

Yuqing (Eva) Cao

Department of Comparative Literature

Yuqing (Eva) Cao

Professor Jonathan Monroe

COML 6866

16, May 2017

Eileen Chang and Roberto Bolaño

On rare occasions have the names “Eileen Chang” and “Roberto Bolaño” been placed side by side, yet their juxtaposition is an effort towards the actualization of the generous cultural vision represented by the intellectual ancestors of Curtius and Auerbach, who took nationalism to be a transitory, finally secondary matter: what mattered far more was the concerts of peoples and spirits that transcend the shabby political realm of bureaucracy, armies, customs barriers, and xenophobia. Standing above small-minded political affairs were both a kind of anthropological Eden in which men and women happily produced something called literature, and a world that Matthew Arnold and his disciples designated as that of “culture”, where only “the best that is thought and known” could be admired (Said, 45).

Chang’s works is the epitome of Chinese writing, particularly “Haipai” (Shanghai-style). Bolaño is the most significant Latin American literary voice of his generation. Despite their different national literary traditions and social circumstances, they write with great similarity in the avant-garde, modernist literary context, eliciting crucial responses in regard to both the form and content of their works. Regarding the forms of their works, essential questions concerning

genre, in particular the prose/verse dichotomy and even hierarchy, and the aftermath of prose-poems when the line between two different genres is smoothed, and the author's metacognition when dealing with genre are raised. By placing their work in juxtaposition, the seemingly simplest question of "What is a novel?" is bundled up in complications when the drastic differences between the Eastern and Western traditions of novel, as well as the authors' individual responses towards the tradition are taken into consideration. Both Chang's and Bolaño's works have been read as visual images rather than solely textual works, thus also giving rise to one of the most important questions in the realm of avant-garde art and literature--- the relationship between image and text. As in content, it's noteworthy that in their works, essential themes overlap, such as gender-politics, body politic, the gendering of eroticism; nationalism, colonialism and post-colonialism; Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and mystery, reflections, mirroring and dreams; the consistency of subject matter in the totality of their works (which for Chang is women, and for Bolaño, poets); the state of the modern man, with their isolations in a transforming society, surreal imageries and plots; and most importantly, their shared fascinations with Baudelaire and Poe. Such interests have left highly identifiable traces in their works and aesthetics. Such a comparison would shed light on the concept of "avant-garde" in a "global" context.

There's no denial that Bolaño is an avant-garde in his writings, yet few Chinese literary critics have depicted Chang as an avant-garde author. One possibility might be the differences in discourse and the definition of concepts across cultures. Yet "avant-garde" should be a concept that transcends such differences along with the rising of "Weltliteratur" and "comparative literature". When two starkly different authors are placed side by side as avant-gardes, one sees more facets and possibilities of an author and his/her literary works.

[Contrapuntal Reading]

The reading of the two authors could be placed under the theoretical structure of Edward Said's "contrapuntal reading" and Susan Friedman's "the new geographics of identity". Said's contrapuntal reading refers to a structure of attitude and reference that takes into account intertwined histories and narratives. Especially when reading colonial or post-colonial texts, the perspectives of both the colonizers and the colonized should be considered. Interpreting contrapuntally is interpreting different perspectives simultaneously and seeing how the text interacts with itself as well as with its historical or biographical contexts. It is reading with "awareness for both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts." (Said, 10) Said states that this global, contrapuntal analysis should be modelled not (as earlier notions of comparative literature were) on a symphony but rather on an atonal ensemble; we must take into account all sorts of spatial or geographical and rhetorical practices--inflections, limits, constraints, intrusions, inclusions, prohibitions--all of them tending to elucidate a complex and uneven topography. To rejoin experience and culture is of course to read texts from the metropolitan center and from the peripheries contrapuntally, according neither the privilege of "objectivity" to "our side" nor the encumbrance of "subjectivity" to "theirs"! The question is a matter of knowing *how to* read, as the deconstructors say, and not detaching this from the issue of knowing *what* to read. Texts are not finished objects. They are, as Williams once said, notations and cultural practices.

