

Crosscurrents in the Literatures of Asia and the West: Essays in Honor of A. Owen Aldridge. Ed. Masayuki Akiyama and Yiu-nam Leung. Newark, Delaware: U of Delaware P, 1997. 235 pp. Index 229-35.

Crosscurrents in the Literatures of Asia and the West: Essays in Honor of A. Owen Aldridge is a welcome breeze to readers interested in taking literature in its global wholeness. Since Goethe's and Arnold's awareness of world literature as a whole, Comparative Literature formally started in the West as a new discipline in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Given the historical fact that Euro-American literature is more homogeneous and hence more understandable to the Western people, Asian literature is alien, or at least much more heterogeneous, packed as it is in various languages and heritages interchanging relatively little with traditions in the West or even within themselves in the East. As such Comparative Literature has largely overlooked literature in the Eastern hemisphere. Moreover, the discipline is constantly taking new turns—toward culture studies with a strong dosage of theoretical speculations for one, and including or focusing on hither-to neglected women's literature or literatures of the Eastern and "third" world for another. In the midst of changes and even "crises" in the field, Owen Aldridge's dictum about literature and life being the most important literary relationship seems particularly noteworthy (14). In what ways can we further invigorate our discipline, not losing sight of that all-important relationship? The seventeen essays in this volume by his students, colleagues and friends seek to honor the veteran comparatist by staying close to the gist of the matter and method he has advocated during his long teaching and writing career. Divided into five parts: Ideology and Culture, Poetics, Genre, Themes and Influences, and Gender, this collection delineates some significant currents, orientations, and possibilities in East-West literary relations. In view of its title, one may get idealistic by noting the absence of the literature of India in the South and of Arabian and Persian literature in the Near East. Nevertheless, this volume fittingly honors Owen Aldridge as one of the

most distinguished pioneers in the globalization of Comparative Literature.

One thing that may explain Aldridge's reluctance to abstract theorizing about literature is his distrust of the so-called "common poetics." Indeed, there cannot be a poetics truly common to peoples of different races and cultures. We should be aware of the pitfall of regarding the lack of "epic" or of "tragedy" in China, for instance, as if it were an unredeemable defect. Instead, we need to learn to appreciate literatures of different cultures not only in their own terms, and then with our own contemporary eyes and those of others. We may be sure that it is only in this way that we see what G. M. Hopkins calls the "pied beauty" of literature as one universal panorama. The mere fact that Poetics is downscaled one notch after Ideology and Culture gives some food for thinking. Despite the usual way of putting theory before practice in sciences and their applications, we may refrain from getting too involved in theory before we have immersed ourselves in various aspects of literature. After all, no theorizing about literature can be made unless there is literature first, and no convincing theories will ensue if we have not grasped more new literature with understanding eyes. It is perhaps a truism to say that literatures of East and the West become crosscurrents not because we start to consider them theoretically but because they have been transferred and translated from their indigenous soil to another new climate, and there take their roots and have their new spring by being read by readers with "unfamiliar affections" and "a foreign code of conscience" (W. H. Auden).

In the foregoing comments I have repeated some important points in the Preface by Yiu-nam Leung and the Profile by Masayuki Akiyama. I should like to add an interesting fact concerning Aldridge's contribution to Comparative Literature circles toward authentic literary universalism in the early 1970s. Aldridge was at the first (1971) through the fifth (1987) of Tamkang international comparative literature conferences and there, ensconced in the VIP room upstairs and equipped with an IBM electric, he performed the Herculean task of recapitulating and gracefully commenting on the numerous papers presented. His devotion and contribution in promoting contact among scholars concerned

with bridging literature East and West will live forever in the history of Chinese-Western comparative literature studies.

