

Visual Culturemes and the Symbolic Representation of Alterity Through the Book Covers of Mishima Yukio's Literary Works in the Romanian Cultural Space

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to analyse the *visual culturemes*—a concept I propose based upon the notion of *culturemes*—that appear on the book covers of the Romanian editions of some literary works belonging to Mishima Yukio. In order to do so, I first present the multifaceted relationship between book covers, which are a paratextual component that can be treated as a form of intersemiotic translation (Sonzogni 2011; Furukawa 2012), and the mirroring of the Other. Then I investigate how alterity is reflected in the content of the covers.
Keywords: Mishima Yukio, Japanese literature, cultureme, the Other, paratext, book covers.

Introduction

Concerning book catalogues, which have some functional similarities to paratexts, the English poet John Clare (1793–1864) wrote that

I used to be uncommonly fond of looking over catalogues of books and am so still [...] they [are] some of the earliest readings that opportunity allowed me to come at [...] if ever I bought a penny worth of slate pencils or Wafers or a few sheets of Paper at Drakards they were sure to be lapped in a catalogue and I considered them as the most valuable parts of my purchase and greedily looked over their contents and now in cutting open a new book or Magazine I always naturally turn to the end first to read the book list and take the rest as a secondary pleasure [...] Anticipation is the sweetest of earthly pleasures.¹

¹ Clare 2002: 56–57.

Book covers more or less accomplish the role of offering a first impression of the literary work and of anticipating the content as well by sometimes visually presenting a part of the subject, for instance the Kinkaku-ji temple on the cover of the novel *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*² (Rom. *Templul de aur*)³ written by Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925–1970), a renowned Japanese author who ‘writes successfully, publishing annually short stories and novels that are devoured by both Japanese and Western audiences’.⁴ Moreover, book covers may contain a quote belonging to a renowned author, for example the French novelist Marguerite Yourcenar’s words on the first cover of the novel *Confessions of a Mask* (Rom. *Confesiunile unei măști*),⁵ which aim at drawing the reader’s attention to the book. Furthermore, alongside other paratextual elements, such as prefaces and blurbs, book covers represent a form of constructing a specific image in a new cultural space. According to Lefevere, it is not only the author and their work that are implied in this process: ‘In the past, as in the present, rewriters created images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes even a whole literature’.⁶ What is more, these ‘rewriters’ may be engaged in the process of constructing images of foreign cultures through the cover design as well. Consequently, paratextual components such as book covers are important in understanding the strategies used in creating a specific image of a foreign writer’s literature and culture. The covers represent a means of introducing alterity and contribute to a specific construction (or reconstruction) of the image of a cultural space—in our case, a Japanese one. Additionally, they introduce and promote a literary work to a new cultural space, being not only a form of literally branding that writer’s literature through various visual details, but also a form of narrating the Other through textual and pictorial resources, such as various fonts used for titles, pictures, and blurbs. A complex image of the Other is thus composed by the designer of the cover (possibly under the publisher’s influence), with the potential reader imagining (or reimagining) the Other’s features and weaving narratives around the depiction, although they may be characterised, for instance, by exoticisation. Generally perceived as belonging to the field of marketing, book covers transcend the economic dimension by building (or rebuilding)

² The English titles that are used throughout this paper belong to the actual English translations of Mishima’s works.

³ Mishima 2013b.

⁴ Gheorghe 2008: 183.

⁵ Mishima 2015a.

⁶ Lefevere 1992: 5.

the properties of a foreign culture and thus creating a specific image of the Other in the minds of potential readers. In the case of Mishima Yukio's literary works, the Romanian reader encounters the cultural space of the Other not only by reading the novel translated into the target language but by visualising the images and the text that compose the book's cover. Apart from coming into contact with foreign concepts and objects that appear in the translated version of the literary works in various ways (for instance, they can be adapted to give the impression of autochthony or can be accompanied by footnotes that preserve culturally charged words in their original form), the reader meets alterity through this paratextual element that, more than anything, has the purpose of enticing them.

For Genette

the paratext in all its forms is a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself that constitutes its *raison d'être*. This something is the text.⁷

The paratext supports the text by including, for instance, pictures, paintings, the critics' opinions, excerpts from reviews, and the text genre, and it exists in relation to the actual text. Moreover, their analysis is of the utmost importance, since as Deane-Cox observes,

By exploring how the (re)translations have been packaged, marketed and received, insights can be gained into the individuals and institutions involved in the circulation of the target texts, their attendant motivations and constraints.⁸

The design of the cover may illustrate how a specific Other is mirrored in the target culture, which stereotypes are present in it, and whether some cultural 'constraints' influence it. What is more, 'paying attention to paratexts as sites of translator intervention or adaptation of the text to its new environment'⁹ is essential because this reveals how the cover designs of several editions of the same literary work have changed over the years.

In this study, I discuss how the Other was mirrored through the book cover design in the case of Mishima Yukio's literary works in the Romanian cultural space and the way various *visual culturemes* were used. After presenting the complex relationship between paratexts and the reconstruction of alterity, I propose and define the concept of visual culturemes and then

⁷ Genette 1997: 12.

⁸ Deane-Cox 2014: 24.

⁹ Batchelor 2018: 25.

examine the portrayal of Otherness through the content of these covers. In addition, I also refer to other tendencies, including romanticising,¹⁰ dramatising, and contextualising (and recontextualising).