Shanghai, in the 30s and 40s, was overpowered by British and French concessions, the state of *Gudao* (a piece of isolated island), *Lunxian* (the great downfall), *Wangjingwei's* government, the overlapping territory and interlaced history of the ROC and CPC parties...the political and social scenes of the era of colonialization forms a contrapuntal reading scenario for Eileen Chang, with her own life and creative experience integrated and weaved with the warfare.

Spivak has stated that the feelings toward a cultural identity is always able to predetermine a certain language. In the ten key years in Shanghai, Chang always writes about the cities of Shanghai and Hong Kong in the tongue of a Shanghainese. She has infinite feelings for the cafes, trams, and the vendors of snacks in Shanghai as she was born and raised there. However, in her writings of Hong Kong, Hong Kong is depicted as a city that has lost its sense of the “self”. She and her works both exhibit the concept of “twofold-otherness”. For western colonists, Hong Kong is the “other” that has been modified in order to hold the projections of the oriental fantasies, while for the Chinese from mainland China, Hong Kong is a distant, alien and blurry “other” as well. In Chang’s writings, Hong Kong is like what W.E. Henley has applauded as the entertainment of the Arabian Nights. Yet, standing from both the perspectives of the “viewer” and the “object of view”, Chang has a clear insight of what is originally Eastern, and what is the twisted vision to appeal to the Western’s taste and their hunger for novelty.

This is demonstrated in many of her lines that depict Hong Kong in times of colonization, for instance, the following quote from her novella *Aloeswood Incense: the First Brazier*, “Inside is typical Western furnishings, yet there are still some Chinese decorations that appeal to both refined and popular taste; on the Taiwan incense burner is the emerald snuff-bottle and ivory Guan-yin statue; the sofa is half-hidden by the small screen painted with mottle bamboo. Yet this Oriental tone is apparently for the taste of foreign friends. The British have travelled all the way to see China, so it’s impossible not to show them something Chinese. Yet the China here, is the China in the Westerner’s eyes: absurd, delicate, entertaining. Weilong has spotted her own shadows reflected on the glass door---she herself is also part of the Oriental imagery of the colony. She wears the exquisite uniform of Nanying High School, turquoise blue robe made from starched cotton cloth, flowing down to her knees, revealing the narrow bottom of her trousers. This is still

the style of late Manchu: dressing up female students like the famous prostitute Sai Jinhua. This is how the Hong Kong government attempts to soothe the eyes of European visitors. Yet like other young girls who love fashion, Weilong adds a wool vest over her robe, looking “neither like a donkey nor a horse” in the Chinese proverb.” (Chang, 76). Another example in the book would be, “The garden celebration of Ms. Liang, is rendering the strong local sentiments. The lawns are planted with large lanterns with the Chinese character Fu written on it. Yet among the bushels of lanterns are several typically western parasols. The servants have long braids, yet they use silver platters to carry cocktails, juices and desserts...” (Chang, 96)

While writing these lines, Chang seems to be doing her own contrapuntal reading of what is going on in Hong Kong; she not only sees the country as the “land of sight”, but also enters the mind of the colonizers, and sees Hong Kong through their eyes. She is simultaneously the “insider” and the “outsider”. On one hand, she has seen beyond the projection and the performance, while on the other, she is also deeply emotionally engaged with both sides of her “dual-otherness”. “Home” and “diaspora” have been the two key words for colonial and post-colonial writing, and for Chang’s characters, there have never been a tranquil, reliable and undamaged “home” physically or psychologically.

The contrapuntal reading in Bolaño’s narrative is most noticeable in the two geographic poles where his stories take place. In his novel we can find cities such as Barcelona, Paris, Rome that are modern cultural centers filled with publishing houses and literary elites as the major setting. At other times, we see territories such as the fictional city Santa Teresa at the Mexican border and the Chile of Pinochet’s era places haunted with murders, crimes, poverty, violence and fear, places where neo-liberal economic policies have been implemented, chosen as the main narrative site in his novel. What’s intriguing is that Bolaño has placed many failed authors in the so called civilized

land. Literary critics from the countries that are generally recognized as the “literal lands” cannot find true authors in their own lands, have to travel to the “less cultured” and “primitive” countries to seek the mysterious author whom they believe is a true master of literature. There’s also Bolaño’s subtle critique against the academic snobbishness and elitism of the scholars in countries that appear as literary centers. An example is in the *Woes of the True Policeman*. “They talked about poetry. To everyone’s surprise, and to the disgust of some (feigned surprise and disgust, of course), Amalfitano held Nicanor Parra in higher esteem than Octavio Paz. When they tried to get Amalfitano to tell the same kind of stories about his previous university (it was very small and I taught only one course, on Rodolfo Wilcock, he said, politely and abashedly), the result was disappointing. No one had read Rodolfo Wilcock, no one cared about him.” In these lines, the “alienation” and “isolation” of an outsider is heightened.

