

## THE BUTTERFLIES METAPHOR

— From rhetorical expression in traditional literature to the use of psychological analysis  
in the work of Ôoka Shôhei<sup>1)</sup> —

Julie Brock<sup>2)</sup>

Department of Architecture and Design

(Received October 18, 2007, Accepted February 7, 2008)

### Brief History of the Study

“Love in Eastern and Western literature”<sup>3)</sup> is the theme of a joint study being undertaken at the Institute of Advanced International Studies at Kyôto<sup>4)</sup> under the direction of Professor Aoki Ikuko.<sup>5)</sup> Invited in 2001 to take part in this work group, we at first wondered how to tackle a subject so vast that it includes well nigh the whole of literature. From what we remember of our reading, Ôoka Shôhei’s novel *A Wife in Musashino*<sup>6)</sup> reminds us how a work that is both contemporary and classical can combine the two aspects of tragic love and an in-depth analysis of feelings. Through the impossible character of a love which finds its fulfilment in death, traditional Japanese literature is well represented, but its description of feelings reflects more the western tradition, and especially Stendhal<sup>7)</sup> of whom Ôoka Shôhei is not only the translator, but also the fervent admirer. Because his work marks a crossover between the western world and both ancient and modern Japan, we became interested in this novelist of post-war love.

If the eyes of a Japanese person reading the works of Ôoka Shôhei focus primarily on their having been influenced by the West, by contrast the Japanese-ness of the author is never highlighted by commentators on his work. However, among the influences that have contributed to the construction of the work — which, moreover, is true for any work —, doesn’t the most important part come from authors using the same lan-

---

1) Ôoka Shôhei 大岡昇平 (1909–1988)

2) Professor of Comparative Aesthetics and Literature at the Kôgeisen.i University in Kyôto. brock@kit.ac.jp

3) *Tôzai bungei ni okeru ren.aikan* 東西文芸恋愛観

4) *Kyôto Kokusai Kôtô Kenkyûjo* 京都国際高等研究所

5) Aoki Ikuko 青木生子, Emeritus professor at the National University for Girls, *Nihonjoshi Daigaku* in Tôkyô.

6) Ôoka Shôhei 大岡昇平, *Musashino Fujin* 武蔵野夫人 (The wife of Musashino), Ôoka Shôhei Zenshû 大岡昇平全集 (Complete Works of Ôoka Shôhei) vol. 3, Chikumashobô 筑摩書房 1994.

7) Stendhal (1783–1842)

guage? In a conference entitled “The influence of French Literature in *Fires on the Plain*”<sup>8)</sup>, Ôoka in person insists on this point: he finds it easier to find traces of western rather than Japanese literature in his work. The work takes its linguistic origin from an expanse of countless memories sometimes dating back to childhood. His memories of times of reading in his own language, since they are linked by a complex network, are infinitely subtle, very old and for the most part unconscious, do not so easily yield up their points of reference.

One of the unconscious memories spoken of by Ôoka Shôhei could be the image of a pair of butterflies that appears in the *A Wife in Musashino*. At any rate this is the image that started us on the track of a study focused on Japanese literature, aimed at finding therein a source of inspiration for the author. If Japanese commentators have often until now neglected this avenue, it is perhaps because they are, following Ôoka Shôhei’s example, so deeply impregnated by literary tradition that they cannot clearly distinguish its influence. Thus the images of butterflies that blossom in love poems or novels is so familiar to the Japanese reader as to perhaps blind him to its presence in a contemporary novel. So since Japanese readers all see in this novel an example of modern literature, it is rather an anachronism to point out in it such a traditional image as that of the butterfly!

Indeed, the butterfly is one of the most recurrent symbols of literary tradition in Japan, especially the pairs of butterflies that flutter blithely across every single literary era. The occurrences are so numerous in the vast field of every work in every era that it would be impossible to locate each one. As the very hypothesis of an attempt to collect “all” the butterflies in literature is absurd given what is scientifically possible now, our project will simply limit itself to the presentation and examination of a few representative specimens from sundry eras. The introduction pages that follow will try to explain by which means, with which aims, and on which criteria, we have moved towards this selection.

## By way of introduction

### *Part one*

The exposition follows the works’ chronological order. The pairs of butterflies serve to mark respectively the eras when they appeared. By the diversity of their origins, we shall confirm that this metaphoric image occurs recurrently in the history of Japanese literature.

1- Through sundry examples given to us by the *nagauta*<sup>9)</sup> songs once accompanied on the *shamisen*, we shall see that the butterflies image in every case is a metaphor of new love. Left to the whims of a gentle breeze, ephemeral as cherry-tree blossom, the butterflies flying two by two form in the spring sky the symbol of a freshly sprung love.

But no sooner has love come into the world than it becomes weighed down with gravity. Right from this

---

8) *Nobi ni okeru huransu bungaku no eikyô* 『野火』におけるフランス文学の影響 (The influence of French literature in *Fires on the Plain*), Ôoka Shôhei *Zenshû* 大岡昇平全集 (Complete works of Ôoka Shôhei), *op.cit.*, v. 16, p. 495. (each quotation is our translation).

9) *nagauta* 長唄 literally “long songs”. More exactly means stage songs.

antique time, it is possible to find in the butterfly symbol the expression of a thought contradicting the apparent levity of the “everlasting lover”. Deep and serious is the sound of the bell ringing in the lovers’ ears when dawn arrives. It is once that love has been consummated that they realize the irreducibility of the act. The symbol’s intrinsic duality exposes an allegorical meaning in this second reading level where the lovers might very easily take the place of butterflies without detriment to the poem’s meaning: isn’t it inevitable that in love we always devote ourselves to living as two people at once? Thus, it could happen that the meeting becomes extended into a time symbolized by the bells, announcing the dawning of an existence where each person is inseparable from the loved one. Born under the sign of chance, love in its deep truth is a conjunction of the order of fate. In this order of ideas, pairs of butterflies represent an aspect of human destiny.

2 – Coming to the 19th century, two examples show that pairs of butterflies, in the eyes of this era and of this part of the world, stand for an ideal rather than an idea of love.

Our first example is taken from *Wakarejimo* by Higuchi Ichiyô.<sup>10)</sup> Why this novel and not another, why Higuchi Ichiyô and not Yamada Bimyô<sup>11)</sup>? Indeed, if our project had been to catalogue representative works from different eras, we should not have been able to ignore a major lead such as *Kochô*<sup>12)</sup> by Yamada Bimyô. However, apart from the already-stated fact that it is impossible, even for an experienced reader, to follow all possible leads, another reason for our choice lies in the fact that our exposé is not a simple variation on the theme of butterflies in literature. Why Higuchi Ichiyô rather than Yamada Bimyô? The very subject of our thematic approach can be summed up in this important question, for if the two writers have expressed the feeling of love, Higuchi Ichiyô’s point of view is that of a woman who can, to a certain extent, be said to be “freed” from social restraint.<sup>13)</sup>

To answer finally the question that we should like to resolve in this introduction, i.e. the definition of the works’ selection criterion, this is the product of a logic of proof that aims to fix the stages of a process of change in the metaphor’s use. Indeed, through its recurrent appearing in every era, the pattern of the butterfly seems to be fixed. But whilst showing that the symbol became a simple cliché, a stereotyped expression devoid of all true or real substance, we shall nevertheless try not to be deceived by the extreme use of symbol that establishes the very existence of a cliché. Can we believe in the universal pseudo-truth of one single conception of love across the whole of history?

