

Cross-Cultural Intertextuality

Douwe Fokkema

ABSTRACT

In this paper I discuss changes which in the course of time have occurred in the terminology of literary criticism and literary theory—terms which were popular some time ago are no longer so, having been replaced by other terms. It is suggested that changes in terminology can be explained by an interest in new problems. I deal in particular with the concept of intertextuality, which at present seems appropriate for discussing the problem of contemporary poetics in different cultures. In order to make things more concrete I refer to two recent Chinese novels: Mo Yan's *The Republic of Wine* (*Jiu guo*, 1992) and Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* (*Ling shan*, 1990). Finally, the relation between intertextuality and the aesthetic effect it may have is discussed. It seems that in "aesthetic criticism" focused on texts with a high degree of intertextuality, the notion of the unity of the text has been replaced by the idea of a unifying discourse.

KEY WORDS

intertextuality
aesthetic value
reception theory
democratization

cultural difference
readers' response
interpretation of texts
textual/discursive unity



A historical survey of literary research in the twentieth century is bound to reveal the coming and going of conceptual instruments. A long series of terms were used, became fashionable, and after some time passed into disuse. This happened to terms like “influence,” “intrinsic” and “extrinsic,” “tradition” and “canon formation,” “generation” and “period concept,” even “form” and “style.” I mention these terms in random order, but they all have in common the fact that once they were more popular than they are now. This leads me to raise the question as to why, sometimes quite unexpectedly, new terms appear and are successful. I assume that a new term enables us to address new problems and to focus on new interests. If, as a conceptual instrument, it is not more adequate than the older terms, then at least it is different.

What were the questions that, in the late 1960s, gave rise to the notion of intertextuality? First of all, the concept of text as a unified whole with fixed boundaries was questioned. This notion of a unified text was the legacy of Russian Formalism, New Criticism and structuralism. Originally this concept of text was applied only to literary texts. It was taken for granted that the texts critics and theorists were talking about were all *literary* texts. The question of *why* certain texts were considered literary or should be considered as literary texts was usually avoided. Yet, I believe that this is a central question of our discipline. The situation became problematic when the notion or label of “text” was extended to texts which did not belong to the literary canon. The texts under consideration were no longer supposed to have intrinsic literary or aesthetic value.

Of course, no text has intrinsic aesthetic value. All value which a text is supposed to have is attributed to it by external agents and conditions. If value is attributed to a text, this is the result of an individual’s judgment regarding that text in a particular context and on the basis of particular criteria, which are related to individual goals and preferences

and partly arbitrary. The New Critical and structuralist critics were right in rejecting the notion of intrinsic aesthetic value, but they overlooked the fact that some texts are more likely to induce readers to engage in a literary reading than other texts. If a “literary reading” means that we pay attention to the formal aspects of a text, to the way it has been put together, to symbolic or metaphorical meaning, to departures from standard views and from common ways of expression,—then in most cases *the text* should contain signs whose meaning arouses our interest, departs from what we already know and leads us to interpretations which go beyond the commonplace understanding of social reality. It has been said, for instance by Stanley Fish,¹ that any text can be subjected to a literary interpretation, but that does not alter the fact that some texts are more likely to be acknowledged as literary by more readers than other texts, simply because these have more to offer that makes a literary interpretation rewarding.²

In hindsight it is easy to see that the terminological change-over from “literary text” to “text” obscured certain problems, including the relevance of the formal aspects of texts and their specific verbal composition. Nevertheless, the terminological change was a necessary one because only in this way could the petrified view that each literary text has its fixed, intrinsic aesthetic value be destroyed. As a negative corollary, the problem of the potential aesthetic effect of texts henceforth received increasingly less attention, although arguably (*via* the “leveling” or intertextualizing effect of cultural studies) “non-literary” texts such as films, advertisements and popular songs began to be read in a more formalistically “aesthetic” fashion.

