

“I Always Destroy What I Love Most”: Julian Bell’s Romantic Failure

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I. Introduction

Our intent to explore the Bloomsbury group is to show extended research on Virginia Woolf has recently been branching out. Not only biographies on Vanessa Bell, Woolf’s sister and Julian Bell, her son, but also novels featuring them have been published. These publications indicate that Woolf studies in extraneous nature is gradually expanding. Then, why do we mention the Bloomsbury again now? Perhaps, topics of the Bloomsburian era raised by the members of the Bloomsbury are based on some of the leading ideas that are still valid even nowadays like all the other stream of thoughts ahead of their time. In other words, several propositions that cannot be overlooked are reposed in their questions time after time. Nigel Nicolson’s remark on the Bloomsbury group reminds us of its present aspect as follows: “Bloomsbury, like the Old Testament, is exceptionally fertile ground for commentary and expertise, and the fun is that, unlike an archaeological site, each new generation can start all over again” (9-10). A group of intellectuals

known as the Bloomsbury is not easily expressed in one word, but their main question along with their liberalist spirit is: “What is civilization? Where does this civilization lead them?” Issues that they argued in the concept of the civilization include utopianism, socialism and religion. Hong Ying summarizes Julian’s biggest despair of their influence as “[t]hey left no space for posterity to say anything new, their influence was so all pervasive” (*K: The Art of Love* 153). Julian, then, is the very figure that acutely reacted to and devoted his life to this question. Although he was not a member of the Bloomsbury, he was trapped by his parents’ fame and reputation. He was a great Bloomsburian in the making who was forced to live under the pressure of such fame and reputation. Woolf published her first novel, *The Voyage Out* as Julian was born. According to Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, this was the beginning of the Bloomsbury’s “golden years,” which slowly disappeared with Julian’s death in 1937 (286). They record that his death is a significant event not only to “[shadow] Vanessa and Virginia’s lives,” but also to allude to the demise of the Bloomsbury’s golden years (286). In other words, the history of the rise and fall of the Bloomsbury began with Julian’s birth and fell into the extreme of the decadence with his death.

The aim of this paper is to examine Julian’s orientation in Hong Ying’s *K: The Art of Love* (1999) and Susan Sellers’s *Vanessa and Virginia* (2008) and to compare and contrast their eastern and western views on Julian and his human nature. They share one fact in common that they both have thoroughly studied Woolf. Sellers is a renowned Woolf scholar who still teaches Woolf related subjects at St. Andrews University. Hong Ying, on the other hand, had visited the Library of School of Oriental and African Studies at London University and researched on Woolf, Vanessa’s collection of letters and the Bloomsbury in general since 1991, eight years prior to the publication of *K: The Art of Love*. Besides their research on books and letters regarding Woolf, Vanessa and the Bloomsbury, it is important for them to be inspired by Julian’s portraits and Vanessa’s paintings before writing their novels. Hong Ying, for example, visited Vanessa’s country home in Charleston, which has been renovated as her memorial hall, by chance. She could

picture the entire story of the novel as she gazed upon the walls filled with Julian’s portraits and his presents to his mother including “two bronze antiques ... and a statue of the Boddhisattva Guan Yin” (Author’s Foreword to *K: The Art of Love* vi). Sellers, on the other hand, papered her library with photocopied art works of Vanessa. She interviewed and spent time with artists to discover what processes a painting had to go through in an artist’s mind during the course of completion. The difference between these two authors is that Hong Ying received immediate inspiration from Julian’s portraits and Chinese artworks whereas Sellers constantly raised problems and questions about Vanessa and Woolf’s lives that served as her driving force to write her novel.