I. Portraying the Other Through the Paratext

For Toporov ‘Culture [...] is not only the place where meanings are born, but the space in which they are being exchanged, “transmitted” and seek to be translated from one cultural language into another’.¹¹ Through literary translations and paratexts, such an exchange is textually and visually ensured; elements with cultural meanings migrate in various forms from the source culture text to the target culture text, thus contributing to mirroring alterity in a specific way.

The Other always is the sum of people’s representations, which imagine and re-imagine the portrait of a particular culture, its qualities, and differences, for instance, by means of literature, movies, paintings, and magazines. For Boia

The Other is most often a real person or community, but observed through the distorted filter of the imaginary. What we perceive is its image, and this image – like any image – is simultaneously part of reality and fiction. Sliding from the concrete to the imaginary, he is subjected to an operation of simplification and amplification, reaching, at the limit, the caricature or the symbol. Banality is denied him; he must be loaded with meaning.¹²

The Other’s characteristics are sometimes deliberately exaggerated on book covers in order to highlight its alterity and impress the reader. By including, for example, exotic features, the covers highlight cultural differences and thus contribute to constructing an unfamiliar image of the source culture. As Beller states,

Our images of foreign countries, peoples and cultures mainly derive from selective value judgements (which are in turn derived from selective observation) as expressed in → travel writing and in literary representations.¹³

¹⁰ Naghmeh-Abbaspour et al. 2020.

¹¹ Toporov 1992: 30.

¹² Boia 2000: 117.

¹³ Beller 2007: 5.

Moreover, book covers are resources that can be used in order to decode the way the Other was textually and visually reconstructed. One can thus decipher which ‘selective value judgements’ of that culture were introduced with the aim of presenting (or representing) it to a new audience. Additionally, it is important to consider the following ideas:

Restricted perceptions are mentally registered as limited pictorial presentations. People can only experience empirical reality in part. Once textually codified, the partial representation will represent the whole. This is an issue of information, or information processing, which, together with our tendency towards value judgements, will generate prejudices.¹⁴

A book cover can represent for the potential reader a form of recreating the world of the Other, a world that includes, for example, clothes, food, architectural elements, habits, rituals, mentalities, and various interpersonal relationships. The ideas that are illustrated in it, ideas that represent only a part of the Other’s universe, compose the reader’s knowledge about the Other and can also generate future judgments—sometimes even misconceptions—with regard to the Other’s identity. What is more, concerning the idea of ‘partiality’, Carlström refers to Tymoczko’s words—‘It is the essence of translation to transpose aspects or *parts* of a text and a culture, and that very *partiality* of translation gives it flexibility, allowing it to be *partisan*’¹⁵—and then notes that

A cover that echoes one particular theme of a novel may end up emphasizing that theme over others, thus contributing to the partiality of the act of translation that Tymoczko associates with metonymy.¹⁶

In such a case, the reader may be unconsciously influenced to focus only on that theme and, in addition to this, when it is also related to an element that has a cultural meaning, the described situation may lead to their concentrating on that particular piece. Moreover, that element may represent the entire culture to the reader. However, there are also situations where such an element does not belong to the content of the literary work. In other words, it is used to attract the audience, but it does not represent the work; still, it may construct an image of the Other and influence the reader to perceive it in a particular way. Apart from this, Alvstad writes that

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Tymoczko 1999: 290.

¹⁶ Carlström 2020: 106.

In the case of translated literature, there may be considerable differences between how a book is paratextually presented in the source and target country, and it is the publisher who is the most important mediating agent of such changes.¹⁷

This is an aspect related to practices in the field of publishing that characterise a culture and can be influenced not only by cultural constraints but also by a financial dimension (for example, excerpts from reviews that contain appraisal may be integrated into the paratext in order to positively impress the reader and influence them to buy the book).

Concerning the construction (or reconstruction) of alterity, according to Rovira-Esteva,

While some characteristic features of paratexts are spatial (cover, title page, preface and footnotes), others are material (format and paper) or visual (illustrations, lay-out, typeface and overall design). [...] However, as we will see, they implicitly convey information about the publisher's intention and contribute to form the image of the Other.¹⁸

This aspect holds true in the case of book covers, because all of the information contained in them conveys a specific intention of the publisher. What is more, concerning domestication and foreignization in the case of the book covers of the translations of Yoshimoto Banana's work *Kitchen*, Furukawa writes that

they have huge implications for the symbolic representation of a marginalized culture in the interaction of the Japanese novel and the Western audience.¹⁹

Venuti's concepts could be used in our analysis as well with the aim of understanding the intention of the publisher—that of *domesticating* or of *foreignising*. Moreover, marking the cultural difference is not always the equivalent of the exoticisation, but as Serra-Vilella observes, 'The fact of denoting cultural specificity does not necessarily imply a stereotyping, but it does indeed show that the Other is being presented as different from the receiving public'.²⁰ In such a situation, the publisher's intention is not that of culturally adapting but rather that of instructing the audience with regard to the *difference*. Additionally, according to Guillaume, 'alterity is

¹⁷ Alvstad 2012: 78.

¹⁸ Rovira-Esteva 2016: 190.

¹⁹ Furukawa 2012: 215.

