

# Ihab Hassan's Travelogue to Japan and Paracriticism: Theory and Practice

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The words of Hugo of St. Victor come back to me: the perfect man has extinguished his *amor loci*. But I stand far from perfection, which I glimpsed in Japan, glimpsed only for as long as cherry blossoms quiver in the wind or fireflies flash in the universe's drifting light. (*Between the Eagle and the Sun*, 205)

Out of Egypt, into middles, passages, falling into true time. (*Out of Egypt*, 113)

Criticism should learn about playful discontinuity and become itself less than the sum of its parts. It should offer the reader empty spaces, silences, in which he can meet himself in the presence of literature. This is paracriticism. (*Paracriticism*, 25)

**Key Words:** I. Hassan, travelogue, autobiography, paracriticism, postmodernism

## 1. Introduction

Ihab Hassan (1925~ ) is an eminent scholar and critic in the study of contemporary literature and culture. He is the author of more than dozen books and some 200 articles related with Western literature, criticism, and postmodernism. Hassan is counted among the first to launch into the study of postmodernism, and, therefore, sometimes called the 'father of postmodernism.'<sup>(1)</sup> The two-column table of modernism and postmodernism Hassan compiled has been regarded as a standard gauge of the differences between them, and 'immanence' and 'indeterminacy' expounded in it as twin traits of postmodernism.<sup>(2)</sup>

Hassan is a practitioner as well as theorist of postmodernism in that his works, highly academic, are tinged with postmodern traits: playful, fragmentary, self-reflexive. His performance with collages of quotations, moreover, makes the postmodern features of his writings more distinct: he dares to quote even his own articles and diaries.<sup>(3)</sup> The self-referential and anecdotal propensity had already been

betrayed in his earlier works such as “Frontier of Criticism:1963, 1969, 1972”, where he let the three voices inhabited in him speak out, and was enhanced in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* (1971) which argues as follows: <sup>(4)</sup>

[We] never end by writing the book we began; nor do we write the book that others read. This is the decree of the imagination in its necessary clash with existence. We change to live, and living change still further. It is all too likely that some uneasiness in this work may betray a manner that I consider no longer my own. I dare to write only in the present. (XVIII)

The self-reflexive inclination culminates in theorizing his critical stance disclosed in *Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times* (1980):

I am not certain what genre these seven pieces make. I call them paracriticism: essays in language, traces of the times, fictions of the heart. Literature is part of their substance, but their critical edge is only one of many edges in the mind. I would not protest if they were denied the name of criticism. (P, XI)

Hassan, who is concerned with the critical method and form and the role of a critic, transcends the conventional criticism by theorizing paracriticism, and go ‘beyond criticism’: para indicates ‘quasi’ or ‘beyond.’ He asserts that “criticism should be free to assume any stance that it pleases,” <sup>(5)</sup> advocating Paul Valéry’s belief that “there is no theory that is not...a carefully concealed part of the theorist’s own life story.” <sup>(6)</sup> The affirmation led him to write a full-fledged autobiography entitled *Out of Egypt* (1986). This book is rife with traits of postmodernism mentioned above, and regarded, therefore, as an extension of his critical work. <sup>(7)</sup> In this respect, Hassan is a critic who cannot “hold ideas idly,” but attempts “to test their validity in applying them to himself and to his own life.” <sup>(8)</sup>

In the same vein as the autobiography, Hassan writes a travelogue to Japan entitled *Between the Eagle and the Sun: Traces of Japan* (1996). He has visited Japan more than dozen times since he first set foot in Japan in 1974. As with Barthes’ travelogue to Japan, *Empire of the Signs*, Hassan’s is unconventional as a travelogue in that it is more concerned with people than landscape, more with deciphering written texts than seeing the sights. In both texts, the targeted country, Japan, recedes into the background and becomes mere materials and signs which the authors meditate and decode. <sup>(9)</sup> Hassan’s travelogue, in short, is an expression of his academic interest in travel as well as paracriticism. Six years before its publication, he brought out the study of the idea of quest in life and literature called *Selves at Risk: Patterns of Quest in Contemporary American Letters* (1990), which examines the tri-fold relationship: traveling, writing, reading intertwined in the American literature. His own travelogue, accordingly,

may be regarded as an extension of his critical work related with travel. In this paper, the cutting-edge of criticism, the moot question — the relationship between his theory (paracriticism) and practice (travelogue) — is interpreted after explicating the characteristics of the book in form, style, and content.

## 2. Travelogue

His story of Japan is composed of six parts: previews, through the literary glass, "them", education, entries (A to Z), envoy. One of the most prominent features of his travelogue is that in many cases, no adequate explanation is given for the things, the manners, and the customs of the Japanese except in Part Four subtitled 'a personal dictionary of Japanese culture.' Instead, the travel story deals with the depiction of and the comments on persons connected with Japan and Japanese culture such as D. Richie, D. Keene, Kenzaburo Ooe, to name but a few. His writing, accordingly, is rife with proper noun: a succession of the names of Japanese and Westerners, noted or unknown.

