p. 9). Eventually, when Shreve, Quentin's fellow at university, hears the story, he assumes it "would still have been the same story if the man had had no name at all" (ibid., p. 247).

Beside the novel's intricate and lengthy statements, the state of communication between its many narrators and their addressees complicates the narration even further. Sometimes, characters seem to vanish in the midst of the conversation to a time past. The ceaseless lapse between past and present indicates a failure to sustain communication. Miss Rosa Coldfield, for instance, insists on seeing Quentin Compson in order to tell him her family's story, yet she is unable to maintain an uninterrupted line of thought, for her thoughts are always drifting back to the past, and so all her efforts to communicate with him (and through him to the world) are rendered fruitless. Her narrative voice is referred to as "talking in that grim haggard amazed voice until at last listening would renege and hearing-sense self-confound" (Faulkner, 2005, p. 1). One might well argue that the words with which she narrates her story are not solidified enough, to the extent that both she and Quentin are carried not away from those words but into them: Both narrator and narratee depart from the present scene and the story-lines that are concretely heard to seek what is unheard between the lines. Similarly, readers may find themselves carried by words into the novel's world or into their own. In such a case words are no longer *signifiers* of well-defined *signifieds* but instead seem to function as "teleporters" through which time and space can be traversed.

1.2. A dismantled syntax of reconstruction

One of the major features of Faulknerian style is the employment of relative clauses and appositives. Though deemed by many critics such as Bernard de Voto and Arthur Scott as a mis- or over-use, these two recurrent patterns of syntax have a modulating and amplifying effect. For example, Quentin, reflecting once again on his bizarre meeting with Miss Coldfield, thinks:

And maybe it (the voice, the talking, the incredulous and unbearable amazement) had even been a cry aloud once, ... long ago when she was a girl—of young and indomitable unregret, of indictment of blind circumstance and savage event; but not now: now only the lonely thwarted old female flesh embattled for forty-three years in the old insult, the old unforgiving outraged and betrayed by the final and complete affront which was Sutpen's death. (Faulkner, 2005, p. 14)

The crescendo note of appositive nouns and phrases in this statement draws attention to a complex and deep understanding of an otherwise simple pronoun "it" or a trivial "girl." In such instances, readers are induced to labor in reconsidering every segment of information provided

to them. In a way, they are led to overcome the oddity and dimness of such narration. Nevertheless, the case is not always so since, as Scott (1953) notes, “even then he [the reader] may have to drive himself savagely through the first half of the novel before he begins reaping rewards which seem commensurate with his effort.... Many readers never reach this level in Faulkner” (p. 91). After all, not everyone is willing to delve deep or “suffer” through such intensity. This intensely complex structure, even at sentence level, though so vexing, parallels the thematic concerns of the novel. In other words, it voices the modernist preoccupation with issues of truth, veracity and history. Hence, the story does not lend itself to an easy understanding or ready-made interpretation but rather requires a searching, attentive and multi-faceted reading to patch the different pieces together. Unlike realism’s claim of picturing the truth and reality of a certain people, era or region, modernism sees that no absolute or factual account of either past or present exists. Fiction is probably humanity’s desperate attempt to retell that part of its past memory which it deems “true.”

Readers of *Absalom, Absalom!* are expected to “reach that state of fatigue of which breathlessness is a symptom” and become “fellow-panthers, eagerly turning chaotic pages to learn the next terrifying tragedy” (Bernd, 1995, p. 119). And such a state is not the outcome of the syntactical complexities only, but also of the “persistent attempt to understand the past from a group of partially perceived fragments” (Hugh, 1971, p. 545). The sense of fragmentation and inconceivability that prevails in the novel echoes the social and psychological aridity that infected the later generations of southerners after the Civil War and the general atmosphere of the Great Depression as well. In view of such a sense of disruption, modernist fiction attempts to articulate rather than cloak the incohesiveness and malaise of human life. If the world were all one chaotic dismantled “patch-work” why would literature pass through it as a neatly set embroidery? Though, stylistically, *Absalom, Absalom!* seems to leave an impression of enclosing meaning within the boundaries of language, it in effect reflects destruction, loss and a desperate hope for reconstruction. Even those who did not live in the past could not exorcise their memory of its specters. Despite striving to understand it, all they get are words like “an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names” (Faulkner, 2005, p. 12). Quentin, for instance, feels torn between the side of him which aspires for an academic career in Harvard College and the other side of him which feels doomed by “the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts” (ibid., p. 9). Without going through such