Thus, for two or three decades critics and theorists were studying “texts.” In the course of these years the status of the text itself, among the many factors generating meaning in human communication, was gradually reduced, while other factors increased in importance: the context, ideological codes, the reader, and even the author. Of course, the death of the author was announced by Roland Barthes (who in fact distinguished the authorial “work” from the open-ended “text”) long ago, but that was at the very early stage of focusing on (not the work but) the text. (In fact, the author had already been dethroned by Russian

Formalism, New Criticism, and structuralism. With the announcement of the death of the author, poststructuralist critics were completing the attack on the author and on the relevance of authorial intention.) However, more recently authorship has returned in the critical debate to play a limited role, as the background of the author can be a factor in the interpretive argument, in particular if that argument focuses on gender, ethnicity or politics. For instance, the interpretation of Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* is influenced by what we know about the author's personal history, by our knowledge of where he has been living, and where his books have been published.

The status of the text was more severely undermined by the discovery of the role of the reader, by abandoning the idea (upheld by Ingarden in the 1920s³) that there is only one correct interpretation of a text, and by acknowledging that the constitution of meaning does not follow mechanically from the text but is partly determined by the perspective of the reader. Theories about readers' response relativized the significance of the text by emphasizing that the readers' values and knowledge largely determine their interpretations. Some reception theories still allowed for a considerable impact of the text on the interpretation (e.g., Jauss⁴), others virtually ignored the text and focused only on the reactions of readers and their various backgrounds.⁵ In the latter case, theories about readers' response became part and parcel of the psychology and sociology of literature.

In view of the great attention paid to the effect of readers' characteristics and conditions, it is rather surprising that at the same time there was room for a renewed study of textual phenomena and the relation between texts, which was subsumed under the name "intertextuality." How to explain this contradiction? It seems that the study of readers' behavior led to generalizations about the cultural knowledge, beliefs and ideologies of the readers. The focus shifted from empirical research about the knowledge and dispositions of living readers (which is laborious and tiresome) to a discussion of ideological codes (which is to some extent speculative and ostensibly more attractive). Apparently, the study of real readers was considered less interesting when the Cartesian subject was criticized. Roland Barthes had

dissolved the notion of the subject into a meeting place of codes.⁶ In *Les Mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*) Foucault suggested that the history of the subject had lasted only little more than two centuries and may find its unhappy end soon. What remains is an *episteme*, a world view or ideological construction, which is larger than a particular textual representation or personal belief and which connects the various texts belonging to one particular period or culture. Not only is the subject a meeting place of codes, texts are also a product of codes. The use of similar codes in the composition of different texts produces intertextual relations.

It is more than a coincidence that Kristeva launched the notion of intertextuality in France,⁷ where research into readers' reactions had never been popular. Readers' response was investigated primarily in North-West Europe and North America. Readers' response continues to be researched there, independently of a widespread focus on intertextual relations. There is room for both approaches, as long as the readers' response theorists remain aware of the fact that readers react to specific *texts*, and as long as the researchers of intertextuality are aware that any interpretation is the product of a reading *subject*.

The notion of intertextuality was the appropriate answer to the problem of an ever-increasing accumulation of texts. Relations between texts are inherent in the literary tradition, both in China and in the West, but the notion of intertextuality refers to more than just taking over models from the past. Rather it relativizes the significance of the isolated text, its particularity and uniqueness. Deconstructionist interpretations enhanced the assault on the text as a unified structure by looking for things which were not openly expressed, and which appeared only from an irregularity in the textual surface or from being ostensibly absent. Deconstructionist readings focused on what was left out, on what had remained outside the text; and what was found there, outside the text, was some hidden ideological bias. Thus, attention shifted away from the particularities of textual form to the potentialities of semiotic codes. Similarly, in 1969—the very same year in which Kristeva launched the notion of intertextuality—Michel Butor wrote that individual works do not exist:

Il n'y a pas d'oeuvre individuelle. L'oeuvre d'un individu est une sorte de noeud qui se produit à l'intérieur d'un tissu culturel au sein duquel l'individu se trouve non pas plongé mais *apparu*. (There is no individual work. The work of an individual is a kind of knot in a cultural tissue, within which the individual emerges rather than is submerged.)⁸

The implications of this shift away from the text to the “cultural tissue” in which the text appears are enormous. It undercuts the idea of individual artistic expression leading to a singular work of art independent of other works. It ignores the author, and pays little attention to readers. Thus the text is released from its historical and geographical parameters. Its structure may be unclear or fragmentary, the plot weak, characterization shallow, the narrator unreliable. This notion of text, correlated to the idea of intertextuality, fits well into the poetics of postmodernism.