If the layout of the connection is the same, revealing the universality of a thematic process where love is systematically represented by butterflies, the author’s or reader’s relationship with the pair of lovers/butterflies on the other hand changes as social norms become more or less permissive, fulfilling or stifling. If examples taken from Higuchi Ichiyô’s novel seem more pertinent to us than those from Yamada Bimyô, the reason for

---

10) Higuchi Ichiyô 樋口一葉, *Wakarejimo* 別れ霜 (The frost of separation), p. 11–24. *Higuchi Ichiyô shû* 樋口一葉集 (Selected works of Higuchi Ichiyô), Chikuma Shobô 筑摩書房 1972.

11) Yamada Bimyô 山田美妙 (1868–1910)

12) *Kochô* 蝴蝶

13) From the discussions that took place during the symposium at the International Institute of Advanced Studies we see that collective oppression, at this time in Japan’s history, is exerted on individuality itself, and in particular in the field of love which is *par excellence* where the individual is affirmed. The affirmation of freedom that rules in love and allows a person’s fulfilment, or at least the wish for this, this desire for affirmation signaled by Higuchi Ichiyô is thought to have been a novelty introduced by her into the literature of her era.

this lies in the fact that this author, by her originality, furthers the topic under consideration. It is because she herself is a vector for social and female emancipation that Higuchi still holds today the attention of readers and commentators, as has proved the symposium from which this work came. This is the very reason why we are keeping examples taken from her work. Our intention is to use them as reference points in an analysis aimed at spotlighting a process of change of rhetorical image in literature from antique Japan to contemporary, modern Japan.

But let us turn to our second 19th century example. This is a translation of *Telemachus* that shows that metaphor is not only one word used for another, but also that it comes from an imaginary infrastructure in speech. Indeed, so strongly is the butterflies image anchored in literature and in Japanese minds that it would seem impossible to formulate any different idea of “freedom in love”.

However, though the butterflies are brought together by a breath of warm air, human beings in love are different in that they are separated by their social ties. Functioning during this period as a simple figure of rhetoric, the butterflies symbol reveals, it seems to us, an idea of impossible love.

As if nature in the wild had become inaccessible to human beings, literature raises up a model of a world where love exists — a symbol’s function is to prove its existence — whilst having at the same time no existence outside the form of the butterflies where the whole substance of the idea of love is absorbed. In our two 19<sup>th</sup>-century examples, the pairs of butterflies serve to sing of the love that has no hope. They are pictures of regret and of nostalgia.

### ***Second part***

What is so traditional a symbol doing in a work representative of modern society such as Ôoka Shôhei’s? We shall try to answer this question through a textual analysis. We shall show that the metaphor is not used by way of simple poetic evocation. The two butterflies sustain the analysis of the feelings of each of the three protagonists that follow them with their eyes. We will conclude by underlining the special nature of this work, which succeeds in bringing together in a perfect unity of style the expression of feelings and their analytical description. Here, the rhetorical tool is put to the service of the psychological analysis of feelings. The symbol from classical literature is filled with a new meaning in the eyes of contemporary readers. It seems to us that the author’s originality is particularly remarkable in this association of the traditional image — perhaps unconscious — and modern thought. Ôoka Shôhei succeeds in transforming rhetorical expression by using the image as an analytical material.

The article concludes by querying the need for rhetorical image in speech. Thus, Jean-Paul Sartre<sup>14)</sup> appeals to Stendhal in order to show the impact of words on human psychology. Knowing that Ôoka Shôhei is well acquainted with Stendhal on account of having translated and commented upon a large part of his works, we submit the hypothesis that the butterflies metaphor, this stereotyped cliché, perhaps reveals a function of the image when words are absent. When reality cannot be otherwise expressed, is that not the time when symbols flourish?

To conclude at last this introduction by providing a line of enquiry for future research, we have seen that the butterfly symbol was employed as a stereotype in the pre-Meiji eras. In Ôoka Shôhei’s case, this symbol is

---

14) Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980)

placed in a modern setting, new in Japan, that of the analysis of feelings. We think that the butterflies symbol is only one example among many others of these stereotyped models of expression that characterise traditional Japanese culture and which, since Meiji, have been moved on to a previously-unknown ground which remains to be discovered for post-Meiji writers. Taking on a quite singular value in the modern context of creativity and art, traditional expression models return to Japanese readership loaded with a new meaning that provides a better understanding of the new world. At the crossroads of the antique era and the modern world, this transformation of models of expression could herald a transformation in the criteria of traditional aesthetics. By using a hackneyed cliché with an analytical intention, the work of Ôoka Shôhei brings a fruitful renewal to the meaning of the symbol. In this sense, he seems to us to be a worthy representative of the contemporary literary era.

## The Study

### *Part one*

#### **1 – Examples taken from the *nagauta***

The *Encyclopaedia of symbols*<sup>15)</sup> mentions: “The butterfly is a universal symbol of fleeting beauty and of the mysteries of metamorphosis. (. . .) As its Greek name *psyche* indicates, it is directly linked to the soul.” There follows a valuable piece of information: “In Japan, the butterfly is the emblem of the young woman, and two butterflies fluttering together represent wedded bliss.” But is it really a matter of “wedded bliss”? According to Professor Minemura Shizuko<sup>16)</sup>, butterflies that flutter in the poems of yesteryear, to the accompaniment of the *shamisen*, suggest to the listener an image of spring, and at the same time troubles, disorders, the madness that arises in a lover’s heart. Thus, what is expressed through this evocation is not the quiet flow of «wedded bliss», that social link inscribed in everyday life. The flight of the butterflies indicates that exact moment in time when this link becomes wiped out. It evokes a wind of madness carrying the lovers beyond the barriers of domestic life and even of life on earth from which they are momentarily detached, light and free, suspended in a form of time where drunkenness and voluptuousness reign. So it is a matter of inebriating love, of love at its birth.

The first illustrations given by Minemura Shizuko in his article entitled: “Reflections on the techniques used in *The Cicadas*”<sup>17)</sup> are three poems by Edo, entitled respectively:

---

15) *Dictionary of Symbols*, published under the direction of Michel Cazenave, Paris, La Pochothèque, Encyclopédies d’aujourd’hui, 1996.

16) Minemura Shizuko 峯村至津子, Associate Professor, Kyôto Women’s University.

