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The Eternal Embrace: Ghostly Maidens in Sidney McCall's Fiction

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At the turn of the century, "Japan" was being imagined for the American public in a variety of ways. Sidney McCall, wife of Hegelian Ernest Fenollosa and close friend of Romanticist Lafcadio Hearn, sought a way to incorporate "Japan" into Fenollosa's broader Idealist arch while simultaneously preserving the titillation of Hearn's "ghostly tales." By so doing, McCall attempted to reconcile divided notions of "femininity" in early Japanology (and American discourse at large). She utilized the form of the novel itself to work systematically through the schism between "feminine mystique" and "maternal feminism"; this uncertainty was resolved, for McCall, in her Idealist fictions from "Japan."

In turn-of-the-nineteenth-century popular discourse, "Japan" was constructed for the American imagination in various ways. Ernest Fenollosa and Lafcadio Hearn advocated distinct approaches to the archipelago: Fenollosa calling for a synthesis of the "East/West" dialectic to result in a utopian Universal,[1] and Hearn, an ardent Romantic, using "ghosts" to reaffirm the mystique of the Far East and remind Western man of his humble origins. Their work oscillated between urges to possess (literally and figuratively) other cultures and a need to introduce something that could not be possessed, a poetic alternative to modern life (which both writers saw as suffering from overindustrialization and a shrinking vitality). Sidney McCall, with an innovative approach and firsthand knowledge of the two cultures, wanted to bridge the gap between the divided rhetorical approaches to "Japan." The wife of Fenollosa and close friend of Hearn, though vastly unrecognized for her contributions, suggested a way in which "Japan" could exist as both a symbol of moral progress and a phantasm to unsettle (and

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[1] Sidney McCall writes in her preface to *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, "The influence of Hegel remained with (Fenollosa) a vital and constructive factor throughout his life." Ernest Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, Volume I (London: William Heinemann, 1912), xiii.

revitalize) Western culture. Through this debate, she sought to reconcile divided notions of "femininity" in the American imagination and provide a way in which a "maternal West" and "mystical East" could find their way into an eternal embrace.

Sidney McCall, the pseudonym for Mary McNeil Fenollosa, first met Fenollosa at the Boston Museum of Fine Art, where she was hired to serve as his assistant curator to the Japanese art collection in 1894. Their romance culminated in marriage and a joint venture to Japan. During this time abroad and throughout their married life, Fenollosa and McCall worked side by side in their scholarly pursuits.[2] She dedicated her novel *The Dragon Painter* to her husband's adopted Japanese title, Kano Yeitan. McCall shared Fenollosa's fascination with Idealism and spent many nights with him diligently studying Hegel's works.[3] Evidence can be found in her fiction as well as her introduction to Fenollosa's *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, which was, after his death, carefully pieced together at McCall's hand:

> Artists and writers seem to have taken their point of view through partisanship. Classicists and Goths flew at each other's throats … real variations are as infinite as the human spirit, though educed by social and spiritual changes, we come to grasp the real and larger unity of effort.[4]

It is difficult to extricate where Fenollosa's words end and McCall's begin; one quickly recognizes their shared pursuit of an Idealist philosophy.[5]

McCall was also a friend of the elusive Lafcadio Hearn, meeting him upon her sojourn in Japan. Though Fenollosa likewise enjoyed Hearn's enthusiasm for Japanese aesthetics, McCall's bond with Hearn was stronger. Hearn writes in a letter to her: "How pleasant to know that there is somebody to whom I can send a book hereafter with a tolerable certainty of pleasing!"[6] While Fenollosa had little patience for intangible "ghosts," McCall recognized that, in order to progress forward, the West would first have to confront the antimodernist "East" that Japanologists (including Hearn and even Fenollosa on occasion) were manufacturing. Hearn commends her: "You understand my wishes to do something new."[7] For her, higher truth

[2] For more on Fenollosa's joint ventures, see Larry Chisolm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963).

[3] See also Van Wyck Brooks, *Fenollosa and His Circle* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1961).

[4] Fenollosa, xxiv.

[5] Though she was not a formal member of the St. Louis or Concord schools active at that time, McCall did share many of their ideological goals as well as uncertainties. See Dorothy G. Rogers, *America's First Woman Philosophers: Transplanting Hegel 1860–1925* (New York: Continuum. 2005).

[6] Fenollosa, 437.