fragmentation of thought and language, it is hardly achievable to save the present from its past inhibitions or reconstruct a new reality out of old ruins.

2. The Unfathomable Past

Faulkner's novels are often read against a background of history. Their publication at a time of great turmoil (depression, economic and cultural crises, etc.) further aggravated their dark tone. Yet their particular relation to the Antebellum South, the Civil War and Reconstruction makes them a fertile ground to project unvoiced anxieties (whether of personal history or communal memory) on the narration itself. It is engaged in an attempt to understand the past as a means to cope with the present. Though of the present no judgment can be passed, the past compellingly enough remains unfathomable. The southern antebellum history was not readily conceivable, at least to those who initially received the novel only a few generations away from its narrative, because a large majority of southerners—and this is what *Absalom, Absalom!* draws attention to—were nurtured on the plantation legend. Such a myth of the Old South as a fairy land of cotton, chivalry, belles and happy slaves was repeatedly endorsed in film, fiction, popular magazines and songs. The popular image of the south hinges on this:

The flirtations and courtships, the duels and dances, which fill the idle days of these charming men and women seem always to be set against a scene of manorial splendor dominated by a mansion with a glistening white portico overlooking green lawns sloping down to a placid river. In the cotton fields, the darkies, too numerous even to be counted, sing contentedly at their work. (Bohner, 1961, pp. 73–74)

Such endemic mythologization is why Faulkner's literature, and all fictional works that run against the flow of the plantation tradition, did not seem "very much attuned to the American experience" (Atkinson, 2006, p. 5). *Absalom, Absalom!* was seen as a novel that "turned the American success story ... into a racial tragedy that few foresaw in 1936 as a national dilemma" (Porter, 2009, p. 710). This, however, did not hinder the endeavor to write about the past in a manner that does not appease for the purpose of wish fulfillment or self-gratification.

2.1. A hollow word haunted by memory

The prevalence of repetition in the southern dialect is found throughout *Absalom, Absalom!* not only as a speech pattern but also as an inclination towards an exposition of a socio-cultural syndrome. The backlooking veterans, whether they fought in the war or not, have to repeat the

same story over and over again to make sure the past is “not even passed.” Quentin, for instance, when reporting Rosa’s tale, makes sure not to obliterate her emphatic phrases:

It seems that this demon—his name was Sutpen (Colonel Sutpen)—Colonel Sutpen. Who came out of nowhere and without warning upon the land with a band of strange niggers and built a plantation—(Tore violently a plantation, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)—tore violently. And married her sister Ellen and begot a son and a daughter which—(without gentleness begot, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)—without gentleness. Which should have been the jewels of his pride and the shield and comfort of his old age, only—(Only they destroyed him or something or he destroyed them or something. And died)—and died. Without regret, Miss Rosa Coldfield says—(Save by her) Yes, save by her. (Faulkner, 2005, p. 3)

The same story is repeated several times—mostly keeping the same wording—as if chanting would make of it a gospel, or the more emphasis put on it the more real it seems. After forty-three years of silence, she bluntly decides to disclose the unrevealed story. Seeing his puzzled looks at her unexpected request, she explains that in moving to the north he may “enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe some day [he] will remember this and write about it” (ibid., p. 10). So, “she wants it told” to others so that they will “know at last why God let us lose the War: that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth” (ibid., p. 4). Quentin’s father explains for his son Rosa’s stubborn insistence upon telling such a story. For her it is not a matter of individual outrage against the family private history but more of a burdening history that torments the collective memory. For Quentin as well it is a matter of identity and consciousness of which he cannot be released and to which he cannot reconcile himself. It seems for the old lady as for the young man, the story of Sutpen is not one tale from the south but *is* the story of the Old South.