17) Minemura Shizuko, 峯村至津子 “*Utsusemi*” *no hôhō ni kansuru ichi kôsatsu* 『「うつせみ」の方法に関する一考察』 (Reflections on the techniques used in *The Cicadas*). Josetsu Nara joshi daigaku 叙説奈良女子大学第 24 (*Bulletin of the Girls University at Nara* n° 24), March 1997, p. 295–311. According to the dictionary *Kôjien* 広辞苑 (A broad semantic field), the word *Utsusemi* うつせみ／空蟬 means: 1. A cicada chrysalis. 2. A cicada. 3. A dead body. *Utsusemi* is also the name of a character in the *Genji-monogatari* 源氏物語 (The *Genji* Verses) whom Hikaru Genji 光源氏 tries in vain to seduce, and who in the end becomes a nun. Finally it is the title of a novel by Higuchi Ichiyô 樋口一葉 (1872–1896), first

- “The *sugagaki*, music as a means of seduction”<sup>18)</sup>,
- “The madness of the young cherry-tree”<sup>19)</sup> and
- “Flowers with eight or nine rows of petals”<sup>20)</sup>.

The first of these poems shows a bashful lover, engrossed in the contemplation of the spring sky:

My thoughts take flight between the clouds. Those two inseparable birds, how I envy them! My heart is a ball of threads floating in the wind, all muddled and tangled. My thoughts and heart go round and round, like a multi-coloured wheel!<sup>21)</sup>

The image of entangled threads indicates the disorder of the lover’s heart. Here we have a pair of “inseparable” birds marking the ideal of a love that no opposing wind could resist. A little further, the butterfly image appears in the following quotation, taken from the same poem:

A butterfly flutters and swirls in the breeze, while the cherry blossom falls in a gentle dance.<sup>22)</sup>

Hasn’t the butterfly been imprisoned in the tangled threads that are floating in the breeze in the previous verse? Caught in the nets of love, it is dancing in the sky, and, in its disordered flight, by hitting the cherry blossom it is jostling the order of the world. As if a window had opened upon his inner world, aren’t these the movements of the poet’s own heart that he is contemplating on seeing the butterfly? The latter is after all only a little splash of colour swirling around in his thoughts. The tangled threads of the previous verse might evoke the whimsical bridling of the imagination. It is also possible to see tangled hair here, hair ruffled by the

---

publication in *Yomiuri Shinbun* 読売新聞, August 1895. The article by Minemura Shizuko refers to this latter work.

18) *Kyōran tekuda no sugagaki* 狂乱手くだのすががき (The *sugagaki*, music as a means of seduction), *Kyūoku Ogiebushi Shōhon* 旧刻荻江節正本, (the songs of Ogie), original version, old edition, *Nihonkayō shūsei kankyū* 日本歌謡集成, 卷九 (Collection of traditional Japanese songs, v. 9, *Kinseihen*) 近世篇 (a publication from Edo’s era), Tōkyō, Shunjūsha 春秋社, 1928. The word *sugagaki* means a musical instrument that accompanies love scenes in the *kabuki*. These scenes take place in districts of pleasure. The word *tekuda* indicates the means of seduction. As a translation we propose «The *sugagaki*, music as a means of seduction». *Ogiebushi* means *shamisen* music, which originated in the *kabuki*, but which was played more in receptions that were enlivened by music and dancing, with *geishas* and *maikos*.

19) *Kyōran wakaki no sakura* 狂乱若木桜 (The madness of the young cherry tree) *Shinpen Edo Nagautashū* 新編江戸長唄集 (Collection of stage songs from Edo’s town, new edition) *Nihonkayō shūsei kankyū* 日本歌謡集成, 卷九 (Collection of traditional Japanese songs), *ibid.*

20) *Yaekokonoe hananosugatae* 八重九重花姿繪 (Styles of flowers with eight or nine rows of petals), *Shinpen Edo Nagautashū* 新編江戸長唄集 (Collection of stage songs from Edo’s town, new edition) *Nihonkayō shūsei kankyū* 日本歌謡集成, 卷九 (Collection of traditional Japanese songs), *ibid.*

21) 「我が思は雲間行く。あの鳥さへも番離れぬ羨し。我が心の纏れ糸。乱れ乱れて風に遊ぶや。花車」「風に胡蝶のひらひらひらと羽風に花もちりちりちり散りかかる」*Kyōran tekuda no sugagaki* 狂乱手くだのすががき (The *sugagaki*, music as a means of seduction), *Collection of traditional Japanese songs*, *ibid.*, p. 67–68.

22) 「風に胡蝶のひらひらひらと羽風に花もちりちりちり散りかかる」*Kyōran tekuda no sugagaki* 狂乱手くだのすががき (The *sugagaki*, music as a means of seduction), *Collection of traditional Japanese songs*, *ibid.*, p. 68.

wind. The butterfly thus appears as a kite, at the mercy of the wind's whims and yet at the same time firmly fixed to the "ball of threads" which defines both the sky's atmosphere and the state of the poet's soul.

Thus, the butterfly's disordered movements evoke for the poet the disordered movement of his own heart. The evocation of the wind in the first verse, then the repetition of *chiri chiri chiri to*, indicate a whimsical force. The same force makes the cherry blossom turn like light snowflakes just when the author's thoughts are becoming detached from the ordinary world. The folly of love is expressed in this correspondence between the outer and inner worlds. The metaphor of the entangled thread influencing the butterfly's dance expresses movements that the poet is feeling in his heart.

In the second poem, there are two butterflies fluttering together.

Look at the butterflies! Their loves are tying themselves together, and then untying themselves! What a strange spectacle! Love really is a strange thing!<sup>23)</sup>

As in the previous example, the butterflies symbolise human feeling. They part, and then come back together. This back and forth movement symbolises the freedom of lovers tied to each other by an elastic link, destined to reunite even if they must part again. However, their movements are immediately understood by the poet as a symbol of their loves, and these butterfly loves are directly evocative of human loves.

The third poem is even more explicit on this point:

They find it hard to separate, the pairs of butterflies! It's not that they never move apart, but they are curled around one another, after having exchanged the vow! Moist embraces! Words of love upon the pillow of dreams! After love the bells of dawn.<sup>24)</sup>

Here, what is evoked is clearly erotic in nature. The butterflies image is not there in order to make us look away, but on the contrary it draws the attention to an aspect of the loves that humans share with butterflies: a attraction so strong that the lovers cannot part. The vow, the moisture of the embrace, represent the patterns of this bond. On hearing the bells of dawn, will the lovers rise, or, on the contrary, will they fall asleep? Whether they are wake or asleep, after love, life in any case is like a sleep filled with dreams . . .

Through these first examples, we have moved from metaphor to allegory: in the third poem, the butterfly

---

23) 「あれあれあれを見や結んだり解いたり蝶の妹背事、ああをかしな事でごんすよの、恋はいなもの」 *Kyôran wakaki no sakura* 狂乱若木桜 (The madness of the young cherry tree), *Collection of traditional Japanese songs, op.cit.*, p. 168, our translation. *imo* 妹 means the woman, *se* 背 the man and *goto* 事 affair, whence *imosegoto* 妹背事: the affair of men and women, i.e. love affairs.