The initial introduction is Iwao Iwamoto, a Japanese scholar of American literature and translator of Hassan's first book, who lived in America and came to interview the author. Unlike ordinary Japanese, the Japanese scholar didn't avoid argument, which was highly valued by the American counterpart and made him regard the visitor as a kind of distant cousin. But Hassan, at the same time, sensed in him something typical with Japanese, something autumnal, "a falling cadence of life, a sense of time's hollowness, if not decay," probably because his nostalgia grew stronger after marrying his three daughters and missing Japan and Japanese food. (BES, 7) Iwamoto always behaves with decency, whose self-deprecating smile reminds the author of traces of ancient memories: fires, volcanoes, typhoons, earthquakes, bloody civil wars. Through the friendship with Iwamoto, Hassan came to fabricate the archetypal image of Japanese, to whom "courtesy," Hassan imagines, "is a kind of shyness, a delicacy before existence." (BES, 8)

This is his earliest memory of Japanese before coming to Japan. Then the writer depicts Ms. Take Suki, an executive assistant to a Chairman who owned a hotel as well as many other concerns, including a cultural foundation. She meticulously arranged the interview with the author, "sitting with her back to the hotel lobby, facing a blank, creamy wall." (BES, 18) Hassan noticed that the physical posture was her 'tact,' a Japanese way of welcoming visitors, intending her guests to face outwards. Hassan humorously adds that "[in] another age, the guest of honor sat back to corner, safe from an assassin's dagger or sword." (BES, 18) Hassan's keen perception makes him realize that the competent secretary is unique for a Japanese woman in that she can handle several languages, traveling the world, dressed in designer clothes, and handsomely paid. But his direct knowledge and contact with Japanese leads him to reach the conclusion that she is Japanese at heart in that she has acquired the habit of giving careful consideration for those around her.

In this way, through the twin figures, Hassan explicates that both of them have been highly westernized and yet preserved features peculiar to the Japanese. The previews — Part One — indicating the mixed traits of Japanese culture, traditional and innovative, static and dynamic, patriarchy and democratic, presage

Hassan's valuable insight into Japanese people and culture

In Part Two entitled 'Through the literary glass,' Hassan compares Matsuo Basho's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* with Walt Whitman's 'Song of the Open Road' in order to understand Japan better. The reason he gives is that "[there] are many roads to knowing a country, and one high road runs through literature." (BES, 23) But there seems to be another purely personal reason for it. He is firmly affirmed that contrasting Japan's literary works with American counterparts he knows is the best and exclusive way of realizing Japan for him, because he thinks of himself as cerebral, who has "spent a good part of [his] life reading books". (BES, 23)

As a prestigious literary critic, Hassan makes a comparison between the two poets discretely, calling reader's attention to the fact that the Japanese and the American poets and travelers, "[attempting] a journey of the soul, passing through death, beyond death," (BES, 27) but their ways diverge and their "clandestine affinities should not lull our sense of variance." (BES, 28) Hassan, therefore, elucidates their differences as well as similarities: Basho, feeling wizened and decrepit, rambles, and Whitman, boasting health, surges. The former venerates the past in his bones, the latter shakes it off like a threadbare coat. Then the critic explains that "though they do not subsume their respective cultures, they do convey something crucially vital in each." (BES, 29) He concludes thus:

In brief, Basho excludes, Whitman includes. It seems an old story: America, a continent with only a prehistory, Japan, an island with more history than it needs; the one acquiring more history than it can manage, the other forgetting selectively its past. (BES, 28)

Is this a banal conclusion or a bizarre one? His assumption that the length of history affects the literati appears to be hackneyed and somewhat oversimplified, but, in some sense, right to the point, demonstrating the difference of their styles in literature. Irrespective of the historical influences, brevity or ellipsis is a most marked feature of Japanese literature, and the *haiku*, a poem composed of only seventeen syllables, is its typical example. While Americans are noted for their forward-looking way of life, which is represented by the exclamation points Whitman utilizes: "*Allons!* whoever you are, come travel with me!" "These sublime apostrophes," Hassan interprets, "create an intimacy....The intimacy, though, remains somehow abstract. Perhaps this is the abstraction of democratic ideals mistaken for actual feelings." (BES, 26)

Hassan's critical way of "letting literature speak through cadences of its own," leads him to the conclusion that the two poets share some sympathy and similarity: "They like to write under an open sky. They believe in dispossession." (BES, 28) In spite of these affinities, Hassan continues, the theme of journey produces disparate effects on each traveler. As for Basho or Japanese in general, "journeys rarely become discovery or exploration; they are, rather, exercises in poetic or spiritual recall," while Whitman embodies "the American mythos of the Territory Ahead," spending time "traipsing over unknown

mountains and rivers." (BES, 28-29) The striking contrast Hassan indicates between Basho and Whitman — a solitary traveler looking back upon the past, and a democratic one facing the future — exhibits the implicit features of each culture.

