

# Le corps dans les littératures modernes d'Asie orientale :

discours, représentation, intermédialité



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# Le corps dans les littératures modernes d'Asie orientale : discours, représentation, intermédialité

*The Body in Modern Asian Literature: Discourse, Representation, Intermediality*

Gérard Siary, Toshio Takemoto, Victor Vuilleumier et Yinde Zhang (dir.)

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## NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

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# *I Sing the Body Electric: Corporal Representations in Guo Moruo's *The Goddesses**

Paolo Magagnin

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## Introduction

- 1 Among the Chinese intellectuals who came to the fore in the aftermath of the May Fourth Movement of 1919, Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978) left a distinctive mark. At the turn of the 1910s he started to gain recognition as a poet and translator, later devoting himself to short fiction, historical plays, and essay writing; after the establishment of the People's Republic, in 1949, he was known notably as a scholar of Chinese antiquity and a statesman. He first obtained real recognition as a poet in 1921, when his maiden verse collection *The Goddesses* / 女神 was published in Shanghai.<sup>1</sup> It contains a poetic prologue and 56 poems – four being actually long verse plays – organized in three sections, mostly composed while he was a medical student in Japan. Because of its formal and rhetorical innovation and the power of its individual expression, the collection was quickly acknowledged as the beginning of modern Chinese poetry, establishing its author as one of the most representative poetic voices in the country.
- 2 The themes and forms found in *The Goddesses* are very diverse, making it an extremely complex and composite collection. Many of the poems celebrate nature, physicality, the communion between man and the cosmos, and are permeated with an allegorical idea of rejuvenation. In this aesthetic universe, the discourse of the body naturally occupies a prominent position. The origins of Guo's modes of physical representation can be traced back to the many-sided literary, philosophical, and scientific sources that the poet absorbed and subsequently developed in his own writing, ranging from the foreign knowledge and literary models to which he was exposed while in Japan to the classical Chinese tradition in which he had been schooled as a child.

## Levels of corporal representation in *The Goddesses*

- 3 The modern, scientific understanding of the anatomical body entered China in the second half of the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> The body of Western medicine – first imported in China as a tool for national self-strengthening and modernization – was quickly adopted by Chinese intellectuals not only as the ground upon which to speculate about the sources of consciousness, but also as a physical and metaphorical object for exploring political, economic, and national issues, a category that allowed them to express concerns related to identity, history, sexuality, and spirituality. “Body,” “blood,” “weakness,” “disease,” etc., together with concepts drawn from psychoanalysis, rapidly became commonplace metaphors for many writers starting in the late 1910s. After Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936), the most representative examples of this phenomenon are arguably Yu Dafu 郁達夫 (1896-1945) and Guo Moruo himself, who – like Lu Xun – had a medical background which frequently resurfaces in his writing.
- 4 Remarks on Guo Moruo’s corporal discourse, often associated with psychoanalytical concerns, remain generally scattered and unsystematic in the scholarship on his literary production. A specific focus on his fiction characterizes Tsu’s (2000) analysis of the significance of masochistic suffering as a metaphor for dysfunctional national identity.<sup>3</sup> Wei’s (2009) exploration of the identity crisis of the desiring body,<sup>4</sup> Fujita’s (2015) discussion of the relationship between medicine and literary writing,<sup>5</sup> and Vuilleumier’s (2015) investigation of the problematic notion of the medical body<sup>6</sup> are noteworthy contributions to the analysis of Guo’s fiction from this perspective. As far as his poetic production is concerned, several studies address the allegory of death and rebirth, as well as the communion between man and nature as one facet of the poet’s pantheistic views in *The Goddesses*.<sup>7</sup> Unsurprisingly, more in-depth investigations into the representation of the body and its significance generally focus on the poem “The Heavenly Hound” / 天狗, where this expressive mode is central. Fujita (2003) treats “The Heavenly Hound” in connection with Guo’s 1920 poem “In the Dissecting Room” / 解剖室中;<sup>8</sup> the idea of the “progressive body” and the low-to-high, inside-to-outside corporal dynamics are the object of Mi Jiayan’s detailed analysis (2004, 2016),<sup>9</sup> while the implications of physical transfiguration have been explored by Vuilleumier (2009).<sup>10</sup> Finally, Jiang (2011) explores the relationship between illness discourse and the formation of the image of the poet in Guo’s early career.<sup>11</sup>
- 5 Nevertheless, to my knowledge a systematic account of the levels of body discourse in Guo Moruo’s poetry and its significance has yet to be conducted. Building upon the existing analyses, I will here explore the forms of representation of the body in Guo’s early poetic writing by conducting a close reading of *The Goddesses*. Based on this discussion of textual examples, I shall then offer a reflection on the position and significance of corporal poetics against the background of the author’s conceptual landscape.