24) 「放れがたなきつがひ蝶、放れぬ中ぢゃないものをちぎりかはしてしっぽりと、抱き締め合うて睦言も、夢の枕にごんごと明の鐘」 *Yaekonoehanasugatae* 八重九重花姿繪 (Styles of flowers with eight or nine rows of petals), *Collection of stage songs from Edo's town, new edition, in Collection of traditional Japanese songs*, *ibid.*, p. 388. *Mutsugoto* 睦言: pillow talk.

is understood immediately as the identity of the human being. The word “lovers” could be replaced without the poem’s meaning changing in any way. This power to evoke doubtless explains why, according to Mine-mura Shizuko, the Japanese reader thinks immediately of the love relationship that unites a man and a woman, as soon as the butterfly image appears in a poem.

If this way of depicting love may appear quite innocent at first, and even if we are tempted to smile at the stylistic device, we must nevertheless remark on the success that this symbolic image has with Japanese readers. With its hollow naiveties, its extreme preciosity, one might believe that it is nothing more than a simple figure of style to allow the evocation of one subject while pretending to talk about another. But let us read the last example again. The act that is targeted through an embrace: the gestures, the words and the promise; this is not a “butterfly to butterfly” act. The insect in itself here is in fact only an image to refer us to the sweetness of a spring evening. And this image is in the end an indication of the right moment for hearts to beat in unison under a cloudless sky.

Later we shall return to the ephemeral aspect of these “spring loves” which mean, in western language, new loves, young loves with their ardour and passion, loves that are heady, intoxicating and exhilarating, fanned by the wind. The mystery of love is abandoned so to speak at its point of origin in primitive life, in regions that the painter’s imagination can associate only with a spring landscape.

## 2 - Examples from a novel and a 19th century translation

At the start of the Meiji era, butterflies leave the field of poetry and fly off towards that of literature in prose that abounds at this time under western influence. As an example, we quote a novel by Higuchi Ichiyō, *The frost of separation*.<sup>25)</sup>

As a brief summary of the intrigue, the Matsugawa and Nitta families — the older and younger branches of the same family — have been very close for a very long time. The Matsuzawa family have a son, Yoshinosuke, and the Nitta family a daughter, Otaka, each the only child and promised in a marriage which will set the seal on this fine understanding between the families. But a quarrel breaks out, and the youngsters have to break off their engagement. As their love for each other is now hopeless, they decide to commit suicide together. Unfortunately, only Yoshinosuke is successful in this. Otaka survives him, and for the seven years following her lover’s death and her own failed attempt, her life is one of sadness and despair, until the day when, escaping from her governess’s watchful eye, she succeeds in joining Yoshinosuke in the grave.

The title, “The frost of separation”, indicates the last cold snap before the arrival of spring. In symbolic language, this is the spring of life. The cold times of winter are represented by the enforced separation of the lovers, who will be dead without seeing the feeling that unites them blossom.

At the beginning of the novel, a passage gives precise expression to the feeling that they have for one another. Noticing a pair of butterflies, Yoshinosuke is honestly envious of them. Here is the quotation:

---

25) Higuchi Ichiyō 樋口一葉, *Wakarejimo* 別れ霜 (The frost of separation), *Higuchi Ichiyō shū* 樋口一葉集 (Selected works of Higuchi Ichiyō), Chikuma Shobō 筑摩書房, 1972, p. 11–24.

This morning, I step on cherry blossom covered with dew, looking enviously at butterflies flying as a twosome. On pretext of having something to say to her, I came to visit my beloved. Around us, the cherry trees are in blossom. We are talking separated by a hedge that I am never allowed to cross, although this hedge belongs to me. We do not have the leisure of exchanging intimacies. With regret I remember days and months spent in vain hope. If time were like a horse, I would myself grab the reins and brandish the whip to urge it on. That is how far my thoughts and dreams carry me away.<sup>26)</sup>

Poor old Yoshinosuke finds that time passes very slowly! In watching the butterflies with envy, he seems to wonder when the day will come when Taka and he will be able to fly away together like the pair of butterflies. Here, we remember the French verb “*convoler*” which expresses the same idea of “flying away together” as part of one’s wedding celebrations.<sup>27)</sup>

But Meiji’s era also sees the blossoming of translations. Among them, a work by Fénelon<sup>28)</sup>, *The Adventures of Telemachus*<sup>29)</sup>, contains a butterfly that is so to speak mislaid, supernumerary, a butterfly that does not exist in the original text but only in the Japanese version, added at the personal initiative of the translator.

The moment the story starts, Calypso is dreaming with nostalgia about the years when Ulysses was by her side. This time is past, for Ulysses spurned her advances and went back home instead where Penelope was waiting for him. Since his departure, Calypso has been submerged in inconsolable sadness. Here are the first lines of Fénelon’s novel<sup>30)</sup>:

Calypso was inconsolable after Ulysses’ departure. In her pain, she thought her immortality misfortune. Her grotto no longer resounded with her song: the nymphs who served her dared not speak to her. She often walked alone upon the flowering lawns with which an everlasting spring lined her island: but these fine places, far from softening her pain, could only remind her of her sad memory of Ulysses, whom she had so many

---

26) 「花の下ふむ露のあした、双ぶる翅の胡蝶うらやましく、用事に藉言て折々の訪おとづれ、余所ながら見る花の面、わが物ながら許されぬ一重垣に、しみじみとは物いひ交すひまもなく、兎角うらめしきは月日なり。ひま行く駒に形もあらば、我れ手綱を取り、鞭を揚ていそがさばやとまで思ひ渡りぬ」 Higuchi Jchiyō, *The frost of separation, ibid.*, p. 12.

27) Larousse confirms this interpretation, but on the other hand, the etymological dictionary indicates that “*convoler*” meant originally “to remarry”. Having said that, whether it is a matter of a “second wedding” or a “proper wedding”, the verb expresses in any case the celebration of a vow of love.

28) François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon (1651-1715), French prelate and writer, private tutor to the three sons of the Grand Dauphin, among whom was the Duke of Burgundy, later to inherit the throne.

29) Fénelon, *The Adventures of Telemachus*, first publication in 1699. Originally, the author intended this text to be a teaching aid for his three pupils so as to initiate them into the texts of Antiquity. Taking inspiration from Homer’s *Odyssey*, he imagines the travels of Telemachus — Homer’s son — in search of his lost father. The lines quoted correspond to the first lines of the work.

30) *Telemaku kahuku monogatari* 哲烈禍福譚 Telemachus’ Delights and Woes. (It would perhaps be more appropriate to translate this as “Telemachus’ Misfortunes”) by Fénelon フェヌロン, transl. Miyajima Harumatsu 宮島春松訳、Taiseidō 太盛堂, 1879.

times seen there at her side. Often, she remained motionless upon the seashore, which she watered with her tears; endlessly trained towards the side where Ulysses' vessel, parting the waves, had disappeared from her eyes.