²⁰ Serra-Vilella 2018: 147.

constructed rather than discovered'²¹; the publisher's intention contributes to this construction and has an important role in the way the audience perceives that Otherness. To put it another way and to again use Furukawa's theory, 'To borrow Roman Jakobson's classification, the representations in cover designs can be regarded as a type of intersemiotic translation (Jakobson, 2004 [1959], p. 139)'.²² Also, Sonzogni treats covers as a form of intersemiotic translation. In particular, in his book titled *Re-covered Rose: A Case Study in Book Cover Design as Intersemiotic Translation*, he examines 'how book covers translate the verbal signs of the text into a (predominantly) non-verbal sign-system of culturally encoded images'.²³

Since book covers represent a form of translating the Other through textual and visual components (and, as I have written elsewhere, a form of 'guiding into Otherness',²⁴ 'into the richness of the Japanese cultural space, a richness that encompasses more than what is visually presented by means of the covers'²⁵), I analyse in this study their structure with regard to Furukawa's theory and the way that they create a specific image of Japan in Romania. Because I treat these covers as a form of translation, I operate with a notion specific to the translation studies field, namely *cultureme*, which is a 'cultural information-bearing unit'.²⁶ For Lungu-Badea, culturemes constitute

a cultural information-bearing unit that certainly exists in the source language, but which may disappear entirely through translation into the target language, either by omission or through an explicit translation, gloss, translator's note, etc.²⁷

She also identifies three features of culturemes: '1) the monoculturality, 2) the relativity of the status of the cultureme, 3) the autonomy from translation'.²⁸ Interestingly, as Coman and Selejan point out,

the cultureme is not a linguistic concept, but one related to extralinguistic, social and cultural contexts, denoting a social phenomenon that is specific

²¹ Guillaume 2002: 37.

²² Furukawa 2012: 228.

²³ Sonzogni 2011: 4.

²⁴ Alexandrescu 2021: 101.

²⁵ Alexandrescu 2021: 93.

²⁶ Nicolae 2015: 216.

²⁷ Lungu Badea 2005: 95.

²⁸ Lungu-Badea 2004: 74.

to a certain culture which, however, emerges as such only by comparison to another culture which lacks that phenomenon.²⁹

Indeed, a cultureme refers only to an extralinguistic element that is characteristic of a specific culture, for instance, the Japanese one. It has not only a linguistic value, but also a cultural one, since it belongs to a specific culture and refers to a cultural element that is very important for that culture. Katan expresses a similar perspective by stating that culturemes constitute ‘formalized, socially and juridically embedded phenomena that exist in a particular form or function in only one of the two cultures being compared’.³⁰ Culturemes are present in only one culture, while for the other one they represent a foreign reality. Interestingly, Pamies describes three possible relations when comparing culturemes that exist in different languages:

Cross-linguistically, three types of relations may be expected from the contrastive analysis of the culturemes of two languages:

- a) complete coincidence: both culturemes and have the same values in both languages. [...]
- b) complete divergence: either a cultureme exists only in one of the compared languages, or both exist but do not share a single value. [...]
- c) partial coincidence: the same symbol works as a cultureme in both languages but they share only part of their values. [...]³¹

Additionally, regarding a possible classification of culturemes, Badea offers two criteria: the formal one³² (i.e., there are simple culturemes and compound culturemes³³) and the functional one (i.e., there are ‘historical culturemes, evocative in diachrony, updating the relationship between the sender and his era’³⁴ and current culturemes³⁵).

Thus, I propose the concept of a *visual cultureme*, which represents any visual element that has a cultural meaning, and explore how such visual elements were employed in order to illustrate a specific image of Japan.

²⁹ Coman, Selejan 2019: 303.

³⁰ Katan 2009: 79.

³¹ Pamies 2017: 108.

³² Lungu-Badea 2004: 71.

³³ Lungu-Badea 2004: 72.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Lungu-Badea 2004: 73.

II. Mishima Yukio's Literature in the Romanian Cultural Space

With more than 10 titles (including novels, essays, short stories, and plays) translated into Romanian, Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925–1970) is one of the most published Japanese writers in Romania. Additionally, he is not only one of the most famous Japanese writers in the world, but as Tobias explains, is also a part of ‘the canon of Japanese literature for Western readers’³⁶ to which the renowned Japanese authors Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成 (1899–1972) and Tanizaki Jun'ichirō 谷崎潤一郎 (1886–1965) also belong.³⁷ Regarding the process of publishing Japanese literature in the American cultural space, he writes that

In the 1950s and 60s, many American publishing houses released translations of Japanese novels, short stories and poetry collections. However, the focus was on a relatively small number of writers (particularly Jun'ichiro Tanizaki, Yasunari Kawabata and Yukio Mishima), who came to represent the canon of Japanese literature for Western readers. Fowler argues that this narrow focus on writers who expressed nostalgia about traditional Japanese culture and aestheticism was deliberate and based on ideological considerations of portraying Japan as exotic and very different from its wartime image (Fowler 1992).³⁸

What is more, this way of ‘portraying Japan as exotic and very different from its wartime image’³⁹ can be observed not only in the choices made by the American and Romanian publishing houses (i.e., the literary works to be published) but also in the visual material offered on the first cover. As I demonstrate in this paper, a significant part of the paratext, namely the design on the first cover, contributes to this depiction of the Japanese world as an ‘exotic and very different’ one⁴⁰ in the case of Mishima's works that were published in Romania. On the first covers of the works belonging to him, various cultural elements, such as a *kimono* 着物 or a *katana* 刀, are illustrated. These illustrations suggest that the publisher intended to depict Japan from a specific perspective, namely that of a different country that can be defined by the presence of such traditional objects.

