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## The Learning Heart: Western and Native Education in Ivan Turgenev's *Nest of Gentry* and Tanizaki Junichiro's *Light Snow (Makioka Sisters)*

Patrick L. Alston

In *Nest of Gentry* (published in 1858) Turgenev gives us a scene set in the 1830s. Nicholas I, Autocrat of all the Russias, has been on the throne for a decade. Fedia Lavretsky, a student at the University of Moscow, is spending an evening in the seedy drawing room of General Korobin. The General's fortunes are in decline. His one marketable possession is his daughter, Varvara Pavlovna. Her beauty has been polished in an Institute for Young Ladies. She can talk intelligently about the theater, and at a slack moment in the conversation, she sits at the piano and plays the latest Western music, Chopin<sup>1</sup>.

A century later, a continent away, Tanizaki gives us a scene from Japan. The god-emperor Hirohito has been on the throne for a decade. The Makioka family is in decline. The family has brought its one marketable object, Yukiko, to an *o-miai* in Osaka's Oriental Hotel for preview by a prospective husband. The conversation turns to modern education. Both families at the table are amazed at the clever, young, up-to-date Japanese wives whose scientific training enables them at one and the same time to serve tea to a guest, feed the baby, and listen on the radio to Chopin<sup>2</sup>.

From Nicholas I to Hirohito, no two nations have taken their "Chopin", their Western education, more seriously than the Russians and the Japanese. Two of their foremost writers, Turgenev (1818-1883) and Tanizaki (1886-1965), wrote classic novels with subtly expressed educational themes: "education" understood as *vospitanie* in Russian, *sodate* in Japanese, the total learning process impacting on the grounds of human emotion, creating a power which shapes character and the native styles of further human learning. The native styles give distinct Russian and Japanese forms to the Western education both peoples embrace in the 19th and 20th centuries. Educational background, house and home, and nature are forces which express and shape the native Russian and Japanese styles of Westernization in the two love stories, Turgenev's *Nest of Gentry* and Tanizaki's *Light Snow*.

*Light Snow* is the story of the Makioka family, its efforts to preserve its integrity by finding a proper husband for Yukiko, the thin, evanescent snow of the title. The life of the family unfolds between the fall of 1936 and the spring of 1941 against the muffled rumble of the China incident, and the quickening pace of the slide into the Pacific War.

Yukiko, an excessively shy, uncommunicative, pure Kyoto beauty, too thin to wear Western clothes, has become the family problem. She is approaching thirty unmarried. Behind her is yet another sister not getting any younger, and the fear is growing that this youngest of the four Makioka sisters, Taeko, will disgrace the family. She is an independent, up-to-date doll of a girl who wears Western clothes to advantage, smokes cigarettes, and melts men with her practiced smile.

She cannot marry until a husband has been found for her elder sister. The mother of the four girls died young. Her early demise is given as the reason for Yukiko's poor *sodate* and her difficult behavior.

Before the father died, he found proper husbands for the two eldest sisters. Their husbands took the Makioka name which still gleamed with the gold of an Osaka merchant house. The Main House, weakly led by the nervous eldest sister and her limp husband, live in the father's Osaka home before moving to Tokyo. With its walled garden, earthworks, lattice front and polished wood, this old-fashioned native Japanese house, where the spendthrift father died ten years before, is cluttered with his second-rate, overpriced Chinese art objects.

The House is quiet, beautiful, dark, unhygienic and inconvenient. It breathes *sodate*, Japanese education. All four sisters are attached to it, for its memories of their extravagant father, but they are glad to leave it. When the Main House with its many children moves to rented housing in Tokyo, the children are delighted. The house has no garden, but there are movie theaters in the neighborhood showing American films.

The principle scene of *sodate* is the house in the Ashiya suburb of Osaka. The Ashiya house is the home of the junior Makiokas, the second sister, the warm, sensitive Sachiko, and her understanding, sympathetic husband. The design of the house is Japanese. Upstairs are matted sleeping rooms and the indispensable bath. Downstairs, a veranda opens out to suburban nature. In April, the lone cherry tree Sachiko has planted in the weedy garden, manages a handful of pale blossoms. In the fall, the traditional food and flowers are set out on the veranda when the family gathers to write verses to the full moon. *Shoji*, the sliding paper doors, give the illusion of privacy. Actually, there are no sealed off places in the house, no separate stairs. Sights and sounds are everywhere.