## Death and rebirth

- 6 The theme of death – and, in general, physical annihilation – and of subsequent rebirth is ubiquitous in *The Goddesses*, especially in its first and second sections. Its most systematic conceptualization can be found in “The Nirvana of the Phoenixes” / 鳳凰涅槃, the verse play that opens the second section, in which the legendary Middle Eastern

bird that rises from its ashes blends with the *feng* and *huang*, the male and female phoenix of Chinese mythology. Following the “Prelude” / 序曲, a depiction of a gloomy world where the death of the phoenixes is imminent, the two birds are consumed by fire; the play then culminates in the “Song of Rebirth of the Phoenixes” / 鳳凰更生歌, where the reborn *feng* and *huang* proclaim their resurrection and the coming of a new world dominated by fire – another incarnation of the image of the sun, which is ubiquitous in the collection.

- 7 Death is similarly presented in a positive light in the final stanza of “Victorious Death” / 勝利的死, dedicated to the IRA fighter Terence MacSwiney, and is romantically praised as the only gateway to “true liberation” / 真正的解脫 in “Death” / 死 (*Guo Moruo quanji, op. cit.*, p. 58). Undeniably, Guo was fascinated by death and decay in that they “represented a phase of the manifestation of nature’s mystery and wonder and one aspect of man’s creative power”.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, death is welcomed and even worshipped, together with life and other forms of bodily energy, in “I Am a Worshipper of Idols” / 我是個偶像崇拜者：

I worship life, I worship death, I worship the light, I worship the night

[...]

I worship the creative spirit, I worship strength, I worship blood, I worship the heart<sup>13</sup>

我崇拜生，崇拜死，崇拜光明，崇拜黑夜

[...]

我崇拜創造的精神，崇拜力，崇拜血，崇拜心臟 (*Guo Moruo quanji, op. cit.*, p. 99)

- 8 The image of fire is often associated with death and rebirth, as in the paradigmatic case of the scorched phoenixes, but can also serve other expressive purposes. In “Coal in the Stove” / 爐中煤, Guo addresses his own nation, compared to a young bride. His yearning for a new world – a new China – takes the form of a burning heart and body:

For my beloved one

I have burnt to this point!

[...]

In this black slave’s chest of mine

You want my heart to be like fire.

我為我心愛的人兒

燃到了這般模樣！

[...]

要我這黑奴的胸中，

才有火一樣的心臟。 (*Guo Moruo quanji, op. cit.*, p. 58)

- 9 Similar metaphorical descriptions, with comparable connotations, can be found elsewhere as well. Let us consider the poem “Crematorium” / 火葬場:

The skull on my sickly neck

Resembles the chamber of a crematorium;

Alas, you burnt my soul long ago!

Oh, fresh breeze, where are you coming from?

In this crematorium

You made a stem of... spring grass grow

我這瘋頸子上的頭顱

好象那火葬場裡的火爐；

我的靈魂呀，早已被你燒死了！

哦，你是哪兒來的涼風？

你在這火葬場中

也吹出了一株—春草。 (*Guo Moruo quanji, op. cit.*, p. 139)

- 10 The decaying skull of the subject is compared to a crematorium, by resorting to a series of images that are reminiscent of Expressionist tropes. However, in the poetic universe of *The Goddesses*, death always brings about a new beginning. In this poem, indeed, new life suddenly appears as a little stem of grass vaguely reminiscent of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), a major influence on Guo's early poetry.<sup>14</sup>
- 11 The only example of death being presented in an entirely different light is "Impressions of Shanghai" / 上海印象, in which the poet expresses all of his disillusion with the frantic life of the metropolis. There is certainly no room for regeneration for the zombie-like men and women of the city, who are compared to "loitering corpses" / 遊閑的屍, drifting in a city filled with skeletons and caskets (*Guo Moruo quanji*, *op. cit.*, p. 162).