[7] Elizabeth Bisland, *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, Volume 1 (Westminster: Archibald, Constable and Co., 1906), 403.

would be found in the working out of these divisive ideas, in the ways Americans came to understand their relationship with the new Japanese art forms and what they revealed to them about their own sensibilities.[8] She likewise called for mutual recognition between the "Classicists" and the "Goths." Her fiction shows dismay at the globetrotting ways that Japanese cultural artifacts were being consumed, especially among women, who McCall believed were decorating their homes with Japanese artifacts in an unsophisticated manner. The little or no agreement on a "proper" methodology toward Japanese aesthetics was a central impetus for the message behind her novels.

Many Americans were engaging in cosmopolitanism at the turn of the century, intent on discovering a cultural sensitivity for sale in the Far East. They found in these purchases something that they believed either never existed in America (perpetuated by a nagging insecurity that the nation lacked culture) or was currently eroding (in the move toward industrialization).[9] For this group, Japanese aesthetics offered a sense of artistic refinement; imports such as Ukiyo-e prints opened a window that allowed writers Hearn and Fenollosa to borrow a past that was not their own in support of cultural "progress." Yet the need to temper this sensitivity with displays of overt mastery (as Western authorities) plagued the two Japanologists. This ambivalence was repeatedly gendered: the "masculine" side of their project, carrying a big stick and a scientific lens, was viewed as morally progressing with paternalistic confidence; the "feminine," antimodernist side, in contrast, was viewed as rejuvenating modern life with lyrical poetics "borrowed" from the Far East. Mari Yoshihara notes, "The powerful West was associated with virile masculinity, and the subordinate East with passive femininity."[10] In previous scholarship, such as Christopher Benfrey's *The Great Wave*, male Japanologists are recognized as suffering from an internal conflict (constructed as a conflict between their "feminine" and "masculine" sensibilities) over the "appropriate" rhetorical approach to Japan.[11] McCall was a female Japanologist who suffered from the same frustrations but whose

[8] Georg W. F. Hegel writes, "the real subject-matter is not exhausted in its purpose, but in working the matter out." "Spirit," according to Hegel, resists "edifying" and instead finds its nature in dialectical becoming. Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. J. B. Baillie (New York: Digireads Publishing, 2009), 12.

[9] For more on this approach to Japanese culture see William Hosley, *The Japan Idea* (Hartford, CT: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1991).

[10] Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Woman and American Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4.

[11] Christopher Benfrey, *The Great Wave: Gilded Age Misfits, Japanese Eccentrics, and the Opening of Old Japan.* (New York: Random House Paperbacks, 2004).

original application of an Idealist framework to the study of Japan as well as its attendant gender conflicts allowed her to approach the problem from a markedly different perspective.

However, McCall, like many of her female contemporaries, was excluded from membership in erudite social circles and denied a public role in this debate. She was (and continues to be today) relegated to the status of "secretary," referenced almost exclusively not as an author but as the widow who dutifully gathered Ernest's notes. The topic of Japan provided one possible arena in which she could express her philosophical perspectives, in a forum socially acceptable for *fin de siècle* women: the novel. Yoshihara notes that discourse on the Orient, for white female writers, offered "an effective avenue through which to become part of a dominant American ideology and to gain authority and agency which were denied to them in other realms of sociopolitical life."[12] McCall joined these writers in their pursuit of literary liberation at the hands of a fantasized "East." Larry Chisolm adds that McCall "hoped to make a place for herself among the literary ladies who wrote sentimental novels and practiced a higher journalism in lengthy notes on social and intellectual events."[13] One can find traces of unrest in her ambition (the unrest common among most writers interested in Japan): the desire to be "literary," "sentimental," as well as a factual recorder of everyday happenings. She was a product of her age, divided internally over sweeping social concerns; her interests in everything from poetry to science to spiritualism, and the intersections in between, were brimming with dialectical energy.[14] She spent much of her life attempting to sort these energies out in the pages of her fiction.

Before specifically addressing McCall's approach to "Japan," it is essential to note the difference in form between her husband, Hearn, and herself. By appreciating this difference, one might begin to recognize the significance of McCall as a mediator between the styles of the two men and as an innovative artist in her own right. Fenollosa did not produce any substantial text during his lifetime. It was McCall and Ezra Pound who later adapted his notes and utilized them for multiple ends. Prior to this, the majority of his scholarship existed as annotations for art exhibitions, lecture notes, and memos to museum administrators. Hearn's texts, in contrast, were fragmented bits of miscellany. His attempts at novels were, admittedly, failures that dissolved into excessive description and abandoned plot

[12] Yoshihara, 6.

