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The International Self

Comparative analysis of Gilles and A Dark Night's Passing

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Asbtract

This dissertation deals with a comparative analysis of two novels, Shiga Naoya (1883-1971)'s *A Dark Night's Passing* (*An'ya Kōro*, 1937) and Pierre Drieu La Rochelle (1893-1945)'s *Gilles* (1939). Rather than comprehensively comparing the two novels, the analysis will be conducted in order to give a detailed portrayal of the two respective heroes' Self, because their own personality is composed by the same elements despite the cultural difference of the literary works in which they act. In this dissertation, the adopted notion of Self lies in the research conducted by Charles Taylor (1989) who sees the Self as a conglomerate of values which, put together, generate a certain individual attitude. Thus, the contingent aim of such a comparison corresponds to the pointing out of identical values (which will be called 'hypergoods' or 'themes') that characterize both the heroes' Self. Such an analytical goal will prove that two literary heroes of far different cultural roots can be characterized by a strikingly similar Self, which would itself stand for the first step toward the accomplishment of a wider aim. Indeed, this dissertation is also meant to be seen as the first attempt to coin an international notion of Self which could entail all the values that characterize a high number of heroes' Self, overcoming national and cultural borders. The pursuit of this research goal will bring the field of comparative literature to be innovated through a new conceiving of the Self according to values that are shared by multiple cultures apparently impossible to be related to each other in these terms.

The comparison of the heroes of *Gilles* and *A Dark Night's Passing* will be conducted through semiotic tools of literary analysis, especially the notion of 'theme' and 'figure' coined by Greimas and Courtés (1979). Each theme will correspond to a value belonging to the two heroes' Self, and a figure will stand for a single passage or quotation which entails such value: the combination of multiple figures entailing the same general value produces a theme. The result of this analysis will be displayed in the shape of a map indicating all the themes' composition.

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*I mean to present my fellow- mortals with a man in all the
integrity of nature; and this man shall be myself.*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

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Introduction

This dissertation marks a first attempt to compare diverse literary conceptions of the Self in order to grasp archetypal values that constitute the shaping of all characters' self-awareness. The comparison will shed new light on the surprising similarities (in cultural and literary terms) standing within the depiction of two kinds of Self depicted into two different novels. It is indeed a literary comparison of two works, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle's *Gilles* (1939) and Shiga Naoya's *A Dark Night's Passing* (1937), which respectively belong to two utterly different literary legacies, and yet show common themes regarding the self-awareness and personality of the two respective heroes. In other words: the aim of this dissertation consists of finding out the similarities between two heroes of two novels that were published and spread within two (French and Japanese) literary worlds belonging to two cultures of far different roots, in order to show that despite such an apparent distance, the two heroes share a surprisingly similar attitude towards their own self-awareness. This goal itself stands for a first step in order to build an international definition of the Self which could be produced by grasping the archetypes of self-awareness contained within multiple cultural and literary spheres. In other words: this dissertation aims to show the similarities between the Self of Gilles and of Kensaku, the heroes of *Gilles* and *A Dark Night's Passing*; the bigger aim which can be accomplished (through further comparisons) corresponds to the finding out of an international notion of Self which could be applied to multiple cultural spheres, in order to produce a globalised conceptualization of the Self. Therefore, this dissertation's research question could be formulated as follows: 'What kind of similarities about the Self are embodied by the heroes of Gilles and A Dark Night's Passing regardless of their widely different cultural roots?'. The wider aim's research question would then be as follows: 'How can we define the Self within a globalised literary field?'. Needless to say, this dissertation will only attempt to answer to the first one, while the second one will need further comparisons in order to be answered.

Research questions of this kind need a number of premises given below, including a) the notion of Self adopted in this dissertation; b) the methodological basis and process of comparison; c) the reasons for having chosen these two works.

A) Theoretical Materials: the chosen notion of Self

By saying Self, one cannot but furtherly clarify its meaning, which has more than one definition depending on certain philosophical approaches, as explained by Charles Taylor in his *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989). This work represents the main theoretical source of this dissertation, as the notion of Self adopted in order to conduct the analysis has been coined by Taylor himself. For him, the Self constitutes a conglomerate of moral values, called 'inescapable frameworks' as 'selfhood and morality turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes' (Taylor 1989, 3). This statement detaches his theory on the Self from the naturalist ones, which define the construction of identity and the gaining of self-awareness as processes led by our biological features, instead of moral concerns. Differently, Taylor believes that a number of things not necessarily related to our biological features, such as national identity, religious creed, and the age in which we were born profoundly affect our self-awareness. These inescapable frameworks are also oriented toward a certain goal, which is the distinction between good and evil, between what we want and what we do not. 'Our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not' (*Ibidem*, 30). One has to furtherly define this point as it constitutes the theoretical core of this comparative analysis. Indeed, the moral elements, which Taylos calls 'goods', will be turned into literary figures to be seen as the moral concerns shaping the self-awareness of the heroes of *Gilles* and *A Dark Night's Passing*. Thus, what is actually a 'good'?

Taylor names 'goods' all the values which can affect any human's worldview, and then distinguishes them between 'ordinary goods' and 'hypergoods'. The former are single actions or situations; the latter are moral standpoints which encompass a universal vision. Taylor makes the instance of 'God' or of 'Universal Justice'. For example, if a certain Self's most affecting hypergood is the Christian God, one will see the war as something to be firmly rejected in order to spread peace among humans. Differently, if one is a samurai who believes in the hypergood of "Honour", he will not reject the armed conflict as it would stand for an opportunity to prove his affection to the samurai family he is protecting in that conflict. The literary comparison conducted below corresponds to the mapping of the hypergoods which mostly affect Gilles and Kensaku, in order to accomplish the aforementioned aim of grasping the similarities between their selves. As the analysis deals with two literary works, the concept of hypergood is to be converted into a textual element, which I would refer as 'theme', whose correspondence with the idea of Taylor's hypergood is furtherly explained into the methodological section. Accordingly, the notion of 'figure' will be corresponding to the concept of good.

Despite the wide scope of a hypergood, Taylor does not see our identity as being shaped by only one of them:

‘We often declare our identity as defined by only one of these [hypergoods], because this is what is salient in our lives, or what is put in question. But in fact our identity is deeper and more many-sided than any of our possible articulations of it’ (29).

In order to follow this important clarification throughout the analytical process, one will have to survey multiple hypergoods/themes surrounding one hero’s Self.

Although the easy applicability of Taylor’s notion of Self within the literary field, one should also state the reasons why surveying the notion of Self in literature rather than in other fields is pertinent. In this case, Western scholarships have produced little resources which relate the Self to literary characters. Taylor himself mainly bases his research on philosophical resources, or on authors who can both be considered literati and philosophers (such as Rousseau). On the contrary, Japanese literary scholarships of early twentieth century have produced a surprising amount of sources on the literary notion of Self, certainly because of the critical importance that the so-called Japanese I-Novel (*shishōsetsu* or *watakushi shōsetsu*) had throughout those decades. Indeed, most of research on the Self in literature produced in Japan mainly relate to Japanese authors of I-Novels. In fewer words: whereas Western literary studies have never standardized literary works based on the hero’s Self as a genre, in Japan such novels became critically prominent, and the I-Novel became ‘the most striking feature of modern Japanese literature’ (Keene 1998, 506).

Among Japanese research, the essay which mostly helps to understand why it is important to turn to novels in order to gain a wider understanding of the Self has been written by Suzuki (1996) who explains that ‘the I-Novel is best defined as a mode of reading that assumes that the I-Novel is a single-voiced, direct expression of the author’s self and that its written language is “transparent”’ (6). Suzuki’s first definition is of key importance as it alludes to a literary genre that European readers would tend to call ‘autobiography’ or ‘memoir’. However, she explicitly claims that by defining the I-Novel one is not referring to a certain work’s intrinsic feature, but instead to the reader’s approach to it. It is the reader who assumes to be dealing with a faithful reproduction of the author’s life. Such a ‘hidden contract’ (*Ibidem*) permits the author to write from other perspectives rather than the sole first-person narration and to narrate personal events within a ‘fictional’ framework, including an organised plot, a certain number of intrigues, and so forth. Here lies the importance of surveying

the Self within literary works which mainly regard it: the reader will easily grasp the way in which the author sees his own Self projected into the characters, thanks to an organisational framework which forces to depict the Self according to linguistic and narrative patterns that are meant to be understandable for the reader. In other words: the framework of the I-Novel is an organised representation of the author's Self. Therefore, in this dissertation, the two selected novels are to be seen as artistic places in which the Self is represented in order to be reasonably understood by the readers. Moreover, whether the fact that the Self embodied by the two heroes corresponds to the personality of the two authors or not is not a matter of interest here: as mentioned before, the goal of this research lies in the grasping of similarities between the two heroes' Self regardless of their apparent cultural difference.

