



Section 4. History of Literature

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ORIENTAL PHILOSOPHY IN SYMBOLIST LITERATURE

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Abstract

This scientific article examines the use of Oriental philosophy in the symbolic literature developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In particular, in the poems of W. B. Yeats and Paul Valéry, the views, phrases and images related to Oriental philosophy have been identified. **Keywords:** *Symbolist literature, Oriental philosophy, Mysticism and Transcendence, Inner Harmony and Balance, traditional symbols, Eastern art and poetry.*

Symbolist literature is a literary movement that emerged in the late 19th century, primarily in France, and later spread to other parts of Europe, including Russia. The movement is characterized by its emphasis on symbolism, where objects, characters, and events in literary works are used to represent abstract ideas and emotions. Symbolist literature is often associated with themes of mysticism, spirituality, and the exploration of the inner world of the human psyche.

Key features of Symbolist literature include:

1. Use of Symbols: Symbolist writers use symbols to represent abstract ideas and emotions. These symbols can be objects, characters, or events that have a deeper, symbolic meaning beyond their literal interpretation.

2. Emphasis on the Inner World: Symbolist literature often explores the inner world of the human psyche, including emotions, dreams, and subconscious thoughts. The focus is on the subjective experience of the individual rather than the objective reality of the external world.

3. Mysticism and Spirituality: Many Symbolist works explore themes of mysticism and spirituality. Symbolist writers were often influenced by Eastern philosophies, as well as by Western mystical traditions.

4. Rejection of Realism: Symbolist literature rejects the realism and naturalism of the 19th century. Instead, Symbolist writers embrace a more abstract, poetic, and imaginative approach to storytelling.

5. Aestheticism: Symbolist literature often emphasizes the aesthetic qualities of

language and imagery. Symbolist writers use evocative, lyrical language to create a sense of beauty and to convey complex emotions and ideas.

6. Influence of Music: Symbolist literature is often influenced by music, particularly the works of composers like Richard Wagner. Symbolist writers sought to create a sense of musicality in their works through the use of rhythm, repetition, and lyrical language.

Prominent Symbolist writers include:

- **Charles Baudelaire:** A French poet known for his collection “Les Fleurs du mal” (The Flowers of Evil), which explores themes of decadence, sensuality, and the inner world of the human psyche (Mein M., 1973).
- **Stéphane Mallarmé:** A French poet known for his complex, abstract poetry that explores themes of mysticism, spirituality, and the nature of language (Stéphane Mallarmé, trans. E.H. and A.M. Blackmore, 2006).
- **Paul Verlaine:** A French poet known for his lyrical, musical poetry that explores themes of love, nature, and the inner world of the human psyche (Underwood V., Philip, 2023).
- **Arthur Rimbaud:** A French poet known for his innovative, experimental poetry that explores themes of rebellion, spirituality, and the inner world of the human psyche (Davies-Mitchell M.C. 2023).
- **Andrey Bely:** A Russian poet and novelist known for his Symbolist novel “Petersburg”, which explores themes of revolution, spirituality, and the inner world of the human psyche.

Symbolist literature had a significant influence on later literary movements, including Modernism and Surrealism. The emphasis on symbolism, mysticism, and the exploration of the inner world of the human psyche continues to resonate with writers and readers today.

If we say about Oriental philosophy, Oriental philosophy had a significant influence on Symbolist literature, particularly during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Symbolism, as a literary movement, emerged in France and quickly spread to other parts of

Europe, including Russia. Symbolist writers and poets were known for their use of symbols to represent abstract ideas and emotions, and their works often explored themes of mysticism, spirituality, and the inner world of the human psyche (Kuan Zhang K., 2021).

Oriental philosophy, with its emphasis on spiritual enlightenment, inner harmony, and the interconnectedness of all things, resonated with Symbolist writers. The Symbolists were drawn to the mystical and philosophical traditions of the East, including Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. These Eastern philosophies offered new perspectives on the nature of reality, the self, and the cosmos, and provided Symbolists with a rich source of inspiration for their literary works.