Since Bolaño’s characters are, for most of the time, constantly on the move, in self or social exile, they could bridge the two sides of the geographic dichotomy. Here the concept of “contrapuntal” reading is not specified to colonialism, but in its original generalizing meaning of the interpretation of a text by considering jointly the discourses that shape it, not only the dominant ones, but also those that resist it (Culture 66-67). In this case, while Bolaño simultaneously reflects and accommodates some aspects of globalization, such as displacement or the concept of a global village, he also resists some of them. For instance, his attitude towards the neo-liberal economy, and the opening of a fluid, interconnected global economy is manifested in his narrations of Santa Teresa, which represents Ciudad Juarez, famous for the maquiladoras, the population boom, and femicides brought on by the opening of markets enabled by the North American Free Trade agreement. In addition, most of the femicide victims were young women who worked in the maquiladoras. Before their deaths, they are typically employed at factories with names like “Nip

Mex, Key Corp and Interzone-Berny". The bodies of the murdered women are recounted in unrelenting, forensic detail, in contrast to the lack of interest of the press and police. "No one pays attention to these killings," Oscar Fate is told, "but the secret of the world is hidden in them." (Bolaño, 27) Santa Teresa is "the sad American mirror of wealth and poverty, and constant, useless metamorphosis." (Bolaño, 97) In some sense, these murders, the mapping made of murdered female bodies is a curse and a mirror for the world of globalization, transnational economy, and neo-liberalism. The other case is the story of Edwin Johns who had cut off his right hand for a haunting artwork of self-portrait, and who later spent his life in an asylum. In 2666, Morini is stunned by the answer that the mad artist gave for the reason why he had cut off his right hand. "For money", "Because he believed in investments, the flow of capital, one has to play the game to win. That kind of thing". (Bolaño, 108)

As in Chang's novels, diaspora, home, and exile are key elements in Bolaño's works. Though, unlike the typical Oriental/Occidental object-subject relationship in the case of Chang, the exiles in Bolaño's works are also epitomes of the "two-fold" or even "multi-fold" otherness. The driving force in this case, is a sort of post-nationalism, or non-nationalism, that dominates the post-modern era. Thus, in this sense, the spirit of "diaspora" and "homelessness" in the Bolaño's context is in succession with Chang's "otherness" and "alienation". In the sense of periodization, Chang's characters are exiles in a colonial and early post-colonial world, while Bolaño's characters are banished as nomads in a modern/post-modern era of globalization marked by neo-liberalism. In Bolaño's works, characters like Padilla, Monsieur Pain, Amalfitano, Rosa, Archimboldi, Liz Norton, Morini, Lola...are all marked with the commonality of an almost surreal homelessness. They move so broadly and frequently across regions, that it has reached a state of a blurring of time, space, and logic, in an uneven and composite fashion, against the bourgeois social reality.