³⁶ Tobias 2006: 33.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

With regard to the translations from Japanese literature that appeared in Romania, Gheorghe explains that

Although the number of translations of Japanese literary texts did not increase much due to Communist censorship and the fact that Japan was a monarchy and a successful Capitalist state (which was anathema for the leftists in Bucharest), modern Japanese literary translations started being published in greater numbers than before the Second World War.⁴¹

This is also proven by the Romanian editions of the works written by Mishima. During the communist era, only two novels were directly translated from Japanese into Romanian: *After the Banquet* (Rom. *După banchet*, 1979) and *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (Rom. *Templul de aur*, 1985), both published by Univers Publishing House. In addition, another novel, *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* (Rom. *Tumultul valurilor*, 1975), was published by the same publishing house, but it was an indirect translation (i.e., from French into Romanian). Moreover, another translation of one of Mishima's works appeared in 1971 in a Romanian journal, which is also considered the first translation into Romanian of a literary work belonging to this Japanese writer: 'Yukio Mishima already appeared in a Romanian translation with *Tărâmul durerii* [The land of pain], in 1971, in *România literară* (no. 15, translated by Narcis Zărnescu)'.⁴² After the communist era, a large number of Romanian editions was published by Humanitas Publishing House, including *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (Rom. *Templul de aur*; 2000, 2013b); *After the Banquet* (Rom. *După banchet*; 2015b); *Confessions of a Mask* (Rom. *Confesiunile unei măști*; 2003, 2015a, 2021); *Spring Snow* (Rom. *Zăpada de primăvară*; 2012b, 2022f); *The Sound of Waves* (Rom. *Tumultul valurilor*; 2010); *Runaway Horses* (Rom. *Cai în galop*; 2014a, 2022a); *The Decay of the Angel* (Rom. *Îngerul decăzut*; 2012a, 2022c); *The Temple of Dawn* (Rom. *Templul Zorilor*; 2011, 2022e); *Thirst for Love* (Rom. *Sete de iubire*; 2013a); *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* (Rom. *Amurgul marinarului*; 2017a); *Life for Sale* (Rom. *Viață de vânzare*; 2018b); *A Morning of Pure Love* (Rom. *O dimineață de iubire pură*; 2019); *Sun and Steel* (Rom. *Soare și oțel*; 2008, 2022d); and *The Way of the Samurai* (Rom. *Calea samuraiului astăzi*; 2007, 2009 [audiobook], 2014b, 2022b). In addition, two plays written by Mishima were published by the Romanian magazines *Luceafărul de dimineață* and *Neuma: Hanjo* (Mishima, 2017b) and *Seijo* (Mishima, 2018a).

⁴¹ Gheorghe 2018 [2021]: 141.

⁴² Frențiu et al. 2020: 157.

Since a great number of works written by Mishima appeared translated into Romanian and their first covers exhibit traditional aspects of Japanese culture, I consider that studying how Otherness is reflected in the content of the book covers is necessary in order to understand how his works were *visually* introduced and promoted in the Romanian cultural space.

III. Otherness as Reflected in the Content of the Book Covers Belonging to the Romanian Editions of Mishima Yukio's Literary Works

Alterity is frequently present on the first covers of the volumes that belong to Japanese literature in the form of cultural elements or rituals, such as cherry blossoms, Buddhist temples, Shintō shrines, *kimono*, or *katana*, or in the form of human figures, for instance *geisha* and *samurai*. Such images can be seen as information (i.e., cultural references). To adapt a term introduced into translation studies by Imola Katalin Nagy—‘*anthropoculturemes*’⁴³—one often observes *visual anthropoculturemes* on these covers, their aim being that of visually impressing the audience and influencing them to read the book. What Nagy defines as anthropoculturemes is represented by

those culturemes that are related to the culture and microuniverse of human existence (home, domicile, lifestyle, gastronomy, habits, clothing, ideas and mentalities, architecture, professions, beliefs, behaviors, folkloric, ethnological, mythological, religious, spiritual elements, holidays, culture and art, traditions, ethnographic elements, feelings and emotions related to the *paideuma* or the superindividual soul of the peoples, lexemes related to the archaic, patriarchal or on the contrary, cosmopolitan existence of a community, the realia of urban or rural life, etc.).⁴⁴

Undoubtedly, their presence aims to preserve and visually mark the cultural specificity, the strategy being in this case, to use Furukawa's theory, that of *foreignising*. Nevertheless, as we can notice, there are situations in which the cultural elements are absent, but in such cases other strategies of representing the Other are employed.

Throughout this section, I analyse the portrayal of Otherness in the case of 29 book covers—out of which three (I–III) belong to books published in the communist era and 26 (IV–XXIX) to volumes that appeared after

⁴³ Nagy 2020: 231.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

it—and how the visual cultureemes contribute to a specific understanding of Japanese culture. For reference, the covers are numbered using Roman numerals.