As a premise to the next methodological clarifications, let us see the aforementioned hypergoods as moral and emotional concerns affecting the narrative life of Gilles and Kensaku, in the shape of themes such as love, solitude, and so forth. In addition, according to Taylor's words, the analysis will lead the finding out of a multiplicity of them, as a single Self is meant to be constituted by several hypergoods.

Thus, by reading the following section, one should be aware that in this dissertation the idea of Self is based on Taylor's theory which sees the self as a conglomerate of moral concerns which emerge from our arbitrary vision on what is 'good': such a morality is generated according to our own individuality together with our cultural heritage, and is visible both on ordinary actions (the 'goods') and even upon vast worldviews (the 'hypergoods'). Such concepts need now to be converted into literary elements.

B) Methodological notions and development

As shown before, the notion of hypergood stands for the theoretical basis upon which to construct the methodological development of the comparison. The key element which allows to do so lies in its conversion into the literary notion of 'theme', here taken from Greimas and Courtés (1979): 'a theme may be defined as a dissemination, along a narrative program,¹ of values' (345). The wide scope of a theme lies in the word 'dissemination' which entails that a theme is a composite

¹ Greimas and Courtés use the term 'narrative program' in order to refer to the framework of steps that lead the narration to its conclusion. For further details, see Greimas and Courtés (1979).

and pervasive entity, thus being found in several parts of a single endeavour. The composition of such entity is made by the combination of multiple 'figures'. A figure is a 'minimal unit' (Greimas and Courtés 1979, 120) which acquires narrative prominence only if associated to other figures of similar nature. Their association produces the theme, which stands for a widely general value which can be found in all the figures constituting it. Greimas and Courtés provide the following efficient instance in order to clarify this point: 'For instance, the theme of the "sacred" can be taken up by several figures, such as those of the "priest", the "sacristan", or the "beadle" '(117). Needless to say, the semiotic nature of such postulates makes the notions of 'figure' and 'theme' much flexible as they can be applied to any kind of narrative element (humans, things, abstract concepts, and so forth).

The hierarchic relation between figures and themes clearly recalls the one between goods and hypergoods. For instance, whereas a single good may be incorporated within a single action, like a couple going out on a date, the hypergood of 'love' could affect the whole life of a single Self through its manifestation within several single goods related to its own essence. Thus, through the textual analysis of *Gilles* and *A Dark Night's Passing*, I am going to demonstrate that both Gilles and Kensaku are affected by a number of goods/figures that combine into identical themes/hypergoods, giving shape to two similar selves despite their enormously different cultural roots.

Although the abstract surface of these concepts, greimasian semiotics provide practical tools in order to analyse narrative themes through the association of multiple figures, a process which is called 'thematization' (*Ibidem*, 344) that traces the figures' combination mentioned before through the shape of a graph that will be displayed at the end of the analysis. Moreover, the greimasian studies on thematization have been recently innovated, that is why one should turn to more recent methodological research such as those conducted by Panosetti (2015), who developed a specific feature of the thematization process. She interpreted similar statements of Greimas and Eco who underlined that by using a certain figure, the author is (even if accidentally) recalling all of its semantic implications. For instance, Greimas (1983) stated that in a fictional work, if a character works as fisherman, such role necessarily implies all the features of fishery itself (the job's features, the quietness, the sea/lake/river...) even though they are not mentioned. Panosetti understood that such a statement is based on the fact that within a single feature, a wider world of meaning lies, and within a novel a single figure can be linked to other ones (2015, 145-146) when seen from the wider perspective postulated by Greimas. For instance, the element of quietness embodied by the figure of the fisherman could be embodied by the sight of a silent landscape at dawn, and by many others.

Whether the quietness is found at the core of a big number of figures, it will automatically be meant to stand for one of that novel's themes.

This kind of thematization will be conducted on the two selected works, and more specifically on the themes (which, as stated before, are to be seen as literary projections of Taylor's hypergoods) related to the gaining process of self-awareness experienced by the two respective heroes, Gilles and Kensaku. It is also important to remind that such a process is meant to represent a description of their respective Self as one has adopted Taylor's notion according to which the Self is constructed upon the combination of moral concerns about one's worldview (the 'hypergood').

The methodological process of analysis will be conducted on both the two novels as follows: 1) contextualization of a certain theme through clarifications on the plot; 2) quotation of passages (figures) that entail such theme; 3) demonstration that such themes affects the heroes of both the novel in order to highlight their Self's similarities.

C) Context and Justification: Why Gilles and A Dark Night's Passing?

There is a number of reasons to compare these two endeavours instead of others, yet one should be aware of the bigger research aim this comparison is part of, which has been stated at the very beginning of this paper: to produce a global notion of Self applicable to the biggest possible amount of literary works no matter their cultural distance. This entails that, in order to accomplish such a goal, there is an enormous number of literary comparisons yet to be conducted even after this analysis has been completed. This means that there cannot be a unique reason to compare *Gilles* and *A Dark Night's Passing* avoiding the involvement of any other endeavour within this research: this comparison only stands for a first attempt to be made in order to accomplish a wider goal of research.

Given this premise, one should turn to the specific reasons to compare Gilles and Kensaku's Self. The main ones are summarised below:

1) Structure → The two selected novels are structurally oriented toward the protagonists' gaining of self-awareness, which could be defined as a sort of personal catharsis they experience once having found the best way to live according to their individuality. In more concrete terms: these endeavours do not show any intrigue, mystery, or clear challenge that the characters face in order to accomplish a certain 'mission' other than the gaining of the purest inner peace before dying. This mainly structural similarity between them remains up to the end of the novels, when the two heroes die after having accomplished their own Self-Catharsis (which is itself the last theme

surveyed into the analysis). Moreover, Gilles and Kensaku start their narrative life at a point in time in which they are both adults yet still struggle to find satisfaction within the human contexts they live. For instance, they have both love issues as they struggle to find a woman they truly love; they both detach themselves from their respective social environments (Gilles from Parisian political circles and Kensaku from his traditionalistic family); they experience solitude as a direct consequence of their marginalisation. These three elements (constituting three themes) schematize their personal, intimate journey, and the fact that these elements are the same in both the novels gives them a similar structurization. Summarizing: the beginning and the end of *Gilles* and *A Dark Night's Passing* are thematically identical when seen from heroes' perspective; the plot development is constituted by the same themes.

2) Stylistic features→ By surveying the way in which *Gilles* and *A Dark Night's Passing* are centred on the heroes' Self, one cannot but be surprised by the fact that both are written in the third person, which usually produces a more detached view on the characters than the first-person narration. Even though the third person is the norm for fiction, novels centred on the heroes' Self are usually written in the first person (a number of instances are mentioned below). It implies a harder analytical effort, as pointing out the leading subjectivity of the hero in the narrative must be also accomplished through considerations on the prose. One is not arguing the general choice of writing a novel mainly regarding the intimacy of the heroes through the third-person narration: what is striking is that novels belonging to utterly different literary legacies share such a narrative feature which is at least to be considered unusual. Indeed, from a French and Japanese perspective, most of the authors focused on the self-depiction of the hero during the first half of the twentieth century adopted the first-person narration. Among the most known French endeavours of that time surrounding these topics from a first-person perspective we could mention *Voyage Au Bout de la Nuit* (1932) by Louis Ferdinand Céline and *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (1927) by Marcel Proust; among the Japanese we could name *Futon* (1907) by Tayama Katai and *Omedetaki hito* (1911) by Mushanokōji Saneatsu, both recognized as the founding works of the Japanese I-Novel (Suzuki 1996, 94). Shiga Naoya himself wrote all his I-Novels in the first person except for *A Dark Night's Passing*. All these major works share the theme of the hero's self-development and intimate concerns as narrative core, thus the choice to let the hero correspond to the narrator seems more consistent in regards of the subjective matter that the story presents as it is mainly driven by the hero/narrator's feelings, choices, ideas, and all the moral concerns surrounding the Self.

Such a point is worth being developed as while the third-person narration usually produces a narration dominated by the authorial discourse (thus alienating the subjectivity stated before), as explained by Bakhtin (1929), both *A Dark Night's Passing* and *Gilles* embody a wide use of the so-called 'free reported speech', a technique through which the narrator's voice syntactically reports the hero's words or thoughts, yet the semantical effect produced does not give such a clear distinction between narrator and hero. This kind of third-person narration helps to produce a text which directly depicts the hero's personality avoiding the objectifying filter of the external narrator. Indeed, if we look at these passages, we will find certain sentences which are syntactically expressed by the narrator's voice, yet semantically by the heroes themselves.

A Dark Night's Passing

'As his work faltered he began to suffer from the monotony of his life. Every day was the same. The only thing that changed was the weather. He had made a calendar out of one of his lined writing sheets and had stuck it on the wall. [...]. But with the onset of his general feeling of malaise, the act of crossing out the date began to seem too symbolic of another day truly wasted' (125).