Hassan implements this kind of well-balanced literary criticism in comparing between Junichiro Tanizaki and Norman Mailer on the theme of shadow, and between Kobo Abe and Donald Barthelme on the "convergences of style and attitude notable in international postmodernism," (BES, 34) and Haruki Murakami and J. Salinger. The parallels and contrasts of Japanese and American literatures induce the reader into apprehending the essential difference in culture, psychology, and pattern of thinking, which renders the book unique and attractive.

He analyses and interprets the text, Japan and the Japanese, in Part Three subtitled, 'Them', which contains various themes ranging from primary differences in space, time, people to exceptionalism, from stereotypes and paradoxes to internationalism. In between the explanations are laid photo essays and depictions of renowned Japanese: Seiji Tsutsumi, Shuichi Kato, Kiyomi and Kumiko Mikuni. In decoding Japanese culture, Hassan utilizes a unique and innovative method, analysing it from tri-fold angles: Japan, America, and Egypt. The three countries concerned are intertwined with each other: Egypt and Japan boast of their long history; America and Japan are highly modernized enjoying postmodern prosperity; Egypt and America are endowed with vast areas; unlike Americans, Egyptians and Japanese walk and work rapidly, but their end results of technology and economy are markedly different.

Hassan left his native land, Egypt, for good when he graduated from the University of Cairo with distinction and obtained the government fellowship to pursue electronic engineering in America. Since his departure from the Suez, he has never returned to his mother country and naturalized in 1956. <sup>(10)</sup> He considers himself an "amateur of change, addicted to travel and avant-gardism, forms of restlessness." (SR, 14) This personal experience together with his academic career as a professor of a comparative literature makes his interpretation of another culture, unbiased, discerning, and convincing.

Hassan interprets the primary differences in space, time, and people, making comparisons across the three countries. After describing the geographical feature of Japan — the smallness of the archipelago with dense population — he indicates that the smallness of the lands has nurtured among the Japanese the propensity to miniaturization and that "crowding breeds good manners." (BES, 52) In this respect, Hassan insists, the American psychology of sprawl and waste shows a marked contrast, though Buckminster Fuller "articulated the concept of 'ephemeralization.'" (BES, 53) Hassan also touches on the issue of the environmental disruption saying that "The Japanese claim to revere nature and deface it everywhere the economic imperative prevails." (BES, 54) In this way, Hassan observes Japan and the Japanese with impartial and comparative eyes, and explicates the duality or ambiguity of Japanese idea and behaviour.

In the same tenor, he elucidates the matter of time. He confesses that "[He] was born in an ancient land (Egypt)...but [he] felt no advantage to history there, and chose America to escape mummy memories.... [He] didn't feel that old was always good." (BES, 54) But the Japanese, he opines, assume

that old is good, which is “a tilt of temper, marking everywhere the difference between conservative and radical. [He] is both and neither, a teetering independent....” (BES, 55) Reflecting on his experience, Hassan concludes that American time is characterized as discontinuity, and that repetition and continuity are the invariable features of the Japanese concept of time. “Yet,” his interpretation continues:

[Nowhere] is technology more ruthlessly evolved. Thus, Japanese time seems multiple, polychronic, different kinds of time, moving at different speeds on different linear and nonlinear tracks. This is only to say that the Japanese themselves are eclectic, syncretic, pluralist in ideas that leave their identity intact; they take paradox and incongruity in their stride. Why, then, shouldn't Mythic, Shinto, Buddhist, Confucian, Christian, Modern, and PoMo time coexist in the same mental or architectural frame? (BES, 55-56)

Hassan calls the reader's attention to the duality, or multiplicity to be precise, Japanese culture involves, and addresses himself to the moot question — the long held myths of homogeneity, uniqueness, exceptionalism of the Japanese — and expresses his opinions on them.

The exact moment of discovering the Japanese homogeneity is when he was sitting in the back row of the Kabuki-za. He noticed before him a slope of black hair, hiding the uniqueness of each face. It felt like an anthropological epiphany, wrote he. The writer insists that in spite of the minorities living in Japan, “Japanese ‘homogeneity’...has become a shared assumption, an effective reality, effective even among skeptical outsiders.” (BES, 59) The myth of homogeneity, he continues, served to create the idea of Japanese national essence, *Kokutai*, which “[insinuates] itself in strangers as well, becoming a kind of submission.” (BES, 59)) He points out the Japanese national characteristic as follows:

Toward foreign guests, the Japanese are infinitely hospitable; toward outsiders who want to ‘go native,’ they are infinitely aloof, not to say hostile. This contrasts sharply with Americans, who believe everyone wants to become American. The Japanese believe no one can ever become Japanese. (BES, 59)

Hassan provides the reader with supporting evidence for his explanation. He quotes Konishiki, a 576-pound sumo wrestler, Samoa-born, the future Empress of Japan, Harvard and Oxford educated, Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi, famed for fluency in English. The adumbrating way of explanation through personal figures is one of the distinctive features betrayed in every chapter of the travelogue.

Hassan's book is not a conventional travelogue — a piece of work describing someone's experiences while traveling — but a record of meditation while staying in a foreign country. His travelogue, therefore, may be categorized as a critical essay, or an extension of a scholastic work, to be precise. The specific feature of the book is revealed in Part Four entitled ‘Education.’ Probably very few travelogues address

the thorny issue — education —, because it requires a great deal of knowledge and experience. A passing traveler cannot carry out the duty. But to the author, interpreting an educational system of the targeted country and its results will lead into decoding the culture as a whole.