## Oneness with the cosmos

- 12 Another set of expressive devices strongly centered on the body is used extensively by Guo Moruo to emphasize the communion between man and the natural and cosmic world. In *The Goddesses*, these devices can take different forms, namely: 1) the representation of the subject's body as being or becoming one with the natural world; 2) the depiction of the human body as a platform making communion with nature possible; and 3) the anthropomorphization of nature and the zoomorphization of inanimate beings.
- 13 "The Heavenly Hound" is arguably the most representative and most often discussed example of bodily poetry in Guo Moruo. It is also emblematic of the category of figurative devices listed above:

I am the Heavenly Hound!  
 I swallow the moon,  
 I swallow the sun,  
 I swallow all the stars,  
 I swallow the entire universe, I am I!

I am the light of the moon,  
 I am the light of the sun,  
 I am the light of all the stars,  
 I am the light of X-ray beams,  
 I am the total *energy* of the entire universe!

I race,  
 I shout wildly  
 I burn  
 I burn like blazing fire,  
 I shout wildly like the ocean,  
 I race like electricity,  
 I race,  
 I race,  
 I race,  
 I peel my skin,  
 I eat my flesh,  
 I suck my blood,  
 I gnaw my guts,  
 I race on my nerves,

I race on my spine,  
I race on my brains,

I am I!

My I is about to explode!

我是一條天狗呀!

我把月來吞了,

我把日來吞了,

我把一切的星球來吞了,

我把全宇宙來吞了。

我便是我了!

我是月底光,

我是日底光,

我是一切星球底光,

我是X光線底光,

我是全宇宙底Energy底總量!

我飛奔,

我狂叫,

我燃燒。

我如烈火一樣地燃燒!

我如大海一樣地狂叫!

我如電氣一樣地飛跑!

我飛跑,

我飛跑,

我飛跑,

我剝我的皮,

我食我的肉,

我吸我的血,

我嚼我的心肝,

我在我神經上飛跑,

我在我脊髓上飛跑,

我在我腦筋上飛跑。

我便是我呀!

我的我要爆了! (*Guo Moruo quanji, op. cit., p. 54-55*)

- 14 The use of free verse and references to nature and science, together with the ubiquity of an amplified 'I,' the catalogue technique, the expression of powerful vitalism, and the feeling of physical and spiritual oneness with the universe can be instantly traced back to Whitman's verse, especially "I Sing the Body Electric" – in the use of foreign technical lexicon and anatomical references – but also "Song of Myself" and the second stanza of "So Long." As Mi points out, the lyrical subject unfolds itself in spatial terms on the vertical (from the sky down to the body and through it) and on the horizontal (from the past through the present to the future) axis. This process begins with the abruptly announced identification of the subject with the mythical beast, a prerequisite for accomplishing the metamorphosis that follows. The external space (the sun, the moon, the stars and so on) then becomes the internal space of the subject: by devouring it, the 'I' acquires the qualities of the whole universe and its material forms, such as light and energy, until it itself becomes a source of light and energy, completing the identification between the subject and the cosmos. At the same time, Mi suggests that on the horizontal temporal plane the physiological act of 'swallowing' encompasses the

overturning, digesting and replacing of old categories that lead to the creation of a new reality.<sup>15</sup>

- 15 As illustrated above, in “Coal in the Stove” the image of the burning heart is intimately linked to the idea of a bodily consumption eventually leading to rebirth. A similar metaphor, rhetorically reinforced by parallelism and repetition, is also present in “Bathing in the Sea” / 浴海:

My blood rises with the waves of the sea,  
My heart burns with the fire of the sun,  
[...]  
Today I became a cicada that has shed its shell,  
[...]  
While the waves of our blood still rise,  
While the fire in our hearts still burn,  
Quick, wash away  
That old, decayed bag of skin!  
我的血和海浪同潮,  
我的心和日火同燒,  
[...]  
我如今變了個脫了殼的蟬蟲,  
[...]  
趁著我們的血浪還在潮,  
趁著我們的心火還在燒,  
快把那陳腐了的舊皮囊  
全盤洗掉! (Guo Moruo *quanji*, *op. cit.*, p. 70)

- 16 The references to the blood and heart of the subject, identified respectively with the sea and the sun, are intertwined with the image of the cicada shedding its shell. Once again, the subject’s body becomes one with nature and undergoes a process of renewal, both physical and spiritual, described through a set of physical images, including “naturification” and zoomorphization. The spiritual element underlying the whole process is further emphasized by the reference to the timeworn “bag of skin” / 皮囊, originally a Buddhist metaphor designating the mortal human body.
- 17 In “Snowy Morning” / 雪朝, as the whole body of the subject is transfigured into light, blood is identified with the water falling from the eaves, dripping quietly to the rhythm of the natural phenomena:

Great waves of snow!  
A silver-white universe!  
My heart and body seem to be turning into a stream of light,  
Oh, *open secret!*

The water dripping from the eaves overhead...  
Is that not the blood in my whole body?  
The dripping blood in my body makes a soft, cadenced sound,  
In harmony with the waves of the sea, of the pines, of the snow.  
雪的波濤!  
一個銀白的宇宙!  
我全身心好象要化為了光明流去,  
*Open secret!*囉!

