

林露德《千金》中的「旅行素材」

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摘要

本文旨在耙梳小說《千金》中主角 Lalu Nathoy（或作 Polly Bemis）的「他者」旅行經驗，以有別於西方自我本位的旅行者。而為了避免「旅行」一詞中的意識形態內涵，本文提出敘事學裡「素材」的概念，用較為中性、客觀的視角來看待旅行主體。由此，「旅行素材」囊括三個主要事件，其分別為「異化」、「交換」、及「回編」，也將據之探索《千金》中的旅行書寫。再者，本文認為，因為這些事件源自於符號的經濟運作，對該小說的討論即為符號學式的，也就是說，就「旅行」的初級表意分析之。

關鍵詞：旅行、素材、《千金》、象徵、符號

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The “Travel Fabula” in Ruthanne Lum McCunn’s *Thousand Pieces of Gold*

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Abstract

This paper aims to unravel the traveling experience of Lalu Nathoy-also known as Polly Bemis-in *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (TPG) in her capacity as an “other” traveler, as distinct from the egoistic travelers in the West. Yet, owing to the ideologically-bound concept of “travel,” this paper seeks to neutralize it by gauging it with the concept of fabula, by which traveling subjects can be discussed in a proper theoretical context. Thus, it is proposed here that the *travel fabula* comprises three events- alienation, exchange, and re/membering-and it will be employed to consider TPG in its specificity. Furthermore, the working hypothesis is that these events are the results of the economy of sign so that such reading of TPG will be semiotic in nature, that is, to explore the signification of travel in its inception.

Keywords: travel, fabula, *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, symbol, sign

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This paper aims to unravel the traveling experience of Lalu Nathoy-also known as Polly Bemis-in *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (TPG) in her capacity as an “other” traveler, as distinct from the egoistic travelers in the West. Yet, owing to the ideologically-bound concept of “travel,” this paper seeks to neutralize it by gauging it with the concept of fabula,¹ by which traveling subjects can be discussed in a proper theoretical context. Thus, it is proposed here that the *travel fabula* comprises three events-alienation, exchange, and re/membering-and it will be employed to consider TPG in its specificity. Furthermore, the working hypothesis is that these events are the results of the economy of sign so that such reading of TPG will be semiotic in nature, that is, to explore the signification of travel in its inception.

Rationale: Two Travelers

In “Traveling Cultures,” James Clifford sweepingly argues, “Alexander von Humboldt obviously did not arrive on the Orinoco coast for the same reasons as an Asian indentured laborer” (107). By this, he implicitly introduces two kinds of travelers, who, though both “under strong cultural, political, and economic compulsions,” are “privileged” and “oppressed” respectively (108). However, once their experiences examined, one would find out: to designate the name of

¹ My use of “fabula” and “story” follows Mieke Bal’s theory. Simply put, fabula refers to the constituent elements abstracted from the level of representation: story. Please refer to the next section for detailed discussion.

traveler to the oppressed is somehow a historical impertinence. The kind of agency attributed to the “travel-er” has not been conferred on the oppressed traveler. It is only in retrospect that one reckons that the oppressed has experienced something like travel. There is thus an irony, that the historical inertia of the oppressed is enveloped in the glorified form of mobility.

This seeming contradiction has been historically derived from the white male’s discourse on travel. Eric J. Leed aptly terms it as a “spermatic journey” prompted by “a male reproductive motive” (qtd. in Wolff 123). For instance, Jason’s quest of the golden fleece fittingly exemplifies this juxtaposition of travel and mobility as well as masculinity and reproductivity. The oppressed, however, entertains no such mobility unless it is coerced and imposed. One is then obliged to scrutinize its connotations that go beyond the empirical domain, that is, to look for the *fabula* of travel that pinpoints the events pivotal to traveling experiences without falling into the *story* of travel, which abounds in racism and sexism.