Their extensive and competent knowledge in Woolf and the Bloomsbury could have served them as a poison rather than a remedy in their literary works. Sellers is a renowned Woolf scholar so that her imagination is naturally limited as a novelist writing about her. It is also difficult for Hong Ying to avoid such limit as an author since she has studied Woolf for a long time. Ha Jin, a professor of English literature at Boston University and a novelist, conducted an exhaustive study into the Korean War and published a novel called *War Trash* (2004). Since he uses the primary sources on the Korean War too candidly, his novel is devaluated a “memoir” disguised as a novel (Eperjesi). Moreover, he is even criticized and accused of plagiarizing a memoir on the Korean War (Martinsen). Unlike Ha Jin, Hong Ying and Sellers attempted ‘defamiliarization’ with their narrators in the novels to create a fictional gap or aesthetic distance to overcome their artistic limit as novelists. Hong Ying chooses to defamiliarize through the eyes of Julian, an unfamiliar western man instead of a Chinese woman—for example, Lin, the heroine in her novel. According to Amy Tak-yee Lai, in *K: The Art of Love*, Hong Ying begins to keep a distance as an author from her characters by discarding autobiographic aspects of her previous novels *Summer of Betrayal* (1992) and *Daughter of the River* (1997) (69). Sellers also establishes Vanessa as a narrator and tries to explore Woolf to overcome the limit of her imagination. If she attempted to write about Woolf in the form of a biography rather than a novel, such

a task would have been less troublesome for her. Biography writing is an author's attempt, plea and justification to discover consistency and explanation on a person so that it can be mythopoeia and a pure fabrication of the person at worst. It is hardly possible for Sellers as one of the leading Woolf scholars to be aware of Woolf's attitudes towards a biography and to disagree with the fact that a series of actualities presented by a biography cannot fully trace a person's life. Instead of mythifying Woolf, Sellers uses a fictional gap through Vanessa's eyes and ears to penetrate into Woolf's life while attempting to filling a space between a peculiar boundary between the fact and fiction. Monica Latham highly regards Sellers as one of the novelists who "have resurrected the figure of Woolf, used her own narrative tools and style to portray her, and put into practice her own theory of "new biography," which serves two "masters," fact and fiction" (354). In other words, Sellers has sublimated her disadvantage into advantage as a novelist according to Latham. Their attempt to overcome their limit of imagination is to maximize their aesthetic distances from their protagonists in their novels and avoid subjectivization of their writings.

"I always destroy what I love most" (*K: The Art of Love* 186) is an expression for Julian to hate and blame himself as he sees Lin, his most beloved person in China indulging in pain. In *K*, the original Chinese manuscript of *K: The Art of Love*, Hong Ying writes Julian's self-blame as "我最愛的, 我就毀壞" (*wǒ zuì ài de, wǒ jiù huǐhuài*; 199) in which she portrays Julian's innate nature well. The Chinese word, "就" (*jiù*) has many different meanings and it is most commonly used as a verb to mean to 'advance.' However, in the above sentence, this word has the meaning of 'soon' or 'immediately.' Thus, the literal interpretation of this expression should be translated as "I [immediately] destroy what I love most." Through this expression in her Chinese manuscript, Hong Ying implicitly holds Julian's spontaneous nature well who finished his life at the early age of twenty nine. In *K: The Art of Love*, Hong Ying's Julian is ultimately responsible for destroying not only his life but also Lin's whereas Seller's Julian is held accountable for breaking his most beloved mother, Vanessa gradually yet

completely. Both authors show the irony of Julian’s life in which he destroys not only the lives of people he loved most, but also his very own life at an early stage of his life. Hong Ying deals with a hopeless affair between a married woman, Lin and Julian that leads to a suicide and a death in a war respectively. On the other hand, Sellers portrays how Vanessa experiences a mental shock and breakdown upon Julian’s death even more delicately than Stansky and Abrahams’s biography of Julian who describe how his death influences on Vanessa, Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group.

II. Julian’s Romantic Failure

Hong Ying as a Chinese female writer, who uses Julian, an English man as her protagonist, cleverly employs flexibility as an author within biographical facts without crossing the borders of falsehood. It is inevitable for Julian’s romantic failure experienced in Hong Ying’s novelist world to end in failure due to the geographical, linguistic and emotional distances of the east (China) and the west (England).