Gilles

'Gilles' medical treatment was now coming to an end and he should have made a decision. Should he have himself sent back to the regimental depot, and then to the war front? [...] Now he had come back to life. Perhaps it was happening as the powerful mirages of the social life were hiding from mankind the final horizons of nature and death? No, this ambitious man was not aiming for the common objects of ambitions' (79).

It is clear the two passages show a meaningfully different manner to implement the free reported speech, also due to the wide difference between the two original languages. Indeed, as stated by Fowler (1988), Japanese language shows a less clear distinction between the third and the first person if compared with French, for two reasons: the personal pronouns are often omitted; certain pronouns can be used both to refer to the third and the first person² (as *jibun* 自分), which Shiga widely uses within his works. However, this does not imply that these features are peculiar to works written in Japanese alone. Indeed, besides *Gilles*, even Flaubert adopts the free reported speech in several passages of *L'Éducation Sentimentale*.³ Within the abovementioned passages we can see how this effect of textual subjectivity can be produced in French through the form of the

² Although French language has a similar pronoun (*on*), it is mainly used to mean 'we'. Differently, *jibun* can only refer to one single Self.

³ For instance: 'Certainly it had occurred some kind of difficulty, and she suffered because of that. But what a joy was about to come!' (316).

rhetoric question, which is syntactically asked by the narrator to the hero yet perceived as an inner thought the hero produces within himself.

In any case, in Japanese the free reported speech is surprisingly easy to be seen because the frequent omission of the subject leaves the space for producing an entire sentence whose authorial reference is never explicitly revealed. Indeed, the frequent omission of the subject 'he' referring to Kensaku gives an effect of subjectivity which is not prevented by the syntactical presence of an external narrator. Yet such a semantical effect cannot be grasped through the English translation. For instance, let us look at the passage below. Kensaku has just found out he was born from the love affair between his mother and grandfather from father's hand.

自分のような運命で生まれた人間も決して少なくないに違いない。 [...] (200)

(There must be many others being born within his same circumstances, he thought.)

The original passage does not include the verb 'to think' nor the proverb 'he'. Moreover, the word *jibun* 自分 does not stand for a grammatical subject, as its adjective essence is proved by its marking particle *no* の. In other words: the original passage is understood to be expressed by Kensaku as the word *jibun* is clearly referred to him, and not to the narrator. The usual omission of verbal and nominal references to the subject and his actions stands for a common way through which the Japanese prose applies the concept of 'free reported speech'. Yet, at the same time, the narrative perspective of a novel needs to be seen in its comprehensiveness, too, and the overall way to conduct the narration of *A Dark Night's Passing* is undoubtedly in third person. The subsequent sentence, indeed, starts with 'Kensaku...' suspending the free reported speech. Thus, one can state that, even though it is accomplished through two different free reported speeches (the rhetoric question in Gilles and the proverbial-verbal omission in *A Dark Night's Passing*), both the narrations show a high degree of subjectivity although their third person standpoint.

Such narrative techniques must not be seen as utterly pervasive within the selected novels, as they do not stand for the sole tool developed in order to centralize the two heroes' subjectivity within the third-person narration. Indeed, a broad and less theoretical pattern used for such an effect of subjectivity is the continuous centrality of the two heroes together with the consequent lack of psychological depth of the secondary characters. The reader never gains, for instance, a detailed depictive account of Myriam (Gilles' 'first love') apart from the considerations of Gilles himself; likewise, it is only through the judgements of Kensaku that we gain a deeper idea on the personality of his brother Nobuyuki or of his grandfather's mistress Oei. These mainly stylistic

features here represent an important reason for comparing these two novels, as they are different in their linguistic realization yet produce the same effect of subjectivity and self-centrality of the heroes.

3) Total lack of previous comparisons between the works and their authors → Given the similarities introduced before, one could have thought that this dissertation is not the first comparison between *Gilles* and *A Dark Night's Passing*. Instead, no trace of previous comparisons has been found, not even between the two authors. Those familiar with Japanese narratives are surely aware of the relatively low number of comparisons of such works with the European ones, probably due to the small number of literary scholars who developed much expertise on the field. Moreover, the reputation of Shiga and Drieu can be seen as nearly opposite when they are placed within their historical context. Indeed, whereas Shiga in Japan used to be so revered that 'no more writer was more idolized than Shiga' (Keene 1998), Drieu La Rochelle has been badly labelled because of his 'unpopular political position' which 'has unfavourably influenced everyone in his judgement both of the man and of his work' (Grover 1958). Thus, the two authors' reputation is quintessentially opposite instead of the striking similarities between their two oeuvres compared in this dissertation. Moreover, the critical reading of their body of works itself seems to have been profoundly affected by their reputation as individuals. Although quite unknown to most of the Western literary scholarships, Shiga had enormous influence on modern Japanese literature, and his work is in continual need of re-evaluation. According to most Japanologists, he is mostly known as the writer who brought the I-Novel genre to its apex (Suzuki 1996, 93), which is itself seen as the most striking and affecting form of modern Japanese literature. Indeed, Shiga was generally called "the god of the novel" (*shōsetsu no kamisama*) (Guo 2014, 4). The genre became an object of academic interest in the West by the late 1970s, yet scholars merely relied on the I-Novel paradigm, as in Hijiya-Kirschner (1981), Fowler (1988), and Suzuki (1996). They all focused on the urgency of giving a literary definition to the Japanese I-Novel stream, yet they did not grasp the striking similarities between it and several European works, including *Gilles*.⁴ This dissertation's comparison stands for an instance of such virtual communication between Shiga and Drieu through their *magnus opus*.

⁴ Even though this dissertation itself consists of a link between Shiga and European literature in a certain sense, such a topic would deserve to be developed through further research.

Differently, the attention on Drieu's body of works has proved far poorer, probably because of his political issues mentioned before. I am referring to his adhesion to collaborationism since the years before World War II. However, after having detached his literary career from such biographical aspects, a small number of scholars has recognized that he is among the most influent French writers of twentieth century (Cattabiani 2017). Especially, and similarly to the criticism on Shiga, the centrality given to the hero's self-depiction and private life is said to be one of the most distinguishing features of Drieu's prose (Leal 1985). As stated by Leal (1982), in Drieu's major works there are often 'two main concerns: the nature of the self and the decadence of society'. The first concern is naturally what is being analysed here into *Gilles* in order to conduct the comparison with *A Dark Night's Passing*. These considerations should lead the reader to be aware that the focus on the hero's Self does not only belong to *Gilles* and *A Dark Night's Passing*: it can be seen as a peculiarity of both the authors' body of works. Drieu is the author of works such as *Le Feu Follet* (1931), *L'homme à Cheval* (1943), whose focus on the hero's Self proves quite evident after a first reading. On the other hand, Shiga's reputation as the master of Japanese I-Novel was supported by novels and tales like *Ōtsu Junkichi* (1912), *Reconciliation* (1917), and *At Kinasaki* (1917), in which the entire narration merely depicts the hero's emotional struggles. However, given their widely different reputation in their respective countries and literary circles, from now on one must only focus on the similarities found on the two selected novels, as a comparison on their complete body of works would entail further difficulties (besides the consequential need to conduct a far wider research) because of the number of oeuvres involved and also because of the unavoidable involvement of the writers' biographical highlights in that case.⁵ Moreover, as *Gilles* and *A Dark Night's Passing* and the two authors' prose have never been compared before, one should first base his own comparison on selected textual highlights (in this case, the themes through the support of the semiotic tools mentioned before. Their practical use will be demonstrated from the very beginning of the analysis.

⁵ This would be mandatory as the author himself would represent the reason for having chosen that body of works: they would be analysed together right because they were all written from the same author.

Analysis

The survey on the common themes of *Gilles* and *A Dark Night's Passing* aims to demonstrate the two heroes are affected by the same hypergoods/themes throughout their life. As mentioned before, Charles Taylor's notion of Self (a composite entity shaped by the moral and emotional concerns that we encounter and adopt throughout our lifetime) led us to see its textual transposition as a group of themes (according to the definition given by Greimas and Courtés). In order to accomplish this dissertation's aim in accordance with such theoretical framework, the analysis will consist of several chapters dedicated to the delineation of a single theme, then a concluding one where the results will be displayed through a thematic map.

Love

Figures concerning the theme of love unquestionably predominate several parts of the novels, especially the first two of each. However, the pervasiveness of this theme extends itself also to the other sections.