TPG was once made into a movie by the documentarian Nancy Kelly, and as generally anticipated, the question of truthfulness is raised regarding the imaging of Asian-American subjects.² For example, the “Jim” that transports Lalu to Hong King is given the name Li Po in the film. Probably because the director wishes to create an immediacy between the visual and the audience, the more familiar

² The following details about the film version come from the website:
<http://www.tvguide.com/movies/database/showmovie.asp?MI=34652>.

name Li Po—evoking the lyric poet in Ancient China—has an easier access to the spectators’ mind. Another instance is the poker scene, in which Charlie Bemis wins freedom for Lalu, but in the film version, it is Hong King who promises Lalu to work off her debt. Although these instances deserve interpretation, they are, in a sense, related to how the fabula is transformed into story. Therefore, in dealing with the fundamentals of travel narratives, one needs to look into what is in reality focused and appropriated at the fabula level of travel.

The “Travel Fabula”

When it is brought up in the introduction to *Traveller’s Tales* that “a minimal definition of travel would involve a movement from one place to another,” this minimized understanding is certainly minimal in the sense that travel writing encompasses a vast diversity of narratives that could be travel-*ized* either literally or metaphorically (2). Travel narratives are literal in that they presumably record authentic events in the form of *account*. At the metaphorical level, narratives that deal with place and space, movement and difference also partake in the journeying process. The latter could be illustrated by Oedipus, whose movement *on the road* evokes discussions concerning the encounter with the other, as well as the constructions of home and away, all those familiar topics in travel accounts.

On the other hand, Barbara Korte’s definition of travel writing—“the interaction of the human subject with the world” that is “foreign”-

seems appropriate at first sight, but just as the metaphorical reading above would expand the travel genre, her conception would only *un*-limit the boundary in delimiting it (5). Virtually all literature tackles the interactions between human subjects and the foreign worlds. In addition, does the foreign world necessarily imply differences in nationality? Or what else?

To approach the travel genre in its specificity, one requires a more structural understanding of its salient features. Alison Blunt thus alerts one to the trilogy of travel as “comprised of departure, journey, and return” (52). This recognition of travel as a three-phase action corresponds to common sense and makes a pertinent definition that points out the crucial moments constituting a journey of home and away. Nevertheless, Blunt overlooks a factor that relates to the uneasiness about the possibilities of returning in post-colonial narratives. That is, the “return” in Blunt’s trilogy appears to favor a geographically-fixed idea of home. This would gloss over the traumatic experiences of the post-colonial subjects whose sense of home may span a spectrum of belonging-ness-too much politicized and multi-faceted to be pinned down.

Therefore, this paper aims to find out what is crucial to the understanding of travel, whether literally or metaphorically. Here, Mieke Bal’s differentiation between text, story, and fabula in a narrative text is particularly useful. Text refers to the media through which stories are shown, an important concept because media is for the moment ideologically significant for those wishing to understand how a certain

form can contribute to the making of ideologies. As to the story, it refers to the main part of the narrative text, that is, what one reads or hears in a certain text. This is the level where similar yet dissimilar representations come to the fore, and where affect and aspect forcibly work on the readership. In terms of text and story, travel narratives can be seen respectively as how they are contained in certain forms and as how one is affected in the reception of a story. It is at the level of story that Blunt defines travel: one knows that in a journey the protagonist has to depart, proceed, and finally return home. Yet, as I have argued, such a sequence blurs the distinction between two travelers and thus imposes an imperialist discourse on the oppressed. In this vein, I would like to invoke the level of *fabula* in the narrative text. As stories may differ in degree, they are dialectically predicated upon models so that differences are brought into play in the story-ing process. Hence, fabula is the category comprised of events, actors, time, and space, the fundamentals that are kneaded into diverse shapes in stories. Among these four elements, events are the leading determinants essential to the formation of narratives. If mobility serves as the vital concern in traveling experience, events serve as its indicators in that they point to "the transition from one state to another state, caused or experienced by actors" (Bal 182). Hence, when one speaks of the mobility of travel, it is better conceived in the more abstract "event" of fabula.