The Osaka house is a village where Yukiko's problem and Taeko's scandals are discussed by everyone, the child, and the maids. Taeko's self-study course in Westernization threatens the family. The rumors about her further complicate Yukiko's situation. As the rumors become known to the marriage brokers, they rub off on Yukiko as a member of the family which permits wild behavior. Sachiko's husband, Teinosuke, is worried that the sisters will have a falling out over Taeko's latest boyfriend, a self-taught photographer back from Los Angeles. The Japanese house, its *sodate*, teaches him an unforgettable lesson:

"Taeko, the youngest sister, was as busy as ever. She continued to live with her older sister, Sachiko, but was often away. One night out of three her face was missing at the dinner table. Teinosuke, Sachiko's husband, could not help feeling that Taeko was avoiding having her two elder sisters (Sachiko and Yukiko) lecture her on her behavior. Privately, he worried that there would be a rupture between the sisters. He felt a particular danger that Yukiko would become alienated from Taeko once and for all. One evening, when he came home from work, he did not see his wife and went looking for her. Upstairs in the six-mat room off the bath, he slid open the *fusuma* of the balcony. There he startled Yukiko sitting with her feet bare, letting Taeko trim the nails of her toes. 'Where is Sachiko?' 'Naka-an-chan has gone to visit Sumayama-san. She should be back soon,' Taeko said easily as Yukiko reached to pull her

kimono down over her instep. The motion scattered the nail parings on her lap. As he slid the *fusuma* shut, Teinosuke caught a brief view of Taeko kneeling, gathering up the silver slivers one at a time into the palm of her hand. This glimpse lingered in his mind, quieting his fears that the two youngest sisters, whatever their differences, would ever suffer a complete break. This assurance the scene of natural loveliness charged with simple feeling taught him anew<sup>3</sup>." Japanese education heals Western education.

Downstairs in the Ashiya house are two western rooms, for dining, and the parlor. The Western parlor is furnished with the indispensable instruments of Western education, piano, phonograph, and radio. The Western parlor is where the sisters receive visitors: the woman who teaches French and how to cook shrimp with garlic; Tokyo friends of the marriage broker, fashionable matrons, dressed in Hollywood clothes. The parlor is where Taeko's boyfriends, dressed in English flannel or Chicago overcoat, negotiate alliances with Sachiko, who has come downstairs to greet them in kimono.

The principal device of Western education is also downstairs. It is the telephone. Mrs. Itani, the marriage broker, who runs a beauty parlor, knows everything, only wears kimono, and plans to re-visit America six months before Pearl Harbor, lives on the telephone. She uses it to scold Sachiko that the Makioka sisters are living in the past, that they are not working hard enough on Yukiko's problem. They must move faster and negotiate more aggressively on the admittedly inferior offers now coming in. For all her pure Japanese beauty, behind the white mask of powder, she is approaching thirty. The mannish Itani dominates the phone. Yukiko avoids it the way she avoids all contact outside the family. Its piercing intimacy repels her. Her voice is too delicate, too fine to travel down a wire.

One major action of *Light Snow* turns on Yukiko and the telephone. Mrs. Itani has found a proper suitor. Sachiko's husband, Teinosuke, who prefers remaining in the background out of deference to the fumbling Main House, takes a personal liking to the candidate. For once he pushes the negotiations. The suitor, a sophisticated, highly Westernized medical doctor with his own pharmaceutical business, a widower with a young daughter, appreciates Yukiko's rare beauty. He telephones her late in the negotiations. Sachiko is out. Yukiko refuses to come to the telephone. The negotiations collapse.

Teinosuke, trained as an accountant, is a poet and calligrapher. He gets out his brush and brushes an elaborate apology on six-feet of special paper. He explains that Yukiko's Japanese education (*sodate*) has been neglected. The family, after the death of the mother and the father, has been remiss. The Makioka family should have trained her better. The doctor responds like to like. No, it is he who is at fault. He is too much a country bumpkin to make happy such a delicate, old fashioned beauty. Japanese education restores harmony. Teinosuke is now in a stronger position to push Yukiko to accept the next suitable candidate. He knows it, she knows it, Sachiko knows it. No one says it. No one has to say it. *Sodate* has said it. Yukiko, however, cannot go forth as bride from the Junior House. She must represent the Main House. This will involve Teinosuke in another exercise of Japanese education beyond the scope of this

essay.

As in the Japan of Hirohito before the Pacific War, so in the Russia of Nicholas I before the Crimean War, houses are more than places to live. They are stages signifying and shaping educational development, the mix of native and foreign education. Like the Makioka house in the suburbs of Osaka, the Kalitin house in the suburbs of Orel provides residents and visitors with a divided stage for learning and practicing the rituals of Russian and Western ways characteristic of the educated classes. The matrimonial prize in the Kalitin house is an unspoiled Russian beauty, Liza, at nineteen, ripe for marriage, and already innocently attracting Western educated males to connubial competition. Liza's *vospitanie* is nominally directed by her vain, self-centered mother. Actually, an old nurse, long vanished on pilgrimage, turned the serious child in early adolescence toward the deeply historic pull of Orthodox christianity. Currently, her mentor is not her halfwesternized mother but an incorruptible old-Russian aunt, who distrusts French-speaking men and religious people with equal venom.