Let us start from *Gilles*. The first section, called 'The License', starts as Gilles comes back to Paris after having fought to the front as soldier of the French army. One of his initial thoughts regards his will to spend the night with a woman, hopefully a prostitute. Thus, he walks around the city with his friend Bénédicte and find a couple of women willing to spend the night with them: 'Gilles wanted the fat one, but she looked like she was only desiring to be with Bénédicte. [...] After all, Gilles interpreted the fat woman's expression as an invite for him to be nicer towards her other friend. So he kissed her. And she conceded him a skilled and reticent mouth' (16-17). Their affair lasts one single night. From chapter two, the section mainly recounts the love story Gilles entertains with Myriam, a Jewish and rich woman that he immediately identifies as the opportunity to gain financial integrity without needing to find a job, because of her rich heritage.⁶ Their marriage and Gilles' subsequent regrets, because he is still willing to hang out with Parisian prostitutes and women randomly met at bars, undoubtedly constitute the structural core of 'The License', for such a conflict between marriage and libertinage starts from the very beginning of the novel. Gilles firstly meets Myriam by case, when he visits her father, Mr. Falkenberg, in order to ask him for financial aid. Since the very beginning of their relationship, Gilles is more attracted by the financial resources of

⁶ In the following passage, the narrator explicitly states that Gilles gives more importance to Myriam's richness instead of her beauty: 'He used to spend long hours together with Myriam. [...] And the things she represented for him, the things she could offer him, had made him forget her body' (35).

Myriam's family rather than her. The narrator reports it as follows: 'After their first encounter, Gilles lived in deep enthusiasm in front of Myriam. He that had always despised and mocked the rich, now worshipped them because of her' (35). In chapter six, Gilles' selfishness towards the value of love causes the first breakup between them, that Myriam narrowly sees as caused by Gilles' willingness to go back to the front: 'As time went by, Myriam could not but notice the ongoing distance that Gilles had been posing between them. [...] She attributed a good reason to it: Gilles was missing the war' (58). However, Gilles' libertine attitude has a certain independence from the will to go back to the front, as he often shows a remarkable desire to hang out with prostitutes no matter where he is or what he is doing. That is the true reason for the distances that arises between him and Myriam. His favourite one in the first section is called 'the Austrian': 'Gilles used to like her [the Austrian] more than everyone else, even though the others [prostitutes] he met around the street before getting to her place always pushed him to stop and stay at their side' (55). Gilles' subsequent detachment cannot be overlooked by Myriam, who tries to take over control on their deteriorating marriage by declaring: 'We're divorcing in six months' (143) when the first section gets closer to its end. Gilles takes advantage of such a breakup in order to move to the front, where he meets another woman who's working as a nurse of the soldiers' lodgement: 'They laid in bed, trusting each other. When they came back to the real world, they were plenty of astonishment: they knew that their impetuous night of sex was only a beginning' (161). Gilles' new lover, Alice, entertains such an intense affair with him that Gilles completely forgets Myriam who, after threatening him of divorcing, feels regretful and wants to have him back to her place. She then visits him to his military lodgement, figuring out that he is already with another woman. In that case, Gilles avoids to lie, and candidly confess her: 'I am in love with another woman' (169).

A number of similar events constitute the framework of the first section, in which Gilles' adventures alternate themselves from the planning of the marriage with Myriam to the sexual intercourses with other women. The complete indecisiveness when it comes to understand which woman he loves the most animates most of Gilles' adventures in the first section. Also, his failure to remain married with Myriam (who finally decides to divorce and never changes her mind) let Gilles' love troubles extend to the other sections. The main character revealing Gilles' contradictive conception of love is Dora, an American rich woman he casually meets within an elevator. His first thoughts on her reflect his usual libertine attitude towards women: 'When Gilles had met Dora for the first time, he had suddenly had a clear impression. They had casually met at Biarritz into an elevator, and Gilles had told himself "Here's a woman much eager of men"' (222). However, as they

continue to see each other, a more profound feeling arouses. Since the first night spent with her, Gilles 'had felt that hope was still laying in his heart', and that 'the wide scepticism he had narrowly tried to accumulate throughout the years was opposite to what was happening [between him and Dora]' (223). Unfortunately, Gilles' Self will never gain full satisfaction from love, as it always constitutes a contradictive side of his life. However, the enormous amount of love affairs he entertains cannot be overlooked, and is therefore a key aspect of his personality. The following passage concerning the end of his affair with Dora explicitly reveals it:

'Gilles had believed, miraculously, definitely believed. He had believed in her, and through believing in her he had believed in himself, like it never happened before [...]. He had leaned on her with all his weight, but at the same time he thought she was leaning herself on him as well. [...]. Now Gilles did not believe in anything. He will have never lived like he had in that moment; his substantial core had been hit' (298).

Accordingly, several passages of *A Dark Night's Passing* mainly concern Kensaku's love issues. He apparently tries to get married, yet keeps hanging around the pleasure quarters of Tokyo while enjoying drinks and games with *geisha*, an environment not suitable to men needing emotional stability. In chapter two, he hangs out with his friends Tatsuoka and Sakaguchi at the Yoshiwara quarter (31), historically known for hosting *geisha* within various restaurants. Once having entered the first one, Kensaku sees a *geisha* called Tokiko and immediately feels attracted by her. While playing cards, 'Kensaku was acutely sensitive to her touch. Whenever she held his hand, he would find himself trying to gauge the pressure with extraordinary wariness' (34). This initial flirt repeats itself in several scenes of the first part. Sakaguchi, a usual costumer of *geisha* restaurants, continuously brings Kensaku with him, making him accidentally believe that such is the way to find a wife. Indeed, after a period in which 'Kensaku [...] constantly thought of Tokiko' (44), his 'feelings toward Tokiko underwent a remarkable change after his second meeting with her. [...] A part of him now wanted to push the relationship with her further' (54). However, Tokiko's continuous meetings with other customers finally push him to avoid meeting her again. Moreover, while Kensaku used to visit Tokiko, he had also tried to marry a friend called Aiko, who had been his friend since the primary school. 'He remembered how happy his brother had seemed when he had first told him of his desire to marry Aiko' (57). Though, not even this attempt ends up positively, as when 'he had gone one day to Aiko's house to speak to her mother. [...]. [...] she was at first shocked, then became pitifully nervous as Kensaku proceeded to explain the purpose of his visit'. Here one can grasp a first instance on how influential the traditional Japanese aristocratic family was on Kensaku's life, which will be furtherly argued in the next section. Afterwards, he entertains a number of encounters with

a *maiko*⁷ called Okayo, to whom he is introduced by a friend called Ogata, this latter having the same libertine attitude of Sakaguchi. As previously happened, Kensaku's attraction proves quite unstable and the affair with Okayo does not bring him to any kind of peace: 'His own feelings about her were somewhat ambivalent. He had found her attractive enough the first time he saw her, but she had a rough, almost coarse way about her that repelled him, though it had its attraction, too' (78). Closely to the end of the section, his fascination towards his house maid Oei also arises: 'As his life grew more anarchic, so did his mind, and his lewd fantasies about Oei became more and more uncontrolled' (101). The ongoing attraction of Kensaku towards Oei does not seem to be placed at the end of the first part just by case. Indeed, as Oei used to be the mistress of Kensaku's grandfather and is currently Kensaku's maid, her social role within the family makes Kensaku's attempt to have a love affair with her even more scandalous than his previous intercoursing with *geisha*. Thus, his intentions upon Oei can be seen as an apex of his deeper feelings' disorder, as pointed out by Starrs (1998, 93).

Differently from Gilles, Kensaku reaches a sort of peace concerning his love issues. Indeed, in the third section he manages to marry a woman from Kyoto, Naoko, after a long exchange of information on him led by his brother Nobuyuki and the members of Naoko's family. The fact that Kensaku's Self found a kind of inner peace surrounding love through marriage is explicitly mentioned by the narrator in the following passage at the end of the novel: 'Without saying anything Kensaku looked at her. His gaze was like a caress. She thought she had never seen such gentleness, such love, in anyone's eyes before' (407). It is interesting that the narrator switches the point of view focusing on Naoko's inwardness, while the perspective had almost always lied in Kensaku's eyes. Love, as something felt for another individual, is depicted in a narratively efficient way right because it is revealed that Naoko herself feels it for Kensaku.

It seems now remarkable that the heroes of *Gilles* and *A Dark Night Passing* start and continue their narrative life by being overwhelmed by unstable feelings for multiple women. The main difference lies in the end of such struggles: while Gilles never manage his unstable feelings, Kensaku does it through marrying Naoko whom he really loves. Apart from this point, their approach remains strikingly similar, as both try to fill this need for love and intercoursing by hanging around with prostitutes or *geisha*. Even though the latter is not necessarily meant to have sexual

⁷ The word *maiko* 舞子 indicates an aspiring *geisha* who is undertaking her apprenticeship.

intercourses with customers (and Kensaku himself barely does so), the attitude of Kensaku whenever he is with them is explicitly sexually driven.