[13] Chisolm, *Fenollosa*, 120.

[14] For further analysis of the dialectical forces at work in Japanology see also Robert A. Rosenstone's *Mirror in the Shrine: American Encounters with Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

altogether.[15] The form of the novel, frequently dismissed by academics of the period as the genre of choice for "sentimental females," allowed McCall to accomplish something innovative that Hearn and Fenollosa could not: to hybridize their ideals, to re-create Fenollosa's progressive narratives while retaining the enjoyable (and, for her, philosophically invaluable) elements from Hearn's "ghostly tales."

Unlike her male contemporaries, McCall, a female writer at the turn of the century, could delve into the "mystical" elements she linked to Japanese art without the expectation of producing (or, more accurately, the freedom to produce) a paternal ethos. Christine Guth notes that American women "expressed themselves by writing of their experiences (with Japan), often with considerable verve and interpretive insight."[16] Overlooking this insight, it was largely expected that women writers would focus on these "fanciful matters" (and not the political questions held to be the near exclusive property of the male-dominated academy). The challenge for McCall was in utilizing her access to an Eastern "feminine mystique" against such oppressive expectations while simultaneously supporting the Idealist ideologies she shared with male intellectuals. Historian Kristin Hoganson has examined the ways in which "Orientalist design as a means of female liberation" offered cosmopolitan women the opportunity to "escape" from traditional domesticity;[17] McCall, in contrast, was interested in how such "Orientalist designs," often radically unfamiliar to Western audiences, could help women come to terms with the desired (and/or prescribed) role of maternal caregiver. At the same time as the Far East allowed liberation through its "mystique," it allowed McCall to expound upon her belief in the role of woman as mother figure for civilization. She subsequently attempted to negotiate a radical "feminine mysticism" with a more conservative "maternalism" vis-à-vis fictional encounters with Japan.

In the years before McCall's journey to Japan, Amy Kaplan has shown that "women (had) the work of purging both themselves and their homes of foreignness."[18] By the 1890s, many women, including McCall, were dealing with increased uncertainty over their proper role in a nascent American empire. In contrast to Kaplan's earlier subjects, McCall as a female artist and

[15] For more on Hearn's style see Carl Dawson, *Lafcadio Hearn and the Vision of Japan* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[16] Christine Guth, *Longfellow's Tattoos* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2004), 26.

[17] Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumer's Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865–1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 31.

[18] Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 47.

intellectual strove to find a way of retaining foreignness within herself (and the home) as a source of individual liberation while also supporting the stability she viewed in the domestic realm. To do so, at certain moments she produced the specter of "femininity" as potentially disrupting the oppressive male gaze; at other points, she viewed this "unreal" specter complimenting a positivist development in America. Undaunted by contradiction, McCall used the popular theme of "East meets West" in hopes of resolving latent tensions between Japanologists such as Hearn and Fenollosa over how a "feminine Japan" was being envisioned (as both a threat to, and cure for, the ills of modern man).

An example of this "meeting" can be found in McCall's examination of the "feminine" in her poetry. In "The Two Homes," McCall compares her flower gardens in America and Japan (as gendered spaces) and how they reveal the double nature of woman:

> Live I, love I, tend and sew
> much as Western women do.
> Yet the life is richer far,
> Owning thus a double star.[19]

Exotic Eastern flowers enrich the life of a domestic Western woman, affording the opportunity for duplicity in nature. According to McCall, woman is intangible in her essence but solid in her duties. "Three Women" is a poem that describes what McCall sees as the three major roles of the female: wife, mother, and finally artist. In her final couplet, she sums up her Idealist approach: "'Clear types,' you say, 'and strangely set apart.'/Look deeper, friend, 'tis but one woman's heart."[20] The solution of "one heart" was developed at length in her novels, where, via the form itself, she attempted to work systematically through the problem.

McCall's resolution for overcoming the limitations of Fenollosa's Idealism and Hearn's "ghostly" resistance (positions they wavered on themselves) was a synthesis of their respective styles. The pattern of her novels introduces an Eastern specter to her Western characters, a specter endowed with an "unknowable" essence that exudes poetic sensitivity (a trope she shared with Hearn). This encounter forces her male cosmopolitan characters to confront unsettling manifestations of their own "feminine" nature. McCall dialectically moves her Western reader towards recognition that such abstract confrontations are wholly insufficient in the modern age. Her conclusions promote a healing "maternal mystique" based in Japan, in which the

[19] Sidney McCall, *Out of the Nest: A Flight of Verses* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1899), 64.
[20] Ibid., 110.