In the subsequent retelling of this same story, alterations, objections, and refutations occur. The last are pivotal in the re-conception of the word as a medium of communicating a full truth. The repeated wording of the story instead of engraving it as an unalterable memory makes of it a myth, a non-existent past that is not fixed but ceaselessly changing into different versions. The word, thus, digresses from delivering a truth into disguising, concealing or even inventing a whole one out of nothingness. Quentin, after “listening ... having to listen, to one of the ghosts which had refused to lie still even longer than most had” finds himself in “a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory at and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago” (Faulkner, 2005, p. 361). As a whole, the phrasing of the

past does nothing to integrate him thoroughly into the present. The stories and the living “among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves ... and bullets in the dining-room table” only make him feel “he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth” (and later to be learnt, he commits suicide in *The Sound and the Fury*) (ibid., p. 361; p. 12). Hence, if history is a mere collection of words, so is the present. And if the past can hardly be articulated into a certain statement, the present, accordingly, becomes a mere rhetorical existence.

2.2. A word of denial and defiance

Absalom, Absalom!, as alluded to by its title, is a narrative of lamentation, an outcry of loss that comes out baffled yet deafeningly loud. It can be taken as a father–son tragedy as much as it may stand for a communal elegy for a bygone Old South. In a constellation of denials, the characters renounce, refuse, resist and repudiate what they cannot reconcile; thus identity, genealogy and even memory are subject to disaggregation. Wording the ledgers of the past becomes an act of forceful revelation. Quentin might have never mentioned what Miss Rosa told him, if it were not in answer to Shreve’s question. That is why when his roommate assumes such a story is a confession that Quentin looks down upon his regional identity with disdain, he bursts out “I don’t. I don’t! I don’t hate it! I don’t hate it!” (Faulkner, 2005, p. 378). Quentin refuses to accept the implication of his words as if caught by a sense of guilt for having set down in words things he should have kept to himself.

For Faulkner, there seems to exist an intriguing interplay between silence, defiance, words and acceptance. For instance, Charles Bon and Henry Sutpen tend to prolong the dreadful and deadly confrontation through a carefully cloaked silence. They escape mentioning the unpleasant reality of which they are both aware. Instead they prefer the wordless roar of war to settle the matter, “since it would not be the first time that youth has taken catastrophe as a direct act of Providence for the sole purpose of solving a personal problem which youth itself could not solve” (ibid., p. 120). Because they are incapable—or unwilling—to face the truth, silence becomes a mere “attenuation and prolongation of a conclusion already ripe to happen” (ibid., p. 118). Their insistence upon escaping reality comes in a turn-a-blind-eye sort of a way, as if not acknowledging the calamity through words makes them less prone to its consequences.

This intransigent sense of denial can be seen in readers’ response to the novel as well. Faulkner’s literary works were never welcomed with enthusiasm; rather they were often

shunned on account of their complex unpleasantness. What *Absalom, Absalom!* communicates, for instance, can hardly be understood by those far removed from the southern setting, as it is scarcely accepted by readers whose past literary experiences include no such unorthodox view of the Old South. A renowned Southern historian asserts that Faulkner is one of those who are regarded with “shock, of denial that they told the essential truth or any part of it—in many cases—of bitter resentment against them on the ground that they had libeled and misrepresented the South with malicious intent” (Cash, 1956, p. 419). Consequently, in both worlds, the fictional and the real, words stimulate denial. Words are, as well, a way to express a strong defiance of social and cultural traditions.