Several key aspects of Oriental philosophy found their way into Symbolist literature:

1. **Mysticism and Transcendence:** Eastern philosophies often emphasize the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment and transcendence of the material world. Symbolist writers were attracted to these ideas and explored themes of mysticism, transcendental experiences, and the quest for spiritual awakening in their works.

2. **Interconnectedness and Unity:** Eastern philosophies often teach that all things are interconnected and that there is an underlying unity in the cosmos. Symbolists embraced this concept and used symbols to represent the interconnectedness of all things and the unity of the human soul with the cosmos.

3. **Inner Harmony and Balance:** Eastern philosophies often advocate for inner harmony and balance as a path to spiritual enlightenment. Symbolists explored the inner world of the human psyche and the struggle for inner harmony and balance in their works.

4. **Rejection of Materialism:** Eastern philosophies often reject materialism and the pursuit of worldly pleasures. Symbolists, too, rejected the materialism of the modern world and sought to explore deeper, spiritual truths in their works.

5. **Influence of Eastern Aesthetics:** Symbolists were also influenced by the aesthetics of Eastern art and poetry, which often emphasize simplicity, naturalness, and the beauty of the ordinary. Symbolist writers

incorporated these aesthetic principles into their works, using simple, evocative language and imagery to convey complex emotions and ideas (Kuan Zhang K., 2021).

Prominent Symbolist writers who were influenced by Oriental philosophy include W. B. Yeats, Paul Valéry, and Rainer Maria Rilke. In Russia, poets like Alexander Blok and Andrey Bely were also influenced by Eastern philosophies and incorporated Oriental themes and motifs into their works.

For example, W. B. Yeats has used different types of symbols in his poetry. They were carefully woven into the pattern of the poem. He uses these symbols to convey his inner sensations, his visions and his mystic experiences. In his early poems his symbols are elementary. They are not complex. Thus they put no obstacles in the way of the meaning. In this phase the poet makes use of traditional symbols.

Yeats contended that symbolism is an element of art, “the substance of all style”.

Yeats’ poem “The Second Coming” are the symbols are gyre, falcon and falconer, lion body, rocking cradle, and Bethlehem, just to name a few. Each of these is an intellectual symbol, and, depending on the person’s individual knowledge, can be interpreted differently and some are only linked to one thing, such as Bethlehem, which can only be linked to the city of the same name and specific historical or religious meaning. In this poem, the ‘ceremony of innocence’ represent for Yeats for one of the qualities that made life valuable under the dying aristocratic social

tradition. The expression ‘falcon and the falconer’ have a symbolic meaning. A falcon is a hawk and a hawk is the symbol of the active or intellectual mind and ‘the falconer’ symbolizes the soul of it (Dash Bipin, 2022).

His poems are full of what we have called “personalized traditional symbols”. They are largely drawn from Irish legends and Celtic folklore, as well as from the occult. Symbols such as rose, cross, swan, water, tree, moon and sun are all what Yeats calls “ancient symbols”, which have come down to us through a hundred generations (Miner Earl, 1990).

Valery’s symbols “are either strictly self-consistent or else chosen in such a way that we know what each one means and does” (URL: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/paul-valery>). His symbols are, by and large, made through an analogy or corresponding aspect of his sensual outer world. Thus, the growth of a plant symbolizes the growth of meaning, or the maturation of the work of art; sun and light always symbolize intellectual power; the sea conveys the idea of life; the wind suggests emotion, etc. His symbols are always suggestive, ambiguous, often mysterious, giving the impression of being closely related to Valery’s intellectual and creative life.

Overall, the influence of Oriental philosophy on Symbolist literature can be seen in the themes, imagery, and aesthetics of Symbolist works, as well as in the exploration of mysticism, spirituality, and the inner world of the human psyche.

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