In the Kalitin house, Western education is practiced downstairs in the parlor, where the piano and the card table are the center of activity learning. In the parlor Liza's mother, Maria Dmitrievna, holds provincial court. The current star and mother's hope for a son-in-law is a Frenchified government official on detached duty from St. Petersburg, Panshin. At the piano, Panshin sings German *Lieder* to Liza's cool accompaniment. At the card table he flatters Maria Dmitrievna over the English card games the bored widow pursues. To the parlor comes the town gossip with the latest news from the West.

In the late spring of 1842, he brings word that a neighboring landowner and distant cousin of the Kalitins has just returned from France, a refugee from his wrecked marriage to the General's daughter, the beautiful Varvara. To the parlor comes this cousin, Fedia Lavretsky, to pay his respects after an absence of 11 years. Fedia lacks Panshin's slick polish. After a few minutes of awkward conversation filled with abrupt silences, Maria Dmitrievna dismisses him as a "bear and peasant,.....no wonder his wife left him." In the parlor the wife, who has been falsely reported dead in a Western journal, appears before the summer is over, out of money and lovers. In the parlor, she quickly displaces Liza at the piano, captures Panshin as a singing partner on her way to roping him as a lover. In the parlor, she gains the sympathy of Maria Dmitrievna by offering the services of her French maid to sew the latest Parisian underwear.

Upstairs at the Kakitin house is another world. This world can be reached by a separate stairway. Fedia will use this separate entrance to reach Russian-educated Russia without passing through Westernized Russia downstairs. The Russian-educated upper part of the house is ruled over by an old woman, Marfya Timofeevna Pestov, Liza's great aunt. Marfya educated Fedia in Russian values when his father fled abroad to government service, disinherited by his father for marrying a serf girl of deeply religious goodness. Marfya's court, in contrast to her niece's downstairs, is based on the Sermon on the Mount. She has around her a bullfinch that no longer sings (in contrast to Panshin who sings downstairs all the time), an ill-tempered cat, a frightened stray dog, and a nine-year-old orphan girl. Here Fedia can weep for his lost love and his shattered happiness, Marfya's hand on his bowed head.

Mayfya is Liza's protecting angel, from her mother's plans and men's passions. When the orphan girl sees Fedia and Liza in the garden by moonlight, the old aunt warns her that all men are goats. When the report of Varvara's death in Paris is refuted by Varvara's appearance in the parlor, Marfya bustles in and out of her room, looking for her cap, so that the doomed pair, Liza and Fedia, who have exchanged a half-kiss in the garden, can have a final word before parting forever. Upstairs at the Kalitin house is the refuge of pure Russian-educated feeling. Its language is not Institute French. It is compassion and silence.

Russian and Japanese houses and homes provide split-level stages on which the natives act out scenes mixing and separating domestic and foreign learning styles. As the stages, so the actors divide, shifting characterizations. The Pestov women (Kalitin by marriage), their gentry lines running back to the age of Basil the Blind in the early 15th century, wait with impatience in their suburban home until male visitors appear with news of the more vigorous world beyond the open windows. Left to themselves, the women are thrown back on the resources of the Western education given them in the schools for noble daughters founded by Catherine the Great.

Marfya Timofeevna (Liza's old-Russian upstairs aunt), born in the early 1770s, and the daughter of her brother, Maria Dmitrievna (Liza's downstairs mother), born in the 1790s, share a core of experience from life in the voluminous source of Russian education, the countryside. Marfya's longer memory is skeptical, her education cruder. She represents talent undeveloped and strength unspent. Her memory of noblemen chasing peasant girls taught her mistrust of men and manners. She remembers her married brother's infatuation with a peasant girl; and another ex-serf, instant noblewoman by marriage (Fedia's mother) left by her cousin (Fedia's father) at the Pestov estate, to be brought up. She taught Fedia's peasant mother to write, so she could write letters to her husband, an exile in London, pleading with him to come home and care for his son, Fedia. Now Fedia, 35 years later, is coming home from Paris, defeated by the adultery of his wife in Paris. Never married, the 70-year-old Marfya still holds Fedia as her adopted child. She is the one person to give him a warm welcome home.