In *K: The Art of Love*, Hong Ying narrates a series of events through Julian’s eyes and ears in which his spontaneous nature makes him escape from his passion and lead him to unfamiliar territories. His uncle, Leonard Woolf highly recommends and supports Julian’s decision to go to China since “China was bound to become the centre of a political storm in the coming decades” according to him (205). Julian also believes he has come to China to “alleviate the plight of mankind” (206); however, he has moved to China in order to evade his parents’ and the Bloomsbury’s influence. He, then, falls in love with a Chinese woman named Lin, but he has no intention to practice monogamy.¹⁾ Lin threatens Julian

1) In one of his letters to his mother, he has no intent to initiate a polygamous passion with his lover, Ling Shuhua or anyone for that matter and declares “I’ve not really forsworn polygamy” (Stansky and Abrahams 205).

that she would commit a suicide if he ever leaves her. Once again he runs away from his lover to the heart of the Chinese Revolution that is the very beginning of his romantic failure. Presenting a case of Hartley Coleridge, an eldest son of the romantic poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as “a paradigmatic romantic failure,” Judith Plotz defines the term, romantic failure as “the failure of the supremely gifted child who does not fulfill the enormous promise of his youth” (133). As Julian was expected, Hartley also failed not only to succeed the literary legacy of his parents’ generation, but also to become a literary figure surpassing them. On the one hand, to Hong Ying who succeeds the literary tradition of Chinese literature, there is another meaning for romantic failure. According to Jack W. Chen, earlier Chinese literature prior to the Tang Dynasty hardly treated the topic of love, but an “explosion of interest in and writing on love” arose in the Chinese literature in the post-An Lushan Rebellion²⁾ (269). Some of these Chinese fictions examine “stories of romantic success” and “stories of romantic failure” (Chen 269). In this aspect, romantic success or failure may be interpreted as success or failure of romantic relationship between a man and a woman. Atherton Noyes, furthermore, defines tragedy, especially failure in a war, as romantic failure (435, 440) and we intend to place Julian’s failure of revolution under the category of romantic failure in this paper as well.

In order to reach the battlefield of the Chinese Revolution, he is issued with a press card from the Reuters. He, then, decides to go to the northern part of Sichuan, an old base for the Red Army with Yi, one of his students at Wuhan University. They cross the Yangtze River by boat and drive a jeep night and day to get to the northeastern part of Sichuan where they find out ‘the Fourth Front Army,’ the main troop of the Red Army, used to stay a few months ago. They keep heading for the northwestern part of Sichuan to follow the traces of the Red Army.

2) An Lushan Rebellion was a war that lasted for eight years from 755 to 763. In this eight-year period, the total of 13 million people were either killed or injured. An Lushan proclaimed himself the emperor of the Great Yen Dynasty in rebellion against the Tang Dynasty. However, the Tang defeated An Lushan and the Yen in 763.

Since the road is not wide enough to drive a car, they ride on horses instead. As they enter the mountain areas of the northern Sichuan, Julian discovers a ruined village and bloody bodies as a result of the war. He witnesses the tragic and dark side of the Chinese Revolution which he has been eager to experience at first hand. They pass the ruin of the war and reach the region where the Sichuan warlord troops have defeated the Red Army and occupied. Yi finds out that the Red Army used to occupy this territory, but it has been driven out of the area and headed westward. He, then, declares “[i]t looks like this is the end of journey” (*K: The Art of Love* 217); however, Julian thinks he has just stood at “only the starting point” (*K: The Art of Love* 217) and reassured his determination to witness the heart of the Chinese Revolution. A staff officer of the Sichuan warlord troops takes Julian to the brigade commander, the commanding officer of the troops. Julian asks the commander if he could interview some of the Red Army captives. After he assures the commander of a good press release on his troops, he meets some of the captives. When he interviews them, they only plead their innocence. As he is about to finish interviewing them, he encounters a fourteen or fifteen year old boy who proudly claims to cut off the landowner’s son’s head in the village. He tells Julian he had to cut at the neck several times since the neck was not cut off easily. Julian cannot bear the boy’s story any longer that stimulates him to vomit. The reason for him to leave Wuhan for the mountain area of Sichuan is to find the Red Army safely and to participate in the revolution at first hand; however, his body is instinctively repelled by only a fragmented piece of the revolution. This is the moment in which the reader needs to start questioning about his authenticity to the Chinese Revolution.