Let us now quote Miyajima Harumatsu's translation, or more exactly our own translation of this translation:

After her separation from Ulysses, she can no longer feel any pleasure. Tears flow on to the sleeve of her kimono. She is like a rock in the high seas. She weeps unknown to everyone, and her tears have no time to run dry. Her life is made up of sadness. She even grows bored with her men friends and always remains alone. And then one day she goes out, still alone. Oh, everlasting spring! Her island is quite immersed in it. On the heaths, in the fields and meadows, the flowers are in bloom and vying with one another with their colours. A pair of butterflies is fluttering above the wonderful carpet of flowers. In watching them, she remembers yesterday's sky.<sup>31)</sup>

We notice at the end of these lines the image of the butterflies fluttering above the blossom. A quick comparison with the original allows us to realise that this image does not exist there.

Out of curiosity, we shall have another glance at the new Japanese translation, by Ninomiya Fusa.<sup>32)</sup>

Calypso was unable to recover from the sadness she felt since Ulysses' departure. At the height of her pain, she even went as far as to curse her immortal fate. No more were her songs heard in the grottoes, and the nymphs, her servants, did not have the heart to speak to her. The goddess often remained alone, and walked in the fields of flowers bordering the island of everlasting spring. But these magnificent places, far from soothing her sadness, remind her of Ulysses' presence when once she always used to see him at her side, and this memory redoubles her sorrow.<sup>33)</sup>

We remark that the butterfly image has disappeared in the second translation, which moreover seems to us more faithful to the original. But it is true that Miyajima Harumatsu was expressing himself in verse. Car-

---

31) 「雄龍士が解纜なし、より。最心の樂ず。涙は袖におきの石。人こそしらね乾く間も。なき暮らしたる憂思ひ。友かたらふも懶くて。閑蟄てのみ居たりしが。或時独立出て。常世の春が此嶋を。粧ふ野辺に咲満る。花の錦に飛かはす。蝶の番を見るにつけ。思ぞ出す昨日の空」 *ibid.*, p. 8.

32) *Telemakosu no bōken* テレマコスの冒険 (The Adventures of Telemachus) by Fénelon フェヌロン, transl. Ninomiya Fusa 二宮ふさ, *Yūtopia ryokōki sōsho* ユートピア旅行記叢書 (Collection of utopian travel stories) v. 4, Iwanami shoten 岩波書店 1998, p. 81.

33) 「カリュプソは、オデュッセウス [ユリス] に去られた哀しみを癒しようもなかった。傷心のあまり、不死のわが身を呪わしく思うほどであった。洞窟に彼女の歌声が響く事も絶えて無く、仕えるニンフらも、言葉をかかえる勇気さえ出ない。女神はしばしば一人きりで、島を縁取る常春のお花畑を散策した。しかし、この美しい場所も、哀しみを和らげるどころか、あんなにも始終かたわらに見たオデュッセウス [ユリス] の面影を、切なく思い出させるのみだった」 *ibid.*, p. 81-82.

ried away by the versification's rhythm, he was doubtless also immersed in the images of traditional poetry. In any case, our comment is not in order to compare translations, and even less to criticise the one by Miyajima Harumatsu, but just to underline how far the butterfly image imposes itself on the latter's mind to express the feeling of love. The translator acts as if it were impossible to speak of love without speaking of butterflies, or as if the butterfly image were an absolute necessity in order to make the reader understand that he is being told about the feeling of love.

How important a place the little winged creature holds in the Japanese imagination seems to us to be well demonstrated by this last example. If the butterfly image has been a fixture of literary tradition since the Edo's era, in Meiji's era it seems so anchored in the imaginations of novelists, translators, and doubtless Japanese readers, that it seems to be established as an unconscious necessity in every expression of love.

But the "slip" of the translator Miyajima Harumatsu at the same time reveals the stereotyped character of this image, which comes to his mind spontaneously amid the images of blossom and the evocation of spring.

### *Part two*

After the war, many other butterfly images can be found.<sup>34)</sup> But their use remains linked to the stereotype that we have just highlighted. Also we shall move directly to a work where butterflies find the freshness of a new lease of life: *A Wife in Musashino*. We shall see how the stereotyped image from previous centuries finds an original use in the analysis of feelings, and more exactly in the description of movements of the heart from which the feeling of love springs like a revelation.

Here the butterflies appear linked to the descriptions of nature. We know the importance that the author attaches to the descriptions of places. Thus, for example, in the second volume of his autobiography *Adolescence*<sup>35)</sup> he writes:

Like Stendhal, it troubles me to repeat "I" this or "I" that many times. I have written these pages by immersing myself in the Shibuya neighbourhood. I intend to carry on like this, and to express the feelings I felt when I was ten years old and had just moved into Ômukaibashi's house.<sup>36)</sup>

---

34) We are indebted to Professor Iwabuchi Hiroko for the following information: there are said to be in Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成, *Yukiguni* 雪国 (Land of snow), 9 mentions of butterflies or moths (pocket edition Shinchô Bunko 新潮文庫, 1971: butterflies *chô* 蝶 p. 24, 90, 91 and moths *ga* 蛾 p. 72, 73, 78, 86, 110, 116). In Enchi Fumiko 円地文子, *Onnazaka* (Women's ways), 7 (pocket edition Shinchô Bunko, 1957: butterflies p. 31, 87, 103, 113, 175, 179, 180, 184, 185. After checking, these butterflies are effectively used as symbols: of unhappy loves, of separation, of death. But these examples bring nothing new with respect to the use that we have already highlighted through traditional literature. So we are not retaining them in this study.

35) Ôoka Shôhei, *Shônen* 「少年」(Adolescence), *Complete Works*, vol. 11, *op.cit.*, 1994.

36) 「スタンダール同様、「私は」「私の」と繰り返すのは照れ臭いので、私自身を渋谷という環境に埋没させて語った。同じことをこれからも続けるつもりだが、大向橋の家へ引越した時、私は十歳になろうとしている。この回想では少し「私」が出しゃばることになるかも知れない」Ôoka Shôhei, *ibid.*, p. 138.

The author tells very much the same thing again in the postscript of the volume *Childhood*<sup>37)</sup>:

This is the first time that I have written autobiographically a story centred upon my own person. When I started off, its purpose was to retrace my own experience. But as I have noted in the text, I find it troubling to repeat many times “I” this or “I” that, which is why I have tried to re-immense myself in the customs of the Shibuya neighbourhood during the first years of Taishô, which constitute the environment of my childhood, the milieu where I was brought up.<sup>38)</sup>

In order to express the idea of immersion, the word used in these two passages is *maibotsu*. In his autobiography, the author also inserts numerous maps of the neighbourhood and town, which are clear signs of this wish to be immersed in the environment.