In the **Ideology and Culture** part, Dai-yun Yue's "Cultural Discourse and Cultural Intercourse" lays out the impact of Western critical theories, chiefly German, Russian, and French, on the more conservative Chinese mainstream. Stripped of their historical context and intellectual aura, these new theories, or for that matter, old theories brought into a new context, often cause critical confusion. To hope or strive for a "dynamic dialogue" and "new discourse" is always useful for dispelling confusion or ambivalence even temporarily, but one should never forget that, in cultural intercourse no imported discourse or indigenous discourse will win the day for an extended period of time. Since cultural interchange goes on as a give-and-take process, there can not be a definite answer to such a question as "Is there any valid reason to apply Western discourses to Chinese culture and society?" (34) If Yue agrees with Jürgen Habermas that examination of self in the light of the other is necessary for self-development, the question can be put conversely: How can we assert that "only we can understand ourselves"? And how do we mean that a native culture cannot be "interpreted" or "interpreted to a full extent"? (35). If the Chinese have inherited the wisdom in Mencius's method of "going back to the authorial intent through textual meaning" (*ii izhi*) as well as Dong Zhongshu's dictum that "poetry cannot be interpreted fully" (*shiwu dagu*), they are the people who understand the ironic statement that it is always necessary but also useless to talk about the validity of interpretation. Different cultures have developed different approaches, and it is futile to expect all people to agree on any single approach or interpretation.

In his "Genre and Canon: An Inquiry into the Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Literature," Heh-hsiang Yuan digs deep into the cultural roots of Greco-Roman antiquity in the West and the Pre-Han in China to see how cultural milieu played an important role in genre and canon formation and development. Among other things, he explains why the Greeks evolved from the epic to the dramatic, and the Chinese from the historical to the poetic. Yuan castigates rightly the *rapport-de-fait* influence studies as missing the essential relationships, and the kind of

studies that appropriate foreign theoretical concepts to the study of a national literature. However, what Yuan considers as the cultural facts or common origins that bring two literatures together for fruitful comparison can only be described in general terms. Apparently the so-called “comparable ground” is up to all comparatists to define from their own perspectives because, as Yue in the foregoing article aptly puts it, “Culture is not the fixed ‘things become’ but the developing ‘things becoming’” (34). It is useful to observe that as a whole the Chinese tradition is more devoted to the lyrical than the dramatic mode, more intuitive or imaginative than analytical or descriptive in its critical apprehension, more integral in considering both the inner and outer form, or the diachronicity and synchronicity of the development of genres and canons. Such basic features, however, were already observable in Liu Xie’s *Wen-sin diaolong*, a towering landmark in literary criticism and theory.

Adrian Hsia’s well documented “The Zeitgeist and Herder’s Reconstruct of China” deals with an unfortunate historical instance of how warped perceptions of cultural differences in the latter half of the eighteenth century paved the way for European colonialism in the next. From the perspectives of aggressive Eurocentricism of the time, the nonmilitancy and the so-called “genetic force” or “inner climate” of the Chinese people were directly linked to their supposed weakness, decadence, ugliness, and slavishness. To Herder, the Chinese are “incapable of important inventions and excel only in paltriness” and are “outside the sphere of the Bible” (57). The turnabout of Herder’s vitriolic criticism against China came along later with his improved knowledge of some Chinese philosophy and recognition of the Jesuits’ role as intermediary between the two cultures. It is useful to note that 1802, the year when these changes took place, signaled the birth of an agreeable climate for comparative literature and culture East and West.

John T. Dorsey’s “Shades of Enlightenment: Concepts of Modernization and Westernization in Meiji Japan” is much more than a historical account of how Japan finally and successfully opened herself to Westernization to rid herself of her feudalistic, sterile past. The people realized that danger lay ahead for both *sakoku* (closing the country) and *kaikoku* (opening the country), but advocates for the latter,

with Fukuzawa Yukichi at the helm, gradually won the day, and *bunmei kaika* (developing toward civilization) was writ large across the board. While the progressive enlightenment thinkers all argued for Westernization as the only effective means of progress, Dorsey does not stint to point out that European enlightenment thinkers on the other hand were “fascinated by Eastern thought, culture, philosophy, and religion, and . . . idealized them as ‘natural’ and ‘rational’ in opposition to the artificial and irrational beliefs of Christianity that stultified thought and arrested social development” (66). Such ironic contrast is quite in line with the healthy, balanced way of viewing the others across cultural borders.