On the following day, he witnesses a public execution of about twenty captives including the boy and feels the cruelty of the Chinese Revolution. He finally realizes that the nature of this revolution is not anything that he has desired.

‘No,’ Julian thought. ‘This kind of revolution is not for me. There’s too much stirring up of class hatred, too much murder. The Chinese peasants are poor, so

are the workers, but they have not reached the stage of revolution yet. Even if they do want a revolution, why should it be so bloody, so riddled with hatred? . . . What they were fighting for was not European-style socialism or liberalism. Atrocities were normal in revolutions in this part of the world, but he was not Asian and he did not have to be dragged into it. Even where the cause was just there was still a difference between East and West. The gap between them was too wide for him to bridge. (*K: The Art of Love* 223-24)

Without looking backwards, Julian retraces his path back to Wuhan with Yi. When his romantic dreaming of the revolution is doomed to disappointment or despair, he comforts himself that he is not a “deserter” (224). This is the moment that his authenticity to the Chinese Revolution is proven to be otherwise and that he experiences another romantic failure.

It is ironic for him to escape from the bloody battlefield of the Chinese Revolution to return to Lin who he has initially evaded to go to the heart of the revolution. His decision reveals his spontaneous nature well and his return to the subject of his romantic failure is not only ironic, but also questionable. As the negation of negation is not affirmation, failure of failure is not success. His act of returning to the initial point of his romantic failure, thus, alludes to coming failure in the future. As he denies himself as a deserter of the Chinese Revolution, he justifies his reason to return to Lin by remembering ‘K,’ which signifies his eleventh lover, as an alphabet “in a sixth-century Jewish scripture from Syria or Palestine that K was the letter of life” (*K: The Art of Love* 224).

Yes, she was the person who should share his future. If only they could live together permanently, wherever it was. Just as she once said, she was part of his life. . . . Once the idea was firmly established in his mind he realized that he had always felt this way. He had just needed some time to clear his head. Now Lin would bring him back from the battlefield. (224-25)

According to the passage above, Lin can preside over Julian’s life and he cannot deny her influence on his life. As she can take him out of the battlefield, she has

initially served as a catalyst to drive him into the core of the Chinese Revolution. He believes her reason to invite him to Beijing in the winter of 1935 is “indeed to let him explore her inner world” (質際上是邀請他暢遊她的內心世界³⁾, *zhì jì shàng shì yāoqǐng tā chàngyóu tā de nèixīnshìjiè*; *K* 243). Likewise, he deludes himself that Lin has allowed him to take the journey between Wuhan and the mountain area of Sichuan in the late summer of 1936 to explore his inner world rather than his own romantic failure. Julian, who does not recognize his repeated romantic failure, returns to Wuhan again that leads to another catastrophe.

Lin does not ask him any questions why he left Wuhan a month and a half. She, instead, makes love with him at his place in the morning as usual. The only difference from her previous visits is that she is staying there significantly longer than before. As a result, her husband, professor Cheng finally witnesses her affair with Julian. Julian finally realizes her intention as follows:

A horrible suspicion flashed into his mind. Could she possibly have set him up? Could she have led her husband here so that he would catch them red-handed in bed together? But what for? ... Their lovemaking today had gone on so long that they had never given themselves a chance to talk. During his absence she must have been making up her mind too. She must have decided on a desperate plan, and today was the day she had put it into execution—she was never afraid of action once she had made her mind up. (*K: The Art of Love* 235)

Lin has purposely created this crisis to seek a divorce and to force a marriage on Julian who has been reluctant to marry anyone. Julian, on the other hand, has planned to give her news, or to make a formal proposal of marriage to her after making love with her that day. Julian, who is spontaneous but irresolute to an idea

3) Nicky Harman and Henry Zhao, who translated *K* into its English version, *K: The Art of Love*, merely make a liberal translation of this part as “she could share with him everything previously denied to her” (*K: The Art of Love* 225). They ignore not only Lin’s inner world or consciousness, but also Hong Ying’s intent to maximize the author’s poetic effect in prose.

of marriage, has driven her into a situation which she tricks herself to destroy her marriage on her own. Although he has never intended, professor Cheng's marriage has not only been destroyed, but also his first impression on the British man as a "gentleman" (*K: The Art of Love* 234) has been shattered.