Now, one should summarize the major figures of the quoted passages that gives shape to the theme of love. In this case, one should choose the women together with Gilles and Kensaku tried to have an affair, even though they can also be seen as characters. There are two main reasons that support such an analytical choice: 1) even though they are textually meant to be characters, the narrator never depicts their inner thoughts nor they constitute anything more than being desired by Kensaku and Gilles. One could not treat them as figures whether their perspective or their actions led the narration. 2) Thanks to its surprising adaptability to the given text, greimasian semiotics let the scholar treat narrative elements according to his own approach, which means that characters can be treated both as figures and as actors in different cases, according to the scholar's analytical aim and to their narrative peculiarities. Indeed, one should add to the scheme also all the abstract figures that characterize the quoted passages, such as 'attraction'.

Furthermore, the fact of naming the hypergood/theme 'love' is quite arbitrary: one could call it in many other ways, though the word 'love' entails the necessary comprehensiveness that a theme should have in order to be incorporated within multiple figures.

Thus, given the theoretical basis, the women with whom Kensaku and Gilles entertain love affairs stand for 'figures' (in semiotic terms) and for 'goods' (in Taylor's terms). 'Love' is to be seen as the main theme affecting Kensaku and Gilles throughout these passages; this does not mean that different parts do not include references to this theme: its pervasiveness could be furtherly proved, yet here one has made a selection of the most remarkable ones. This kind of consideration is to be applied on all the following themes, too.

Marginalisation

While the previous thematization has showed a certain integrity in narrative terms (because the love affairs experienced by Gilles and Kensaku are of similar nature), the second theme comes out from apparently different narrative events. However, even in this case their tie in semantical terms remains quite strong because of the similar essence of the phenomena influencing them. I am referring to a hypergood I have named 'marginalisation' which can be generally seen as the detaching effect which the respective social environment causes to Gilles and Kensaku. Whereas

the former starts being reluctantly involved in political tumults led by a group of rebels called 'Revolt' that detach themselves from mainstream politics, the latter undergoes familiar issues which reveal the roots of his bad relationship with his parents and relatives. Likewise, also Gilles' relationship with his friends and with the Parisian political circles is also conflictual. This means that at the base of both the second parts stands the self-detachment Gilles and Kensaku experience within their respective social environments. However, because that environment is familiar for Kensaku and more social or political for Gilles, the theme of 'marginalisation' is to be seen as acquiring both familiar and social value, depending of one of the two heroes one is considering. Thus, the similarities between social and familiar marginalisation should be deepened through philosophical and historical considerations upon the social role of the traditional Japanese family in the early twentieth century together with Parisian political circles, yet it would need another kind of research in order to be supported.

The second part of *A Dark Night's Passing* opens with the lonely trip Kensaku experiences around Onomichi, a small town on the south-eastern coast of Japan. There, he attempts to marry Oei by sending her a letter. His elder brother, Nobuyuki, replies on her behalf, symbolizing the beginning of the aforementioned social/familiar issues which stand for a consequence of Kensaku's abrupt idea to try to marry his maid. Nobuyuki writes: 'I'll tell you here and now that she will not accept your proposal. She showed me your letter to her. [...] She read it, then immediately said that it wouldn't do' (142). This event looks like it is more related to the theme of love, yet its consequences are quite different. Indeed, in Nobuyuki's letter, Kensaku discovers a secret held by his own family which suddenly shed light on his knowledge of himself:

'You are the child of your mother and the man you knew as your grandfather, the man you went to live with as a boy after our mother died. [...]. When mother was pregnant, grandfather (your real father) and grandmother wanted her to have an abortion [...]. When I first heard about the terrible circumstances of your birth, the curse under which you were born, I was shocked and saddened' (144).

Apart from the shocking effect this news has on Kensaku, its social implications also arise:

'I need not tell you that it was because of your birth that Aiko's family rejected you. Her mother sympathized with you; but her sympathy was not enough to make her your ally. What more can we expect of people like that, to whom convention is everything?'

The last sentence of Nobuyuki reveals the social damage that Kensaku's birth circumstances had on his marriage aspirations. This chapter is of narratively key importance in order to understand

that such unfortunate events constitute Kensaku's social and familiar detachment, as the narrator reveals:

'He [Kensaku] felt as if Oei, Nobuyuki, Sakiko, Taeko – indeed everybody – had moved far, far away from him; he could see their figures, but they were tiny, like figures seen from the wrong end of a telescope. It was a truly lonely feeling, [...]. (150)'

This passage explicitly reveals Kensaku's feeling of familiar/social exclusion, which extends also to the successive chapters, where Kensaku's father (the 'official' but not the 'real' one) comes to know of his proposal to Oei. And his rage strongly stands for Kensaku's familiar struggles as he is the patriarch of his family. In a new letter, Nobuyuki reports his father's will:

'So long as you [Kensaku] are in Onomichi, there seems to be no reason why you should maintain a house in Tokyo. Besides, Oei, her situation being what it is, can have no expectation of remaining with you forever. (153)'

In a quite indirect yet effective way, Nobuyuki reveals that Oei must leave Kensaku's house in Tokyo before he goes back there, because of Kensaku's attempt to marry her.

Kensaku's 'curse' (so his birth circumstances are often defined by Nobuyuki) affects multiple events of the novel, even after his return to Tokyo. While he is having dinner with Nobuyuki and Oei, they are making comments on his physical conditions after the trip to Onomichi. Oei accidentally says: 'I thought for a moment it was his grandfather' (166) and deeply offends Kensaku, who is 'scarcely able to hide his anger at her insensitivity' (166). Moreover, Oei's distasteful comment leads Kensaku to a new step of awareness surrounding his family:

'He [Kensaku] became conscious of a new, complicated emotion arising within himself. From the time he was six, when he had first encountered his grandfather, the nasty first impression of him had remained. Not once had he felt a trace of love for him; always he had felt as though they were strangers, [...]. (166)'

Even after having discovered that his real father is his grandfather, Kensaku cannot but experience the familiar marginalisation he was unconsciously undergoing far before discovering the reasons for it.

As demonstrated before, these events can be naturally defined as 'familiar issues', and also the detaching effect they have on Kensaku's mood is textually proved. However, the reader can grasp the importance of familiar relations for Kensaku also when they have opposite effects on him. For instance, in the third section, when he has just moved to Kyoto and is willing to definitely find a wife, he starts organising all the formal meetings with the potential wife's family which used to be

mandatory in early twentieth century Japan. There, he finally gains the social acceptance he was missing since the very beginning of the novel, and which was dramatically extirpated after the revealing of his birth circumstances. Kensaku and Ishimoto (a friend who's managing all the necessary things in order to let Kensaku marry a young Kyoto woman) receive a letter from the perspective wife's uncle, Mr. S, who has great importance regarding the marriage arrangements. Mr. S, having just been said about Kensaku's birth, states as follows: 'Whether that is bad or not depends on the kind of person he is; if he himself has not allowed it to affect him adversely, then it is of no significance to me' (233). This passage's importance lies in the fact that there is a direct reference to the relationship within Kensaku's familiar roots and his Self. The reader knows the big amount of sadness brought by the adulterine relationship between his mother and grandfather, that is why Mr. S's words are so meaningful to him that 'with great effort he [Kensaku] back the tears that threatened to fill his eyes' (233).

Now, one can state Kensaku's marginalisation from his family is a distinct feature of his personality, which shapes his emotions and, most importantly, his own perception of himself. Several other episodes remark this point, and Mr S's consideration remains the sole instance in which Kensaku feels socially accepted integrally. Concluding, also Morrison (2009) has pointed out that Kensaku's marginalised conditions are due to his birth circumstances: 'Kensaku is born out of line, and is therefore out of place in his relations with his family [...]' (78).

Gilles' marginalisation also lies in his familiar roots, even though it extends to the Parisian political circles. Orphan of unknown origins, Gilles was raised by Carentan, an old man who, after Gilles was sent to war, moved to Normandie and lived there closed to the sea with his servant. While Kensaku is surrounded by relatives throughout most of the story, Gilles remains alone, and he visits Carentan only once. In that case, Carentan pushes him to feel a certain kind of marginalisation because of his relationship with Myriam. She comes from a Jewish family, and Carentan is anti-Semitic because for him the Jews 'quintessentially represent the modern world, which I hate' (119) and cannot approve such marriage. For Gilles, such disapproval stands for a painful marginalisation right because he sees Carentan as his ultimate mentor. This passage explicitly shows the imagery of leadership Gilles used to project on Carentan when a child: 'Yes, that was Carentan, the mysterious and familiar genius of his [Gilles'] entire life, the man who had grown him. Gilles was happy to have stopped feeling that savage fear overwhelming him, throughout the years before the war, against the vassalage to his tutor' (109). However, as Carentan only occupies few chapters of the entire