樓頭的檐霽.....  
那可不是我全身的血液?  
我全身的血液點滴出律呂的幽音,  
同那海濤相和, 松濤相和, 雪濤相和。 (Guo Moruo *quanji*, *op. cit.*, p. 85)

- 18 “Hymn to the Sun” / 太陽禮讚, which closes on a series of invocations that reveal again their indebtedness to Whitman’s catalogue technique,<sup>16</sup> also contains a very similar image. In a line of the last stanza, the subject’s life appears to be turned into blood by the blazing light, thus accomplishing a sort of pantheistic transubstantiation:

O sun! Please shine on my whole life, turning it into a stream of bright red blood!  
 太陽呀！你請把我全部的生命照成道鮮紅的血流！(Guo Moruo *quanji*, *op. cit.*, p. 100)

- 19 Finally, “Venus” offers a noteworthy example of the poetic superposition of body and nature:

I would compare your loving mouth  
 To a wine cup.  
 An inexhaustible, sweet liquor  
 That would keep me constantly inebriated!

I would compare your nipples  
 To two grave mounds.  
 We would sleep in those graves,  
 Until our blood turns to sweet dew!

我把你這張愛嘴，  
 比成著一個酒杯。  
 喝不盡的葡萄美酒，  
 會使我時常沈醉！

我把你這對乳頭，  
 比成著兩座墳墓。  
 我們倆睡在墓中，  
 血液兒化成甘露！(Guo Moruo *quanji*, *op. cit.*, p. 130)

- 20 Apart from the reference to Greco-Roman mythology in the title, the mode of expression used by Guo in the first stanza obviously draws its inspiration from the chapter 4 of the “Song of Songs”.<sup>17</sup> The sensual portrayal of the female body, however, sublimates once again into the communion with nature in the second stanza, reaching its apex in the death-like slumber of the two lovers in the grave mounds and their blood morphing into sweet dew, in a sort of circle of life and death.

## The body as a space of dialogue

- 21 In another set of expressive devices, the body appears to be more than an instrument of perception, becoming an interface that allows nature to enter the lyrical I or that facilitates a form of cosmic communion. Wu suggests that in “The Heavenly Hound” the body of the lyrical subject is a platform that allows the moon and sun to communicate and become one within the universe swallowed by the mythical beast. The same concept is observable in “By the Electric Light” / 電火光中, where the perceiving body of the subject becomes a space where the objects (Beethoven’s portrait and Millet’s painting) and the poet’s musings (the mental image of the Han period diplomat Su Ziqing 苏子卿 (140-60 BC) on the shores of Lake Baikal) evoked in the three sections of the poem are put in communication.<sup>18</sup>

- 22 One of the most powerful representations of the body as a space of dialogue is found in “The First Hour after Class” / 輟了課的第一點鐘裡:

Barefoot and bareheaded,  
 I run into Nature’s arms.

[...]  
 I run to the pine woods to stroll,  
 My head washed by the rising sun,  
 My feet washed by the clear dew,  
 Cold and heat, warm and cool,  
 Are all joys of Nature!

我赤足光頭，  
 忙向自然的懷中跑。

[...]  
 我跑到松林來散步，  
 頭上沐著朝陽，  
 腳下濯著清露，  
 冷暖溫涼，

一樣是自然生趣! (*Guo Moruo quanji, op. cit.*, p. 124)

- 23 The poet's feet and head touch nature in an unmediated way and are subsequently washed by the sun and dew. This process follows a top-down direction – as in Mi's reading of "The Heavenly Hound" – portraying the subject as a link between the astral body and the earth. It is also depicted as a cleansing ritual with strong religious (i.e. pantheistic) connotations, whereby the subject finally becomes one with the natural world, perceiving its various manifestations and acknowledging them as part of a luxuriant, joyful All.

