

Jyan-Lung Lin: On "In a Station of the Metro"

A great deal has been written about Ezra Pound's discovery of a structural technique, "a form of super-position," in Japanese haiku and his first use of it in his "In a Station of the Metro."

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However, it has seldom been noticed that when Pound first imitated Moritake's most famous haiku, he imitated not just its super-pository technique but its mood of Yugen, one of the four dominant Zen moods--Sabi, Wabi, Aware, and Yugen--often found in Japanese haiku and Chinese classical poetry.

The word Yugen actually represents two Chinese written characters . . . literally meaning depth and mystery.

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Lucien Stryk in his *Encounter with Zen* more clearly defines Yugen as the sense of a mysterious depth in nature: "Yugen, most difficult of the dominant [Zen] moods to describe, is the sense of a mysterious depth in all that makes up nature" (Stryk 60).

[?.]

First let me use the following haiku of Yugen as an example:

The sea darkens,
The voices of the wild ducks
Are faintly white

And this Yugen in the *Zenrin Kushu*:

Wind subsiding, the flowers still fail,
Bird crying, the mountain silence deepens

As the two preceding poems may show, in a typical Yugen the mood of a mysterious depth in each cluster of images is well balanced with and reinforced by the mood in the other. In Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" a similar use of parallelism to strengthen the mood of

Yugen can be seen clearly.

In the first line of his poem, Pound uses the word "apparition" to mystify the visual yet unmetaphorical image "these faces in the crowd." As Hugh Kenner observes, "Apparition? reaches two ways, toward ghosts and toward visible revealings" (Kenner 187). Indeed, Pound's use of the word "apparition" internalizes and at the same time externalizes his feelings about "these faces in the crowd." In other words, his use of the word "apparition" allows him and his reader to walk the edge between what can be seen and what cannot be seen, which not only mystifies the image "these faces in the crowd" but gives a depth to it. In the second line, by inserting the two adjectives "wet" and "black" in between the two flower images "Petals" and "a bough," the poet suggests that the "ki" or season, a basic component in a haiku poem, is between spring and winter and the time is probably the evening, which is between day and night. By allowing the season and the time to walk the line between spring and winter, day and night, which may represent life and death respectively, Pound succeeds in building up a mood of mystery. This mood of mystery is deepened particularly by the color "black," whose profound darkness points to an unfathomable depth.

As can be seen in a typical Yugen haiku, the mood of mystery and depth suggested in the dark, chilly "ki" in the second line of Pound's poem is parallel with the same mood suggested in the word "apparition" in the first line. Since the moods in both lines are well-balanced, no copula or adjectives such as "is" or "like" should be used between the lines so that the mood in each line would not be limited to a certain suggestion. Instead, the two lines should be juxtaposed as they presently are so that each of the two clusters of images, which, if viewed separately, is not deep and mysterious enough to be called Yugen, would produce a deeper, more mysterious mood. Moreover, a sense of distance or space between the two clusters of images can be built up, which allows the reader to associate, to imagine, to dive more deeply into what Watts calls "the unknown never to be discovered."

In fact, in a Yugen haiku like Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" meanings are not so important. What is important is the effect, the mood of Yugen. This mood, as mentioned before, is identified by Zen people as an essential precondition of enlightenment. It produces and at the same time is produced by the image, which is not to be used as an ornament but to point at the Tao or self-nature, a mysterious totality of the inner and outer nature. This Zen mood may well be compared to the kind of mood Pound has written about in his Gaudier-Brzeska. It has something to do with "the image," "a radiant node or cluster"--"sea, cliffs, night"--, something to do with "a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing," something to do with "the equation," of which Pound's explanation sounds much like a Zen master's expounding of the Dharma: it "governs the circle. It is the circle. It is not a particular circle, it is any circle and all circles. It is nothing that is not a circle. It is the circle free of space and time limits. It is the universal, existing in perfection, in freedom from space and time" (Pound 9 1-92).

From "Pound's 'In A Station of the Metro' As A Yugen Haiku." *Paidenma* 21:1-2 (Spring/Fall 1992). © National Poetry Foundation.

Publication Status:

Excerpted Criticism [1]

Criticism Target:

Ezra Pound [2]

Author:

Jyan-Lung Lin [3]

Poem:

In a Station of the Metro [4]

Source URL: <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/criticism/jyan-lung-lin-station-metro>

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