Mo Yan's *The Republic of Wine* and Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain*, two novels which thrive on postmodernist techniques as well as on narrative devices from traditional Chinese fiction, are texts which are compatible with this concept of intertextuality. Let me immediately emphasize a major difference between the two books. Mo Yan is an exuberant narrator, using various forms of hyperbole and the “grotesque.” Gao Xingjian offers a slow and subdued narration, in which the characters “I” and “you” seem close to the personality of the writer. Mo Yan is joking continuously, Gao Xingjian never. In fact, Gao's gravity may have made him the greater writer in the eyes of the Nobel Prize committee. However, apart from these crucial differences the two writers have many things in common. Both *The Republic of Wine* and *Soul Mountain* direct the readers' attention to the technical construction of the narrative discourse. Wang Ning considers this a sign of postmodernism,⁹ and more such signals can be found, but the postmodernist label does not exhaust the richness of the two novels, in particular not the significance of *Soul Mountain*.

In *The Republic of Wine* the narration is fragmented by the introduction of several narrators and metafictional commentary in the form

of letters exchanged between the writer Mo Yan (who indeed becomes a character in his own novel) and one of his admirers, Li Yidou. The narrative structure of *Soul Mountain* is even more fragmented. In 81 chapters, the peregrinations of the “I”-narrator through South and South-West China are described in various registers and styles. The first chapter contains the realistic report of a man arriving in a small town somewhere in South China. His wanderings lack motivation and are largely determined by chance: “You can’t explain why you’re here. It happened that you were on a train and this person mentioned a place called Lingshan” (2). In this chapter the dialogue is represented between quotation marks. In other chapters this is not always the case, either because it is an interior dialogue, or the dialogue is recorded through a subjective consciousness and presented as free indirect discourse. There are chapters which contain descriptions of towns and of nature, lyrical ruminations, references to Chinese history and myth, quotations of folk songs, soft-spoken dialogues, coarse dialogues, and absurd repetitions of words. The various episodes are loosely connected by an escape from political harassment in the capital and a search for some kind of enlightenment in the mountains. The story ends with several chapters in which the scenery is dominated by snow and ice. The last lines of the last chapter recapitulate a theme which is mentioned or suggested throughout the book: “The fact of the matter is I comprehend nothing, I understand nothing. This is how it is” (506). How could that conclusion allow for a plot with a clear beginning and end? Gao Xingjian’s worldview prevents his work from having a clearly structured plot. His novel belongs to the genre of philosophical travel notes, of which Liu E’s *The Travels of Lao Ts’an* (*Lao Can you-ji*, 1903–1907) is the first modern example, but which goes back to an older tradition, also in Japanese literature, which in the West became known through the travel sketches of the seventeenth-century haiku poet Matsuo Basho, translated into English under the title *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*.

If Gao offers an understatement of plot, Mo Yan overstates the function of the plot. Mo Yan’s book is a postmodernist crime story set in Liquorland, where the detective Ding Gou’er, an antihero, tries to

find out whether the crime of cannibalism indeed took place and who was responsible for it. Neither fact can be established. There are stories about eating young children, but these are never confirmed by a reliable narrator. The story is utterly bizarre and full of impossibilities. It is motivated by “paranoia” and is situated in a country which resembles a “labyrinth”—words which, as semantic signposts of postmodernism, occur in the text (*The Republic of Wine* 168). The story ends in ambivalence.

Both authors are well aware of Western techniques. Mo Yan refers to Faulkner, “a split personality” who “learned from Joyce’s *Ulysses*,” and adds the rhetorical question why he, too, should not learn from Joyce (353). Indeed, the last section of the last chapter has been inspired by Molly’s famous interior monologue in *Ulysses*. The novel’s intertextual relation to/with *Ulysses* is explicitly acknowledged. And Gao Xingjian is clearly influenced by the French absurd theatre, by Artaud, Ionesco and Beckett—an influence which also appears in his theatrical work, in plays like *Between Life and Death* (*Sheng si jie*, 1991) and *Dialogue and Rebuttal* (*Duihua yü fanjie*, 1992). In *Dialogue and Rebuttal* a man says:

You know it very well, there is no end, but still you have to keep on going, turning wherever there’s a turn. There’s no end, you can’t stop because you have to go on, even though you know nothing will ever come of it.¹⁰

This is a kind of contradiction which in an even more reduced form appears in *Between Life and Death*, where a woman says: “The world is finite [. . .] the world is boundless [. . .].”¹¹ These contradictory assertions display an absurd logic. As a translator of Beckett and Ionesco, Gao Xingjian is familiar with the logic of absurdity, with things happening for no particular reason. In *Dialogue and Rebuttal*, the girl is afraid that “someone might just suddenly kill me, just like that, with no particular reason.”¹² In considering that possibility Gao implicitly refers to the theory of the gratuitous action, first expressed by Dostoevsky in *The Devils* and later elaborated by Gide in *Le Prométhée*

mal enchaîné (1899, *Prometheus Misbound*) and *Les Caves du Vatican* (1914), translated into English as *Lafcadio's Adventures*. The latter novel describes how Lafcadio kills a person for no particular reason by throwing him out of a fast-moving train. Therefore Lafcadio became a favorite of the dadaists; unmotivated action is also a central issue in surrealist writing. With his wide knowledge of modern French literature Gao Xingjian must have been aware of these sources, but his main inspiration was French absurd theatre.

In *Soul Mountain* the references to chance meetings and unmotivated action are numerous. Thus the sentence in the first chapter, "You can't explain why you're here," sets the tone for the novel, which, as we mentioned, concludes with the phrase "I understand nothing." In between the same theme is expressed in various ways:

Life has no logic, so why does there have to be logic to explain what it means? (50)

This is pristine natural beauty. It is irrepressible, seeks no reward, and is without goal. (61)

Fiction [. . .] is the same as life and does not have an ultimate goal. (315)

Life itself is without goals, and is simply travelling along like this. (342)

Don't go searching for meaning, all is embodied in the chaos. (350)

I say wherever I happen to go, I don't have a specific destination. (398)

The device of juxtaposing contradictory statements used in Gao's plays occurs also in *Soul Mountain*. The "she" in chapter 21 suddenly switches from loving the man addressed as "you" to scolding him for his lack of understanding (129–30). On more than one occasion characters are making up things. Sometimes they are flatly lying (376). At times the contradictions are reduced to a single phrase: "no existence and no non-existence" (114). Of course, this is not a reference to existentialism but to Buddhism. Elsewhere Gao writes explicitly:

“Thus Buddha told the bodhisatva: the myriad phenomena are vanity, the absence of phenomena is also vanity” (p. 152). Much which has been said in the novel about absurdity or nihilism fits in with Buddhist or Daoist philosophy. But it does not seem to be of any significance where the ideas of absurdity or nothingness come from. On close scrutiny the words “East” and “West” are empty terms. What one character calls “Western” can as well be seen as “Eastern” by another (453).

Thus Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan draw on both Chinese and Western cultural heritages, and the boundaries between the two traditions are blurred. Apart from referring to Joyce and Faulkner, Mo Yan mentions Chinese legends and traditional fiction, such as *Journey to the West* and *Flowers in the Mirror*, as well as Li Bai, famous for his drunkenness. Of contemporary writers Guo Moro, Wang Meng and Yu Hua are referred to, but more significant is Mo Yan’s discussion of Lu Xun’s “Diary of a Madman,” which—like *The Republic of Wine*—leaves undecided whether or not cannibalism took place in China but which univocally draws attention to various forms of cruelty in Chinese culture (*The Republic of Wine* 55, 352). Mo Yan refers to “The True Story of Ah Q” (329), as does Gao Xingjian (447). Gao’s engagement with the Chinese cultural heritage is stronger than Mo Yan’s. Li Bai and Qu Yuan are mentioned and many folksongs and legends are incorporated in the text. Many references will have escaped me, but the following discussion may show what further explorations of the intertextual relationships might reveal.