Shunsuke Kamei traces the history of the reception of Mark Twain in Japan, paying meticulous attention to the intermediaries and cultural context to which his writings were introduced. He noted especially how a full-scale appreciation and scholarly treatment of the author (*The World of Mark Twain*, 1995, by Kamei himself) had been preceded by warm reception of him merely as a writer of juvenile, humorous stories, which succeeded an initial period of indifference, in which Twain was deemed “course and vulgar,” contrary to Japanese traditional values. This story of Twain’s “fate” of a hundred years in Japan illustrates how cultural understanding may come slowly and gradually, but steadily and fruitfully if the flow of interchange is kept up.

Seon-kon Kim studies how Asian Eyes perceive “American Culture on the Silver Screen,” or at least the title says so. It turns out, however, to be an examination of the film industry as a text of American cultural history, a text which reveals the dynamic interplay of the American Dream and its opposite and constantly opposing American nightmares. One may say that as the American Dream continues its legendary position of money-centered success, there will be not just one but various nightmares—the nagging racism constantly on the agenda of school teachers, the uneasy men-women relationship with the American Adam matched with an American Eve not being able to come to terms for a sweet home, and the disappearing peaceful green garden threatened by roaring machines. As part of the bargain, human

existence will always have to live through, one way or another, the discrepancy between dream and reality. Such a view of the American Dream is perhaps not particularly Asian. But what is the American Dream? In what sense, for instance, is Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* "Great" or "great"? Can we really eulogize him for shutting his eyes to the Valley of Ashes while casting his eyes steadily at the green light? Or shall we look at the whole scene with Dr. Eckleberg's eyes, ironically or enigmatically?

In part two, **Poetics**, Wai-lim Yip contributed his "Ezra Pound's Tensional Dialogue with the Chinese Concept of Nature." Yip has been working on Pound and Daoist aesthetics for some time even before his *Ezra Pound's Cathay* (1969), and he has crystallized his ideas and sharpened his expression of them to perfection. The dense texture of Yip's essay defies any facile description, but first we note that it consists of two parts, one on Daoist poetics and the other on Pound's "failure" to practice it faithfully. In so far as creation often results from appropriation and misunderstanding (*duanzhang qu'i* in Mencian terms), we are interested not only in Pound's dialogue with the Daoists (Zhuangzi and Laozi), but also in Yip's dialogue with Pound. Having said this, we may care to modify Yip's castigation of Pound that he "fails" because he understood neither Daoism nor Daoist contribution to Chinese poetry (94). In a nutshell, Yip's pristine idea of what poetry ought to be is a Chinese brand of "pure" poetry, the kind that deals with the exquisite sentiment of "stillness, emptiness, silence, or quiescence" (99) as in Wang Wei, Liu Tsungyuan, Wei Yingwu of the Tang, and noticeably also in Japanese haiku poets such as Basho, Buson, and Issa, and No playwrights such as Zeami. It is one supreme kind of poetry which, as it were, apprehends the universe in its cosmic unity. The plain fact, however, is that we need all kinds of poetry, and most poets with their limited vision are bound to "fail" to measure up to this. So with his Daoist impulse, Pound practiced simultaneity, montage, and visual perspicuity, culminating in some of his Cantos. But, as Yip points out astutely, Pound failed to practice Daoist aesthetics to the hilt presumably because, as a Westerner, he also had his Platonic impulse "to relish some transcendental light" (106).