The visual cultureemes that appear on the book covers of Mishima’s literary works that were translated into Romanian ‘evoke the past’,⁴⁵ since they are related to traditional arts and elements; as Serra-Vilella explains in her study,

The appearance on the cover of traditional elements is especially relevant, since they recall the past and are considered part of the essence of a culture, which can be linked to essentialization.⁴⁶

In the case of the Romanian covers, there is a presence of elements, such as *kimono* (XIV); *Kinkaku-ji* (III, XV); *katana* swords (VIII, XVI, XVII, XXIV, XXV, XXVII); Japanese human figures with specific hairstyles, as is the case of the first Romanian edition of the novel *Confessions of a Mask* (V)—on its cover, the actor Yooso’s face (who plays the role of Kanpei) appears, the entire image being a part of an *yakusha-e* 役者絵 (a woodblock print which includes the figure of a *kabuki* actor); another *yakusha-e* (VI); *iaidō* 居合道 (the Japanese martial art of drawing the sword; VIII); *kabuto* 兜 (the helmet belonging to a warrior; VII); *hi no maru* 日の丸 (the circle of the sun; XXIV, XXVI, XXVIII); *Nō* 能 (a mask; XXIII); *hachimaki* 鉢巻 (a headband⁴⁷; XXVII); *torii* 鳥居 (a Japanese gate that marks the entrance to a Shintō shrine; XXVIII); and *wagasa* 和傘 (a Japanese umbrella; XXIX). In this case, the foreignising strategy⁴⁸ is implied. Moreover, Serra-Vilella refers in her study to the prevailing temporal dimensions: ‘the Other is presented in an archaic way in the largest number of books, and modernity is the least represented temporality’.⁴⁹ The components of Otherness that characterise the past are especially illustrated on the covers of Japanese novels, probably as a result of the fact that they reflect tradition and therefore, to a large extent, (absolute) alterity, an intangible world of bygone days, which is loaded with meaning and mystery; such components are, to borrow Boia’s

⁴⁵ Serra-Vilella 2018: 151.

⁴⁶ Serra-Vilella 2018: 151.

⁴⁷ Actually, ‘Mishima had written in works like the 1969 *Wakaki samurai no tame ni* (For Young Samurai) of reviving samurai ideals in modern Japan and had died with a *hachimaki* band around his head proclaiming *shichishō hōkoku*, or “seven lives to give for the emperor”’ (Flanagan 2017).

⁴⁸ Furukawa 2012: 215.

⁴⁹ Serra-Vilella 2018: 151.

words, ‘loaded with meaning’.⁵⁰ Hence, they have a powerful impact on the contemporary potential reader (who is almost constantly surrounded by ultramodernity and is even unaware of the cultural heritage of their own culture), bringing to their attention the richness of the tradition of the Other and presumably filling them with nostalgia. As I previously indicated, one meets this temporal dimension on the covers of the Romanian editions of Mishima Yukio’s novels as well. In these cases, the cultural difference is marked by means of traditional components that may influence the reader to view the Other through this particular frame and Mishima’s volumes as bearers of the atmosphere suggested by these visual culturemes. The covers of the Romanian editions may influence the act of reading—the novel or essay will be perceived as a textual amplification of the visual support (the cover), and the reader will interpret the literary work as one that consists of depictions of traditional Japanese culture and society. Moreover, the reader will regard Mishima in light of this background mediated by the paratext, namely as a writer interested in portraying this traditional dimension of Japan, with all its old values and ideals. What is more, there are cases when the visual culturemes do not occur in the presence of Japanese human faces. For instance, one notices a *katana* in the hands of a mysterious figure (XVI) or a *kimono* that covers a female silhouette (XIV), with the only part of the human body that is represented being the right hand. Such pictorial details enhance the enigma that surrounds the image of the Other. The Other may thus be perceived as being synonymous with the hidden, the unknown, the mysterious.

Another category of covers that represent the Other, but especially through Mishima Yukio’s figure (and not only by means of visual culturemes such as *hachimaki*), is represented by IX, XXV, and XXVII. In these situations, the strong relationship between the Japanese author’s biography and his views as expressed in *The Way of the Samurai* (Rom. *Calea samuraiului astăzi*) and *Sun and Steel* (Rom. *Soare și oțel*) are highlighted. Thus, the book covers aim at contextualising (or recontextualising) these works in Mishima’s literary world and establishing a link between his life and beliefs and his writings. Interestingly, image IX presents only his portrait, while images XXV and XXVII illustrate the Japanese author’s strong relationship with bodybuilding and martial arts, influencing the reader to understand the works in this frame. Moreover, by encompassing photographs that include visual culturemes—*hachimaki* and *katana*—the covers XXV and XXVII

⁵⁰ Boia 2000: 117.

visually integrate Mishima into Japanese culture, underlining that these works belong to Japanese culture and that they contain ideas related to the previously mentioned culturemes. Thus, they are characterised also by a cultural recontextualisation.

Regarding the connection between the book covers and the plots of the novels, the above-mentioned visual culturemes hint at the latter. For instance, the image of Kinkaku-ji was used on the first covers of the 1985 (III) and 2013 (XV) editions of the novel *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. The visual dimension of the paratext illustrates in this context the temple, with which the protagonist Mizoguchi is obsessed. By viewing the image of Kinkaku-ji on the first cover, the potential reader is introduced to the spatial dimension of this novel, its centrality in the plot being underlined by its visual presence on the cover. Other visual culturemes that allude to books' contents are the *yakusha-e* (V) and the *Nō* mask (XXIII), which were utilised for the 2003 and 2021 editions of the novel *Confessions of a Mask*. As I indicated elsewhere, with regard to the 2003 edition,

the cover has the role of presenting in a suggestive way the autobiographical subject of Mishima's literary work. Moreover, the symbolism of the mask – an art object that hides one's identity – is (somehow) convergent with the image of an actor, who willingly assumes the identity of another human figure during a specific play. Thus, the cover aims at anticipating the narrative.⁵¹