Consequently, in tracing the fabula of travel narratives, I rewrite Blunt's trilogy of "depart, journey, return" into "alienate, exchange, re/member." With Korte's definition of travel as a human subject's

interaction with the foreign world, it is clear that traveling initiates a differentiation between self and other. To alienate thus applies to the surfacing of the sense of self, either secured, in the case of the hegemonic subjects, or jeopardized, in the case of coerced traveling subjects. In either case, the self is pit against the alien world whence alienation arises. Then the second phase features the reaction to the aforesaid sense of alienation. To assimilate it is the habitual practice of the colonizers, in the act of exchanging gifts, for example, with the natives, and the subsequent exploitation that tilts the balance of exchange between the coded subjectivities: while one becomes over-coded, the other de-coded. So, how exchange is conceived and practiced carries purport of sustaining or subsuming self and other in traveling experience.

The third-phase event in the travel fabula, in a sense, has something to do with the home-ward journey. Yet, as such understanding proscribes the multi-layered sense of home, I redefine it as an act of re/membering. For one thing, in view of memory at work in forming subjectivity, this re/membering relates to how the journeying subject maintains his/her mnemonic site, how the past negotiates with the present, and how the mnemonic traces contest or collude with each other. The other thing is, to re/member draws the pun of membership. This is the result of the above negotiations so that the journeying subject confronts the issue of identifying him/herself with a certain group. There arises the sense of home, though it may remain contested in the end. That is, even if the choice falls in-between, it is also indicative of resting on the fragmented sense of self appropriate to the

postmodern climate.

In sum, it is via these three phases—to alienate, to exchange, to re/member-in the travel fabula that I intend to analyze *TPG*. The ultimate concern is to evaluate how the protagonist Lalu Nathoy/Polly Bemis procures selfhood in her status as a traveler.

Alienation: From Symbol to Sign

As Trinh T. Minh-ha contends that “Every voyage is the unfolding of a poetic” (21), every traveling experience is a deviation from the norm. This is reasonably bolstered by the fact that each journey contains invariably numerous exotic encounters that will pose challenges to the norms one has received in native homes. In the Lacanian sense, therefore, a journey must be understood as setting aside the symbolic order and simultaneously entering what Julia Kristeva would term “the semiotic,” the site where signs engage with each other and re-create visions of *other*-s. Meanwhile, because such a process indicates the emergence of unfamiliar sights, the transition from the symbol to the sign constitutes the first instance in the travel fabula, which I refer to as “to alienate,” to forgo the symbolic and immerse oneself in the multivalent sign.

This distinction between symbol and sign is well expounded by Kristeva in her “The Bounded Text.” First of all, the symbol’s function is one of “restriction,” referring back to “one (or several) unrepresentable and unknowable universal transcendence(s)” (38). She is saying that

what the symbolic represents is the disembodied law that gives its orders through exclusion, creating binary oppositions with one of the bipartite acting as the model. The typology of the symbolic is thus “nonconjunction,” suggestive of particularism of a certain seme while expelling other semes of the same sign (Kristeva 41). By contrast, the sign has the capacity of exposing semes that, each being irreducible, could discernibly coexist in the semiotic practice of the sign (Kristeva 40). Kristeva hence describes the work of sign as “nondisjunction,” in which dualism and contradiction co-exist as if in a normal state, in contradistinction to the finite symbol (41). Accordingly, to alienate is to contest the nonconjunctive symbol and to encounter the nondisjunctive sign.

In this respect, Lalu’s alienation takes place at two moments when the symbolic withdraws its hold and the semiotic sets in. The first one occurs when her father gives her in to Chen the bandit by accepting two bags of soybeans from him (*TPG* 49-50). What is at work is the semiotic practice of the sign that the symbolic fails to assimilate. Before the event, Lalu is nicknamed “qianjin” by her father, who means to position his daughter in the symbolic.³ He even tries to distinguish her in the symbolic by allowing Lalu to work in the field after his adventuresome act of growing winter wheat turns out to be a fiasco. Her symbolic status thus seeks to repress the female elements and

³ Literally, “qianjin” means thousand pieces of gold, and metaphorically, the daughter of a wealthy house. The substitution of the gold theme for an otherwise devalued girl suggests that Lalu’s father has to find a way to justify the existence of his daughter.

