

“How did they get in?” University admissions and faux Japanese fiction

Author: Terence Rajivan Edward

Abstract. I consider a puzzle that greatly preoccupies some people and mildly preoccupies others, while being of no interest to some at all: “How did those people get into an elite university?” Problems with writing faux Japanese fiction provide one explanation. Once skilled literary craftspeople have failed, one turns to others.

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“She is a loser and a winner

Though you would simply bin her!”

Philosophers and others work on puzzles, but not all puzzles interest everyone and some puzzles interest very few. People are starving, the climate is changing, but I wish to address a puzzle that greatly preoccupies some: how did those people get into that elite university? This question can seem especially pressing when they regularly struggle with ordinary tasks of competence in a field, regarding which a number of others can do them. In the field of philosophy for example, their premise-by-premise reconstructions seem significantly off, they struggle with applying the distinction between exam questions that are about interpretation of a philosopher and ones which ask for evaluation as well, and more. “How?” “Why?” (I don’t mean to be insulting. I worry about my own competence in these matters, I confess.)

A strange answer occurred to me after reading the introduction by an American to a renowned Japanese novel. The American, namely Nancy Wilson Ross, said:

The Temple of the Golden Pavilion is a novel which could only have been written by a Japanese and a member of a race whose cultural heritage is essentially Buddhist. (1959: xviii)

Now as a claim about possibility that seems false. There is nothing logically or naturally impossible about the thought that someone else wrote the work, by randomly pressing typewriter keys say. It is astonishingly unlikely, even the most unlikely event in the world above probability zero (Turri 2011), but it is not inconsistent or a case of defying gravity, etc.

Anyway, presumably there were some efforts by skilled competent non-Japanese literary craftspeople and these efforts all failed. One might then pass on the mission to others. But who? Well, they are not going to seem like the people who failed, competent skilled craftspeople, but they occasionally do something worthwhile.

So my conjecture is that elite universities have a number of these projects, which skilled competent people have failed with, and with some puzzling admissions they try their luck with others. Maybe these people can help. There is a touch of magic about them even, or that is an impression anyway.

References

Ross, N.W. Introduction. In Mishima, Y. (translated by I. Morris), 1959. *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. London: Secker and Warburg.

Turri, J. 2011. Contingent A Priori Knowledge. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 83: 327-344.