
Introduction: Literature and Theory, and East-West Relations

Ever since the beginning of serious attempts to compare literary works of the East — mainly those of China, Japan, and Korea — with those of Europe and the Americas two major lines of investigation have dominated literary and critical scholarship: tracing the influence of classical Eastern literary models on subsequent, chiefly modern, Western writers, and applying the theories of Western literary critics to Eastern texts of all periods. Very few general conclusions in the spirit of a synthesising East-West poetics have been reached as a result of these investigations. In my opinion, perhaps the main reason of this *lacuna* is the highly individualistic and occasional nature of the scholarship — at least before the modern period. Broad trends did not spread on a large scale from one cultural hemisphere to the other, and notable approaches, topics, or styles were taken up, if at all, by authors working independently of each other. Similarly, Western literary theories exported and introduced to the East have by no means been universally accepted or applied on a large scale. This has begun to change since the 1950s with the discipline of Comparative Literature and with the work of scholars associated with the International Comparative Literature Association / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée.

In the present thematic cluster of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, although all articles are devoted to some aspect of the interchanges between East and West, again, few significant generalities can be deduced. But, at the same time, the articles of the thematic cluster *in toto* demonstrate the viability as well as the significance of the comparative approach. Pietro Giordan analyzes and adjusts the theories of Antonin Artaud concerning Eastern drama, theories which are based primarily on his personal but limited contacts with Balinese performances. For Artaud, Oriental theatre is Balinese theatre. In contrast to the Western concept of mimesis in which the stage is a mirror or explication of real life (verisimilitude), Artaud celebrated the notion of a mystical and quasi-magical representation that is entirely antimimetic. He maintained also that the players, not enslaved by a written text, are required to demonstrate a greater degree of spontaneity and improvisation than actors on the Western stage. Largely upon the basis of this observation, he criticized the Western concept that theatrical performance is

merely a material reflection of a text. Giordan argues that this contrast is partially correct, especially with regard to Balinese shadow puppet plays, but more importantly, the author affirms that Bali is not the "whole" Orient as Artaud assumed. Artaud, moreover, failed to give due recognition to the highly refined and complex code of gestures which circumscribe movements in Balinese performance. These codified movements are parallel to the verbal text of the Western theatre. While giving due credit to the value of Artaud's influence in revitalizing French theatre, Giordan concludes that his theories on the Oriental theatre are based on artistic imagination rather than on accurate knowledge.

Ming-dong Gu's study is about the influence of classical Chinese poets on Anglo-American modernist poetry. The article covers familiar territory in a novel manner. It is well known that the American and British poets who came under the influence of the linguistic and aesthetic theories of Fennellosa and Pound were likewise familiar with classical Chinese poets such as Li Po and Wang Wei and that much of their own work was directly inspired by these classical Chinese models. Gu argues, however, that this historical contact represented more than an example of source-influence. Rather, the contact represents an actual bridging of the gap between the two cultural traditions. The poets and critics he treats in some detail — Pound, Fennellosa, Yeats, Fletcher, and Lowell — looked upon their Chinese forerunners as reflections or mirrors of themselves. The ample historical-critical background Gu provides offers a convincing demonstration of his thesis. Highly intriguing are two of his observations. First, that Chinese intellectuals contemporaneous with these Western poets were themselves reacting against their own classical past. The other comment is directed against the notion of Orientalism which some present-day critics have introduced into the Chinese-Western orbit. Gu observes that the fervour revealed by Pound and his fellow enthusiasts "is remarkably free from patronizing condescension and hegemonic domination."

Just the opposite attitude toward Orientalism is reflected in Ruiqi Ma's article. She argues that David Henry Hwang in his play "M. Butterfly" did not go far enough in criticising the West for its political and economic imperialism and cultural domination. Following Feminist criticism, Ma affirms that "the Orient has played the role of the female in a patriarchal [Western] society." Despite the generally accepted view that Hwang intended a criticism of Western imperialism, she reads his play as expressing subconscious sympathy with a Western and male paradigm.

The Postmodern notion of neo-colonialism lies also behind Ma-Ji Rhee's article on the Korean Yi Sang. Although she includes two epigraphs from André Breton, it is not automatic writing that the author has in mind, but rather a dichotomy between "colonial reality and the presence of the world created by Japan," the colonialists who at the time occupied Korea. In another interpretation, the border in one of Yi Sang's poems is associated with aesthetic sensibility and related to "the colonial reality by confusing the victor and the victimized, by

using the female figure of complicity in humiliation being the colonized." This view, with reference to Yi Sang writing during the Japanese occupation of Korea, results in Rhee's reading that the Korean poet and novelist did not write "overt propagandistic" texts. Rather, he used Western themes and genres as "a vicarious voice" against colonialism. Here, Western influences are presented, interestingly and well argued, as anti-colonialist symbols rather than in themselves embodying colonial domination as they usually appear in Postmodern theory.