His analysis of Japanese education begins by featuring Hiroko Washizu, a female scholar of American literature, and ends with mentioning Makoto Ooka, a prominent poet and literary critic. We find his method of introducing persons when deciphering and decoding a culture, which is indicated elsewhere. Making comparison from plural perspectives is another characteristic of Hassan's criticism. He does not make a hasty decision. Hassan, instead, assigns the task to the reader.

Washizu is taken as an explication of Japan's wasting her women: she has attained a doctorate in America, and "can outdrink, outthink most men and lives alone." (BES, 119) To the question given by his wife whether Washizu really belongs in Japan, she answered that "[she] belongs nowhere else," adding that "[because she is] neither mother nor wife, [she] cannot belong in Japan, either." (BES, 119) Hassan deplores and condemns Japanese treatment of the competent, willful, and bright female, saying that she is "a triumphant victim of Japan," and wonders "how much Japan continues to waste its women" (BES, 120)

Ooka is introduced as an artist with cosmic charm who aspires to "mediate between tradition and experiment, Japan and the West, universal experience and personal voice." Hassan perceives in the poet "a genial embodiment of Japanese contradictions turned into art," or "a radiant sensuality." (BES, 141-142)

Through the depiction of the two, Hassan alludes to the trying situation where highly westernized and well educated intellectuals and artists find themselves. Both of them, Hassan insists, suffer trapped between the Japanese tradition of harmony and the Western sense of self-consciousness. He refers to *renga*, or linked verse, to illustrate the high paradox of Japan: the elimination of self-concern for the sake of true individuality. As in the first and second sections, his allusive explanation is also found here: Hassan does not make a hasty and definite decision by himself, but allocates it to the reader.

In between the description of the dual figures of Japanese, extraordinary but, in some sense, exemplary, lies the interpretation of Japanese education. In this part, his another critical trait is observed: he contemplates from triangular perspectives — America, Egypt, Japan. First, the author quotes his own autobiography, *Out of Egypt*, to show that the school days in Egypt were "intellectually demanding, socially bruising, physically dismal." (BES, 122) In short, government schools left nothing but trauma in him. He seeks liberty and future in America, and crossed the Atlantic aboard a Liberty Ship. Hassan then proceeds to analyze the American system. He does not disclose his own opinions but lets the three voices lodged in him speak: cranky and strident voice, a more judicious one, rambunctious unabashedly triumphalist. The three voices speak out in different cadences and moods: some deplores that Americans have become a whining people, a plaintiff nation; another admits that America has become bemused, even bruised, in its identity, and the acrimonious debates about contemporary issues express profound social anxieties; and the other one retorts arguing that since 1910, America has remained the richest

and most productive economy in the world, and twenty, perhaps thirty of the American universities are indisputably preeminent in the world. (BES, 123-126)

As Hassan suggests that “[none] of these voices, of course, can convey the whole truth, though together they may hint at where the truth hides.” (BES, 126) We find the ‘indeterminacy’ of postmodernism revealed here. The readers, therefore, are left undecided with only several clues, which is the characteristic of Hassan’s critical method mentioned above.

As to the education in Japan, Hassan indicates several serious flaws in it in an interactive world and expresses grave concern about its effectiveness: it is not a liberal education but a machine for conformity or harmony; discussions with Japanese students, and even with adults, can become quickly thin because of their lack of intellectual scopes; authoritarianism pervades not only classrooms but every sphere of Japanese society; the paucity of self-transformation, self-knowledge results in the lack of inner struggle, irony, dialectic, contradiction, in many Japanese students. The author concedes that “education coextends with a particular culture, a specific environment,” but he, at the same time, wonders what education can “contribute to thought and behavior in a global context, in an intermingling world, where native proprieties no longer serve.” (BES, 130)

The well-balanced and judicious critic refers to the artistic heritage of Japan, and extols the virtues of pragmatism in Japanese schooling indicating that “the Japanese grade schools practice what American schools only preach,” and that “John Dewey is more alive in Tokyo than in New York.” (BES, 131) Hassan remarks somewhat ironically that Japanese bills carry portraits of their writers and educators — Natsume Soseki, Inazo Nitobe, Yukichi Fukuzawa — which, he adds, illustrate how deeply they honor teachers.

Summing up his opinions, the writer insists as follows:

The task in a shrinking world is to discover, perhaps create, new transcultural values. To this task, liberal education everywhere hopes to contribute its share — call it *Einfühlung*, cognitive empathy, or simply openness to the Other.... We need some pragmatic principles of coexistence, some tentative rules of planetary behavior, that liberal education may adumbrate but cannot enforce. (BES, 135)

In no other part of the book is the author’s stance not as a traveler but as a critic disclosed more distinctively than in Part Four subtitled, ‘Education’. Then he goes on to explain Japanese culture in alphabetical order in Part Five entitled ‘Entries: A to Z — Japanese Culture: A Personal Dictionary —’. He scrutinizes thirty phenomena or concepts characterizing Japanese culture with acute but somehow ironical comments. The rubrics in his personal dictionary of Japanese culture begin by ‘apology,’ and end with ‘zen.’ His observation is wide-ranging and penetrating, and explanation plain and lucid, which makes the writing a practical guide to Japanese culture.