Maria Dmitrievna also expects her cousin's arrival. She has been educated more broadly, with thinner, adaptive emotions. While spending the first decade of her life with her aunt on the Pestov estate where Fedia was born, she has had positive experiences with men and outside schooling. The death of her parents (Turgenev's documentation is elusive on this point) spared her the lessons of marriage under strain. Her aunt, Marfya, has been born too early in Catherine's reign to reside in the boarding schools opened in St. Petersburg and Moscow to varnish gentry daughters with European manners. Born twenty years later, Maria spent her adolescence in a Moscow institute for young ladies. Another early death, of her elder brother, transformed her from poor relative like her aunt to heiress. The masterful Kalitin, a university graduate who worked himself to death making money, captured her heart and united their fortunes. He sold the Pestov estate to the abiding chagrin of the aunt, and moved his bride to town.

Maria adored her husband (Liza's father) alive and worships his memory in death. From beyond the grave his maxims guide her continuing education and her efforts to raise her daughter. She enjoys the company of men who flatter her as

beauty fades. As a widow of means with a lovely daughter, the rather detached Liza, she presides over a prairie salon attended by local retainers whom her husband picked up by the ears, and dashing young men from St. Petersburg on the make for propertied brides. Maria is sentimental, and not sure how to receive Fedia, whose status as cuckold needs to be clarified. Her husband taught her that men know best, and she is eager to consult a lackey of her husband who poses as town arbitrator of manners except for Maria who despises him as a *popovich*, priest's son, turned scandalmonger. As the scene closes, the two Catherinian women are at odds over how to receive Fedia, divided as they are by temperament, fortune, age, and degree of Western education.

Educational conventions surface in *Light Snow* from the opening scene, upstairs in the Japanese quarters of the junior Makioka house in the Osaka suburbs. Two of the sisters are preparing for an outing to Kobe in 1936, the last autumn before the China Incident began to cloud their world. The elder sister, Sachiko, born in 1903, has integrated Western and Japanese education into an harmonious personality. Her beauty (at 33 she looks five years younger) is the pride of her husband. Sachiko is mother of a school-age daughter, whose piano lessons downstairs, supervised by Yukiko, cover the upstairs conversation with Taeko, the youngest of the four Makioka sisters. If the piano stops, the sisters will change the subject from Yukiko's latest marriage prospect.

Taeko is in Western clothes. Her short figure looks dumpy in kimono. She reserves robes for dancing exhibitions. Sachiko is well into the elaborately layered ritual of dressing up in kimono. While she is at ease in Western dress and prefers it in summer, her husband Teinosuke of the polite brush, is a connoisseur of Japanese style and likes to show off his wife in public. The costumes of the sisters are the first hint Tanizaki gives of their educational variety. Further differences arise in the course of their conversation over the snapshot of the man suggested for Yukiko. Sachiko wants the youngest sister to encourage Yukiko, who at 29 has been in the marriage market for a decade, to agree to an early *omiai*, the first meeting face to face.

Japanese education teaches the art of indirect, third-party negotiations, indirect pursuit of a goal by ritualized tactics. By all the canons of *sodate*, Sachiko is guide and mentor now that both parents are ancestral and the Main House ineffectual. As Marfya is educational guide (*vonpitannitsa*) to Liza, Sachiko is educational guide (*sensei*) to Yukiko and Taeko. Taeko, Koi-san, Baby sister, has already embarrassed the family. Five years ago at the age of 19 she eloped with the younger son of a prominent Osaka jewelry house. The young people were brought back, their relationship placed on indefinite hold to await the resolution of Yukiko's problem. The scandal broke in the local paper with a mix-up of names spattering Yukiko. Taeko blames the Main House for not bribing the publishers. The damage has been patched over, but as the years pass and no husband is found for Yukiko, Koi-san is getting restless.

Both sisters remember this background as they talk, Taeko powdering Sachiko's ripe shoulders and passing a worldly eye over the photograph of Yukiko's latest, an ordinary salaryman. On the surface, the talk is of Yukiko. At the educational level it is a reversal of Japanese roles with leadership passing to the more Westernized younger sister. With a gallery of her own where she displays

the Japanese and foreign dolls she designs, with a postal savings book and a knowledge of the Kobe business world, Taeko represents the Western learning edge in traditional Japanese education. Younger sister (*imoto-san*) makes middle sister (*naka-chan-san*) feel inferior, foreign learning replacing traditional age in the family hierarchy.