A fascinating metaphor in *2666* concerning the theme of exile and nomads is the book *Testamento Geometrico* hanging on a clothesline in Amalfitano's backyard. The concept itself is a metaphor of the nomadic and the exiled, and the essential state of their being. "Duchamp instructed the couple by letter to hang a geometry book by strings on the balcony of their apartment so that the wind could go through the book, choose its own problems, turn and tear out the pages". (Bolaño) The homeless characters are like this model of geometry book, with a certain "randomness" and "chance" dominating their lives, molding and defining their life experiences along the way. Wind throws a problem in their way, and they either overcome it, allowing themselves to be defeated, or push it aside, swallow the problem down, absorbing it inside the body. Constantly facing indeterminacies in life and constantly on the move. This describes how Monsieur Pain deals with the mysterious Spaniards, Amalfitano deals with the charges of him "corrupting minors" at the university due to his sexuality, Rosa deals with her countless travels due to his father's choices of life, Lola deals with her obsession with the poet and her wanderlust, and Padilla deals with his diagnosis of AIDS. Their state of life reflects Duchamp's idea of bringing the idea of the happy and unhappy into ready-mades, and then the rain, the wind, the pages flying...Even without the cult of hanging a geometry book on a clothesline, the book itself is playing with the concepts of "isolated, homeless individuals", and a globalized village. The structure of the book mimics human relationships, as it consists of three books, "each independent, but functionally correlated by the sweep of the whole". How the book comes into Amalfitano's hands remains a mystery, yet the sites mentioned weaves the map for a nomad. The people in these site "Barcelona", "Santiago", "Galicia", "Laie", "Santa Teresa", these men and women, they are everyone at once, while being nobody at all; they could be at anywhere, except for going to a real "home". The God of beggars, the God who sleeps on the ground, in subway entrances, the God of

insomnias, the God of those who have always lost. This is part of disillusionment in a world dominated by both the vision of a global village, and the disconnection of people spiritually even though they are more connected geographically with the help technology.

[Genres]

The element of “exile” that dominates the works of Chang and Bolaño’s works is also a metaphor and a method for the novel itself. Two of the most important contemporary theories of the novel grounded in the idea of “homelessness” by George Lukacs and Mikhael Bakhtin could aid our understanding of Chang and Bolaño’s choice of genre, and the nature of the genres of their works. In contrasting ways, George Lukacs and Mikhael Bakhtin have used the image of exile as a crucial metaphor in their conceptions of the novelistic enterprise. And curiously, though from the works of Chang and Bolaño, it’s hard to ascribe their dealings with genre to any one of those conceptions of homelessness, they help develop the paradoxical tensions between the two branches of theory, from the Western perspective and the Eastern textual tradition. In general, Lukacs’s conception is a form of nostalgia, the index for the desired recovery of a mythical lost genre, the epic, while in Bakhtin it becomes an ethical and aesthetic drive in search of difference and estrangement.

According to Lukacs, “The old parallelism of the transcendental structure of the form-giving subject and the world of created forms has been destroyed, and the ultimate basis of artistic creation has become homeless. The novel form is, like no other, an expression of this transcendental homelessness (40-41)”. The modern novel becomes the fractured epic of “a world abandoned by god”. The renunciation of the category of totality and thus the epic ideal is nothing but the cowardly and redundant representation of a world marked by the strategic alliance of

modern subjectivism and capitalist individualism, the resignation to the fragment, the favored vehicle of capitalist domination.

Bakhtin, on the other hand, does not see in exile the ideal of return but rather the ethic/aesthetic need of compulsive estrangement that allows the writer system to rebel against the overpowering tendencies of power and authority: " In modern times, the flowering of the novel is always connected with a disintegration of stable verbal-ideological systems and with an intensification and internationalization of speech diversity that are counterpoised to the previously reigning stable systems". The novel's goal is the systematic displacement that denies the possibility of that "totality" being used for authoritarian purposes.

Eileen Chang has been renowned as the only modern writer who has inherited the bloodline of classical Chinese literature. She is able to construct her own unique Tang poems and Song verses with the vernacular expression, which is highly rare and considered as a transcendental gift from god. In parallel with the Greek tradition of epic poems, poetry in China is the priority in the hierarchy of genres since classical times. Striking, delicate and elaborate imageries that are as glorious as Hangzhou colored silk could elicit an almost physical response as soon as the combination of those Chinese characters catches the eye of a reader. Not only does the text have a lyrical quality, it is a visual image as well. That Tang poetry and Song verses could grasp the hearts of readers to such a great extent is due to its tradition of using precedents, so that two words might represent a great length of history, or a haunting, complex tale. The other tradition is that when using nouns, Chinese poets seldom use direct reference, but rather a visual representation characterized by abstract language. Delicacy and accuracy are also highly valued, so that a good poem must be like a demure, beautiful lady with appropriate make-up. The rhetoric should be placed exactly where they are needed, and be used with enough caution to create a holistic,

harmonious effect that makes readers forget that rhetoric is used. Succinctness, strict rhyme scheme and rhythm are necessities for a great poem.