The initial signifier of that culture is 'apology,' which is judged as ambiguous as "so many things Japanese," because many Japanese appear to apologize without the sense of regret or remorse involved in the word. (BES, 147) The foreigner or *gaijin*, therefore, is confused when his counterpart apologizes saying *sumimasen* in Japanese, wondering whether the apology is meant real regret or only a lip service to get out of the situation. Hassan explicates this by quoting a politician saying something outrageous and then simulating an apology, and a student who skipped his oral report and came to the teacher's office the following week to apologize, just bowing deeply with the words "Sorry, very sorry." (BES, 147) To these examples, Hassan analyzes thus:

To a 'sincere' Japanese — and most strive to be so — apology means loss of face, shame. This is painful. What will my family, my friends, say? The feeling is interiorized, just as a Freudian guilt is a parent interiorized. Then it becomes *giri* toward oneself, toward one's name, akin to honor, dignity, pride. This makes for unusual sensitivity to criticism or detraction.... (BES, 147-148)

Hassan calls the Japanese way of apology an art "[observing] the form, recant without necessary contrition," as well as a "way to break through a double bind." (BES, 147) To the westerners, accordingly, this kind of regret without remorse appears to be corruption of apology and hypocrisy, but the observer vindicates the Japanese insisting that "apologies, like some clear, fragrant oil, also lubricate that culture." (BES, 148) The explanation of 'apology,' illustrates that Hassan's observation and elucidation of Japanese culture is not superficial and fault finding, but analytical and multi-dimensional, tinged with cold-eyed, cynical, diverting, perspective. His tactful way of explanation is shown in the column of 'zen,' whose page is left blank without any explanation. Readers have only to guess the author's intention and the meaning of zen from the empty page. Some, therefore, may realize vacancy or nothingness of zen, and others may feel that the essence of zen defies verbal explanation, still others coming to comprehend the limitation of language, or the impossibility of translation both of language and culture. <sup>(11)</sup> Herein lie the twin key concepts of postmodernism Hassan elucidates — indeterminacy and immanence. <sup>(12)</sup>

His personal lexicon of Japanese culture deals with the following items which seem to characterize her culture to the writer. They are boredom, cleanliness, department stores, economy, fax, gifts, humor, Japlish, kitsch, law, marriage, noise, order, Pragmatism, quirks, rivalry, swords, travel, urbanism, veracity, war crimes, xenophobia, and Yes? Hassan betrays his extensive knowledge and direct experience of Japanese culture in the explanations given for each entry. His dictionary, in short, proves to be useful as a guide to Japanese culture. It teaches how to get along with the ambiguity haunting foreigners in 'yes,' and 'gifts' binding Japan as ever-renewed obligations. His interpretations are supported by illustrative examples. Under the rubric of 'kitsch,' for instance, nine items are lined: Café Opéra in

fashionable Azabu, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony reverberating from one end of the archipelago to the other, the bodi-con (body conscious) girls, OLs (office ladies) by day, nocturnal vamps at discos like Juliana, mechanical pandas or life-size dolls flagging down motorists, the 'Palacio' dining hall of the Toya Park Hotel in Hokkaido, a full-body, Yakuza-style tattooed yuppies.

He concludes from the standpoint of postmodernism as follows:

If kitsch, this is kitsch of a special kind. The parody is often unconscious, the irony frequently unintended, the allusion almost forgotten. There is glossiness, the high-tech flatness of postmodernism, yes. There is ignorance, cheapening, vulgarity, too. There is idiocy. But even these, in their prodigal if finally controlled variousness, manifest awesome vitality. (BES, 164)

In sum, no other books or articles on Japanese culture have ever interpreted more aptly and pertinently than Hassan's. This is especially true of the analysis of sword. He refers to the preminent book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* by R. Benedict who insists that "the history of the sword and the history of Japan are one." (BES, 176) But Hassan denies the myth arguing that her opinion may be nostalgia. He, instead, wonders what swords mean for postmodern Japan, and concludes that they have "a purity...a shadow of things past, which no longing or remembrance can return." (BES, 177) Hassan captures the quintessence of the sword after frequenting such places as the Japanese Sword Museum in Ise, and confessing that he "found in them something penetrating the hype and noise of a consumer, a media society." (BES, 177)

As with other parts, Hassan finishes Part Five by the depiction of a person, Donald Richie, his close friend and author of more than forty books and countless essays on Japan.<sup>(13)</sup> Hassan suggests the difference between America and Japan by referring to his intuition that he may belong finally to America more than Richie was permitted to belong to Japan in spite of being self-exiled in Japan for as long as the author has been in America. (BES, 194) Richie's story reminds the reader of the Japanese isolation, xenophobia.<sup>(14)</sup>