The images of the *kabuki* 歌舞伎 actor with a *Nō* mask were probably employed to create a link with the word 'mask' (Rom. 'mască'), which Mishima included in the title of the novel, with the image that appears on the cover of the 2021 edition perhaps alluding even more to the content of the book—the idea of hiding one's true self—than the image that appears on the 2003 edition. Furthermore, the *Nō* mask may also imply the distinction between how one acts in one's intimate space in the company of others. Interestingly, the cover of the 2015 edition of this novel does not contain any visual cultureme, but

a part of Guido Reni's painting Saint Sebastian appears on the first cover of the edition published in 2015. [...] the entire piece of art is thoroughly described in Mishima's novel in the context of the narrator's experiencing facets of his intimacy.⁵²

Actually, the reason behind this choice may be the fact that

⁵¹ Alexandrescu 2021: 97.

⁵² *Ibid.*

the cover illustration lays emphasis on a specific reading of the book, based on the importance of Saint Sebastian for Mishima's novel, foreshadowing its close connection with the subject of the literary work.⁵³

Moreover, another cover that contains a cultural reference is VI. The cover's depiction of actors surely has a powerful impact on the Romanian reader, for whom such a piece of art—a *yakusha-e*—alludes to another cultural world. Interestingly, the covers (II and XIX) of the other two editions of the same novel—*After the Banquet* (Rom. *După banchet*)—do not include any visual cultureme. For instance, on XIX, the image of a kettle appears, but it is not a cultural hint—a part of *chadō* 茶道 (Japanese tea ceremony). Actually, it is part of a tea set—which, in addition to this, also contains a vessel—for daily use, but it does not refer to the tea ceremony. Indeed, it looks exotic (perhaps also because of the background, which illustrates a natural scene) and may influence the potential reader to buy the book and perceive its content in a specific way (i.e., related to an exotic, foreign world, to Otherness). Therefore, one can state that, despite enclosing no Japanese visual cultureme, some covers, such as XIX, contribute to an Otherization, or to put it another way, to influencing the audience to read the novel as one depicting a totally different cultural universe, an exotic one. Furthermore, visual culturemes, such as *katana* swords in examples VIII, XVI, XVII, XXIV, XXV, and XXVII, do not only hint at the Japanese cultural world but may also indicate Mishima's view on art and life. Actually, he was 'an accomplished martial artist, was a believer in "bunbu-ryodo", which is the ancient samurai code fusing excellence in the fine arts with military skill'.⁵⁴ Thus, the above-mentioned visual cultureme may not only influence the Romanian reader to have specific expectations for the content of these works (e.g., they may suppose that the works are related to the Japanese martial arts, with various forms of violence, or with the samurai code), but they also introduce the Romanian reader to what constitutes Mishima's world: his interest for *kendō* 剣道 (the way of the sword), *iai* 居合 (swordsmanship), and *karate* 空手. Accordingly, this visual cultureme—the *katana* sword—may also have a biographical dimension, since it sketches an important component of Mishima's life: his relationship with the samurai code and the martial arts. Another visual cultureme is represented by the kimono on XIV, which covers the silhouette of a woman. As a matter of fact, it can be stated that this cultureme suggests

⁵³ Alexandrescu 2021: 97-98.

⁵⁴ 'Enigmatic Japanese Writer Remembered', <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/03/13/opinion/l-enigmatic-japanese-writer-remembered-145293.html>.

the Japanese cultural atmosphere, imbued in this case with traditional elements, such as a kimono, alluding to the Japanese traditional elements that are mentioned in the novel *Thirst for Love*. Additionally, the *hi no maru*, which was used on XVI and XVIII, is a cultureme through which the spatial dimension—Japan—is exposed, and although only part of the narrative takes place in Japan in *The Temple of Dawn*, this cultureme contributes to accentuating the fact that the novel culturally belongs to the Japanese space. By employing such an important symbol, the publisher probably aimed at presenting Mishima's profound relationship with Japanese tradition, which he wished to protect.

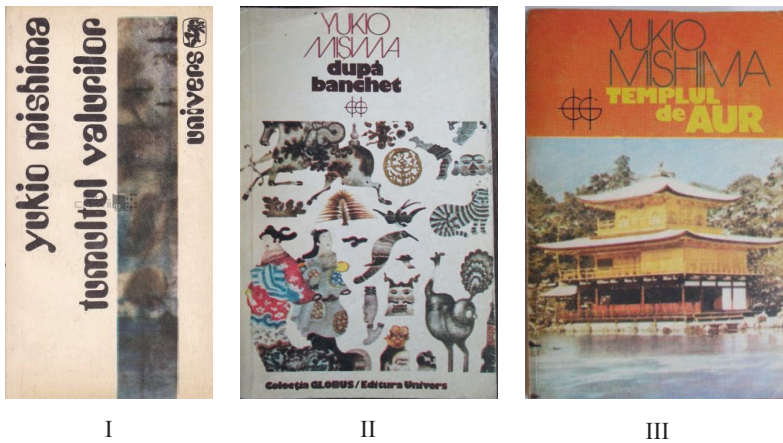


Fig. 1. The first book covers of Mishima Yukio's novels that were published by Univers Publishing House.