Chapter 74 of *Soul Mountain* begins with a story about a Daoist ceremony. In general, Gao’s account of Daoism is slightly more favorable than his discussion of Buddhism with its rigid rules. The “you”-character searches for a Daoist temple by the sea and in complete darkness finally finds a cave where a monk shows him a room where he can stay overnight. At night he hears the faint sound of a woman chanting. He imagines the back of a young girl wearing her hair tied up in a bun. “She is sitting sedately, legs crossed, and is striking a bell. The delicate sound spreads out in waves like light, you cannot stop yourself believing in destiny and fate, and pray that in the nether world your soul will have peace [. . .].” (467)

This is one of the few instances where the travelling “you” finds some kind of enlightenment. Usually he is not prepared for acquiescing in fate, for he is and remains an “insatiable human being” (505), one who is incapable of giving up his self and his desires.

In this same chapter 74, just after the passage which indicates that he experienced a moment of “believing in destiny and fate,” there is an implicit reference to “The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton” by Matsuo Basho. Gao Xingjian describes how the “you”-character goes down the mountain after his visit to the temple and sees a naked child sitting in the middle of the road. The little boy, ostensibly abandoned by his parents, is relentlessly sobbing. He picks the child up and carries him on his arm for some time. Then he decides that he cannot take care of him and puts him back where he found him. The brief episode ends in shame: “You run off, in broad daylight, like a fugitive criminal. You seem to hear sobbing behind you, but don’t dare look back” (470).

Basho describes a similar event, which similarly involves a man looking for enlightenment.

I saw a small child, hardly three years of age, crying pitifully [. . .], obviously abandoned by his parents [. . .]. It was so pitiful that I gave him what little food I had with me [. . .]. How is it indeed that this child had been reduced to this state of utter misery? Is it because of his mother who ignored him, or because of his father who abandoned him? Alas, it seems to me that this child’s undeserved suffering has been caused by something far greater and more massive—by what one might call the irresistible will of heaven. If it is so, child, you must raise your voice to heaven, and I must pass on, leaving you behind.¹³

After abandoning the child, the wandering “you” in *Soul Mountain* feels like a criminal. However, in the pre-text (hypotext), Basho does not think about any personal responsibility and finds an excuse in the “will of heaven.” Edward Bond, in another remake of this episode in his play *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, castigates Basho’s attitude

with sharp irony. When the poor parents of the abandoned child ask Basho to take care of the boy, Basho says: "No. I've given it all the food I had. But I'm poor, too. And I'm going away to get enlightenment."¹⁴ Gao Xingjian will almost certainly have known either Basho's travel sketches or Bond's play, and possibly both. Gao's rewriting of the episode has no transcendental bias. When the wandering "you" leaves the child behind he accepts the responsibility for doing so and feels ashamed. Like Bond, he rejects the transcendentalist excuse.

In *Soul Mountain* the character "you" is attracted by Buddhism and Daoism which offer some (but not sufficient) compensation for the political disasters of modern times. But this interest in religious traditions is no more than a flirtation. The "I"-narrator in chapter 26 is aware that "the self is in fact the source of mankind's misery" (152), but he is far from renouncing all desire and killing the self. As mentioned earlier, at the end of the novel he calls himself an "insatiable human being."

This living and curious self is in continuous dialogue with himself. The notion of individuality creates a distinction between I" and "you." The individual "you" creates a "she" which is composed of memories and dreams, experiences and imagination (chapter 52). The individual self is divided among two or three speakers—the "I," the "you," and sometimes the "she." This makes the self plural and relative, but no less present. Desire and curiosity are expressed by several voices.

These characters, each with a strong individual consciousness, resist the homogenizing effects of the official political ideology. Any official explanation of the historical past is to be distrusted. The self is not only sharply critical of contemporary political disaster, but of any comprehensive worldview. The historical tradition itself is both a fiction and a pliable instrument in the hands of those in power. The passage where the "I"-character reads a stone epitaph near the tomb of Yu the Great is most revealing. The inscription cannot be deciphered and therefore leaves room for a fictional interpretation, which begins with "history is lies" and ends with "actually history can be read any way and this is a major discovery!" (450–51).