Interpretation of his travelogue in terms of style, form and content has proved it to be not a systematic and academic analysis of Japan, but fragmentary and whimsical record of his contemplation of Japanese culture and of the dialogues with his acquaintances including his wife, whose traits are common with his autobiography, *Out of Egypt*. In both texts, Japan and his childhood became not the targets of writing but the subjects of speculation written in a markedly postmodern style. In this regard, the twin books are regarded as an extension of his academic work — extension of his critical mind.<sup>(15)</sup>

### 3. Paracriticism

Hassan is an influential and prolific critic and sometimes called as a 'critical personality' with reason.<sup>(16)</sup> Though he started his academic career as a scientist, his works cover the various fields of the humanities:

contemporary western literature (*Radical Innocence, The Literature of Silence*), cultural theory (*Innovation/Renovation: New Perspectives on the Humanities*), literary criticism (*Paracriticisms, The Right Promethean Fire*), postmodernism (*The Postmodern Turn*), mind and imagination (*Selves at Risk*). A brief glimpse of the table of contents of his collected work, *Rumors of Change: Essays of Five Decades*, tells the width and depth of his knowledge and study to the reader.

From the beginning of his career as a critic, he has been concerned with the role critics should play, and the form and style they should utilize. In short, he desired to transcend the conventional criticism, and fashion a new critical discourse, which resulted in his unique self-reflexive style with variations in typeface and layouts.<sup>(17)</sup>

Among the stoically objective academe, he unusually discloses his identity and betrays personal voice in his critical writings, which culminates in writing a full-fledged autobiography and the travelogue analyzed by us.

As a critic, Hassan has played a prominent part in defining postmodernism as well as in theorizing 'paracriticism.' According to him, paracriticism is "an attempt to recover the art of multivocation. Not the text and its letters but metaphors thereof. Not a form strictly imposed but the tentativeness between one form and another." (P, 25)<sup>(18)</sup> 'Para', therefore, denotes beyond and beside, and 'paracriticism' beyond criticism or quasi-criticism. He attempts at moving beyond earlier, conventional, orthodox criticism. "Criticism," meaning paracriticism, "should learn about playful discontinuity and become itself less than the sum of its parts." (P, 25) Between these lines, we sense, lie his intention and desire to deconstruct the established criticism — objective, impersonal, uncommitted — arguing that the contemporary postmodern critic should act and write freely as he/she wishes. In the age of ambiguity, he asserts, the role of a critic is "only a modest but dual role: one of subversion, the other of making." (PT, 165) In this vein, he has continued to write critical works such as *Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times* (1975), and *The Right Promethean Fire* (1980).

In the preface of *Paracriticisms*, he professes his critical stance as follows:

I am not certain what genre these seven pieces make. I call them paracriticism: essays in language, traces of the times, fictions of the heart. Literature is part of their substance, but their critical edge is only one of many edges in the mind. I would not protest if they were denied the name of criticism. Perhaps I should simply say: in these essays I write neither as critic nor scholar — nor yet impersonate poet...but try to find my voice in the singular forms that speculation sometimes requires. (P. XI)

We may find his firm determination, or a principle of life, to betray himself in his writings without hiding behind pages, and to write in a personal tone without effacing the traces of his thought. Scheer-Schäzler insists that "Writing is neither a pastime nor a mere professional necessity; it is an existential

quest, a risk.”<sup>(19)</sup> Hassan confesses that his whole life is composed of three basic activities: desiring, reading, making, (PT, 158) which means that reading and its related act of writing are another name for life. Concerning Hassan’s critical stance, some critic insists that “Hassan has always pleaded that criticism should be free to assume any stance that it pleases.”<sup>(20)</sup> His paracritical works, therefore, are innovative in form, content, and style.

In the next work, *The Right Promethean Fire*, the trait of holistic, and self-referential approach is markedly shown. As its subtitle — Imagination, Science, and Cultural Change — suggests, this writing covers the whole field of the human mind from literature to science, from philosophy to technology, from society to culture. In the Preface, Hassan makes his intention clear to the reader:

Imagination...is my arch theme; teleological or not, it makes our future, *is* our fate, though we may come to it soon or late. Conjoined to that theme are other recurrent themes: desire, hope, change; ambitions and afflictions of the humanities; the immanence of languages, the indeterminacies of knowledge and action.... (RPF, XVI)

He is concerned with the whole human knowledge like the Greek demigod Prometheus, who taught men the use of fire and various arts. The target of Hassan’s epistemic pursuit includes the self and its other self, death, so that the writing is tinged with autobiography. This peculiar feature is strengthened by inserting the private journals he kept while writing this book. He puts interchapters between chapters extracting from the diaries. The author defends himself arguing that “these intertexts still offer a context for my text, can become themselves the text and my words quotations.” (RPF, XVIII) *The Right Promethean Fire*, Hassan himself admits, is not an orthodox academic work, but a postmodern collage of “fragment of an autobiography, meditation on science and imagination, small prayer for change....” (RPF, XXI)