## Nature anthropomorphized and zoomorphized

- 24 In several passages of *The Goddesses*, nature is anthropomorphized and depicted as a loving mother embracing and feeding its children, be they human beings or not. In "Fetal Movements of Spring" / 春之胎動, for example, the season of regeneration is presented as a child about to be born, "moving in Nature's embrace" / 在大自然的懷中胎動著在了.<sup>19</sup> A similar image is also found in "Sea of Light" / 光海:

The sandy plain, like a silver foil,  
 Is waiting to embrace us, smiling,  
 We are coming.  
 Embrace us!  
 We want to be in your arms,  
 And have a bath of light!  
 銀箔一樣的沙原，  
 笑著待把我們擁抱。  
 我們來了。  
 你快擁抱!  
 我們要在你懷兒的當中，  
 洗個光之澡! (*Guo Moruo quanji, op. cit.*, p. 91-92)

- 25 The loving embrace of nature is a very common metaphor by which the poet expresses his yearning for communion with the natural world. This union is celebrated, again, through a pantheistic ritual of purification and renewal: in the example cited above, the ritual is represented by the immersion in a sea of light, the form taken by nature itself in the very first lines of the poem (*Guo Moruo quanji, op. cit.*, p. 91).
- 26 "O Earth, my Mother!" / 地球，我的母親! is another example of this mode of representation:

You shake the child in your arms awake,  
 I am now crawling on your back.

[...]  
 I think everything in this universe is your incarnation:  
 Thunderbolts are the mighty sound of your breath,  
 Rain and snow your blood soaring.  
 [...]  
 When I drink a glass of water, it is rain falling from the sky,  
 I know it is your milk, my soup of life.  
 [...]  
 O Earth, my mother!  
 My soul is your soul [...].  
 你把你懷中的兒來搖醒，  
 我現在正在你背上匍行。  
 [...]  
 我想這宇宙中的一切都是你的化身：  
 雷霆是你呼吸的聲威，  
 雪雨是你血液的飛騰。  
 [...]  
 我飲一杯水，縱是天降的甘霖，  
 我知道那是你的乳，我的生命羹。  
 [...]  
 地球，我的母親！  
 我的靈魂便是你的靈魂 [...]. (*Guo Moruo quanji, op. cit., p. 79-83*)

- 27 Throughout the twenty-one quatrains, each of them opening with the invocation that lends its title to the poem, the transparent image of nature as mother of humankind is gradually enriched and developed. Finally, towards the end of the poem, this elaboration finds its apex in a pantheistic announcement where the soul of the lyrical “I” becomes one with the soul of nature.

- 28 The natural world is also depicted in anthropomorphic terms in “A Night Stroll in Jurimatsubara” / 夜步十里松原:

Countless stars, their eyes open wide,  
 watch the beautiful night scene from afar.  
 Countless old pines in Jurimatsubara  
 Praise the sky in silence, their arms raised high.  
 Their arms all shiver in the sky,  
 My nerves all shiver within my body.  
 無數的明星正圓睜著他們的眼兒，  
 在眺望這美麗的夜景。  
 十里松原中無數的古松，  
 都高擎著他們的手兒沈默著在贊美天宇。  
 他們一枝枝的手兒在空中戰慄，  
 我的一枝枝的神經纖維在身中戰慄。 (*Guo Moruo quanji, op. cit., p. 98*)

- 29 In addition to ascribing human features and actions to the stars and trees, Guo resorts to the rhetoric devices of parallelism and repetition in order to emphasize the gradual superposition between the natural and the human, represented by the pines and the nerves, the former shivering in the sky and the latter within the body of the lyrical subject.

- 30 An analogous anthropomorphizing device and even similar phrasing are used in “A New “Three Variations on the Yang Pass”” / 新陽關三疊:

The waters of the ocean dance under my feet,  
 Stretching countless arms and wrists waiting to embrace the sun.  
 汪洋的海水在我腳下舞蹈，  
 高伸出無數的臂腕待把太陽擁抱。 (*Guo Moruo quanji, op. cit., p. 104*)

- 31 Finally, the opening verses of “Looking Afar from the Peak of Fudetate Yama” / 筆立山頭展望 offer a particular example of zoomorphization of inanimate beings:

Pulse of the great metropolis!  
 Surge of life!  
 Beating, panting, shrieking...  
 Spurting, flying, jumping...  
 大都會的脈搏呀!  
 生的鼓動呀!  
 打著在, 吹著在, 叫著在, .....  
 噴著在, 飛著在, 跳著在, .....(Guo Moruo *quanji*, *op. cit.*, p. 68)

- 32 The modern, industrialized Japanese city of Moji is portrayed as a restless wild animal, in a language and manner that immediately resonate with the depiction of the Heavenly Hound and its unstoppable energy. The poem reveals its indebtedness to Futurism in its formal patterns and rhythmic features. However, Guo’s intention is not the celebration of industrial progress and urban modernity (which represents the mainstay of Marinetti’s *Manifesto*), his disappointment with urban life being obvious in such poems as “Impressions of Shanghai.” On the contrary, by resorting to this mode of expression, the poet seems to blur the boundaries between human and natural, celebrating the city together with the natural universe in a “marriage of man and nature” / 自然與人生的婚禮 (Guo Moruo *quanji*, *op. cit.*, p. 68).