Eugene Eoyang's "Metaphor in the Sciences and in the Humanities: Logic, Rhetoric, or Heuristic?" promotes "scientific humanism" by examining kinds of metaphor and models of thought. In this rare essay relating literature in particular and humanities in general to the sciences, Eoyang claims that recent findings of scientists are closing the gap between scientific discourses and humanitarian expressions. In a humorous tone, he debunks one scientific (traditionally considered to be scientific any way) method after another, pointing out that scientists have been incessantly creating inspired errors only to be "corrected" or overturned by later ones. The supposed subjectivity of literature and objectivity of sciences as a matter of fact complement each other in man's reach for truth. In singling out the catalytic and heuristic mode of metaphoric thinking as crucial to man's search for truth, Eoyang places man's imaginative or intuitive faculty above systematic research. The essay boils down to affirming that the literary metaphor, the "rhetorical and suasive" and the "heuristic" use of metaphor, ought to be considered the most useful. All this is in line with the Romantic poets' faith in the power of imagination. In discrediting "faith in system" (114) and the organic model of thought, Eoyang is perhaps proceeding in a low gear towards an ambience of positivism or chaos theory. There is no gainsaying that bureaucracy cannot be a good system, but for that matter, neither can we say that democracy as it is practiced is always a good system. All we can do, and should do without doubt, is to keep thinking about improving our systems by recourse to a (sometimes metaphysical) system on a higher level. It may be that our instinct for survival, creative imagination if you like, will adamantly take chaotic occurrences, serendipity, arbitrary human constructs, or freaks of nature to be still part and parcel of a cosmic unity which will emerge through the combined operation of metaphorical thinking.

The third part on **Genre** begins with Marián Gálik's "Feng Zhi and His Goethean Sonnet," a minutely documented page of Chinese-German literary relations. It is a personal reminiscence of Feng Zhi, a modern Chinese poet-scholar who studied in Heidelberg and was inspired by such German teachers as Karl Jaspers. Feng's immersion in the works of Goethe and R. M. Rilke led to his spiritual renewal in

those difficult war years. One of his “Sonnets” is dedicated to Goethe, others are addressed to such outstanding “stars” as Du Fu, Cai Yuanpei, Lu Xun, and van Gogh (125). While wars were raging in and ravaging both European and Asian continents, Goethe was inspired by Hafiz the Persian lyric poet, and Feng Zhi was spiritually invigorated by German poets Goethe and Rilke, and the great thinker Jaspers. Were these the main sources of Feng’s belief in “cosmic love”? Gálik does not presume to give a definite answer, but he has set a good example of how cultural history is to be written.

Koon-ki Tommy Ho’s “Dystopia as an Alternative Historical Hypothesis of Eutopia: The Life Histories of Eutopia in *Animal Farm* and *A Utopian Dream*” is an interesting account of how history blends with fiction and the two enhance each other. Ho’s analysis shows convincingly how in both novels, by George Orwell and MoYing-feng respectively, the utopia gradually declines, turns into a dystopia, and eventually collapses because of the community members’ different inclinations—to adhere to original ideals or to opt for reforms. The birth of an ineffectual aristocratic class is indeed a time bomb in a society supposed to be classless, and a similar crisis develops when benevolence is rigidly carried to the extreme of endangering the survival of human species. If political allegory is clearly there in both novels, Ho seems to refrain from identifying the individuals with respect to the Russian or PRC communist regimes. Perhaps the fun is reserved for readers to discover.

Yiu-nam Leung’s detailed comparison of two prominent naturalists in his “High Finance in Emile Zola and Mao Tun” calls several topics to our attention: (a) Mao Tun’s role as a forerunner of Naturalism in China, (b) how Mao Tun’s *Midnight* (1933) parallels Zola’s *Money* (*L’Argent*, 1891) without being directly influenced by him, and (c) how Mao Tun compares with Zola in theory and practice. It has been pointed out that Mao Tun obtained his theory of naturalism and philosophical materialism from foreign critics other than Zola, and that he had never read Zola’s *Money* before he started practicing novel writing (147). It is interesting to note that Zola came by his theory (*La Roman expérimental*, 1880) on the basis of his practice for almost

thirteen years, while Mao Tun started with acquired knowledge of naturalism in 1922 but did not produce his *Midnight* until eleven years later. Whether practice should come before theory or vice versa is a matter of great concern for the discipline of Comparative Literature. In both theory and practice, however, *Money* and *Midnight* afford much ground for comparison. Leung's valuable contribution lies in examining how Mao Tun's fictional technique compares with Zola's. The similarities in theme (the power of the financiers in Paris and Shanghai), plot (the pain of the underprivileged), and character portrayal (through minute observation) are often attended by dissimilarities resulting from various factors. Tolstoy's influence on Mao Tun, for instance, produced a warm sympathy instead of cool detachment to people's sufferings (146). Leung makes a good point in describing such disparities with naturalist tenets as an indication of Mao Tun's loyalty to his calling rather than to the theory he abstracted from F. W. Chandler (147).