Another example is provided for us by his article “What was intended in the novel *Fires on the Plain*”.<sup>39)</sup> There again, the author underlines the importance that the environment holds as far as he is concerned, an environment which in this case is not his own but that of the character:

In July 1949 in the review *Buntai*, (. . .), I published the part that today runs from the chapter entitled “The River” to “Salt”. (. . .) In this part, the character is walking from the source of the river to its mouth. In writing that, I was referring to “The River” of Ibuse Masuji.<sup>40)</sup> In that work, the author describes the relationships that form ties between the river and the inhabitants, men and beasts, of the landscape that it crosses. In this situation, the river becomes the main character. In relation to the lonely, defeated soldier, also, the vegetation works like a character.<sup>41)</sup>

So it is in full possession of the facts, i.e. in knowing to what extent the descriptions of places are charged with meaning in Ôoka Shôhei’s works, that we enter into the *Musashino* countryside. Let us emphasise that the word *Musashino* itself indicates the name of the place where the intrigue unfolds, and let us remark in passing that the author, as in his autobiography, feels it once again necessary to insert a topographical map here. But *Musashino* is not only a place name. The vegetation, the animals, the stretches of water, all these are also part of *Musashino*. In this novel, the author never stops alternating the situations that put human

---

37) Ôoka Shôhei, *Yônen* [幼年] (Childhood), Kôdansha, bungeibun 文芸文庫 edition (Art and literature, pocket collection), 1990.

38) 「私自身を中心に、自叙伝の形で書いたのははじめてです。自己の経験の確認が目的だったのですが、本文中にも書いたように、「私は」「私の」と繰り返すのは私の趣味にはないので、私の育った環境である大正初年の渋谷の風物に、自己を埋没させて語るのを旨としました」Ôoka Shôhei, Postscript of the first edition, *ibid.*, p. 203.

39) 『野火』 *op. cit.*

40) Ibuse Masuji 井伏鱒二, *Kawa* 川 (The river), Tôkyô, *Chuôkôron* 中央公論, 1931.

41) 「「川」から「塩」までは（中略）、『文体』24年7月号に発表しました。（中略）この部分は主人公が一つの川の源から、川口までを辿るところから成り立っています。この作為は、井伏鱒二『川』に先例があります。井伏さんのは川が流域の人や動物と交渉する様を書いたもので、「川」が主人公になっています。孤独な敗兵に対しても、自然は一人の人物のように働くのです」Ôoka Shôhei, *op.cit.*, p. 181.

beings on stage and the descriptions of nature. Thus human existence is never detached from its natural environment. In this way, we can find that Ôoka Shôhei is very representative of the Japanese writers who, since the beginning of literature, have borne witness to this profound symbiosis that unites human being and nature in the same degree of reality.

For the record, let us recall that the novel's main protagonists are called Akiyama, Michiko and Tsutomu. Akiyama is the name of Michiko's husband, and she (Michiko) secretly loves her cousin Tsutomu. The latter, repatriated after the war, often comes to visit his cousin in the house where she lives with her husband. A relationship of love becomes established between the two cousins, yet each of them is as unaware of this as the other. It is precisely in order to deal with the moment when they will become aware of the nature of the feeling that is attracting them towards each other that the author uses the butterflies image.

Just as the rainy season was coming to an end, one fine Sunday, the three characters settle down on the terrace.

Everyone was silent. Akiyama eventually went down into the garden; without seeming to, he walked right round the terrace then, once out of sight of the two others, leant against a tree trunk.<sup>42)</sup>

In the dazzling July light, the cicadas are singing, the butterflies are swarming in the landscape.

(. . .) Swallowtails, nymphalidaes, cabbage whites and many others were crossing the garden and landing with a beat of their wings on the flowers in full bloom by the waterside.<sup>43)</sup>

A pair of butterflies comes along into the scene.

That day, two swallowtails that had come from the Nogawa were dancing in the sky less than a metre from the ground. One had large black wings, the other's wings were finer and pale brown.

The black butterfly was gently beating its wings. The brown one came and positioned itself underneath it, as though, very busily, thrusting its body and raising it evenly from top to bottom. The moment when its head was going to brush against the upper butterfly's belly, its body fell back at a stroke. Then the thrusting started again.

Constantly the black butterfly, slowly, calmly, seemed to be opposing the upward movement of the other one below. The two insects were getting nearer to the pond little by little, to the subtle rhythm reproduced frenetically by the upper butterfly's beating its wings.<sup>44)</sup>

---

42) 「三人は黙っていた。秋山はやがて庭に降り、さり気なくヴェランダの横手に廻って行ったが、二人から見えないところまで来ると、つと軒に身を寄せた。」「武蔵野夫人」, *op.cit.*, p. 199.

43) 「アゲハ、タテハ、モンシロその他様々の蝶が、流れに沿って咲いた花々に羽を畳みながら、庭を横切った。」「武蔵野夫人」, *ibid.*, p. 199.

44) 「この日も二羽のアゲハ蝶が野川の方から飛んできて、地の上一間ばかりの高さの空間で舞っていた。一羽

Having been left together, Michiko and Tsutomu do not say a word.

On the terrace there was the profoundest of silences. Akiyama guessed that the two others were watching the butterflies. Jealousy bit into his liver.<sup>45)</sup>

Their eyes converge on the butterflies in flight. The butterflies thus find themselves caught in the beams of light as looks, intentions and feelings cross.

He was correct. For a moment, Tsutomu and Michiko had not been able to take their eyes off the insects in flight. Against a blurring background, formed by the coral trees and the pond, the lone butterflies were becoming separated in the light.<sup>46)</sup>

Here at last is the most meaningful passage, because Michiko and Tsutomu, each one individually, identify themselves with the butterflies.

For Michiko, the butterfly underneath was with a doubt the female. She too was suffering from unrequited love and, in order to flee from the sovereign male that was dominating her, could only beat her wings again and again. But Tsutomu was familiar with even the smallest corners of her heart and had always got there first.

Tsutomu for his part thought that the butterfly underneath was a male. When, finally, filled completely by Michiko, he thought he was right up level with his butterfly lady, he was pushed back and had to withdraw. Endlessly he had to start again, for ever in vain.<sup>47)</sup>

But the jealous husband intervenes.

Suddenly, Akiyama came into their field of vision: he was running alongside the pond, waving his arms

---

の翅は黒く大きく、一羽は淡褐色で細かった。黒い蝶はゆるやかに翅をあおっていた。淡褐色の蝶はその下に密着して、突き上げるように忙しく上下の運動を繰り返した。頭部が上の蝶の腹に触れるように見える瞬間、つと身を落した。それからまた突き上げた。黒い蝶は始終ゆっくりと落ちついて、下の蝶の上昇する運動を上から絶えず抑えているように見えた。二つの蝶はそうして下の蝶の忙しい飛翔の間に生ずるわずかなずれに従って、少しずつ池の上の方へ移って行った。」「武蔵野夫人」, *ibid.*, p. 199-200.

45) 「ヴェランダはやはり静かであった。秋山は二人がこの蝶の運動を見ているなと感じた。すると嫉妬が起きて来た。」「武蔵野夫人」, *ibid.*, p. 200.

46) 「秋山の直感は正しかった。二人はさっきからこの蝶から目を離すことが出来なかった。背景の珊瑚樹も池も霞んで、二羽の蝶だけが浮き上がるように光って見えた。」「武蔵野夫人」, *ibid.*, p. 200.