Japanese and Russian houses are outposts that mark the progress and style of the foreign invasion of manners, emotions, and learning styles. The Makiokas and the Pestovs exhibit variant styles of resistance and collaboration. Beyond the outposts there is a refuge, a place where Russian and Japanese traditional learning are still relatively unpolluted. For the Makioka sisters, Kyoto in April is a garden with emotive magic. Each year, from 1937 to 1941, the sisters of the Junior House restore family harmony and pure Japanese feeling by walking in their holiday kimonos through the showers of cherry blossoms blessing the ancient temples and shrines of the old capital of Nippon. The annual pilgrimage is a clock in their lives, marking the passage of years, the aging of the sisters, a barometer of personal and family and national moods, a repository of memories hoarded for use throughout the ensuing year. Cherry blossom viewing, *o-hanami*, is an indigenous educational force, an annual refresher course and comprehensive test of family and national integrity.

For the lesson to take hold, for the magic to work, for the examination to be passed, careful preparations must be made. The threat to *o-hanami* is the same as to schooling: formalism and routine, lack of sincerity. Under Sachiko's direction, the family overcomes the death of the heart, the unraveling of feelings, the blunting of sensibilities, through intensive preparation and the excitement that comes with realizing that a sudden wind may blow the blossoms away before the moment at sundown when they glow for the last time. For the exercise to be successful, the blossoms must be viewed at that moment when they are about to die. Special kimonos are sewn for the outing, the precise route retraced from the year before, over the bridges, around the ponds, along the hills and through the gates, the sisters in flowing patterns of color, the blossoms dancing on their sleeves. Strangers turn to photograph this procession out of the vanishing past.

If the family has done its homework, and is lucky, an instant of native feeling will restore their connection with their island home's past. They will be able to chase taxis, answer telephones, tune in to Western music, stare at Western films without destroying their Japanese souls, what they have been taught they uniquely are. Sachiko is the one who insists on high performance. The others follow for the picnic on the grass. Even under her guidance, the number of educative springs is limited and uncertain. Of the five staff rides recorded in *Light Snow*, only two restore Japanese education.

For Fedia Lavretsky there is also a garden source of native education. After paying his respects to his relative in town, he travels to the estate he owns nearby. Eight years before, he had fled the Russian countryside as his father before him, for the city and the university. He left the university to marry the beautiful Varvara who was as bored with the countryside as Kalitin. The couple settled in Paris, chasing pleasure between the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. At the fount of Western education, Fedia took a different path from his wife. While he read books on drainage, Varvara created a salon of admirers. A lover's note destroyed



Fedia's nest. He returned to Russia doubtful whether he would ever build another.

This return of the Westernized Russian disappointed in love is Turgenev's own experience converted into a universal. The event is the educational turning point of *Nest of Gentry*. Still in pain from his boyhood memories of his artificial Western education at the main estate, playing Emile to his fatuous father's Rousseau, Fedia goes instead to the small estate of his sister. The peasants are disconcerted at the sudden appearance of their landlord. The small house where his sister died pressing an ikon to chilled lips has been shut for two years. The flies have dust on their backs and the yard dog is immobilized by a heavy chain. A one-armed peasant, freed from taxes, old Anton, who remembers when the fields were forests, and an old woman half out of her mind, welcome him home. She serves his inaugural meal, chicken-in-the pot, an ancient bird with blue veins.

The next day, Fedia remains in the crumbling house where the rhythms of the countryside rise from the abandoned garden going to steppeland. The rattle of a cart, a woman's voice, the birds swooping over the fields, the runaway vines creeping in at the windows, plunge him into a reverie of Russian country life "at the bottom of the river." Here on the floor of the river, Fedia's Russian education begins. After a decade of books and smart talk and foreign travel, he is at a quiet stopping place. His wife, finding him as dull as the Russian countryside, has left him. Resting on the bottom of the river in a resuscitative trance induced by exhaustion, open to the teaching power of nature, Fedia submits to Russia and knows that here and only here can he build a lasting nest.

Both *Nest of Gentry* and *Light Snow* focus on beautiful young women unspoiled by Western education, their emotional ground native and pure. Their suitors, in the Russia of 1840 and the Japan of 1940, are Westernized countrymen, returning from abroad, their hearts divided. The gardens, the families, the houses, are focal points of the educational themes orchestrating the love stories. In both stories, the pure, undivided, natively educated hearts of the women are stronger than the half foreign hearts of the men. Neither story degrades itself with a happy ending. Whatever learning there is depends on the dance of foreign and native styles.

## NOTES

- 1 Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev, *Dvorianskoe gnezdo*, P. Waddington, ed. (London, 1969), p. 45.
- 2 Tanizaki Junichiro, *Sasame yuki* (Tokyo, 1955), I, p. 79.
- 3 *Idid.*, II, pp. 236-37. (Patrick L. Alston's translation).