Chang's language is the arrow that never misses its target, so that like classical poetry, her language is rich and exuberant, yet never redundant or excessive. Reading Chang's novels makes a reader forget and even question the genre of the text that he or she is engaging in. Is it truly a novel? Or just a beautiful poem with condensed ideas and striking intensity both in its aesthetics and philosophies? When viewed from this aspect, then Lukacs's theory of "homeless" with its emphasis on a certain nostalgia, a faded genre, and even "the double banishment: from a transcendental Heimat [homeland] and from ancient Greece, where the transcendental became immanent in social formations" could be applied. Chang's modern narratives are so inseparable from the tradition of Chinese classical poetry, and her genius gives further contrast to the lack of such talents in reviving the tradition of poetry in modern Chinese literary circles, echoing the lament of Lukacs's "The modern novel becomes the fractured epic of a world abandoned by god".

Yet Chang is also extremely fascinated with the novel genre of Ming and Qing dynasty, especially two novels on which she has done a tremendous amount of scholarly research as a literary historian and critic. The two novels are *Dreams of a Red Chamber*, and *Flower in a Sea of Sin*, both of which are episodic, loosely structured, and with seemingly infinite characters. Especially in the *Flower in a Sea of Sins*, most of the characters seem to have disappeared almost as soon as they had been introduced. Such novels, unlike the divine poetic tradition in China, are teeming with life, events that are sometimes too trivial to seem worthy of writing. Yet, this kind of "line-drawing" technique traditionally adopted in traditional Chinese drawings, could exactly capture the lives of human beings, and thus shed light on the nature of humanity. The poetics in Chinese literary tradition is high in the sky, offering its beauty to ethereal beings, while novels are

for common citizens and “jingshui” (the wells in the crowded markets where stories are tolled and gossips shared).

On the other hand, Chang’s works also agree with Bakhtin’s interpretations as she is also deeply influenced by various Western and Japanese avant-garde movements- modernism, surrealism, Dadaism, symbolism, expressionism, and psychoanalysis. This marks her as one of the New Sensationalists who could create a visual narrative reflecting the very subtlety of city life and love. Though it’s doubtful if Chang has the “ethic aesthetic need of compulsive estrangement that allows the writer system to rebel against the overpowering tendencies of power and authority”, it is apparent that she has that aesthetic impulse inside her. A great lover of modern abstract paintings and the poems of Decadent writers, she is rebellious enough to make the vow of writing better in English than Chinese in her early years. The cosmopolitan influences that she has absorbed have allowed her to form an almost indecipherable genre, teeming with poetics, but fundamentally prose, paradoxically adhering to the tradition of Chinese classical literacy while being inspired by western avant-garde art movements. Her works are surreal, leading us into a world of dreams and beyond dreams.

According to Media, the paradoxical tension between the two dichotomies of the state of avant-garde writing as represented respectively by Lucaks and Bakhtin is even more pronounced in Bolaño’s writings. Bolaño, as a young infra-realist poet, proposes a Utopian return, as does Lukacs, but no longer to an ideal plenitude of epic meaning. The lost home is now precisely the aesthetic estrangement of an avant-garde inseparable from political engagement. On the other hand, the ethic and aesthetic mandate of the writer becomes, as in Bakhtin, the systematic “de-centering” of the ideological world, including the avoidance of the reifying tendency of the avant-garde to become paralyzed into establishment. Thus the avant-garde mode is at once an object of nostalgia

and a method of resistance and displacement. The Bakhtinian drive to heterogeneity is not necessarily incompatible with the admired nostalgia for a past model but rather finds in it inspiration and justification as a way of remembrance and a tribute to both the compromised avant-garde artists of the 1960s and the victims in whose name they created. As a novelist, Bolaño will further develop the paradoxical tensions of that simultaneity among nostalgia, remembrance, and search of difference and displacement. Indeed, those tensions reveal themselves in another intriguing paradox present in many of his novels. (*Arts of Homelessness: Roberto Bolaño or the Commodification of Exile*). Such tension is most pronounced in his *Antwerp*, the prose-poem, with lines such as, “Everything looks worn. Not a recent phenomenon. From a long time back, everything wrecked. It’s too late, forget the gesture that never came. It was just a facade” as the opening of his book. The tone of mixed reminiscence, twisted desires, loss, displacement mystery...continues throughout the entire book, undulating and breathing its own memories, echoing the dual presence of the sentimentality of remembrance and difference, displacement...