47) 「道子は下の蝶が雌だろうと想像した。雌は自分と同じ苦しい片恋を抱き、上の鷹揚な雄蝶から逃れようとして、無益な飛翔を続けているのである。しかし勉は彼女の心の隅々まで知っていて、彼女の心の行くところにはいつも彼が先にいる。勉は下の蝶が雄だと思った。道子に憧れる彼の心は、上の雌蝶に達したと思う瞬間、その無心にはじかれて離れねばならぬ。いつまでもその空しい試みを繰り返さねばならぬ。」「武蔵野夫人」, *ibid.*, p. 200.

so as to frighten the butterflies away, and put an end to the dreaming. The insects separately moved higher in the sky, then came closer together again and, blending together once more, flew off towards the Nogawa.

In his excitement, Akiyama had bared his arms up to the elbow and Michiko thought them very gaunt and very ugly.<sup>48)</sup>

The two cousins come out of their dreaming :

His gaze crossed that of Tsutomu. In their eyes they both had a gleam of whose meaning there could no longer be any doubt.<sup>49)</sup>

In reading the last quotations, we observe the author's attachment to the butterflies image, and we have shown how much this is part of the traditional, literary heritage, and even, to use Jung's expression, of Japanese collective unconsciousness. At any rate, it seems that this image comes spontaneously to Ôoka's pen, as if it were clearly registered in his unconsciousness as a fitting metaphor for the expression of feelings of love.

However, we also observe that the author doesn't just use this image with the banal and stereotyped purposes to which it is confined in classical literature. Exiting the purely rhetorical arena, it becomes here the subject of a painting, serving to express feelings that the novelist wishes to put into the heart of his characters.

In the former, the movements of heart and thoughts are standing entire in a stylistic device. In the latter, the novelist — and this is the whole difference — is creating his own style: the butterflies start to move, drawing arabesques. The characters' feelings are no longer imprisoned in undecipherable arabesques and reduced to a splash of colour. Their own movements accompany those of the butterflies: what the stylistic device had reduced to silence is exactly what comes out of the picture of feelings painted by Ôoka Shôhei.

As we were noting above, most Japanese commentators of Ôoka Shôhei's works are more than anything else sensitive to the way in which the West has influenced him. The author himself recognises this and insists upon it in his article "The influences of western literature in *Fires on the Plain*". It is not that he was not conscious of the ways in which Japanese literature might have influenced him, but that to him they seem too complex, too confused, and too unconscious a fabric for him to envisage going around.

That he has been influenced by Stendhal needs no demonstration: simply reading the previous quotations allows an idea to be made of the nit-picking meticulousness with which Ôoka Shôhei pursues, in his characters' very depths, the most intimate, the most secret, the most unconscious movements. Like Stendhal, these are the underground springs, alive and deep, of human feelings that he seeks to make flow forth in the unconscious. That he has on the other hand been influenced by Japanese literature, this we think has been made explicit thanks to the butterfly example, an image coming from the very oldest archetypes of classical literature.

---

48) 「秋山が不意に視野に現れて、池に駆け寄り、手をあげて蝶を追ったので、二人は夢から醒めた。蝶は離れて中空に揚がり、また近寄り、もつれながら野川の方へ飛んで行った。振り上げて、脇まで露わした秋山の細い腕を道子は醜いと思った。」「武蔵野夫人」, *ibid.*, p. 200.

49) 「勉と道子の眼が合った。そのお互いの目の輝きの意味を、二人はもう疑うことが出来なかった。」「武蔵野夫人」, *ibid.*, p. 200.

Thus, Ôoka Shôhei's literature is truly situated in a moment of history where two worlds meet: on the one hand the traditional world with its formal representations, its liking for stylisation, and the limits reached by the extreme attention given to form and style, and on the other hand the "modern" world, with its western models that favour content sometimes to the detriment of form. It can be seen that the author, in each of the areas of influence, has not only grasped their essential character, but that he has succeeded in using them simultaneously, combining with remarkable control and skill the specific characters of these two quite separate streams.

To summarise, there would be no point researching the work for the influences of one or the other world in order to locate the author on the side of tradition or of modernity, as Japanese critics often do. The advantage of such a study is rather to recognise the interpenetration of horizons that are *a priori* highly different, and its remarkable consequence in the unity of the work — that we could call traditional through its figurative borrowings and modern through the psychological analysis that makes up the content. The image is of Japanese inspiration, but it acquires a surprising sharpness thanks to its analytical content. This result is without doubt what we find most characteristic about Ôoka's work, and demonstrates, were it necessary, the resources of creativity that the artists of all eras can exploit where two or several cultures meet.

## Conclusion

What remains to be shown is the original character of the work, or more modestly of *A Wife in Musashino*, where the novelist succeeds in renewing one of the most archetypal images in sentimental literature while serving the needs of psychological analysis specific to western literature.

In his article published in 1953, "What was intended in *Fires on the Plain*"<sup>50)</sup>, Ôoka mentions Sartre's *Situations*, and more precisely *What is literature?*.<sup>51)</sup> Was he already acquainted with this work, published in France in 1949, at the time when he was writing his novel *A Wife in Musashino*, published in Japan in 1951? It is not impossible. Indeed, the translation of *What is literature?* was published for the first time in Japan in 1952.<sup>52)</sup> Knowing that Ôoka read Sartre, that he was the perfect gallicizer, and moreover taking into account the great proximity of the dates of publications of the two works, we presume that there could at least be a community of spirit between these two authors so that we can develop the following analyses, which aim to reflect upon the necessity of the symbol.

We shall first point out a passage at the end of the chapter entitled «Loves Vale» in *A Wife in Musashino*. Michiko and Tsutomu are walking along the river together, trying to reach the source.

Cutting obliquely across the bank, a little path led the two walkers to the edge of the pond. In the paddy

---

50) Ôoka Shôhei, *Nobi no ito* 『野火』の意図 (What was intended in *Fires on the Plain*), *Ôoka Shôhei Zenshû* 大岡昇平全集 (Complete works of Ôoka Shôhei), v. 14, Tôkyô, Chikuma Shobô, 1996.

51) Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, Paris, Idées/Gallimard, 1975.

52) Transl. Katô Shûichi 加藤周一, Tôkyô, Jimbunshoin, 1952. On the translator and friend of Sartre Katô Shûichi, see our interview published in *Daruma* 12/13.

fields, a peasant between ages, busy with his seedbeds, looked at them with an air of obvious suspicion and hostility.

- What do you call this, round here? asked Tsutomu.

- Loves Vale, retorted the other, rather rudely.

Michiko's knees gave way. Tsutomu had taught her this name. The «Loves» were doubtless only an etymological fantasy (. . .) but it was precisely the word that she had always wanted to avoid.<sup>53)</sup>

Thus, it is by chance, on hearing the word “love” in this peasant's mouth that Michiko becomes aware of her feeling for Tsutomu. The feeling that has so far remained unconscious discovers its name, and becomes conscious thanks to the word that names it. From that moment, Tsutomu becomes for his cousin “the man she loves”.