highlight its social value. The maximization of the symbolic is so great that one of the villagers says-when they gossip about the possibility of Lalu being sold by her father-"Don't be absurd. Nathoy wouldn't sell her. When his oldest girl died from small pox, he mourned her like a son" (*TPG* 20). This comparison of daughter with son reveals the non-conjunctive and particularizing caliber of the symbolic "qianjin." However, When the seme "thousand pieces of gold" comes to designate Lalu, her father has no way but to acknowledge the multivalence of the sign by *purchasing* the above-said soybeans with "qianjin." Lalu is at this moment alienated from the symbolic infrastructure and embarks on her journey with the bandits.

The second moment of alienation from the symbolic "qianjin" takes place as Lalu steps onto the land of America, said to be a place in which "there is gold everywhere.....Gold just waiting to be picked up" (*TPG* 91-92). She pictures soothingly to herself her family's faces "when she gave her father the gold that would make him that richest man in the village" and "the pride they would have in her, their qianjin" (*TPG* 92). McCunn even tells that she holds to the picture "as to a talisman" (*TPG* 92). Here it is obvious that she still entertains the idea of symbolic integrity since her father has tried to establish her daughter as a socially acceptable entity. Yet, the symbolic univocity is immediately displaced when Lalu finds out that she is actually walking onto the auction block naked and waiting to be sold, enslaved to somebody else. The seme of "qianjin" now rivets on the body of woman, which, in one of its possibilities, awaits exploitation. In Lalu's case, she is going to

be enslaved-sexually-by Hong King and works as a waiting-girl in his saloon. So, if the first moment of alienation bespeaks the distortion of the symbolic “qianjin” in its familial context, the second alienates Lalu further by adding to it the seme of the perverse connotation of woman’s body. Her travel is consequently the outcome of the fall of the symbolic and the semiotic practice of the sign. When the semes of “qianjin” crop up forming a nondisjunctive entity, Lalu’s journey is certainly one that unfolds a poetic in the sense of the alienation from the symbolic “qianjin.”

Exchanging: “Thematic Economy” of the Sign

Conspicuous in the alienation is the loosening of the symbol and the dynamics of the sign. That is, the semes excluded by the symbol converge in the sign and pose challenges to the symbolic. The name “qianjin” is given to Lalu by her father but it cannot repress the significations of its underlying semes such as money and woman’s body or curb them from perversion. In other words, the patronymic coding of the sign offers Lalu a *proper name* in a broader symbolic context. As Kristeva has it, such “duplication” of the woman body in the symbolic is to integrate it into “the circuit of exchange” by “signifying it” (53). She argues,

Within such an ideologeme, the idealization of woman (of the Other) signifies the refusal of a society to constitute itself

through the recognition of the *differential* but *nonhierarchizing* status of opposed groups. It also signifies the refusal for this society to give itself a permutative center, an *Other* entity, which has no value except an *object of exchange* among members of the *Same*. (50)

What Kristeva purports to say is that, by imposing on the *other* a name, the symbolic constitutes a center that homogenizes the supposedly un-subsumable *otherness*. This homogenized otherness would in turn serve as an object of exchange because exchange presupposes an agreed sameness that could only be recognized as a symbol. In Lalu's case, for example, in order to normalize the otherness of her being the devalorized other in the symbolic, her father has to idealize her being by naming her "qianjin"-in the pecuniary sense-so that Lalu can enter the symbolics of the Chinese society. However, in doing so, her father simultaneously places her in the circuit of exchange, where she could be valued merely because she is destined to be exchanged for something else.

As a result, with alienation set in, Lalu seeks to re-establish the former symbolics even though that patronymic "qianjin" keeps confronting *otherness*. So, one could discern a tension between Lalu's desire for the symbolic while the semiotic keeps thwarting it. Then and there arise a series of exchanges that implicate Lalu in the hierarchical and patriarchal world. In Roland Barthes' words, Lalu is involved in the "thematic economy" of the sign, "merely acting in accordance with the economic nature of the Name" (93-95). That is to say, even though

she has been situated in the semiotic, she stops short of perceiving the diverse semes that work to subvert the attempt to re-construct the symbolics. Lalu is therefore predicated upon a sequence of exchanges which lead her to nowhere until she can acknowledge the permutation of semes.