The first of the three essays in the **Themes and Influences** part is Masayuki Akiyama's "A Woman's Search for Identity in *A Certain Woman* and *The Portrait of a Lady*." Both works carry the theme of woman's search for identity in a cross-cultural setting. Because of the difference in their upbringing, Arishima's Yoko is an ordinary woman, and James's Isabel Archer is a lady. Both find the society of their native soil stifling, and both venture forth to find a new heaven and new earth. Yoko aspires for freedom, and Isabel yearns for artistic refinement. Both freedom and refinement, however, turn out to be only mirages in a bleak reality in which women cannot easily extricate themselves from their "transgression" (Yoko) or misguided judgment (Isabel). Akiyama aptly mentions Whitman's influence on Arishima and other writers of his day (163). May we not suppose both Yoko and Isabel to have dreamed the special kind of American dream embodied in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and their dreams just went awry? When we readers realize this, we can be always sympathetic toward women's search for self identity and fulfillment, and realize that they just have to go through the process of trial and error singing their "Song of Myself."

The next essay, Yoko Matsui's "Koyo Ozaki's *The Golden Demon* (*Konjiki yasha*) in the Light of Western Fiction" poses an intriguing

ing problem of source hunting. Citing the most probable sources, two not well-known American novels, Bertha M. Clay's *Dora Thorne* (1883) and Alice K. Hamilton's *White Lilies* (1895), and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1843), Matsui initially focuses on Hamilton's as the most nearly correct answer. Later in the essay, however, she concludes that Ozaki might have adopted elements from various sources (176). This seeming incongruity we should take as part of an open-minded, sound approach to influence studies. It is such a study that contributes to the history of literary relations and stimulates readers to intertextual thinking. The subjects of money and of women's emancipation, as Matsui has pointed out, were much on people's minds as Japan was opening herself to the "material" civilization of the West. Kwanichi the protagonist is jilted by Miya who in turn has apparently been pressed by her parents to betray their ardent love and mutual trust. What made Ozaki's novel so very sensational was not just the way the lovers are mercilessly torn apart, but the psychological change following their separation. Miya's ambivalence and later regrets are comparable to Catherine's in *Wuthering Heights*, whereas Kwanichi's all-consuming, diabolic hatred is, in comparison with Heathcliff's, beyond comprehension. Does Kwanichi take too much for granted? The author of this essay might agree that the central interest of the novel lies in the tension between Kwanichi's demonic defiance against money-polluted society and the new breed of women who assume the right to balance or even manipulate one suitor against the others? (176)

Matoshi Fujisawa's "The Role of Ogai Mori's Translation of Hans Christian Andersen's *Improvisatoren* in the Poetical Works of Takuboku Ishikawa" provides a detailed account of how much Takuboku was influenced by the Danish author's novel *Improvisatoren* (1835) through Ogai's translation based on a German version. The immense success of Ogai's "creative rendering" is itself an interesting topic for translation study. Takuboku's liberal appropriation of Anderson without acknowledgement is yet another intriguing topic. The resemblance of some poems by Takuboku to portions of Anderson's long novel is indeed strikingly close. And yet, Fujisawa is reticent where some evaluation or

judgment may be expected. It may be that creative borrowing, as many classical examples go (e.g., Shakespeare's borrowing from Holinshed's *Chronicles* for one), is not usually considered a defect.

In the **Gender** part, I-chun Wang's "Class Conflict and the Politics of Gender in *Arden of Feversham* and *Kan Tou Chin*" is a socio-economical study of two murder plays. In both Elizabethan and Chinese Yuan societies, class distinction and the politics of gender were supposed to contribute to social stability. The author is to be credited for pointing out the similar subjection of women in both Elizabethan and early China. She affirms that, contrary to common assumptions, the two domestic tragedies typify the kind of revolt that will ensue in transition from rigid feudal hierarchies to more liberal practices. It is perhaps no mere coincidence that in both plays it is men rather than women who get murdered: while men have only the moneyed and ruling class to revolt against, women may have two axes to grind, one for the rich, and the other for their ineffectual or oppressive husbands.