"feminine" can remain a source of creative longing while evolving into a source of stability within the household. This examination of the "feminine" in early twentieth-century America, though not entirely successful as an alternative to Western progressive doctrines (as we will examine later in the essay), enabled McCall to reflect on the question of "femininity" against the popular backdrop of the Far East.

PROJECTING JAPANESE GHOSTS

"Oh, I feel in my bones that it is going to be a ghost story, a real one," whispered Gwendolen, with a shiver of excitement.

The Breath of the Gods[21]

The Orient, according to theorist Naoki Sakai, has perpetually served as the "shadow of the West" for Western writers.[22] "Japan" is encountered in these works as a landscape where the "unknown" frequently comes into contact with the material realm. In McCall's *The Breath of the Gods*, for example, Gwendolen (the American protagonist) proclaims it to be, upon first seeing the archipelago, a "phantom land."[23] McCall positions the "East" as a romantic nightmare for her Western cosmopolitans, onto which the characters project all of the self-doubts at work in turn-of-the-century America. The symbolic event is endowed with a significant number of social anxieties, including the loss of a poetic sensitivity at the hands of empirical science. This Other was, for McCall, the object most unlike the overly confident male imperialist being portrayed in America at that time: a female ghost from the Far East.[24]

Truth Dexter is a Victorian tale of unrequited love, in which there is a lingering unease that the two lovers (allegories for a divided America after a bitter period of Reconstruction) may never (re)unite. The novel opens with a divided America: Craighead, the masculine lawyer from Boston, and Truth, the innocent young girl from the South. The story centers around their relationship and the various external forces that threaten to drive them apart.

[21] Sidney McCall, *The Breath of the Gods* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1905), 148.

[22] Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On Japan and Cultural Nationalism* (Duluth: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 173.

[23] *The Breath of the Gods*, 85.

[24] The aspects of Eastern religion projected onto this "ghost" can be expressed in the statement from Judith Snodgrass that Buddhism "would provide the competition with Christianity that was essential if the West was to reach its full evolutionary potential." The "ghost" of Japan would unnerve early twentieth-century Christians but it would also force them to become "better Christians." Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 151.

Craighead epitomizes chauvinistic values that came to be associated with imperial America. He boldly asks, "Are we a nation of men, – or of charlatans?"[25] Craighead the Northerner, civilized and ambitious, opens the novel as the newly appointed legal adviser to a fading southern family. The southern characters are everything that Craighead is not. The grandchild, Truth, "believes in fairies yet,"[26] and relishes in Nature, loathing urban life. America is represented by McCall as a nation torn between the "ghostliness" of the Old South, with its moss-covered trees and lost ancestors, and the all-knowing stance of the North. Forced to marry as a matter of logistics, the couple face each other as strangers throughout the opening of the novel.

Orchid, the beautiful but dangerous antagonist, appears as an eerie presence amidst assorted Eastern curios (in a far-from-subtle allusion to Japan, she is also located on her own private island). Craighead is both drawn toward and repulsed from this living spirit: "It was not so much the ghost of his boyish ideals, as the danger alarm ringing through the last moments of a dream, that now haunted him. With all her frankness Orchid had ever remained elusive, a mystery."[27] She serves as a demon lurking in the margins of his married life, attempting to pull the all-American couple apart and ruthlessly deny the possibility of future love between the two. Craighead's initial voyage to the South was meant to "exorcise the spectre" of Orchid.[28] Instead, the specter continues to mock his efforts. She whispers to him, "Ghosts can be exorcised only by being faced and defied."[29] To Craighead, Orchid's Otherness is ever-alluring, tempting him to pursue global acquisition as an alternative to his dull and burdensome married life.