work, the theme of marginalisation must have further implications in order to be seen as ‘major’ within the depiction of Gilles’ Self. Indeed, it becomes a sort of attitude Gilles undertake whenever he tries to collocate himself within Parisian political circles. Thanks to Myriam’s connections with the Ministry of the Defense, Gilles starts working there as an employee and hence gets introduced to its main political circles. The ongoing intrigues between the president of the republic’s family and some of their acquaintances let him see the moral corruption which has dramatically poisoned French political future. As a reaction, he partially takes part to some political ‘demonstrations’ of a group of rebels called ‘Revolt’, led by a certain Cael: they are essentially a group of marginalised extremists who only try to bring disorder. For instance, in the middle of the second section they go to an event where an old aristocratic woman, holding the medal to the Legion of Honour, is presenting Boniface, a revered poet who is about to read some of his writings. From the rebels’ perspective, they embody the establishment, the Parisian high society from which they voluntarily marginalised. When she starts making her speech saying: ‘Boniface is the purest and most secret glory of France...’, Gilles interrupts her: ‘your haemorrhoids, old fat whore, are a secret glory’ (247) automatically setting himself against the ‘good people’ that were sitting there, who ‘terrified, turned pale’ (247). As furtherly proven below, Gilles’ marginalisation has a fundamental difference with Kensaku’s: the former intentionally does it. However, as shown in the next analytical section, marginalisation will be narratively associated to a path of solitude, undertaken by both of them despite the essential difference of these two kinds of marginalisation (unintentional for Kensaku and intentional for Gilles). Moreover, like the hypergood of love, not even marginalisation drives Gilles to personal satisfaction: the group of rebels fails to become a true alternative to mainstream society. They stop organising tumults when their most scandalous member, Paul Morel, son of the president of the republic, commits suicide after having been tempted by them to try to kill his father. The pression he feels for being forced to do such a thing makes him go mad, and instead of simply renouncing, he shoots himself. From this event, Gilles understands his political project of marginalisation has failed: ‘He had vaguely hoped, sometimes, that Cael, Galant and the others would manage to cause some great catastrophe. And now all that miserable excitement had found the symbol of its own abortion in Paul’s crisis: all that such a gang could produce was a fact like that, to be reported on a newspaper’ (348).

Now, one can state Gilles’ marginalisation mainly consists of opposing the political circles he was introduced by Myriam. He does it joining the rebels gang ‘Revolt’ together with he participates into acts of verbal violence and attempted tumults. However, the evanescent nature of

such political marginalisation does not create any sort of catharsis within Gilles' Self. Far different is Kensaku's sense of marginalisation, as it mainly consists of the exclusion his family applies on him because of his unfortunate birth circumstances, instead of the political marginalisation intentionally carried out by Gilles. Thus, although the hypergood of marginalisation lies in both their Self, its nature widely differs if compared according to their personality.

Concluding, in this case one should include both the concrete and abstract elements causing marginalisation to Gilles and Kensaku: what is shared by both is certainly the figure of birth because of their unusual birth circumstances; for Kensaku, the figures of his grandfather, of the letter in which he discovers his 'curse', and his deep sense of exclusion (that proves clear because of the profound happiness he feels when his prospective wife's uncle states he does not care about his familiar roots) represent the main figures constituting his theme of marginalisation. Moreover, the figure of Oei cannot but be included both in the composition of love and of marginalisation, thus becoming an across-the-board element.⁸ For Gilles, Carentan is certainly an important figure that makes him feel marginalisation given that he refuses Gilles' marriage with a Jew; the group Revolt stands for his attempt to marginalise himself from the Parisian political circles he was introduced by Myriam; 'Paul Morel' is also relevant because, with his suicide, he opens Gilles' eyes about the evanescence of his anti-establishment activities.

Solitude

The theme of solitude will seem widely linked to the theme of marginalisation, especially in the shape of this latter's consequence. However, if one turns to the two novels' plot development and analyse them from a structural perspective, this relation will not prove systematic. Indeed, Kensaku and Gilles' experience of marginalisation often merely accompanies the sense of solitude that overwhelms them, which means that sometimes marginalisation causes them solitude, and some other times the two heroes find themselves alone for other reasons not necessarily linked to marginalisation itself. Again, the heroes' self-centrality of the two works makes a cause-effect based structural analysis of their plots quite hard. Such similarity should be surveyed through further research, as the thematic analysis does not include such considerations.

⁸ A figure that is included within the composition of multiple themes is not unusual, as shown by Panosetti's (2015, 146) graph.

The solitude Kensaku experiences soon proves to be a distinctive part of his Self because he often tries to isolate himself from his relatives and his acquaintances. One of the most meaningful attempts he carries out in order to contemplate his own loneliness lies at the end of the first part and at the beginning of the second one, when he suddenly decides to leave Kyoto in order to make a trip to Onomichi. There, the fact that his perception of solitude is so profound that it overcomes the notion of 'good' and 'evil' becomes evident. Throughout the ship trip from Tokyo to Onomichi, he wakes up in the middle of the night. The darkness embraces him while he is standing alone on the prow: 'He alone stood face to face with nature, as mankind's chosen representative. But together with this exaggerated sense of self-importance came the helpless feeling that he was about to be swallowed up by the great darkness around him' (115). Such is the contradictory feelings through which solitude overwhelms Kensaku. He is certainly attracted by it, even though sometimes it is also oppressive, like after the first days spent at Onomichi, during which 'Every day was the same. [...]. Having come away to be alone, he [Kensaku] was now finding his isolation unbearable' (125). On the other hand, solitude also gives him a great sense of self-empowering. It happens when Kensaku sails with a touristic boat from Onomichi and entertains a round trip. There, he joins a group of tourists and locals together with he chats a little. When he decides to be alone again, his imagination enriches his self-awareness:

'Kensaku moved away from the group and went astern. [...]. There was a mountain on this side of the one the purser pointed at which seemed to Kensaku to have a much greater resemblance to an elephant's head.

The elephant, which has until now only shown its head, suddenly rises out of the ground. The people are thrown into a panic. Will this monster destroy all mankind, or will they find a way to destroy it? [...].

Before he knew it, Kensaku himself had become the elephant, excitedly preparing for his one-man war against the world at large' (133).

This passage certainly entails both elements of marginalisation (because he puts himself against all humanity) and of solitude, yet one should include it into the theme of solitude as this imaginative scene takes place right because Kensaku decides to remain alone while contemplating the landscape at night. However, one shall also include the figure of 'war' within the composition of the theme of marginalisation, as Kensaku refers to it as a metaphor which detaches him against everybody else.

The thematic focus on solitude of this episode is furtherly strengthened by a dialogue between Kensaku and another passenger soon after having imagined to be a lonely elephant-like monster fighting against the whole world. The passenger asks: “Are you going to Kotohira Shrine?” “Yes.” “It must be lonely, travelling all alone.” “Yes.” (134). Despite the apparently lack of psychological depth, Shiga’s literature is often characterized by the depiction of simple scenes which subtly entail deeper meanings.⁹ Sometimes, his characters do it also through scandalous scene which could slightly offend certain readers. It is also the case of Kensaku at the end of the second section, in which he expresses his need to set free from his solitude shaking the chest of a *geisha* together with he spends the night. The scene would remind of an attempted sexual harassment if it was not about a *geisha* (who used to be paid in order to offer such ‘services’), though within the last sentence the reader can grasp that the semantic core of such episode lies in Kensaku’s sense of loneliness.

‘Yet when he reached out and held her round, heavy breast he was filled with an indefinable sense of comfort and satisfaction. It was as though he had touched something very precious. [...]. It was for him somehow a symbol of all that was precious to him, of whatever it was that promised to fill the emptiness inside him’ (197).

Solitude’s thematic relevance can finally be determined because of the vastness of its shapes: it is fearful when he stands alone into the darkness; it is imaginative as he daydreams to be an elephant-like monster fighting against the whole world; it is physical as the last passage mentioned in this section shows his need for physical contact in order to ‘fulfil’ himself.

The relevance of solitude in the depiction of Gilles’ Self is also unquestionable. There is an enormous amount of passages in which he reflects on the fact that he is often aiming for being alone, as he feels solitude is his most familiar state of mind. Like Kensaku’s spiritual closeness to solitude, Gilles’ approach to it generates images in which he sees himself as something embodying solitude both in physical and intellectual ways:

‘He often happened to stop in the middle of a street, of a room, willing to listen. To listen to what? Everything. He saw himself a hermit: simple, stealthy, loner, going through the forest with invisible steps, and halting to grasp every noise, every mystery, every fulfilment’ (79).

⁹ For instance, in one of his major novels called *Wakai* (Reconciliation, 1917) the reader is introduced to the hero’s bad relationship with his father through a quick phone call in which the hero asks his mother whether father is home, and to her affirmative reply he just cut the call and refuses to visit her. The reader will understand the deeper meaning of such scene through further episodes of similar nature.