## Conclusions

- 33 From the close reading of the poems in *The Goddesses*, two bodily macro-discourses can be identified: the discourse of death and rebirth, or dissolution and regeneration of the body, and the oneness of man (in the person of the lyrical subject) and nature or the cosmos. Although these two discourses are not the only ones in the collection, they are among the most prominent, and can help to shed light on some of its central conceptual nodes.
- 34 In *The Goddesses*, death is never an end or a goal, but rather a tool.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the collection, it is represented as a sacrifice which the lyrical subject awaits and gladly accepts upon himself, safe in the knowledge that the act of dying, like a form of martyrdom, is necessary in order to cross the threshold of a new life. Indeed, death is always followed – either explicitly or implicitly – by the proclamation of a rebirth, of the beginning of a new existence, as in the poem eloquently titled “New Life” / 新生 / *Xinsheng*. The question of whether this is essentially a political allegory, as a significant part of traditional scholarship affirms, remains debatable. However, the more deeply this discursive device is scrutinized, the less this interpretation seems justifiable, at least as a predominant strain. Of course, one may see in the idea of death followed by renewal the seeds of the revolutionary engagement that will dominate Guo’s later life and artistic production, starting with his conversion to Marxism in 1924. However, apart from the repeated proclamations made in *The Goddesses* – starting with the famous “I am willing to become a communist” / 我願意成個共產主義者 (Guo Moruo *quanji*, *op. cit.*, p. 3) in the “Prologue Poem” / 序詩 – which mostly sound pretentious and hollow, the political nature of this process is never elaborated. Conversely, Guo’s modes of expression reveal patent spiritual and religious overtones. From this perspective, the regeneration allegorically staged by Guo could be understood within

the framework of the renewal brought about by the May Fourth Movement, which to him is “not a mere historical event but a religious ritual, one that initiates the new youth into an ecstasy of total self-confidence and self-sacrifice”.<sup>21</sup> This notion is also reflected in the religious image of consumption by fire (as well as the related ubiquitous motifs of light, sun, etc.) and subsequent resurrection, exemplified by the phoenixes, which is used extensively throughout the collection.

- 35 The second macro-discourse, with its various physical representations, is linked to the idea of a dynamic unity with the natural and cosmic universe. It completes the discourse of death and resurrection, with which it is intimately intertwined. I call it “dynamic” because it is almost always presented not as a given fact, but rather as a process that begins with the “I” as the active subject of the identification of man and natural world. I see in this discourse a set of poetic devices that further express Guo Moruo’s pantheism and his yearning for a spiritual and aesthetic “newness”, with the poet becoming a demiurge of his own world. Guo’s syncretic pantheism is rooted in the thought of Zhuangzi / 莊子 and Wang Yangming / 王陽明, Chinese shamanism, the poetics of Kabir and the *Upanishads*, the philosophy of Spinoza, the meditative verse of Tagore and the vitalistic poetry of Whitman. There is no place for a God in the poet’s conceptual world, but rather for a godlike “greater self” / 大我, essentially a poetic device that possesses no real religious implications, and which overlaps with the Buddhist notion of “sea of the heart/mind” / 心海 as common consciousness of all sentient beings.<sup>22</sup> The “greater self” in turn takes the form of the phoenix, the Heavenly Hound, and the material manifestations of nature. It absorbs their qualities and energy, identifies with them, and becomes itself a source of energy in an ecstatic, death-like explosion: only through this process is it able to bring about the process of renewal.
- 36 In my view, the two discursive modes analyzed above are closely connected, as their frequent overlapping shows. In *The Goddesses*, these devices allow the poet to portray the cycle of the energies of life – death being one of them – that the subject puts into motion as a result of his “activistic ethos”<sup>23</sup> and creative endeavor. They are the translation in poetic terms of the “process of transformation brought about by the becoming newness of bodily awakening”<sup>24</sup> that exemplifies modernity and progressiveness.

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## NOTES

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