Orchid is also a symbol of "nothingness," a crudely perceived Buddhism run amuck, one trope that was captivating the American imagination at that time.[30] Mirroring questions surrounding gender identity, the Japanese Buddhism arriving at world exhibitions was viewed by some as a risk, especially to those seeking religious certainty; on the other hand, this imagined "nothingness" was an exhilarating alternative to the traditions of quotidian modern life. Orchid "worshipped it all in a sort of pagan ecstasy."[31] Her presence is repeatedly compared by McCall to the Old South, and yet the

[25] Sidney McCall, *Truth Dexter* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1901), 7.
[26] Ibid., 86. [27] Ibid., 5. [28] Ibid., 36. [29] Ibid., 222.
[30] For more on this anxiety see also Thomas Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844–1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). In addition, Christine Guth discusses Americans' obsession with (and repulsion from) the Buddhist ritual of cremation: "Such images no doubt fueled fear and horror of a practice that for many Christians brought to mind the fire and brimstone of hell." Guth, *Longfellow's Tattoos*, 195. [31] *Truth Dexter*, 188.

depth of what Orchid offers is unnerving. Truth is linked with serene ponds, calm and poetic; Orchid, in contrast, is linked to the mighty sea. Truth, fearful of what this sea is capable of, notes that "it laughs and pretends to play at the edges, but out there, in the deep part, it don't laugh. Somehow it always makes fun of you for tryin' to be good."[32] Orchid's Eastern nihilism is simultaneously aligned with the imagined terror of an immoral Other, sexualized as a "feminine sublime." It threatens to drag Truth away, to separate violently the elements of the Western consciousness: the gentle femininity of Southern Truth and the rugged individualism of Northern Craighead:

> It was not that Craighead had forecast it, this mockery of marriage, this mere pleasant duty of domestic proximity. Neither had he desired, for alternative, a wild defiance of society's mandates, a Sicilian outlawry of romantic passion. Strange that his fate should be cast between two such abortive extremes! Orchid and Truth! Siren and sister! The evanescent mockery of the flame itself, and of its shadow![33]

The West faces its shadow in *Truth Dexter*, the immaterial and boundless "East," and consequently loses all bearing. The encounter with Orchid, the fleeting Japanese "ghost," threatens to separate the "feminine" from the "masculine," the "South" from the "North."

In *The Breath of the Gods*, these dialectic forces appear in an even greater number of allegorical characters: Gwendolen, the admirable American beauty, and Yuki, the Japanese girl of a "thousand tantalizing forms";[34] the individualistic senator Todd and the patriotic prince Hagane; sensitive Gwendolen and imperialist American Dodge; the aesthetically obsessed Frenchman Pierre and the militaristic Hagane; even Yuki is divided between her American and Japanese loyalties, her Christian and Buddhist upbringing, and her desires of "love" to Pierre and "duty" to Hagane. The form of the novel reflects this ambivalence, shifting between lyrical abstraction and frank commentary on American politics.

The plot revolves around Yuki, a Japanese girl educated in America, and the struggle to possess her between two strong-willed men: the artistic Frenchman Pierre and the aged Prince Hagane of Japan. Yuki serves as an idol for the two lovers: a symbol of unfulfilled desire to Pierre and a symbol of national honor to Hagane. Yuki is quite literally pulled apart between her role as an aesthetic "ghost" and as a physical embodiment of the national Spirit. At one point in the narrative, Hagane displays a gruesome painting to Yuki and Pierre (Gwendolen, as will be discussed later in the essay, observes). The painting, foreshadowing the struggle between the two men

[32] Ibid., 88. [33] Ibid., 181. [34] *The Breath of the Gods*, 11.

over Yuki, becomes unnerving to everyone in the group with the exception of the two men. They delight in its passions:

> The thing glowed wet and fresh, like new-spilled blood. Before its artistic wonder was the wonder of vitality, for the image lived, – not in a world of heavy human flesh, nor in realms ethereal, but in some raging holocaust where the two worlds chafe and meet.[35]

Pierre and Hagane are in the midst of a "raging holocaust" over what "Japan" will come to mean in the twentieth century, as an iconic "ghost" meant to inspire global art or a sacrificial body to capture the raging "Spirit" of Japanese nationalism. The concepts are equally foreboding. "Half in the world of poetry, half in the material present, she wavered."[36]

The dichotomy is inspired by the ambiguous rhetoric of the Japanologists; for her, these ambivalent forces consistently come to rest on the fragmented body of a female phantom. The denouement of *The Breath of the Gods* involves such a body, shrouded in white robes and a Gothic atmosphere of cackling ravens. Pierre has bargained with Hagane: in exchange for a document he has stolen, Hagane will forfeit Yuki, his legal wife. The two parties meet to complete the transaction on a lonely roadside; in a carriage, "the black hood, bent far over the front, completely conceals the occupant."[37] Pierre approaches, full of hope for an artistic life together with his possession, and holds her gently: "And your little hands are cold! Why do you not speak, my love? Are you trying to frighten me?" Hagane, moving in the shadows, utters, "'She wishes the dagger not removed, monsieur. It keeps her sacrificial robes – immaculate.' Hagane spoke like a machine." Pierre, with a look of frenzy, cries out: "Who is that that speaks to me? Has night a voice? What spirit hides behind that mask?" To which Hagane replies, calmly, "Death."[38] The scene offers an unfinished Hearnian moment. Is Japan to be a "ghost," an impossible lover for the world's art community? Or a martyr, as Hagane himself declares, in which the material realm is publicly sacrificed? The romantic and the militant finally receive what they have wanted all along in the idea of Japan: not a real female, but an ideal to haunt them and inspire them in their respective ideologies.