This might explain why it is hard to find avant-gardes gestures in Bolaño’s writings. If they do appear, they are mostly in the form of parody, as in the visual poems included in *Los Detectives Salvajes* or his novel *Amberes*. Indeed, Bolaño's texts are almost compulsively anecdotal. There are no linguistic experimentations, no temporal displacements, no radical recontextualizations or schizophrenic interior monologues. The aesthetic radicalism of the infra-realist manifesto is nowhere to be seen. The subject of his writing is obsessively the avant-garde, but at the same time his aesthetic means make it readable for everyone just interested in good stories. "The author seems always placed on the other side of a mirror, taking notes" (Villoro 19). Everyone feels at home but also, curiously, homeless. Nostalgia and dislocation keep each other at bay, but they also change

masks, dislocation now being the subject and not so much the method of writing; nostalgia for good old stories, particularly detective stories, becoming the formal method.

In the case of the prose/verse relationship, Bolaño's design of storytelling might be even more enigmatic than Chang's. His attitude towards the hierarchy of genres could be reflected in the content of his writing, as a strong consistency in his works is the reverence and attention to poets and poems. *The Savage Detective*, *2666*, and *Woes of the True Policeman*, could all be interpreted as books writing about poets and their lives. In *2666*, lines such as "And what books do you read? I used to read everything, Professor, I read all the time. Now all I read is poetry. Poetry is the one thing that isn't contaminated, the one thing that isn't part of the game. I don't know if you follow me, Professor. Only poetry- and let me be clear, only some of it-is good for you; only poetry that isn't shit" is giving full credit to the superiority of poetry, yet there's still space to contemplate if it is actually the author's real intentions and belief. In *Monsieur Pain*, Pain could be read as a poet himself. But a traditional one. His mysterious stories thus revolve around the salvation of poetry. And in *Woes of the True Policeman*, the author begins with assigning sexuality to the two genres, with novels being heterosexual, and poetry fundamentally "Within the vast ocean of poetry he identified various currents: faggots, queers, sissies, freaks, butches, fairies, nymphs, and philenes." Though it's hard to define the true intentions of Bolaño in his seemingly offensive narratives of calling poetry "faggots", "sissies", it is undeniable that in the newly arising gender politics within the politics of identity, homosexuality is a more debatable, unorthodox and controversial sphere of discourse, which allows the characterization of poetry to be fulfilled with more stories, adventures and rebellion.

In his writings, the line between poetry and prose is very thin. The consensus is that Bolaño's prose is poetic and his poetry narratives prosaic, which is the same case with Eileen

Chang, who writes only “poems” as “poems”. Bolaño’s poetry is not a supplement but rather a complement to the author’s fiction. It is part of a single evolving totality, and yet it can be treated on its own, not so much on account of its intrinsic formal and thematic qualities, but because Bolaño the poet occupies a different cultural frame than Bolaño the novelist. As a poet, Bolaño stands as an interlocutor in a dialogue with other poets of his generation- and their precursors- that takes place in a different and more restricted cultural field than exchanges involving his identity as a writer of prose fiction. It is not an exaggeration to say that as a poet Bolaño acquires a different identity than he has as a novelist. As a poet, Bolaño adores Rimbaud, Ernesto Cardenal, Nicanor Parra, Enrique Lihn; while as a prose fiction writer, Bolaño would insert himself in a different genealogy with authors such as Borges, Cortazar and Kafka. In general, Bolaño believes that poetry and fiction are blood relatives, yet a fine degree of separation is preserved. “Poetry is Platonic, prose Aristotelian. “