The entry of autobiographical elements into his critical writings is the protest for conventional critics who insist on objectivity, and rigorous specialists who “will protest in the name of rigor....always protest whatever threatens specialization....” (RPF, XIX) Hassan extends the propensity for autobiography into writing autobiography proper, *Out of Egypt* (1986). Few academicians attempt at penning autobiography; “Until recently only the toughest critics dared to make the autobiographical move. Literary theory was against it.”<sup>(21)</sup> But, nowadays, some critic insists, “autobiographical criticism has come into general use.”<sup>(22)</sup> Hassan is a precursor to and practitioner of this trend in criticism. The twin critical books, *Paracriticisms* and *The Right Promethean Fire* are couched in paracritical form and style — playful, fragmentary, self-reflexive. Hassan wants to bridge the disjunction between self and text, filling the gap between personal experience and private discourse. He thus transcends the convention of objective criticism, blurring the boundary of genre.

The two critical books are mélanges of fragments, so is his autobiography, *Out of Egypt*. As the subtitle

— Scenes and Arguments of an Autobiography — indicates, the writing is not a coherent, chronological records of his life, but fragmentary essays, tracing his meditation on education, death, and so on. In this sense, he focuses not on his past experience, but on the self, the thinking mind. In other words, the memories of the times gone by are mere materials for his speculation. He displays the same inclination in his travelogue, wherein the objects of interpretation are laid not in Japan and the Japanese, but in the self, his own mind and activity. Whence does the centrality of the self come? The entry of autobiographical elements into his criticism culminates in composing autobiography, so that his travelogue may be derived from his critical work.

Hassan is considered to be a leading theorist and practitioner of postmodernism in America, but he gradually lost interest in theorizing it. Finally in 1987, he was disappointed and disillusioned at the end results of postmodernism when he saw the panel in New York. Since the disillusionment with postmodernism, he moves away from it and returns to the study of his earlier field, contemporary American literature proper, with a new concept and insight, which results in *Selves at Risk: Patterns of Quest in Contemporary American Letters* (1990).<sup>(23)</sup> Against the recognition that the ideology of adventure is evident in the American experience and that American literature is largely autobiographical, a literature of Self, he deals with the quadric-fold themes — quest, adventure, travel, and autobiography, formulating equations among them: quest is adventure, adventure travel, travel autobiography. (SR, 29) Hassan finds in travel narratives a species of auto-bio-graphy. (SR, 28) “In them, a first-person narrator serves at the same time as vagrant, witness, hero, writer.” (SR, 28) Thus, he recognizes the triad: traveler, writer, and reader. “The journey,” Hassan opines, “becomes...symbolic of the writing process itself, and of the artist’s own quest for self-understanding.” (SR, 28) His allusion of the trinity goes deeper:

Travel requires reading the signs and manners of foreign places; and reading itself requires travel or displacement as the eyes move across the page, as the mind flies beyond every word on the page. Travel is also writing.... [Books] frequently inspired (Romantic voyagers’) trips....[Writing] itself is a kind of travel, a text of secret displacements. (SR, 28-29)

Upon the recognition of the trinity —travel, reading, writing— he analyses Paul Bowles, Paul Theroux, and Peter Matthiessen. They are different in the form of travel: Bowles takes the form of exile, Theroux travel writing, Matthiessen naturalist and anthropological curiosity. But the three artists, Hassan insists, address the main issue of quest: “quest as lived and felt and rendered into language, in the second half of our century.” (SR, 133) Hassan’s Travelogue is considered to have been written in the same vein. In *Between the Eagle and the Sun*, Japan and the Japanese recede from the main text, and, instead, his meditation emerges. “I said to myself,” he declares, “this is not a book about them; it is a book about myself living among others. Living and seeing myself sometimes as another, because in Japan I will

always remain a stranger on a far island.” (BES, XVI) This is why the traveler, Hassan, is concerned more with people than landscape, more with decoding written texts than seeing the sights. Hassan’s travelogue markedly shows “his special bent not to hold ideas idly but to test their validity in applying them to himself and to his own life.”<sup>(24)</sup> As is examined in *Selves at Risk*, the triad of traveling, reading, writing, merges into one in his own travelogue, and renders it into a record of his life, autobiography. Hassan’s travelogue to Japan is the manifestation and extension of his critical activity: All text are autobiographical and none of them is or can be.<sup>(25)</sup> Starting from framing a concept of paracriticism via writing autobiography, his self-referential propensity has been enhanced and strengthened in his critical stance, which is displayed in the travelogue.

As is introduced before, Hassan is “amateur of change, addicted to travel and avant-gardism, forms of restlessness.” (SR, 14) He travels, reads, and writes throughout his life. As *Selves at Risk* is his critical work of the quest of selves, so is his travelogue to Japan. It is his own quest of the self, the perennial critical concern where his theory and practice converge.