In light of such an exchange mechanism in the travel fabula, for Lalu to comprehend the semiotic “qianjin,” it is necessary for her to struggle through the various semes to restore the symbolic-albeit precarious. Thus, as Barthes puts it, trying to pin down the sign is to “proceed from name to name, from fold to fold,” and “to fold the text according to one name and then to unfold it along the new folds of the name” (82-83). This coincides with Kristeva’s idea of woman as an object of exchange, for Barthes also conceives that the name contains an “exchange value” in its folding and unfolding process (82). Then, after the corresponding symbol founders, Lalu is obliged to face exchanges of semes derived from “qianjin.”

If, to Lalu’s father, the primordial seme of “qianjin” is the daughter of a wealthy house (though his household is in a devastated state), then what it is exchanged for immediately after the first moment of alienation is the desired body of woman. Such a seme is introduced into “qianjin” by Chen the bandit, who intends to use her as an object to satiate his followers. This heterogeneous element is perhaps best explained by Ding, one of the bandits, who advises Lalu:

A girl like yourself does not have one chance in ten thousand of traveling alone safely. But say you have made it to a village or city without being kidnapped or raped or killed, what would you have done then? (71)

His words point out that the symbolics that Lalu has so relied on has no solid center. Even if her father wishes to maintain the non-conjunctive state of his "qianjin," the semiotic play of subversive semes questions to a great extent the foundation of its centrality. The exclusiveness of the proper name, once unlimited, makes Lalu enter the "circuit of exchange." It is worthwhile to note that this circuit discloses two facts. First, even though the actors of kidnapping, raping and killing remain unspecified, their common denominator could be said to characterize masculinity. So, Lalu in the seme of female body has no value whatsoever. In Kristeva's phrase, she "has no value except an *object of exchange* among members of the *Same*." This is most evident in Chen's sharing his wife with his followers in exchange for leadership. Second, this exchange also makes clear that Lalu is bereft of mobility, in that she could only "proceed from name to name" via the willed exploitation by men.

The sort of exchange that befalls Lalu at the first moment of alienation is as a matter of fact also carried out at the second moment. Yet this time, the seme is materialistically exposed to confront the symbolic "qianjin." The decent daughter is now told that she has to take off her clothes for "when a man has to pay several thousand

dollars for a woman, he likes to see exactly what he is buying” (*TPG* 101). The unrepresentability of the symbol is here radically defaced by the embodiment of the female body. There appears an unbridgeable gap between “qianjin” and the naked body on sale. Even though Lalu undergoes a fate that somewhat differs from the other girls, who might be brought and taken to the bagnios, the seme of exploited body continues in her relation to Hong King, who, though not making her a prostitute, avails himself of her body not only for his own sexual satisfaction but also for the visual pleasure of the patrons of his saloon. Even in her relationship with Charlie, the protection of the latter problematizes the former’s willingness to engage with him sexually. So, some form of the aforesaid exchange between the men seems applicable to Charlie all because it is he who has to strike an agreement between “members of the Same” not to harass Lalu without actually resorting to her agency.

These exchanges between semes of daughter and body are further problematized because there are also other semes of “qianjin” at work to complicate its signifying process. It is noticeable from the outset-the moment of alienation-that the seme of money (“qianjin” as thousand pieces of gold) metamorphoses Lalu into a currency, whose mobility is synonymous with passivity among “members of the Same.” In turn, Lalu’s body is exploited and exchanged for currencies as she is sold to a bordello by Chen, stands on the auction block or works in the saloon. In a bid to retrieve her mobility, Lalu even attempts to take the seme of currency as her own, that is, she tries to buy herself out by belaboring