It is this exact order of things: the feeling's being revealed in the word that comes to us in order to say it, that Sartre wants to demonstrate in the first chapter of *What is literature?* The general idea of this chapter answers the question asked in the title: “What is writing?”. We know Sartre's answer: “writing is a commitment”. He explains himself in the following passage, where “the committed writer” is supposed to have read *The Charterhouse at Parma*<sup>54)</sup>:

He [the “committed writer”] recalls Mosca's sentence when in front of the Berlin carriage that was taking Fabrice and Sanseverina away: “If the word love ever occurs between them, I am lost.” He knows that he is the man naming what has not yet been named or what dare not say its name, he knows that he is making the word love and the word hatred “occur” and with them the love and hatred between men who had not yet decided on their feelings.<sup>55)</sup>

Thus a “committed” writer is one whose eyes dive into a reality as yet invisible. His word is a means of “revealing”, by giving them a name, the as yet unknown aspects of the world, which for this reason still seem mysterious to us. The connection with *A Wife in Musashino* is simple: it is also thanks to a word and one word alone — and precisely the same word “love” said by chance in her presence — that Michiko realises the feeling that she attaches to her cousin.

---

53) 「土手を斜めに切った小径を降りて二人は池の傍らに立った。水田で稲の苗床をいじっていた一人の中年の百姓は、明らかな疑惑と反感を見せて二人を見た。「ここはなんてところですか」と勉は訊いた。「恋が窪さ」と相手はぶっきら棒に答えた。道子の膝は力を失った。その名は前に勉から聞いたことがある。「恋」とは宛字らしかったが、(略)「恋」こそ今まで彼女の避けていた言葉であった。」*「武蔵野夫人」*, *op.cit.*, p. 189-190.

54) Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, Paris, Gallimard, Folio classique, 1972.

55) Sartre, *What is literature?*, *op. cit.*, p. 31. May we point out that the author is wrong about the exact location of the passage taken from *The Charterhouse at Parma*. Fabrice and San Severina's journey does not actually take place in reality. A prey to jealousy, Mosca imagines the worst: “(. . .) I'm losing my mind. I must calm down; if my manners are harsh, the countess is capable, out of pure vanity, of following him [Fabrice] to Belgirate; and there, or en route, chance may bring on a word that will give a name to what they feel for each other; and afterwards, in a flash, all the consequences.” (Stendhal, *ibid.*, p. 153, our underlining).

Sartre carries on:

He [the “committed writer”] knows that words, as Brice-Parain says, are loaded pistols. If he speaks, he fires. He may keep silent, but since he has chosen to fire, he must do this like a man, by aiming at targets and not like a child, at random, by closing his eyes and just for the pleasure of making detonations.<sup>56)</sup>

In the sequence where Michiko realises his love by hearing the word “love”, the name of the place is not an innocent choice on the part of the novelist. The latter uses it on the contrary with the conscious intention of producing an effect: the name “Loves Vale” works well in the novel like a “pistol shot”. By doing this, Ôoka Shôhei seems to verify Sartre’s theory perfectly.

A comment on the translation is needed here: Sartre and Stendhal use the same word “love”. In the Japanese translations, Katô Shûichi, as well as Ôoka Shôhei, uses the word *ai* 愛 in order to express this feeling. However, in his novel — and when it is a matter of the same range of feelings —, Ôoka uses the word *koi* 恋. It is difficult to translate into French the nuance that exists in Japanese between *ai* and *koi*. Let us say that the first one expresses a feeling of affection, tenderness, attachment, in a much broader acceptance than that of the word *koi*, which has the connotations of desire or sensual love.

Now the butterfly image is used precisely to express the feeling of sensual desire. We have quoted above the example of a butterfly fluttering above blossom, and forming as it were a splash of colour amid the dazzling colours of the flowers blooming in spring. It happens that the word colour and the word spring, in Japanese symbolism, evoke the same nuance of meaning: the butterfly image thus represents without any possible doubt, in the eyes or ears of a Japanese reader or listener, the disorder of love, the madness of amorous desire. Let us re-read Edo’s poems or Meiji’s novels starting with this hypothesis: when the butterfly image crops up, it seems just as evocative as the word “love” in Michiko’s ears, and it works in the same way as the “pistol shot” whose effect is suggested to us by Sartre.

Was Ôoka conscious of “firing” like a man, aiming at a target, or else, to take up Sartre’s expression again, was he firing at random, like a child? A clue allows us to presume that he was fully conscious of the effects that he was going to produce: the two chapters that we have just been discussing are respectively entitled *Koi ga kubo* 恋が窪 “Loves Vale” and *Chô no hishō ni tsuite* 蝶の飛翔について “The flight of the butterflies”.

In the first of these chapters, we have shown that the novelist verifies so to speak Sartre’s theory by his own practice in novel writing: “Loves Vale” could provide Sartre with a second example just as striking — and perhaps even more so — as Stendhal’s passage which serves to illustrate the hypothesis. Since Sartre could well have quoted Ôoka in place of Stendhal, we can clearly see by this equivalence the “modern” character of Ôoka Shôhei’s work, which is “committed” in Sartre’s meaning of the term: aiming to throw light on the dark zones of the conscience.

---

56) Sartre, *What is literature?*, *op. cit.*, p. 59

In the second of the quoted chapters, we again find the butterflies image from Japanese literature whose function, as we have already seen, is as expressive as words. Between Fabrice and San Severina, wrote Stendhal, had the word “love” simply been uttered, it would have been enough to ruin Mosca’s hopes. In the “Flight of the butterflies”, it is not the word “love” that fuels Akiyama’s jealousy, but precisely the butterflies which Michiko and Tsutomu are following with their eyes, with a look so eloquent that the husband cannot be mistaken. It is the character last mentioned who, in fiction, plays the role of the traditional reader, understanding the word “love” without its being uttered, just by noticing a pair of butterflies. Ôoka Shôhei demonstrates by this process the eloquence of the symbol in the eyes of the traditional reader, and how the symbol works unequivocally in the painting of human dramas.

Known as a Europeanised writer, Ôoka shows nevertheless that he is perfectly capable of also painting Akiyama’s point of view, a worthy representative of a time not so far away, when readers saw in their imagination, through romantic scenes symbolised by butterflies, other scenes far less respectable, other “colours” far more stark and the flight of propriety! Isn’t representing the butterflies in this way a lure serving to draw the three characters’ attention, where their looks are suddenly caught on the spot, in a beam of contradictory intentions and feelings? Two cultures meet at this particular moment of the novel’s dramatic art, and by this device, it seems to us, the characters acquire a universal stature.<sup>57)</sup>

---

57) We would like to thank Professors Aoki Ikuko 青木生子, Nakagawa Hisayasu 中川久定, Minemura Shizuko 峯村至津子, Iwabuchi Hiroko 岩淵宏子 for their contribution to our collection of specimens. Thank you also to Mr. Kenneth Lovatt for his help in this english translation.