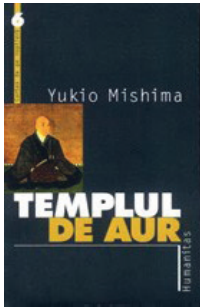
- I. Mishima 1975, *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* (Rom. *Tumultul valorilor*);
 II. Mishima 1979, *After the Banquet* (Rom. *După banchet*);
 III. Mishima 1985, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (Rom. *Templul de aur*).

Source of the first image: [https://www.targulcartii.ro/yukio-mishima/tumultul-valurilor?an=1975&editura=Univers&coperta=Brosata%20\(paperback\)&pid=144726](https://www.targulcartii.ro/yukio-mishima/tumultul-valurilor?an=1975&editura=Univers&coperta=Brosata%20(paperback)&pid=144726) (last accessed: 29.07.2022).

Source of the second image: <https://anticariatagora.ro/literatura-universala/4126-dupa-banchet-yukio-mishima.html> (last accessed: 21.12.2021).

Source of the third image: [https://www.targulcartii.ro/yukio-mishima/templul-de-aur?coperta=Brosata%20\(paperback\)&pid=327467&campaignid=9925646126&adgroupid=102255248564&network=g&keyword=&matchtype=&creative=432572633258&adposition=&device=c&gclid=Cj0KCCQIA_P6dBhD1ARIsAAGI7HDslh8JMxI_uvuhtzUYxOuE-06900WQrrebr5LXbR31vcoFqx-WC9V5MaAjYREALw_wcB](https://www.targulcartii.ro/yukio-mishima/templul-de-aur?coperta=Brosata%20(paperback)&pid=327467&campaignid=9925646126&adgroupid=102255248564&network=g&keyword=&matchtype=&creative=432572633258&adposition=&device=c&gclid=Cj0KCCQIA_P6dBhD1ARIsAAGI7HDslh8JMxI_uvuhtzUYxOuE-06900WQrrebr5LXbR31vcoFqx-WC9V5MaAjYREALw_wcB) (last accessed: 12.01.2023).

VISUAL CULTUREMES



IV



V



VI



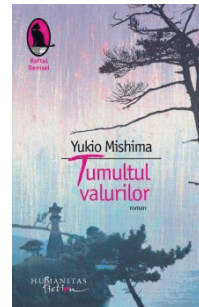
VII



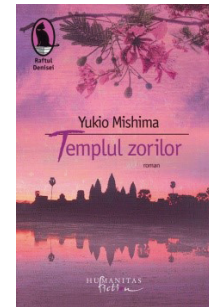
VIII



IX



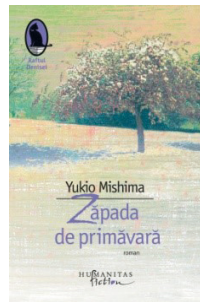
X



XI



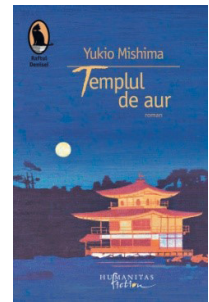
XII



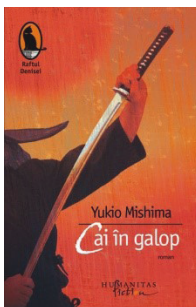
XIII



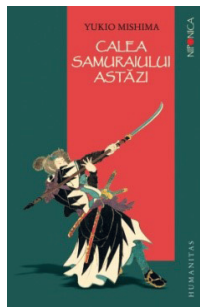
XIV



XV



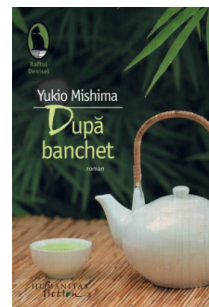
XVI



XVII



XVIII



XIX



Fig. 2. Book covers of Mishima Yukio's novels published by Humanitas Publishing House (2000–2022).

IV. Mishima 2000, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (Rom. *Templul de aur*); V. Mishima 2003, *Confessions of a Mask* (Rom. *Confesiunile unei măști*); VI. Mishima 2004, *After the Banquet* (Rom. *După banchet*); VII. Mishima 2007, *The Way of the Samurai* (Rom. *Calea samuraiului astăzi*); VIII. Mishima 2008, *Sun and Steel* (Rom. *Soare și oțel*); IX. Mishima 2009, *The Way of the Samurai* (Rom. *Calea samuraiului astăzi*); X. Mishima 2010, *The Sound of Waves* (Rom. *Tumultul valurilor*); XI. Mishima 2011, *The Temple of Dawn* (Rom. *Templul zorilor*); XII. Mishima 2012a, *The Decay of the Angel* (Rom. *Îngerul decăzut*); XIII. Mishima 2012b, *Spring Snow* (Rom. *Zăpada de primăvară*); XIV. Mishima