herself in exchange for gold. Laughing, she tells Jim: "White men mine the rich claims. Chinese mine the ones that have been worked over, Hong King mines the miners, and I mine Hong King" (*TPG* 129). Drawing on the metaphor of mining, she intends to collect enough gold dust when she cleans the saloon so that she could exchange herself out. This is no singular event: earlier Lalu has tried to achieve this by offering jewelry to the Madam of the bordello (*TPG* 85). Nevertheless she fails in both cases. To use Kristeva's words, Lalu "has no value as an object of exchange." It is no wonder then that the semiotic practice of the sign is by all means subject to "members of the Same." This is exemplified in the Madam's comparing herself to the cormorant, whose value merely resides in facilitating the exchange between the fish it catches and the money the fisherman might get (*TPG* 86).

Another seme at work to place Lalu in the circuit of exchange is the ethnic otherness-what represents the American culture. This seme may be irrelevant to "qianjin." Yet, there is a semiotic incorporation of the former into the latter. One may be aware of the fact that Lalu is renamed as Polly by Hong King after her second alienation (*TPG* 116-117). This name is interestingly intertwined with "qianjin" for Lalu/Polly still conceives of it in the symbolic sense after a longer stay in the States (*TPG* 132). As a result, "qianjin" as a sign not only has to confront the emergence of underlying semes but also resists to no avail the penetration of heterogeneous elements. This kind of exchange is compliant with Kristeva's argument about a society's refusal to "give itself a permutative center." The then American society is invested in

the aura of exclusion—the making of a symbol-and materializes it in the act of abjecting other ethnic people. Namely, the culture Lalu confronts, instead of acknowledging her otherness, represses it with a name. This leads one to consider what Barthes says about the exchange value of a name. Lalu is then predicated upon a series of exchanges as such that behoove her “to fold the text according to one name and then to unfold it along the new folds of the name” (Barthes 83).

Here, one may stop awhile to ponder the constitution of the sign. It is clear that Lalu, as “qianjin,” has proceeded from the nonconjunctive symbol to the nondisjunctive sign, which allows of the semiotic mobility. Yet a disparity exists between the factual state-the semiotic-and what she desires: a return to the symbolic. In other words, Lalu couldn’t accept the nondisjunctive dynamics of the sign so that she involuntarily puts herself on the grid of the exchange circuit. There derives Lalu’s sense of pain all because of the fluidity of value and the flimsiness of existence among members of the Same. This is evidenced by Lalu’s recurrent feeling of walking like a monkey on a tightrope (*TPG* 179, 205&237). Reminiscing about her childhood, she narrates:

I remember one time a man bring a performing monkey to my village.....The man divide the audience in two and give each side one end of a rope to hold. Then the monkey walk carefully back and forth between two sides. At each end, he stop a little bit, but he cannot stay, and so he walk again until he so tired, he fall. (*TPG* 178-179)

Judged from this instance, Lalu’s problem actually points to her obsession with the nonconjunction-either end of the rope. Each time as she nears one end, she could not succeed in occupying that place, an unrepresentable position. The other end is similarly untenable. In order to terminate such plight, Lalu/Polly has to execute the third action of travel fibula-to re/member-to put an end to any attempt to maximize a certain seme, that is, to refrain from symbolize it.

Re/membering: The Problematics of the Symbolic Performativity

As Korte indicates, postcolonial writing is overwhelmingly saturated with the agenda of defining and searching for a home (170). This is a very semiotic practice of the sign for it involves the exchanges between denominations. Take Lalu for instance. What she desires and abhors largely depends on which seme of “qianjin” is appropriated and maximized. As Trinh also notes regarding how signs condition what can be known, language tends to serve as “an indisputable point of reference on whose authority one can unfailingly rely” (14). Thus, it is quite reasonable to infer that the manufacturing of home-sense pertains to the act of reminiscing in signs—Lalu/Polly keeps relishing what “qianjin” *meant* to her—so that the past and the present negotiate with each other and arrive at an ascertained denomination. The word “remember” is thus an apt word to describe the multi-layered meanings of home: to reminisce semiotically about the past and thus via negotiations become

affiliated.