What serves as the intersection between Chang and Bolaño’s novels are first, the multiple characters and storylines. In Bolaño’s works, literature professors, zealous revolutionists, soldiers, artists, poets, victims, and detectives dominate the pages; and in Chang’s narratives, students, revolutionists, prostitutes, mistresses, gentlemen, policemen, and soldiers occupy the center of attention. The characters come from different layers of social stratification and map a society in flux. Multiple storylines intersect and are then dispersed; various themes and concepts spring out and bite before fading away and being substituted by another idea. “This is not a novel. Or maybe it starts as a novel and ends as a novel, with a bunch of randomness in the middle that makes me question its novel-ness.” The way they compose are also similar in various aspects. There is the theory of Bolaño’s *The Woes of the True Policeman* being the warm-up, the sketch for his major 2666. “Since Bolaño frequently reused characters (slightly altered) from book to book, and never

wasted a word he wrote, I'm tempted to think that when he finally had 2666 pretty much where he wanted it, he wondered if he could make another novel out of the leftovers that we now have as Woes." In parallel to this theory, is the fact that Eileen Chang's *The Golden Cangue* (1950) is the sketch work of her major novel *Yuan Nv* (1988). Both authors are under the influence of Poe's philosophy of composition, especially its emphasis on the "unity of effect", stating that a work of fiction should be written only after the author has decided how it is to end and which emotional response, or "effect," he wishes to create, commonly known as the "unity of effect." Once this effect has been determined, the writer should decide all other matters pertaining to the composition of the work, including tone, theme, setting, characters, conflict and plot. The reason is that both authors are so capable of capturing what is "truly at stake", there's an urgency in their raw power of engaging readers with "what truly matters" that bursts through the enigmatic labyrinth that they have constructed with their rhetoric. Such bursts of strength that aim so accurately are hard to achieve without having pre-determined the effect one wishes to actualize. Though the lengths of their works vary, "brevity" and "intensity" are the two major traits shared by the authors.

[Aesthetics]

The aesthetics of Eileen Chang is closely intertwined with her gender politics. Discourses about the possibility of female languages have conveyed problematic issues among literary critics and they have somehow been revolving around the argument of Jacques Lacan's Symbolic order. Lacan explains that, at the Symbolic order, we can have language to begin the process of signification, and these enable us to form the subject "I" through interactions to others. Human beings come to have language and the accompanying cultures at this Oedipal order. Those activities cannot be performed in the pre-Oedipal imaginary order, which is the

stage for identification, narcissism and self. Derrida noticeably attacks Lacan about this idea, stating that Lacan's notion of the Symbolic is nothing but inherited Freudian phallocentrism. It should be reminded that the phallus as the "primary signifier" determines the social order of signifiers in the conception of the Symbolic order. For instance, the concept of the "lettered men" in ancient terms has been evolved to the human condition of speech belonging to the realm of "action", which is performed in the public space in the enjoyment of freedom. Eileen Chang is avant-garde in her new way of female writing that dismantles the traditional way of thinking and presents a new outlook on female authorship. New Woman, commodities, exotic civilization and aesthetics were the purveyors of sensuality and brought a revolution to Chinese lives and society. This triangular relationship of eroticism, modernity and narrative formed the base of the political and cultural condition in which the modern Chinese subject germinated. Through her intentional infraction and subtle irony, she created a text brimming with obscure, uncanny layers of meaning. Her rhetoric is, therefore, familiar as well as defamiliarized and becomes the locus.

In some sense, she has killed women in her novels in parallel with the hundreds of women killed in Bolaño's 2666. The difference is that though the women in Eileen Chang's novels have not physically demised, they are in a state worse than death due to the social reality, and a disillusionment towards love. In contrast to Bolaño's tender treatment of these female victims by rendering the details of their death with the accuracies of an autopsy, Chang kills those women elegantly yet coldly with her pen as the knife. Qiuqiao, Weilong, Manzhen, Manlu...they haunt readers with their ruthlessly beautiful death, with the strong contrast of the ownership of a beautiful face, and lack of control over their own fate. Poe's aesthetic belief that "the death... of a beautiful woman" is "unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world" dominant both Bolaño and Chang's narratives.