As already shown in this passage, solitude is perhaps the theme through which Kensaku and Gilles mostly resemble themselves, especially regarding the spiritual and intellectual stimulus that solitude produces within them. This means that in this case the comparative pertinence of the two heroes' Self reaches a further step, in which they not only share the experience of the same hypergood/theme, but they are also characterized by it in the same manner. As mentioned before, one is referring to their thoughts on the place in the world they feel they are occupying, or that they would like to occupy. They both reflect on their own meaning of life and on their instinctive aspiration when they find themselves alone.

However, while Kensaku's experience of solitude shows marginalisation as closest theme, for Gilles solitude stands also together with love. Indeed, let us turn to a passage of the first section in which he first reflects on his own thoughts on Paris, the city that has welcomed him back after the First World War: 'He did not know anybody in Paris, and he did not even need to. Lover of both solitude and of women, he looked like he was mostly attracted to the women who did not bother his solitude' (56). The reader can grasp both the theme of love (surveyed before) and of solitude, depicting together Gilles' basic attitude. Besides the insightful considerations on himself, the reader can prove Gilles' chosen state of solitude even by his considerations on the relationship with him and the rest of mankind (as partially mentioned in the last passage where he underlines the need for him to date women who do not bother his solitude). Indeed, in an ideal world, Gilles

'would have listened and watched mankind. He was its more actual and unactual witness, the most participating and absent. Keenly, he saw himself living within them, in any of their minimal trembling of the past and the future, and then suddenly he moved away from them, in order to perceive them as a single mass, as an enormous being alone in the universe going through seasons, growing up, getting old, dying, and then be born again to live a little bit less young' (80).

Gilles sees himself able to penetrate the other humans' inner reality, yet his imaginative apex can be reached only when he detaches himself from all of them and sees mankind as something he can observe while not being part of it. Here lies Gilles' choice to be alone, similar to Kensaku's feeling of ultimate abandonment and consequential empowering. This similarity accompanies them also through the end of their adventures, in which they accomplish a sort of self-catharsis. Indeed, it is not a case that both the two novels get closer to the end when the two heroes newly go away from home, try to marginalise themselves from the rest of society, stay alone, and finally manage to connect themselves with the roots of their Self. In this analysis' last section, the reader will find out that all the themes, love, marginalisation, and solitude can be found within the heroes'

accomplishment of their own Self-catharsis. Needless to say, this stands for a further prove that Kensaku and Gilles can be seen as two individuals whose personality is fundamentally shaped through those three elements.

Before moving to the last analytical section, let us summarize all the figures composing solitude. Gilles and Kensaku certainly share the empowering effect of solitude, as both show great self-confidence while remaining alone. For Kensaku, the figure of the elephant at war embodies his personal sense of this kind of power; the dialogue with the tourist is also an important figure: it helps Kensaku to realize that his condition of solitude is not only imaginative because also unknown people can see it in himself; and finally the breast-shaking scene is the key figure embodying the fact that for Kensaku solitude is also painful: through that scene it is proved that he needs to avoid it through other people's presence. The metaphor of the elephant is for Kensaku what the image of the hermit is for Gilles: this latter sees himself as an endless loner who observes mankind's birth and death. Indeed, mankind itself stands for another important figure of solitude for Gilles, as it is what he feels able to comprehensively observe when alone; finally, invisibility (in the sense of 'stealthy attitude') is the element that permits him to see and listen to every small happening of life, representing another relevant feature of his solitude.

Self-Catharsis

As one approaches this section, it is important to bear in mind that only in very few cases the feature of a theme's effect on a hero are nearly the same in more than a novel (like for the theme of solitude). Indeed, as mentioned in the methodological premises, a single figure stands for a concept expressed through linguistic entities (a word, a sentence, a paragraph...) that embodies a nuance of the theme it composes by combining itself with other figures that embody other nuances of the same theme. Thus, it is nearly impossible to find completely identical figures composing identical themes in different oeuvres: the reader would be reading the same work. Moreover, it is interesting to see how figures of nearly opposite nature can bring to the production of the same theme. Such is the case of Self-Catharsis, the last hypergood/theme of this analysis, corresponding to the end of the two works and embodying all the themes analysed so far. If the end of both *Gilles* and *A Dark Night's Passing* did not bring to an ultimate accomplishment of the two heroes' communion with their own Self's nature, one could not have stated that Self-catharsis is the last shared theme of their Self. Indeed, whereas Gilles finds his best mental conditions through joining

the Spanish nationalistic army in the Spanish Civil War, Kensaku reaches gains the purest self-awareness on Mount Daisen, a volcano where Zen monks have built their own school and lodgements. In other words: Gilles gains Self-Catharsis through war; Kensaku gains it through peace, and the last element which associates their Self-catharsis is its final effect: death. Both Gilles and Kensaku will pay the gaining of their own Self-Catharsis with death.

Gilles, after a brief experience as leading editor of a revolutionary pamphlet collection called 'Apocalypse', still convinced of his marginalised position within society in political (and other) terms, again decides to go back to the front. However, this time he will not come back alive. He joins the nationalist army of the Spanish Civil War under fake identity, and after having accomplished a number of missions, he asks to be sent to the warfront, at an unknown place within Estremadura region (552). There, he sets himself to fight against several troops of the republican army who have occupied the arena of that small town. While he is getting closer to the conflict, he reflects on his own conditions and realises he has finally found what he was looking for in order to satisfy himself:

'For a long time, he had aimed for nothing, but now could see that he was only preparing himself for today's military flowering. That kind of stealthy and wild happiness he had always been persecuted and sometimes gained, now he was holding it, overflowing like never before, in his hands' (553).

Afterwards, Gilles has to spend the night hidden because of a sudden skirmish led by the republicans. The following morning, he is awakened by gunshots and missiles' 'sinister whistles' (558). Escaping from the building he has slept in, which is now covered by flames, he sees his identity being represented by such a scene, and thinks: 'My own Self eradicated into a flame, a howling' (558). Gilles sees himself in the elements of war. Once he has entered the arena, his Self-catharsis takes place:

'His entire consciousness rebirthed as well as the moon was raising over there. A thousand of thoughts, memories, considerations raised within himself, He was like this, he was himself, becoming himself like never before. He was madly himself, like a drunk man who stops in-between two drinks and benefits from that suspension of time' (560).

This passage explicitly reveals that Gilles has completed his path toward Self-Catharsis. He stands alone within the arena (solitude); has definitively abandoned the society from which he had intentionally detached himself (marginalisation); and has finally figured out the confusing effect that love affairs causes him (love): 'He was no longer eager for women. He was now definitely scared of talking to a woman' (560). The three hypergoods that mostly influenced him are fused into the

ultimate one which stands for his abstract life goal. Whereas love is rejected, marginalisation and solitude fundamentally accompany his last act, in which war carry him to Self-catharsis and then to death. It is not explicitly written that Gilles dies, yet by the very end of the novel he has been hardly wounded by gunshots and explosions, and instead of looking for assistance, he holds a gun and continues going towards the enemy front. Moreover, the last passage of the novel depicts Gilles' last thoughts, in which he sees himself as a god needing to die: 'So, I will be heresiarch forever. The gods that die and revive: Dionysus, Christ. Nothing is accomplished without blood. One needs to constantly die in order to constantly revive' (561). This passage let the reader understand Gilles is about to die without regrets.

Kensaku himself reaches an intimate Self-catharsis, yet in his case the accomplishment of such a path seems far different from Gilles' willingness to go and die on the warfront. Their thematic similarity lies, again, in the hypergood they embody, which is indeed Self-catharsis.

After the dramatic loss of his first child, Kensaku struggles to find a way to get along again with his wife. Like he did when he left his family and travelled to Onomichi, Kensaku understands that the only way to find inner peace is to leave his house again, and so he goes to Mount Daisen, a volcano of Tottori prefecture. There, he joins a group of Zen monks who handle their monastery close to the peak of Daisen. Surrounded by forests and fabulous landscapes, Kensaku finally achieves his Self-catharsis, which corresponds to a sort of profound communion with nature. It happens when he is walking through the forest with a friend he met at the monastery, but at a certain point Kensaku decides to proceed alone. While being surrounded by high trees and all the sounds of nature, he comes to know a pleasure he had never felt before:

'He felt his exhaustion turn into a strange state of rapture. He could feel his mind and his body both gradually merging into this great nature that surrounded him. It was not nature that was visible to the eyes; rather, it was like a limitless body of air that wrapped itself around him, this tiny creature no larger than a poppy seed. To be gently drawn into it, and there be restored, was a pleasure beyond the power of words to describe. [...]. He had experienced this feeling of being absorbed by nature before; but this was the first time that it was accompanied by such rapture. In previous instances, the feeling perhaps had been more that of being sucked in by nature than that of merging into it; [...]' (400).