This interpretation of history is a celebration of the interpreting self which is free to explain history in whatever way. However, who is

this “self”? In the metafictional chapter 72 a critic asks the writer whether he is from “the searching-for-roots school.” But the writer has detached himself from geographical location and ideological bonds. He is writing “because he can’t bear the loneliness” (453). He is curious about how other people live with their solitude and their awareness of being deficient and incomplete. Therefore he is on a journey.

Intertextuality is antifoundationalist. Its focus is not on the one particular text but on the possibility of writing. The idea of intertextuality implies that there are no fixed hierarchies between texts, and that, for lack of common values, it is impossible to establish such hierarchies. No text is intrinsically better than other texts. The significance of any text has been reduced to that of just one possible form of verbal expression. And there are absolutely no restrictions on its composition. Every technique is allowed. A text may, for instance, incorporate other texts, may consist of quotations and may be an implicit or explicit rewriting. It is authentic only to the extent that it was made by a particular human being who has put together what he or she has found in other texts and in their (the other texts’) own experiences, memories, imaginings.

Gao Xingjian goes briefly into the problem of authenticity. Again it is the individual subject who decides. Taking his cue from Xu Wei, he writes: “as far as what is original and authentic, at issue is not [the] authenticity [of the work] but whether or not it can be proposed” (448, cf. also 446). I interpret Gao’s position as follows: the fate of a text depends on whether it can be proposed and accepted, and become part of the dialogue about overcoming our incompleteness. The justification of art is that it may enable the self to encounter another self.

If there is no longer any fixed hierarchy of literary texts, does this mean that the notion of aesthetics has become obsolete? No, but the aesthetic judgment depends as much on the individual reader as the judgement of originality or authenticity does. I should add, however, that it remains statistically true that some texts are more challenging and have more to offer to more readers than other texts. As mentioned above, this position has been substantiated by research. But this kind of research can never yield results which predict the success of future literary creations, since part of this success consists of unpredictable

innovation. Nor do the results of this research force anyone to appreciate a text which is appreciated by numerous other readers.

It is not fashionable to talk about aesthetics, although this may change as more books appear like Wendy Steiner's *The Scandal of Pleasure* (1995) or Emory Elliott's *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Society* (2001). It will become fashionable again to discuss the aesthetic effects of texts, if one discovers that aesthetic techniques (i.e., techniques in writing which make an aesthetic effect likely) can be used to present political, ethical and philosophical issues indirectly but with uncommon imaginative force.¹⁵ The idea of an aesthetic reading follows from the conception of literature as an art.¹⁶

It is hazardous to speak of the conditions favoring an aesthetic response to texts. Yet, for clarity's sake, I will suggest some conditions of which we happen to know something, and then turn to the question whether *Soul Mountain* and *The Republic of Wine* meet these conditions. In order to be appreciated aesthetically I assume that texts must have certain formal qualities that attract the attention of the readers, such as a high degree of internal coherence favoring the acceptance of uncommon metaphors, symbolic meaning, and linguistic and narrative constructions which depart from well-known models.¹⁷ If in this way their attention has been caught, readers are tempted to suspend their inclination to interpret the text in terms of factual correctness or immediate practical application.¹⁸ This "suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge)¹⁹ allows for an engaged observation which enables readers to discover new fields of knowledge. That knowledge should be relevant to the lifeworld of the readers. Thus, after two centuries of literary studies it is common knowledge—almost a platitude—that texts must be formally attractive, inviting engaged observation and be relevant in order to have aesthetic effect. These are necessary—though not sufficient—conditions for eliciting an aesthetic reading. What we do not know much about is another crucial element in the process of the aesthetic experience, and that is surprise or the degree of innovation which can be appreciated.²⁰ The acceptability of innovation is strongly determined by the variables of the social context and the knowledge and disposition of the individual readers. It is almost impossible to gener-

alize about these variables. Therefore I wish to concentrate here on the textual conditions.

In various degrees *The Republic of Wine* and *Soul Mountain* meet the textual conditions necessary for an aesthetic reception. A point of discussion, however, is the notion of internal coherence and, on a different level, the criterion of relevance to the lifeworld of the reader. We might argue that the metafictional commentary in the two novels and the fragmentary and inconclusive nature of the narratives, notably in *Soul Mountain*, detract from the internal coherence of the texts. Supposedly, this should diminish the readers' intention to "suspend their disbelief" and to subject the text to an aesthetic reading. However, it is the experience of many readers, including the Nobel Prize committee and myself, that *Soul Mountain* calls for an aesthetic reading which conceives of the text as a work of art. Probably also *The Republic of Wine* has been appreciated for literary/artistic reasons. How to explain these aesthetic readings in spite of deficiencies in the internal coherence of these texts?