The adherence to a name, however, culminates in a symbolic reading of a sign. So, the problem is, how can one strike a balance between symbolic centripetality and semiotic centrifugality? If the former is an inevitable phase for kneading a secured subject, then it seems that this kneading should avoid what Barthes calls “lexical transcendence,” which enacts the petrification of the sign (83). That is, an awareness is needed, that, disillusioning the metaphysical presence of the symbol, recognizes the materiality of the sign and the slipperiness of its semes. This indicates that one should not resort to the symbol as a referential model, an origin myth. The truth of its signification is rather contingent and situated, and therefore performative. If there is a subjectivity that is more appropriate, it is derived from the plurality principle of the performative sign to counter hegemonic discourses.

The third phase of the travel fabula is therefore invoked at two moments. The first moment takes place after she has lost Charlie, when a boy that she wants to patronize with a candy blurts out the question “Who’re you?” (*TPG* 280). The second moment comes as Polly is touring Boise. On a street car, she overhears a conversation between two Chinese men, to the effect that the uncle urges his nephew to return to China but the latter claims that America is his home. The second event leads Polly to ask: “And where is my home?” (*TPG* 290). These two moments exact a probe into the search and definition of home from Polly, who, after having practically lost all familial connections, is now

obliged to find herself a place in the world. Does this “qianjin” resort to the symbolic past and glean an unrepresentable membership from the old world? Apparently not. For Lalu, the old China has by now become “a faded memory” owing to its untenability in relation to the sign. Then what does she in factuality remember and how does she regard herself as a member with a secured identity?

As shown in the narrative text, after stricken by the conversation between two Chinese men, Polly is enveloped in a great quandary with regard to where she actually belongs. The settlement she arrives at befalls Polly Place, an idyllic place in which she used to live in euphoria with Charlie, now dead. In response to her old neighbor’s surprise at seeing her back, she explains,

You see, after Charlie die, I hurt so much, I think I must get away. But I wrong. Charlie’s not just here in the canyon. He’s inside me, and it does not matter where I go, Warrens, Grangeville, or Boise, he be there. There and not there. That is what hurt. But nothing will change that, and this canyon is my home. Our home. So I come back. (TPG 293)

In point of semiotic practice, the fall of symbolic order-Charlie, like her father-positions Polly in a poetic, a voyage in which she is always plagued by the sense of loss. Yet one must not mistake her return as a restoration of the previous symbolics because Polly Place has by now changed into a decentralized symbol. For one thing, the fixity of the

symbol has loosened its hold and the symbol becomes capable of adjusting itself to spatial transformations. The univocity of symbolic locality is now subverted: “There and not there.” The other thing is, even though it is characteristic of Polly’s way of representing herself, noticeable is that what is supposedly past or future merges into the present tense in this passage. For Polly, what counts is not what follows stringently the sequence of time, but the interlacing and coexistence of events—the materialized state of semiotic play. Dovetailed with the former dissolution of the symbol, all these indicate that Polly’s *re-mem-ber-ing* is a recognition of the multivalent sign, by which she allows semes to come and go in her memory in no effort to foreground a certain seme. What Polly remembers at the moment is by now not a symbol that dictates and represses but a sign freed to enact performativity, in the same way that Rojek and Urry argue about memory: “to reminisce is collectively to effect a performance” (14). Model and origin become quite irrelevant here. As a consequence, Lalu/Polly secures herself in the hybrid of symbolic performativity.

Epilogue

This paper has sought to work out the definition of travel by resorting to the fabula of travel, not that of *TPG*. By it, the novel is analyzed according to the trilogical events of travel: to alienate, to exchange, and to re/member. In accord with fabula, this paper thus understands the trilogy not so much from the “story” perspective as

from what constitutes the purported meaning, that is, the signifying sign. In sum, it could be said that the travel fabula in *TPG* suggests a transition from symbol to sign and also achieves a problematics of symbolic performativity. Such a new way of comprehending “travel” may contribute to the understanding of the present global mobility, lest one gloss over the distinction between travelers particular to each cultural context due to the dominance of Western perspectives—in the hope of mapping out an ethical terrain of multiculturalism.

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