

As for de Grazia's parting quip, I can only reply by refusing to hold myself accountable for what some of my readers may wish.

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Trakl and Chinese Poetry

To the Editor:

Pauline Yu's intriguing article on the "East-West Correspondences in Lyric Poetry" (*PMLA*, 94 [1979], 261–74) points to hitherto unfamiliar aspects of Trakl's poetry, unfamiliar at least to the Germanist. Therein lies its strength but also its weakness. Strangely, Yu does not once mention the term "expressionism." Rather, she refers to Georg Trakl somewhat blandly as a "post-Symbolist." It would seem that, however we define expressionism, Trakl's formal and thematic identification with that style is evident; he shares with the other poets of expressionism the many features singled out by Yu (e.g., parataxis, "ciphers," end-stopped lines, the juxtaposition of nouns). While Trakl's poetry lacks the pathos characteristic of the later expressionists who struggled against the forces that threatened to enslave mankind and who issued a call for the rebirth of man, he was certainly one of the early poets of the group. Moreover, the expressionists are linked to the romanticists through the visionary aspects of both movements. Trakl's poetry, therefore, cannot simply be considered in isolation, as if the poet just happened to be a kindred spirit of the poets of the Tang Dynasty of a thousand years ago. The "discontinuity" of language present in Yu's Chinese examples and the corresponding quality in Trakl's poems have different origins. The distrust of traditional language, the need to express a vision of the essence of man, and the view of reality as chaos were born of a historical development with which the expressionist poets were confronted at the beginning of the twentieth century. Their perception of the human condition led them to employ new or uncommon poetic means, such as abstraction, the omission of any reference to a speaker or the use of the collective "we" in place of the personal "I," typecasting, and mythologizing. Their ultimate aim was the poetic realization of the rebirth of man.

Yu points to the similarities in syntax and imagery between Chinese poetry and Trakl's and states that the classical Chinese language tends very much toward syntactic discontinuity (pp. 262–63). Since German, however, does not have that tendency (or a tradition of writing poetry in a paratactic style, as Yu says ancient Chinese poetry does [p.

262]), the discontinuity of Trakl's language must be contrived. The correspondences in the two sets of poems, therefore, appear to be accidental rather than historical; as Yu remarks, Trakl sought the effect of Chinese poetry because it suited his purposes. He and the other expressionists share the technique of using parataxis, for example, or of attaching absolute value to objects. In this respect, then, Pauline Yu's parallels, including the parallel of impersonality, are instructive but misleading. The world view of Trakl specifically and that of the expressionists as a group encouraged "generality," that is, a highly subjective view of man against the backdrop or foil of a seemingly objective style.

Finally, a word about Pauline Yu's translations from the German. They are on the whole felicitous and betray a good feel for the language. Still, there are errors that matter, because in poetry, especially, every word is important: p. 261 et passim: *Weih-er* = "fish pond" (not "weir"); p. 267: *Gewaltig* = "mightily" (not "peacefully"); *verbrennen* = "to be consumed by fire," "to burn up" (not just "burned"); *Hügel* = "hill" (not "hillock"); *Kahn* = "boat," one of no particular description (unlike "skiff"); p. 268: *Grauer* = misprint for *Trauer?*; p. 270: *ein Sterbliches* = "something mortal" (not "a mortal") and hence the next line should be "something else suffers also" (not "and another suffers in sympathy"); p. 271: *Des Menschen gold-nes Bildnis* = "man's golden image" (not "That man's golden image").

Again, Yu's article, though an unusual and instructive piece, lacks the historical dimension that would have given it a much stronger base than merely the Rilke reminiscence about Trakl and Li-Tai-Pe (p. 273, n. 1).

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To the Editor:

Pauline Yu's "The Poetics of Discontinuity: East-West Correspondences in Lyric Poetry" offers a useful consideration of *Symboliste* and *Imagiste* poetry in terms of Chinese poetics, but it confounds *Symbolisme* and *Imagisme*. Ezra Pound insisted that "*Imagisme* is not *Symbolisme*" and that the "Image is not a symbol." The distinction, which is real and significant, should be noted in this context.

Yu pictures a poet attempting to achieve timelessness by arranging representative ciphers from an internal landscape. While this picture seems just for the *Symboliste*, *Imagisme* is in opposition to each of these points.