3. The Futility of Communication

Conversation does not necessarily mean genuine communication. The expression of one’s inner thoughts might be sheer babbling, as Faulkner puts it: “a cacophony of terror and conciliation and compromise babbling only the mouth-sounds, the loud and empty words which we have emasculated of all meaning” (1955, p. 34). Such awareness of words’ failure may have different outcomes: some keep up an overtly phony attempt to communicate whereas others resign themselves into silence. Many of the characters in the novel, such as Mr. Coldfield, Ellen and Judith, prefer a reclusive silence to uttering anything at all. Ironically, the silence is sometimes more eloquently expressive than utterances. A good case in point is that of Judith and her father, who “did not need to talk. They were so much alike that ... the need, to communicate by speech atrophies from disuse and, comprehending without need of the medium of ear or intellect, they no longer understand one another’s actual words” (Faulkner, 2005, p. 59). Hence, conversing in an audible language of syllables and stresses is rendered pointless. What seems to convey a meaningful message is instead wordlessness.

Such a sense of futility is almost akin to fatality, as if one’s words would never alter the predestined course of events. Quentin Compson, “who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost, but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South”, comes to such a realization after a prolonged attempt to come to terms with the past; he finds no escape but the “long silence of *notpeople*, in *notlanguage*” (ibid., p. 2, emphasis added). If the silence of Judith and her mother Ellen is no surprise since they—as southern ladies—could not defy the “soulless rich surrender anywhere between sun and earth,” Sutpen’s confused and belated communication costs him the collapse of his entire plan (ibid., p. 196).

As a whole, the message that *Absalom, Absalom!* conveys so clearly through its characters' attitudes is the incommunicability of the past and the present.

Conclusion

It seems while the word and the world do not always choose to reconcile into a compatibility of signified and signifier, the chasm in between—significant or not—is where communication occurs. Human beings, ever since the dawn of history and all through humanity's mishaps and fortunes, attempted to keep a two-ways communication going not ceaselessly or tirelessly but more like instinctively. Language, voiced or voiceless, is sometimes all the proof that humans lived. Writing about a history, a war, and a people, William Faulkner renders the particularities of a communal and individual experience into an evenly repeated tale. In such a tale, Faulkner's relation to language does not seem to rest on a given touchstone; it instead lingers in between an aggravated endeavor to reach full expressiveness and a sense of impotency to mold words at one's will. Both alternatives, however, meet at one point: that is, the inescapability of communication. Win or lose, human beings need and ought to communicate just the same, the novel seems to suggest. As long as man is not finally and irrevocably silenced by some cataclysm, he will have to use words even if only as an elusive sign of life. Words thus are "that fragile thread ... by which the little surface and edges of men's secret and solitary lives may be joined before sinking back into the darkness where the spirit cried for the first time and was not heard and will cry for the last time and will not be heard then either" (Faulkner, 2005, p. 129). The relationship between language and the world is a paradoxical one. Such a paradox is most highlighted through literature. This, in its modernist phase, articulates a distrust, a defiance, a willingness to destruct, but also a hope to reconstruct the word—and transitively the world—anew.

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About the Journal

The Editor welcomes unsolicited contributions to the Journal, but the vast majority of papers accepted for publication come from the related IAFOR conferences and are usually closely associated with the themes of the conferences. Papers are mostly selected for publication in April and May, to be published in the Northern autumn of the same year. Contributors are expected to submit the initial draft of their paper in The IAFOR Journal house style, which is APA (the academic style of the journal of the American Psychological Association: see the Purdue Owl for details at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>). If accepted for publication, the paper's style will likely be slightly modified to provide consistency across papers. British and U.S. English are both acceptable, but spelling and punctuation conventions should be consistent with the form of English used. In-text citations rather than footnotes should be used for references to secondary sources. General notes should be in the form of footnotes rather than endnotes, and should *not* be manually inserted (use Word's automatic formatting). Generally contributions should be between 4,000 and 7,000 words in length. Japanese names should follow the modified Hepburn system of transliteration, including the use of macrons for long vowels.

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