“Spleen” is also a key concept for both Chang and Bolaño’s writings. There is always the beauty of the grotesque, the desolate, and the decadent in their narratives. “Her golden earrings have pinned her against the door, like a vibrant yet dead specimen of butterfly”; “A piece of emerald lies on her black face-net, resembling a huge green spider”; “This woman is an absolute horror, so sick, so godless.” The decadent beauty in the works of the two authors, as Wolfgang Kayser states, has its drives in the anxiety innate within existence, and the understanding of “a mysterious force in man, which modern philosophy does not take into consideration; nevertheless, without this nameless force, without this primordial bent, a host of human actions would remain unexplained, inexplicable. They possess the fascination of the abyss”. The chill towards the dark side of humanity, and the confusion and fear it raised, in Chang’s case could be explained by Roland Barthes’s idea of agony being beyond an individual experience, but a succession and accumulation of all the pains within human history, including continuous wars, slavery, robbery, conquering, sadism and various other forms of violence. These pains remain in the collective psychology of humanity. Thus the historicity and collectivity of pain allows it to be beyond the individual. It is a collective unconscious, a primitive memory, a coding, and writing about it would be the releasing of libido. For Bolaño, under Borge’s influence, the mind itself is terrifying, with its elaborations and labyrinths, “We went back through an endless succession of doors.”

Dreams and mirrors play key roles in Chang and Bolaño’s writings. Mirror, could be related to the mirroring stage of “Reel, Symbolique, Imaginaire”. It reflects the normal, and abnormal, reflexivity in “masochism”, the non-existence of pure aggression, the structure of pleasure-in-pain, and internalization and introjection. Dreams manifest latent content. In both authors’ works, the language of dreams and seemingly irrelevant events are included; the desires

in the subconscious take the form of volatile imageries and creep into the dream-like lines of the authors, drawing parallel lines with the material reality. Bolaño writes stories within stories, and Chang often sets the ending of an event at the beginning of her narration, reflecting the aesthetics of “flipping over” the content or time. At the beginning of her narratives, Chang would often write about the moon of thirty years ago or the smoke from the incense as the storyteller finishes her narration. The imageries that have occurred in the start of her novel would always reappear at the ending, forming a Zen circle, and complete the “punctum” of those literary images. Bolaño’s narrations often develop into surreal dreams as he directly writes about dreams constantly, with the typical example of Norton, Espinoza, and Pelletier’s dreams in their hotel in Santa Teresa. Bolaño himself seems to be a psychoanalyst in his writing process, with the metacognition of relating details that would elicit dreams with the scenes of a dream itself.

In the comparative reading of trans-national, and trans-temporal authors, genres, aesthetics and political readings are merely points of departure. To gain further insight, the new geographic of identity combined with close reading would be a nice approach to fully see something called literature, where only “the best that is thought and known”. In the age of digital media and the avant-garde approach of combining STEM with literature, a brave new world is ahead of us to explore the vast unexplored space of the juxtaposition of two highly distinct authors, and be struck with the discoveries.

Works Cited

- Bolaño, Roberto. 2666. 1A ed. Vintage Español., Vintage Español, 2009.
- Eileen, Chang. *Qing Cheng Zhi Lian: Duan Pian Xiao Shu Ji Yi: Yi Jiu Si San Nian*. Chu ban., Huang guan wen hua chu ban you xian gong si, 2010.
- Andrews, Chris. *Roberto Bolaño's Fiction : an Expanding Universe*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.
- Gutiérrez Mouat, Ricardo. *Understanding Roberto Bolaño*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2016.
- Maristain, Mónica, and Kit Maude. *Bolaño : a Biography In Conversations*. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2014.
- Peng, Xiaoyan, and Whitney Crothers Dilley. *From Eileen Chang to Ang Lee : Lust, Caution*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014.
- Chen, Jingyi. *Zhang Ailing Chang Pian Xiao Shuo De Nü Xing Shu Xie*. Chu ban. Taibei Shi: Wen jin chu ban she, 2005.
- Gao, Quanzhi. *Zhang Ailing Xue*. 2 ban. Taibei Shi: Mai tian chu ban, 2008.
- Lin, Xingqian. *Li Shi, Nü Xing Yu Xing Bie Zheng Zhi : Chong Du Zhang Ailing*. Chu ban. Taibei Shi: Mai tian chu ban, 2000.
- Pannian, Prasad. *Edward Said and the Question of Subjectivity*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.