McCall's "ghostly" encounters reveal Hearn's influence, though her intention was distinct from Hearn's pessimism that a grand narrative could be recognized by mankind. Naoki Sakai reads the impulse within the Western imagination to seek out Otherness as an attempt to reaffirm its own position in the world: the West "is always urged to approach others in order to ceaselessly transform its self-image; it continually seeks itself in the midst of

[35] Ibid., 151. [36] Ibid., 275. [37] Ibid., 418. [38] Ibid., 420.

interaction with the Other."[39] He proceeds, "the idea of progress or historicism would be unintelligible without reference to this continual search for the Self, a ceaseless process of re-centering."[40] Sakai critiques Hegelian historicism, the dialectical progress of the Western mind, as an almost inescapable apparatus used to approach the "non-West." By utilizing evocative moments of terror in the "non-West" to reach Idealist conclusions, McCall follows the "inescapable apparatus" to its logical end: "Japan" serves to recenter Western subjectivity by forcing the American character to expel (and then overcome) the dialectical forces within itself.

EASTERN PHANTASM, HOLY MATRIMONY

I care not for the ghost, the spirit, however pure. I want the wife I have lost.
The Dragon Painter[41]

"Japan" as a trope in McCall's novels unfolds in a systematic fashion. In Hegelian terms, the imperial Western gaze begins as pure Ego. Hegel defines this early stage of consciousness as follows: "It seeks its 'other', while knowing that it there possesses nothing else but itself: it seeks merely its own infinitude."[42] Ego assumes its own a priori cohesiveness and then recklessly casts its eyes out over the globe. Here we find Craighead, and his growing worldly ambitions, who "felt as that his only possible outlook upon the universe was through the high gold rims of his own eyeglasses."[43] The Other, in the form of the Far East, serves the function of a flat object to be consumed (an example being the flood of Japanese curios, such as those surrounding Orchid, into American living rooms). The one-sided perspective emanating from the West, forcing an ill-conceived synthesis of world forces through consumption, leads to a romanticized "East" that is reassuring in its status as pure difference. At this point, the Western self has yet, in Hegel's words, "to come back to itself from this state of estrangement."[44] Hearn's fiction provides an illustration of this crisis, mired in perpetual self-estrangement.

According to McCall, however, neither the "East/West" nor the "feminine/masculine" dialectic can be content with pure difference. Instead, she sees a universal development taking place. The Western subject, at this point in the narrative, is startled to discover that the "ghost" is (and has always

[39] Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 154.
[40] Ibid., 171.
[41] Sidney McCall, *Dragon Painter* (Tokyo: Ganesha Publishing, 2002), 236.
[42] Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111.
[43] *The Breath of the Gods*, 173.
[44] Hegel, 25.

been) the West's own shadow, the hidden parts of itself that it has been attempting to hunt out and understand. These parts have been cast out to play the role of Other. The "Japanese female ghosts" are recognized as elements of American culture that were perceived by some as internal threats, and by others as evidence of something beyond modern decay: "nothingness" and agnosticism, aesthetic sensitivity and culture, and, most prominently for McCall, a thrilling (but at its core, familiar) "femininity."