#### NOTES

- (1) *cf.*, Written in the dust jacket of his *Rumors of Change*.
- (2) ‘Indeterminacy’ is utilized by Hassan to denote a complex referent including ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, and so on. Hassan defines ‘immanence’ as “the capacity of mind to generalize itself in symbols, intervene more and more into nature, act upon itself through its own abstraction and so become, increasingly, immediately, its own environment.” *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*, pp. 269-270; RPF, pp. 97-99.
- (3) Scheer-Schäzler, p. 242. She argues that “the Professor’...discusses Hassan, quotes Hassan, ridicules Hassan....” His critical works are often regarded as a collage of quotations, and sometimes invite severe criticism. Best, XIII.
- (4) *cf.*, Frontiers of Criticism in *Paracriticism*, pp. 3-36.
- (5) Scheer-Schäzler, p.241.
- (6) Klinkowitz, p. 118. This critic insists that Hassan “is drawn to Henry Miller’s disposition that ‘writing is autobiography, and autobiography is therapy, which is a form of action.’” *Loc. cit.*
- (7) W. Hassan, p.13. The critic opines that “*Out of Egypt* must then be read as an effort not so much to render Hassan’s ‘life as lived,’ but as a ‘quest’ and a ‘labor of self-creation’ that complements and extends his work as a critic....” *Loc. cit.* See, Fjellestad, pp. 867-868; Okazaki (2007), p.28.
- (8) Scheer-Schäzler, p. 242.
- (9) Roland Barthes, a French philosopher and semiologist, betrays his intention saying that “[the] author has never, in any sense, photographed Japan. Rather, he has done the opposite: Japan has starred him with any number of ‘flashes’; or, better still, Japan has afforded him a situation of writing. This situation is the very one in which a certain disturbance of the person occurs, a subversion of earlier readings, a shock of meaning lacerated....” Barthes, p. 4.
- (10) Some critic regards Hassan’s autobiography as a plea for his reinvention of identity. *Cf.*, W. Hassan; Fjellestad.
- (11) In the travelogue, Hassan gives two examples of the translation or the mistranslation of culture, referring to Kawabata Yasunari and M. Zimmerman, his disciple. pp. 137-138; pp. 191-192.
- (12) See, note (2).

- (13) Hassan's travelogue is dedicated to Richie as well as to Iwao Iwamoto, his translator. Hassan depicts the Japanophile in Part V, pp. 191-194.
- (14) Concerning the issue, xenophobia of the Japanese, Hassan unusually criticizes them saying that "[after] all, Japan has only opened its doors under duress, inch by excruciating inch, and still the door seems shut." BES, p. 186.
- (15) Scheer-Schäzler, p. 242; W. Hassan, p. 13.
- (16) Luca, part 2.
- (17) Thiher, p. 237. Concerning Hassan's tendency for postmodern performance, Thiher asserts that "Hassan's later texts that attempt to enact, through collage, juxtaposition, and typographical fireworks, the postmodern disintegration of the centered text." *Loc. cit.*
- (18) Klinlowitz, p. 117.
- (19) Scheer-Schäzler, p. 242.
- (20) *op. cit.*, p. 241.
- (21) Veese, p. IX.
- (22) *op. cit.*, p. X. The study is somewhat ironically entitled *Confessions of the Critics*.
- (23) The experience of his 'turn' is depicted in PT, pp. 216-229.
- (24) Scheer-Schäzler, p. 242.
- (25) Kinkowitz, p. 118.

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# イーハブ・ハッサンの「日本旅行記」とパラクリティシズム

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現代アメリカ文学の批評から出発したハッサン（1925年～ ）は、ウィスコンシン大学ミルウォーキー校で長らく英米文学と比較文学を講じたが、その犀利な批評眼を文化一般にまで広げて、アメリカにおけるポストモダニズム論の第一人者の地位を占めるに至った。彼が編纂したモダニズムとポストモダニズムの対照表は、両者を見分ける標準的な指標としての有用性を今なお保持しており、彼の提唱した「決定不能性indeterminacy」と「遍在性immanence」はデリダの「差延」とともにポストモダニズムのキーワードとして援用され続けている。

しかしハッサンの活動は批評家、理論家の立場に止まらずパフォーマンスの領域にも及んでおり、世界各地でのセミナーや学会で斬新なスタイルの発表を行っている。また、その著作は高度な学問性を維持しながらも、戯れに溢れた断章的な文体というポストモダニズムの特色を色濃く帯びている。さらにハッサンは客観的な立場を堅持する学者とは異なって、ジャンル横断を試み、自己の内面を曝す「自伝」をも出版している。このような多彩な行動の背後には、旧弊の批評に対する批判がこめられており、自ら提唱する「パラクリティシズム」の実践という意図が窺える。

近年、ハッサンは30年以上に亘る知見を元に『鶯と太陽の間』<sup>はざま</sup>と冠する日本旅行記を物した。これはバルトの『記号の帝国』と軌を一にした著作で、単なる旅行記、印象記の枠を脱して、一個の自立した批評となっており、そこでは観察の対象たる日本は著者の「思考の題材」の位置を占めている。本稿ではハッサンのユニークな「旅行記」の特質を分析するとともに、批評家としての立場（パラクリティシズム）と「旅行記」の相関関係を明らかにして、彼の批評の特徴を抽出したい。