This passage, very close to the end of the novel, recalls Gilles' state of mind as even Kensaku has finally found the most harmonious way to live in accordance with his own Self within nature. Indeed, Kensaku's emotional struggle are suddenly replaced by peaceful sights of the natural world, whose details he can grasp with keen observation and commitment. The scene that mostly shows

the effects of his Self-catharsis takes place at dawn, after Kensaku has spent the night alone on one of the mountain's peaks, observing the natural world:

'The sky was soft blue – the color of kindness, he thought. The mist below had dispersed and there were lights here and there in the villages at the foot of the mountain. [...]. When he turned around, he saw the mountaintop outlined against a swelling mass of orange light that became more and more intense; then the orange began to fade, and suddenly everything around him became clearer' (401).

A scholar of Shiga's literature would not be surprised that Kensaku achieves his own peace of mind through this sort of fusion with nature: in several I-Novels written by him, the hero gains inner peace through a communion with nature. It is the case of *At Kinosaki* (*Kinosaki nite*, 1917), *Manazuru* (1936), and others. Indeed, Guo (2014) has conducted an interesting survey on the most recurrent natural elements found in Shiga's major works.

The ultimately positive effect that this episode has on Kensaku, demonstrating that it is an actual Self-catharsis, can be found in the last chapter, when Kensaku's wife Naoko joins him at the monastery because Kensaku has suddenly started to feel seriously sick. Despite the sadness of the final episode, Kensaku does not look bothered by anything. On the contrary, his Self-catharsis brought him to act with more sympathy for his wife despite his previous desperation for the death of the child. Indeed, the end of the novel consists of a sweet love portrait of them while Kensaku is dying while in bed:

'Kensaku seemed too tired to say any more. His hand still in hers, he closed his eyes. She had never seen him look so tranquil. Perhaps, she thought, he is not going to live through this. But the thought somehow did not sadden her very much. As she sat there looking at him, she felt herself becoming an inseparable part of him; [...] (408)'.

The last passage proves Kensaku has achieved Self-catharsis, as even his wife realises he has never been 'so tranquil' before; moreover, she feels like she is becoming an 'inseparable part of him', making the hypergood of love being again connected with Kensaku's Self.

As for Gilles, even Kensaku's Self-catharsis corresponds with the achievement of a complete awareness that he gains upon the hypergoods that have characterized his life: he marginalised himself from society going on the peak of a mountain, thus leaving the urban world that had raised him (marginalisation); he has achieved Self-catharsis while being alone into nature (solitude); he dies while his wife is feeling the eternal love which will let them be together for ever (love).

It is interesting that two novels of such different cultural roots and literary legacy share this numbers of themes constituting the heroes' Self together with their conclusions. One could assume that if a certain novel's plot development is mainly based on the hero's Self maturation, there would no longer be any meaningful reason to let the hero live once he has achieved Self-catharsis which, as shown before, essentially consists of a condition in which one's own Self finds ultimate peace within the human conditions that best suit it.

The figures merging within this last section clearly show the opposite way through which Gilles and Kensaku gain Self-catharsis. While the figure of 'war' and of 'fire' composes the perfect state of mind of Gilles, 'peace' and 'nature' take part to Kensaku's Self-Catharsis. The only shared figure, in this case, is death, as the two heroes both face it after these extraordinary experiences.

Conclusions

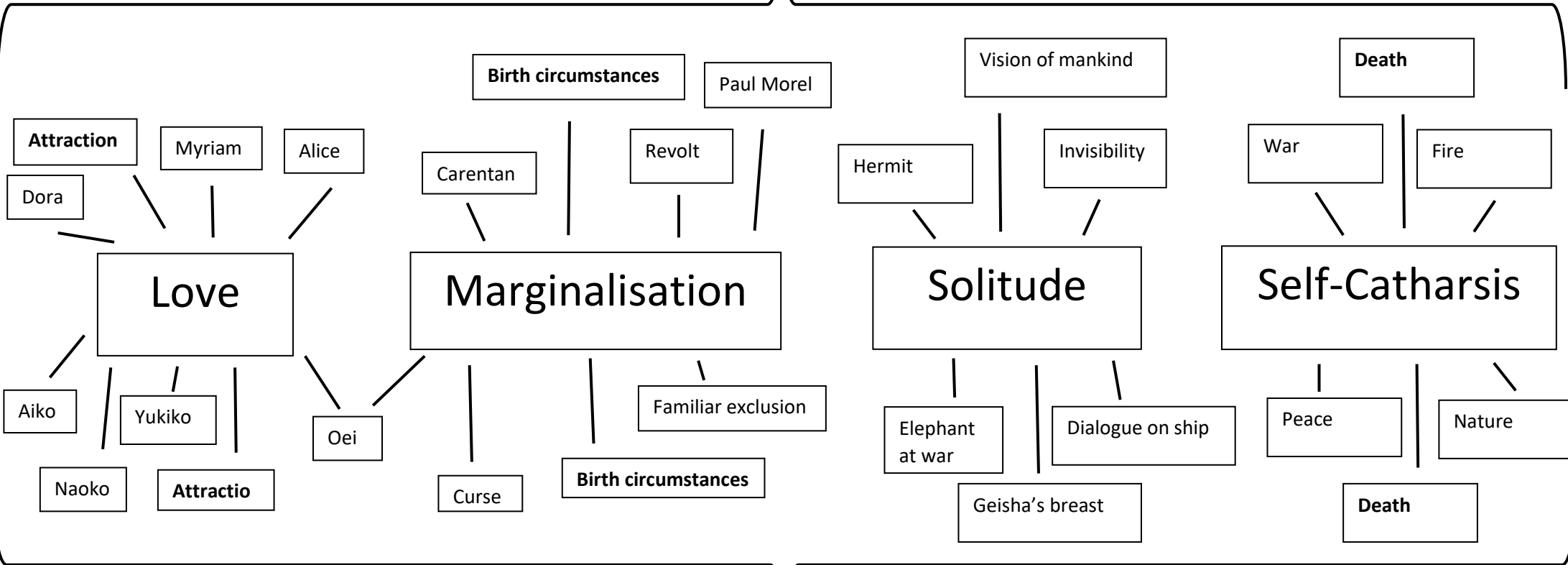
The analysis has shed a light on the striking similarities surrounding the characterization of Kensaku and Gilles, two literary heroes that had never been compared before mainly because of the apparent lack of semantic communication between them. The cultural distance of the places they live and of the people they meet apparently let the reader think the only thing that makes Gilles and *A Dark Night's Passing* similar is the centrality of the respective heroes' inwardness. However, the analysis has proven that once one has surveyed the composition of their own Self, further similarities come to light, in the shape of hypergoods that affect their life.

In order to display these similarities, a thematization graph has been attached below. It includes all the major figures composing the four hypergoods/themes that have been textually extrapolated throughout the analysis, and gives them an organised shape which efficiently summarizes the merging of the four themes.

It is important to bear in mind that *Gilles* and *A Dark Night's Passing* are two full-length novels: it is impossible to grasp every single figure composing one of their major themes and to mention all of them. The passages quoted before, together with the consequent projection of the figures on the graph, only stands for a summarized version of the semantic path which brought the four themes to be generated and to affect the Self of Gilles and Kensaku. There is certainly a bigger amount of figures combining with those mentioned here. Moreover, the fact of naming a certain figure in a certain way could be argued with different nomenclatures, yet what matters the most is the indication of what semantical unit produces a certain theme together with other ones.

The graph below has to be read as follows: the four themes are shared by both Gilles and Kensaku. The figures found on Gilles lie in the upper part; the figures found on *A Dark Night's Passing* lie on the lower part. The shared figures have been written twice and in bold.

Gilles



Kensaku

Limitations and Future Research

This dissertation would definitely benefit from two further surveys on the same novels: a cultural and a stylistic one. The former would delineate the differences that arise when an individual of a certain nationality/ethnic group experiences the immersion within universal values such as love, solitude, and so forth. Such a research would help to understand what concretely makes a Japanese and a French hero differ in those contexts. However, this dissertation cannot include well developed cultural considerations as its methodological basis mainly surrounds the literary conversion of the notion of Self and the semiotic tools used to conduct a thematic analysis. Moreover, the first attempt of this comparison consisted of underlying the similarities of the two heroes' Self, rather than their differences (which does not mean that detecting the differences is not important).

A stylistic analysis would help to understand the similarities and differences surrounding the depiction of the Self in more linguistic terms. The considerations that have been done before the analysis surrounding the subjective nature of the two works' prose represent an instance of the kind of stylistic survey that could be conducted in the future. However, in order to conduct such a research one should include further considerations on the main differences between written French and Japanese, also taking their typical features found on twentieth century literature into account. Thus, it seems easy to understand that such a survey could be carried out only by conducting an entire dissertation based on those topics.

Concluding, because the analysis has proven Kensaku and Gilles share the same composition of their Self, one hopes this dissertation will stand for a first step of a wider path that will bring more and more narrative works of different legacies and languages to be compared with special regards for the hero's Self, so to produce a literary and global notion of such a fundamental concept that lies at the very base of civilization.

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