"Japanese female ghosts" in McCall's fiction are essential to her understanding of the telos of Western civilization. Through engagement with these specters, McCall insists that cosmopolitan readers face the "unknown," recognize their role in introducing it as an imagined Other, and then move towards reconciliation. In *Truth Dexter*, Truth is pulled away from Craighead and toward her counterpart, Orchid. Addressing the art of the East, she exclaims, "I never get tired of studying it. All that chaotic mystery … I can't keep away from it! … how much finer the pictures are unfinished!"[45] When she realizes Craighead's secret lust for Orchid, she retreats further into the abyss that Orchid represents, identifying with the mystique that the women share as alternatives to Craighead's pragmatism. The climax of the novel is Craighead's impending divorce from Truth, symbolizing a decisive schism within America between its "feminine" and "masculine" aspects. Leaving Boston to wander in the woods of her Southern home, "her human body drifted, as it were, into a world of other dimensions … out of the very hush of finite movement … she knew herself to be a mere sentient atom." Through this experience, Truth realizes her individuality and independence from Craighead: "What had she to do with Craighead, culture, and Boston?"[46] Yet she also recognizes the limit of this "vegetative" escapism, telling her grandmother, "it seems to me that we never do anything down here but eat, and go to bed, and get up again."[47] Following the momentary union with Orchid's "ghost," the immaterial "nothingness" of her own being, Truth begins to shape a nascent identity. Within McCall's novels, the nihilism of a "feminine mystique" will not do, nor will the stiff and passionless society of masculine Craighead and its empty consumption; it will rest in an overcoming of the two, an alternative America that coexists with its own poetic sensibilities and practical ambitions.

Craighead likewise evolves over the course of the novel. His worldly ambitions fade, to a degree, and he begins to miss the simple Truth. He goes to see his wife in the South, setting aside his stubborn pride. His unsophisticated imperialism gives way to what McCall views as the stronger bonds of

[45] *Truth Dexter*, 158. [46] Ibid., 320. [47] Ibid., 334.

nationalism. She writes in the preface to *Truth Dexter* that she intended the book "to remain a picture of feelings and relations really subsisting between North and South just before that crisis in our history which brought the two sections, let us hope forever, into a common enthusiasm for a common national cause."[48] The (national) family unit is unveiled as an alternative America for Truth: "Absurd as it may be, and archaic, and in some sense, cruel; yet something may be said for a system which, in this pragmatic age, can yield the possibility of a new Annunciation."[49] Truth reunites with Craighead, forgiving his temporary wanderlust, intent on raising their child together with an Idealist faith in the world to come. McCall's revised doctrine of "progress" centers on the theme of reproduction, in merging the seemingly disparate parts of the self-compass into a new "Annunciation": "North" and "South," "East" and "West."

The result for McCall, however, is not as vaguely conceived as her husband's "World Synthesis." Amy Kaplan examines the imperialism behind a synthesis such as Fenollosa's: "If America sees reflections of itself everywhere and strives to encompass the globe, then it risks losing the boundaries between the domestic and the foreign that define the nation as home."[50] To preserve within domestic boundaries the familiar and the foreign, McCall articulates a dialectic that retains difference while recognizing a higher connection between the actors involved. She projects "Japanese female ghosts" to forge alliances within the nation without erasing its tacit boundaries (an erasure that McCall frequently critiques as being perpetrated by naive cosmopolitan "globe-trotters"). The figure of the ghost, as in Hearn's fiction, reminds the reader that they have limited knowledge, that there are some things which elude their Western grasp. Nevertheless, through this realization, the intricacies of the whole gain clarity. Immediately preceding the conclusion to *Truth Dexter*, Craighead confronts the temptation of Orchid for a final time. The two characters realize upon the meeting that, in accordance with the famous Hegelian dictum, they have passed into their opposites. He tells her, "You are not half so worldly and romantic as you think." To which Orchid responds, "You are not half so unworldly and high-minded as you think."[51] Craighead has been forced to recognize and appreciate his own romantic essence, found in Truth, in the South, and even inside himself. He does not, however, lose his individuality and convert completely into a Hearnian dreamer; he retains his own pragmatism in balance with his newfound poetic sensitivity. In *The Breath of the Gods*, Yuki and

[48] *Truth Dexter*, preface. [49] Ibid., 346. [50] Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire*, 170.
[51] *Truth Dexter*, 361.

Gwendolen, symbols of "East" and "West," are recognized as mutually exclusive and yet intimately connected: "both are perfection apart – and a vision of paradise together."[52] McCall sees these forces as distinct but mutually dependent on one another; she promotes the necessity of unfamiliar "ghosts" as well as maternal figures in the search for a unified American identity.

In *The Breath of the Gods*, the Todd family offer another allegory of American culture divided between its "masculine" and "feminine" impulses. They are active listeners to the ghost story happening all around them. This prompts them to turn inward to the unrest taking place in their native country. Dodge, agent of chauvinistic imperialism, and Gwendolen, lover of all things beautiful, spend the bulk of the novel in a quarrel, during which Dodge is lured away by Carmen, the Spanish maiden (an allusion to the Spanish–American War). Yet, during Yuki's plight, they are drawn back together. Dodge reassures her, "But all I can offer now is – myself. Come to me, darling, put your poor tired little head against me, and let me try and comfort you."[53] Through witnessing Yuki's figurative dismemberment between Pierre and Hagane, a shadow of their own unrequited desire for one another, the two Americans begin to reassemble themselves into a family unit, a cohesive national identity.