2013a, *Thirst for Love* (Rom. *Sete de iubire*); XV. Mishima 2013b, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (Rom. *Templul de aur*); XVI. Mishima 2014a, *Runaway Horses* (Rom. *Cai în galop*); XVII. Mishima 2014b, *The Way of the Samurai* (Rom. *Calea samuraiului astăzi*); XVIII. Mishima 2015a, *Confessions of a Mask* (Rom. *Confesiunile unei măști*); XIX. Mishima 2015b, *After the Banquet* (Rom. *După banchet*); XX. Mishima 2017, *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* (Rom. *Amurgul marinarului*); XXI. Mishima 2018, *Life for Sale* (Rom. *Viața de vânzare*); XXII. Mishima 2019, *A Morning of Pure Love* (Rom. *O dimineață de iubire pură*); XXIII. Mishima 2021, *Confessions of a Mask* (Rom. *Confesiunile unei măști*); XXIV. Mishima 2022a, *Runaway Horses* (Rom. *Cai în galop*); XXV. Mishima 2022b, *The Way of the Samurai* (Rom. *Calea samuraiului astăzi*); XXVI. Mishima 2022c, *The Decay of the Angel* (Rom. *Îngerul decăzut*); XXVII. Mishima 2022d, *Sun and Steel* (Rom. *Soare și oțel*); XXVIII. Mishima 2022e, *The Temple of Dawn* (Rom. *Templul zorilor*); XXIX. Mishima 2022f, *Spring Snow* (Rom. *Zăpada de primăvară*).

Source of images IV–XVII, XIX–XXIX: <https://humanitas.ro/autori/yukio-mishima> (accessed 3 July 2022, 17:15).

Source of image XVIII: <https://www.printrecarti.ro/55375-yukio-mishima-confesiunile-unei-masti.html> (accessed 29 July 2022, 14:27).

Apart from this, there are also covers (X, XI, XII, XIII, and XIX) that do not include visual culturemes but instead natural elements that do not specifically represent Japan. Rather, to use a concept that was analysed in relation to some of the paratexts of the translations of Rumi’s texts, they ‘romanticise’⁵⁵ Mishima’s literature in the Romanian space. On the covers, one can observe colours such as pink, purple, red, and light green; a deep red flower; pink-purple flowers; a tree in a spring setting, over which snow has fallen; lighthouses on islands accompanied by vegetal elements; the image of the sea (on X we also notice chromatic combinations with light purple and blue that romanticise the atmosphere); and a temple reflected on the surface of the water. The Other is often represented through natural landscapes, which may anticipate the descriptions of natural settings found in his novels. At the same time, they build a romanticised image of Otherness, with Japan being portrayed as a container of some otherwise lost ideals and values (that no more represent Romanian culture) and as being characterised by the central place that nature occupies in human life. For example, cover X suggests the image of an island, perhaps even a remote one, and although it does not actually refer to the Japanese culture, it introduces the Romanian reader to the atmosphere—specifically to life on an island—that characterises the plot of the novel *The Sound of Waves* (i.e., a young fisherman called Shinji, who lives on the island Utajima in Ise Bay, falls in love with Hatsue, one of

⁵⁵ Naghmeh-Abbaspour et al. 2020.

the wealthiest inhabitants of the island). Furthermore, cover XI, in contrast to cover XXVIII, which visually represents Japan, presents another spatial coordinate that characterises the setting of the novel *The Temple of Dawn*: Thailand. Interestingly, the two covers belonging to the Romanian editions of this novel illustrate different cultural spaces: on the one hand, cover XI exhibits Wat Arun (The Temple of Dawn) in Bangkok, and on the other hand, cover XI visually represents Japan. Moreover, there is another difference in the case of the covers XIII and XXIX, which belong to the Romanian versions of the novel *Spring Snow*: while the first one is not culturally marked, the second one contains a *wagasa*, which may influence the reader to expect to discover the depiction of a traditional Japan in the pages of this book. Nevertheless, both of them exhibit the image of snow, which actually hints at a scene in the above-mentioned novel when the characters Kiyooki Matsugae and Satoko Ayakura kiss in a rickshaw while it is snowing outside.

Other examples of covers that do not contain visual culturemes are XVIII, XX, and XXI. The first one (i.e., a detail of the Italian artist Guido Reni's painting *Saint Sebastian*) is representative of the plot in *Confessions of a Mask* (Rom. *Confesiunile unei măști*), while the other dramatises the content of Mishima's novel by employing a chromatic strategy that does influence the reader and influences them to have specific expectations for the actual book content. They keep the reader in suspense and influences them to regard the novel as intriguing and thrilling. Additionally, the big letters that compose the title on XX accentuate the meaning of this title—*Life for Sale* (Rom. *Viață de vânzare*)—thus contributing to *visually* positioning the entire work in the category of thrillers.

Conclusions

To sum up, the strategies employed in designing the Romanian book covers of Mishima Yukio's volumes illustrate the publisher's tendency of foreignising (utilising visual culturemes), romanticising, dramatising, or (sometimes also culturally) contextualising (or recontextualising), which demonstrates the publisher's intention: to influence the audience to perceive Japanese culture and Mishima's literature from these perspectives. On the covers, the Other is sometimes present—through visual culturemes—and sometimes not. When not comprising a symbolical representation of the Other, the covers have the role of dramatising the content of the novel, eliciting specific expectations from the reader, who may perceive it as being intriguing and thrilling. Moreover, through the use of vegetal elements and specific colours,

the Other is romanticised. Regarding the mirroring of alterity, the visual culturemes—even visual anthropoculturemes—are of great importance and influential, since they introduce traditional aspects of the Japanese cultural space. Thus Mishima’s works are introduced into the frame of Japanese traditional culture, the reader being influenced to understand them as literary pieces that portray traditional aspects of Japanese culture and society.

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