The fragmentary and inconclusive nature of the two narratives is compensated for by their intertextuality: the references to other texts, both traditional Chinese and foreign. The intertextual discourse, which brings a great variety of texts together in a web of intertexts, provides coherence on a higher, discursive level. Moreover, in their interpretations of the intertextual connections, readers are guided by the metafictional commentary which adds to the discursive unity. If readers may think that one or two chapters in *Soul Mountain* could have been left out, or if they believe that they could insert some chapters of their own making, this could be considered as detracting from the unity of the text. But at the same time the relative incoherence of the text makes us recognize the organization of the intertextual discourse. Discursive unity compensates for the fragmentary nature of the text and is a factor favoring an aesthetic reception. What a reader appreciates in *Soul Mountain* is the way it has been written—the possibilities that have been used, or just have been indicated or hinted at—rather than the words on the page. Intertextuality is incompatible with a fetishization of the text. It calls on readers to construct a discourse of virtual texts, in

which they themselves can participate.

Are the two narratives also relevant to the lifeworld of the readers? The crime story in *Liquorland*, as told in *The Republic of Wine*, requires some knowledge of Chinese contemporary politics. My guess is that this novel has less appeal to Western readers than *Soul Mountain*, which covers a wider range of issues, is less dependent of political and cultural particularities, and is more philosophical. In *The Republic of Wine* characters may be stripped of their clothes; in *Soul Mountain* they lose their cultural attire, reduced to the universal nakedness of being human.

As I suggested at the beginning of this paper, intertextuality can be seen as an answer to the ever-increasing accumulation of texts: this is because it turns our attention to the question of how they have been written. Intertextuality implies a conception of literature that emphasizes the process of writing rather than the fixed result. It views literature as basically dialogical. Is this because no one accepts the wisdom of anyone else any more, and everyone wants to find his own Way? Gao Xingjian and most postmodernists would answer this question in the positive. Gao abhors the personal pronoun “we” (313); his philosophy is strictly individual.

Perhaps this individualism is the result of a certain “democratization” of individual minds exploring the potentialities of meaning. In the present age that exploration no longer stops at national or cultural borders. Hence we are entitled to speak of cross-cultural intertextuality. Contemporary Chinese authors are fully aware of the challenges of such an intertextuality, one which transcends national and cultural boundaries.

NOTES

¹ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980).

² Petra Hoffstaedter, *Poetizität aus der Sicht des Lesers*; Rolf Zwaan, *Aspects of Literary Comprehension*.

³ Roman Ingarden, *Das literarische Kunstwerk* 359, 363.

- ⁴ Hans Robert Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*.
- ⁵ Siegfried J. Schmidt, *Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literature*; Norman Holland, *The Brain of Robert Frost*.
- ⁶ Cf. Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).
- ⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Sèmeiotikè* 146.
- ⁸ Quoted in Ulrich Broich and Manfred Pfister 9.
- ⁹ Wang Ning, "The Reception of Postmodernism in China" 504.
- ¹⁰ Gao Xingjian, *The Other Shore, Plays* 127.
- ¹¹ Gao Xingjian, *The Other Shore, Plays* 77.
- ¹² Gao Xingjian, *The Other Shore, Plays* 113.
- ¹³ Matsuo Basho, "The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton" 52.
- ¹⁴ Edward Bond, *Narrow Road to the Deep North* 8.
- ¹⁵ Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch, *Knowledge and Commitment* 181-83.
- ¹⁶ Jurij M. Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1977).
- ¹⁷ In cases where formal coherence cannot be ascertained, contextual conditions may induce a reader to assume a high degree of textual coherence.
- ¹⁸ Siegfried J. Schmidt, *Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literature* 87.
- ¹⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia literaria* 2: 6.
- ²⁰ D. E. Berlyne, *Aesthetics and Psychobiology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971).

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