Senator Todd, appointed as a neutral party in the forthcoming transaction over Yuki's body, is followed, step by step, as he begins to recall the dialectical process he has observed while in Japan. His vision clears as he reasons it through: "Here were the meeting-places of the living and the dead. Here the two worlds answered, face to face, as reflections in the still water."[54] Finally, after meticulous thought, the reader (through Todd) pauses to inspect her own progress: "The treadmill creaked again, and registered the notch of another empty revolution. Now Todd shook himself and raised his eyes to see how far he had come."[55] The distance surveyed is profound. And suddenly a ghostly teleology emerges beneath the preceding romance:

> The thing came, like a predestined growth, from the soil of necessity. "Joint knit to joint expands the full formed fate." As if, indeed, some ghostly counsellor leaned to him, from which his human, his conventional selves recoiled, shuddering, seemed to his spirit a thing designed, not cruelly, by the Gods themselves.[56]

Enlightened, Todd, and a host of other characters who have suffered through Yuki's tale, huddle together to find solace in their communal being. Removed from his usual machismo, the senator admits, "I'd really like – if

[52] *The Breath of the Gods*, 5. [53] Ibid., 363. [54] Ibid., 409. [55] Ibid., 410.
[56] Ibid., 405.

you don't mind, my dears, – to turn woman and have one good cry."[57] They absorb the shadow of themselves, the "feminine" aspects that were projected upon Yuki, and find safety inside their collective. All of McCall's novels close with a domestic reconciliation in which the romantic can coexist with the pragmatist. Her proposed escape from the impasse between Fenollosa's positivism and Hearn's Romanticism (or, more precisely, the ambivalence between the approaches that their work shared) comes in revealing the mutual interdependence of each approach with the other. Not merely for the sake of synthesis but by retaining "perfection apart," the family unit offers McCall a possible alternative to the corrosive dichotomies of Japanology (and modern society at large).

Yet in McCall's alternative one finds ideological problems in her resolution to the question of gender. Her synthesis of styles ultimately cannot supersede the confounding conclusions of her male contemporaries. The dialectical system she suggests, relying upon "feminine mystique" and "maternalism," provides little more than a reliance on predictable interpretive paradigms adapted from male-centered schools of thought. McCall valorizes the self-destructive Eastern female, who accepts martyrdom to preserve Western civilization; she likewise champions the Western woman who enthusiastically takes up the mantle of maternal devotion. In both cases, at the head of the family is a sacrificial woman, willfully allowing Otherness to be cast upon her for the "greater good." Truth, embracing the immaterial elements of Orchid, returns to her roots to emerge once again a symbol of purity; Yuki firmly tells Senator Todd that it is her "choice" to become the "ghost" for the two men. These protagonists know all along that playing the phantom will force men, be they imperial conquerors or love-struck artists, to come to terms with the dialectics haunting them. Her iconography of the "feminine," meant to be either poetically subversive or devotionally uplifting, exemplifies the stereotypes that have persistently categorized "Japan" and "femininity" in the American imagination. Though it was unorthodox at the time to put the stereotypes in conversation with one another, proximity does not overcome the unsatisfying limitations of each. Rather than effective revision, McCall is ultimately guilty of recapitulating the quagmire of gender politics from that era.

McCall's texts, albeit frustrating in their lack of satisfying answers, were nevertheless important contributions to the intersection between notions of Idealism, gender, and the role of Japanese aesthetics in America at the turn of the century. In ways more sophisticated than her friend Hearn and husband

[57] Ibid., 412.

Fenollosa, McCall imagined a method with which the West could mature past an imperialist ego and turn back on itself, focussed on "mending its own house." As Hegel writes in the preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, "what is thus separated, and in a sense is unreal, is itself an essential moment; for just because the concrete moment is self-divided, and turns into unreality, it is something self-moving, self-active."[58] The most unique and enduring aspect of McCall's fiction is its introspection on the "self-active" imagining of "Japan" and what that concurrently meant for notions of "femininity" in the West; her work engages with the latent complexity that existed (and continues to exist today) between gender construction and the fantasy of the Far East.

[58] Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 23.

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