The West hardly appears at all in Noriko Takeda's article on the modern Tanka. However, the author also provides general comparisons between Japanese writers or texts with corresponding ones in the West. The "reformation" of poetic language is said to consist of modernistic trends rather than conscious efforts at revision, subversion, or substitution. Takeda devotes much attention to a woman poet of the early twentieth century, Yosano Akiko, who wrote a collection of Tankas (poems of 5 lines and 31 syllables), embodying modern themes. In Takeda's reading, these poems, when presented in a sequence, are "modelled on the Western long poem" because theoretically, the modern style of the Tanka influenced by the West emphasizes the authorial self rather than abstractions.

In a further article on Japanese fiction, Enchi Fumiko's "Boxcar of Chrysanthemums," Susan Fisher explains how the text can be interpreted by both traditional Japanese criticism and by recent Western narratology. The author successfully shows that both critical strategies can be relevant and fruitful. The story concerns the thoughts of a woman writer who encounters on a railway platform a young and beautiful girl who has been married off to a mentally handicapped son of a prosperous family. Later in life the author writes a story about such a couple in which she portrays the girl as a monster who murders her husband in order to marry a handsome young lover. Much later she again encounters the couple and learns that the family has lost its money and that the wife now supports her husband by growing fruit and chrysanthemums. She then notices that the face of the wife resembles that of a white chrysanthemum. This reading of the text demonstrates how it can be analysed with both Western and Japanese approaches to the narrative. The two contrasting narratives concerning the couples' destiny allow for the characterization of the narrator, while the comparison of the wife to a chrysanthemum reflects the traditional Japanese method of narrating by symbols. Fisher then develops other similar interpretations based on each of the contrasting methodologies. Her exposition amply justifies her conclusion that instead of choosing a single way of interpretation, Western or Eastern, we can profitably "embrace various critical perspectives, each one capable of yielding its own measure of understanding."

Although — theoretically and following an exclusionary approach — Chinese and Western systems of linguistics, metaphysics, and criticism may be antithetical to each other, pragmatically they are constantly being used in concert. And this approach is embodied in Weiping Lu's article about Confucianism versus modern Western concepts of originality and individualism. Needless to

say, the notions are contrary, but there is, nevertheless, a strong tradition of imitation in Western literature, not only in classical and neo-classical times, but even today. The article also indicates a parallel between the Confucian notion of self-cultivation and the Western concept of the development of individuality. Although one is basically altruistic and the other egocentric, they are, nevertheless, in certain points similar. In the final paragraph, the author indicates that the modern individualistic movement triumphed in China over the Confucian doctrine of self-cultivation and that a whole generation of Chinese poets early in this century looked "for poetic models or inspiration from Western, rather than from the indigenous."

One of the best tests of the accessibility of one literary culture to another is to study whether individual works may be translated from one language into the other. Mabel Lee's article of the translation of Paz and Yang Lian's poetry considers the comparative resemblances of the works and ideas of the two poets. In addition to revealing resemblances in the theories of Paz and Yang Lian concerning translation, Lee quotes extensively from the latter's English translation of *The Book of Changes* in support of Paz's and her own argumentation.

Critical principles involved with East-West literary and cultural relations — here meaning East-West in the widest context — and with focus on individual texts are the object of two articles of the thematic cluster. J.M.Q. Davies's paper on Timothy Mo analyzes his narrative techniques about the neo-colonialist occupation of East Timor, which places itself on "a site on the border between conventional realism and the non-fictional novel" and Yusur Al-Madani's article on the *Arabian Nights* and *Huckleberry Finn* analyzes the two texts as examples of the genres of the imaginary voyage and of the *Bildungsroman*. Combined, these two essays support the postmodern concept of globalization in literary criticism as well as an understanding of East and West, and literature, in its widest context.

In sum, while most of the articles in this thematic cluster of the journal do not support any single literary or critical approach, Orientalism and neo-colonialism appear to be the main issue. In general terms, the articles may be read in the best tradition of Comparative Literature, in that of synthesis and in the spirit of cultural understanding.

Finally, I would like to thank the Associate Editor of the *CRCL/RCLC*, Steven Tötösy, for inviting me to guest edit the thematic cluster at hand. I would like to add here that the *CRCL/RCLC* in the last few years — because of the truly comparatist point of view of the journal's editorial board — succeeded, more than most Comparative Literature journals, in attracting and publishing a good number of East-West studies. This approach and its enactment follows Tötösy's own view, elaborated on in his new book, *Legitimizing the Study of Literature* (forthcoming also in Chinese translation with Peking UP), that "there

is not much sense in introducing and bringing yet another Western approach to Chinese scholarship, thus quasi 'colonizing' it. What needs to be done is, yes, presenting the Western approach, but doing so by reference to already existing Chinese frameworks and approaches and hoping that our Chinese colleagues will take the approach and 'merge' it with their knowledge." Following my own approach toward East-West scholarship of literature and culture and Tötösy's sensible argumentation, I sincerely hope that this thematic cluster of the *CRCL/RCLC* will further facilitate that meaningful comparatist approach which is demonstrated eloquently with the articles at hand.

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