In Kai-chong Cheung's "Female Rebellion: Old Style and New," comparative study of three feminist novels is probably not really meant to bring a conclusion as to which style of female revolt is to be preferred—old or new, or which solution is better—independence or triumph (201). No matter whether she is to be held responsible or credited for it, Ibsen's Nora Helmer brought in her wake a great many feminist problem novels. Cheung has made a happy choice of these three because, far from being propagandistic, the characters and settings are all convincingly drawn. Given the character and situation in which the heroine finds herself, she makes the choice of venturing forth one way or another. If the truth must be told, the conclusion is often ambiguous. It may not be total independence, but independence with a substantial mixture of loneliness. Neither can it be undiluted triumph, but a Pyrrhic victory which serves as a balm for hurt minds. Freeman's Mrs. Penn has a happy ending in having a husband who realizes what his woman desires most. Thus seen, Freeman's novel is really a sort of Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's* "Prologue" to two gruesome tales that follow.

The structuring of this essay serves to place a mutual-illumination kind of analogical studies above mere arraignment of historical facts. Yu Li-hua leaves her readers wondering or worrying what will happen to Tsui-o. The results lies somewhere between Nora Helmer's departure from home, and Edna Pontellier's (in *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin) submersion in the sea. Walker's Celia moves out of her husband's sphere of influence to win her independence and "psychological" triumph (207). A less pessimistic feminist novel may give the protagonist a complete triumph, but then it may cease to be an interesting problem novel.

The last essay to round off this collection is Naomi Matuoka's "Tsuyeda Umeko as University Founder and Cultural Intermediary." This is a unique critical biography of a great Japanese woman who played a crucial role in educating Japanese women toward Westernization and modernization. Her rare opportunity of studying in the United States from seven to eighteen years of age (1871-1882) enabled her to play that role with fortitude and brilliancy. She managed to survive those difficult years of double identity in being a Japanese girl of Confucian upbringing embracing the Christian faith, and living in a culture an ocean apart from her native soil. In considering Japanese culture primitive, she exhibited the prevalent inferiority complex felt by the East toward the West. In considering educational opportunity the key to liberating Japanese women from their subjection to men, however, she was much like a Mary Wollstoncraft. Her divided allegiance, however, did not distract her from her sense of mission, which was to be an educator of her fellow countrywomen. She served as spokeswoman for women and her own culture, promoting understanding between the East and the West. She succeeded in uniting women in sisterhood across national, religious, and linguistic barriers.

While each essay is a satisfying and fruitful reading experience, I must point out a blemish in transliterating Asian names. Although the *MLA Style Manual* has recognized as standard most Asian peoples' way of putting surnames before given names, the actual practice is a welter of confusion. The general tendency in this essay collection, for instance, is toward the Western form of "first name" followed by "last

name.” This results in a number of misnomers or confusions among Asian names. For instance, should the Daoist philosopher be Tsuang Tze or Chuang Tze and his last name Zhuang or Chuang or even “Tze”? Another source of confusion then lies in our not agreeing on one transcription system. If we acknowledge MLA’s adoption of the increasingly popular Pinyin (PY) as the standard for Chinese, the philosopher is obviously one name Zhuangzi (Yue 37) and the surname first also for Japanese names, as in FukuzawaYukichi (Dorsey 61). While editors usually yield to the contributors’ personal preferences, we do hope to have more uniformity in intercultural communication.

In the foregoing paragraphs, I have tried to be as objective and disinterested as possible in my reading, but there are times when I could not but be touched by the writers’ brilliant, intelligent grasp of things, by their sense of devotion to their calling, and, may I add, by their zeal to make their efforts worthy of their esteem and affection for Professor Owen A. Aldridge, old friend or mentor. There is no doubt that my bias creeps in here and there, and I must beg my gentle reader’s indulgence.

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