Julian, who has experienced romantic failure for the second time with Lin in Wuhan, falls into her trap. He, then, faces the reason to lead to China again that is "the thing he most feared: losing his freedom of choice" (*K: The Art of Love* 235). He has fled to China to get out from under an umbrella of the Bloomsbury and to choose his freedom of choice. Ironically, he is forced to give up the love of his life and choose to return to the west, the initial escaping point of his romantic failure.

He urges himself not to look back or resent. He has considered himself as a cosmopolitan, but he has merely made effort to chase exotic things in the end. Now I have no choice, but to love and participate in a revolution in the west. (Authors' Translation)

不能回怨，他對自己仔告。他自認爲是個世界主義者，結果在來芳只是獵奇。他只能回到西克 文化中關戀愛，關革命。⁴⁾

Bùnénghuí yuàn, tā duì zìjǐ zāi gào. Tā zì rènwéi shì gè shìjièzhǔyìzhě, jiéguǒ zài lái fāng zhǐshì lièqí. Tā zhǐnéng huídào xī kè wénhuà zhōng guān liàn'ài, guān géming. (*K* 257)

4) Harman and Zhao translate this part as "[i]t was painful for him to acknowledge all this. He had thought himself a good internationalist, but had treated China as if it were an exotic distraction. Now there was no way for him to turn except to the West, to find love or war" (*K: The Art of Love* 238). Their translation is clearly different from the author's literal translation of Hong Ying's original manuscript. For example, Hong Ying describes that Julian considers himself as "世界主義者" (*shìjièzhǔyìzhě*) or a cosmopolitan; however, Harman and Zhao translate this particular noun as an "internationalist." Since "世界主義" (*shìjièzhǔyì*) is usually translated as "cosmopolitanism," "世界主義者" (*shìjièzhǔyìzhě*) should be translated as a "cosmopolitan." One drawback of their translation is the fact that they do not capture Julian's desperately emotional state in which he is forced to return to the west, his initial escaping point without looking back by his repeated romantic failure.

Suddenly, he vaguely remembers the alphabet K may be the first letter of Kitai, the origin of Cathay, an old name for ancient China. (Authors’ Translation)

此時，他突然想起，K，是「神州古國」，中國古稿 Cathay 的詞源 Kitai，他命巾注定無法跨越的一個字母。⁵⁾

Cǐ shí, tā tūrán xiǎngqǐ, K, 'shì shénzhōu gǔguó,' Zhōngguó gǔ gǎo Cathay de cí yuán Kitai, tā mìng jīn zhùdìng wúfǎ kuàyuè de yí gè zì mǔ. (K 257)

When he leaves from the heart of the Chinese Revolution, he justifies himself he is not a deserter. Likewise, he once again comforts himself by self-evaluating him as a “cosmopolitan.” He has deluded himself that Lin has led him out of the battlefield of the revolution; however, she has caused him to sink into romantic failure twice. Moreover, he has thought the alphabet K is not only his eleventh lover, but also a vital part of his life. That particular alphabet, nevertheless, is an alphabet that he no longer can overcome. Since K is not a part of his life any more, it insinuates that he is taking a step closer to the end.

Julian’s romantic failure up to now has ruined his authenticity to the revolution and Lin and Cheng’s marriage that may not be as significant as the coming catastrophe. It has led him from England to China and now from China to Spain. As he sees Lin suffering because of him, Julian blames himself and exclaims “I always destroy what I love most.” What is more to come is excessively destructive. On July 6, 1937, a year from his witnessing the Chinese Revolution, Julian finishes his life as an ambulance driver in the midst of the Spanish Civil War. As always, he throws his life, the most precious thing to him, to the war and destroys it as “a hard man of action” (Stansky and Abrahams 287). It is inevitable for Julian’s romantic failure with Lin since his western values collide with her eastern or Chinese values. He, moreover, ventures in pursuit of a western revolution away

5) Harman and Zhao do not translate this part so that the English readers of *K: The Art of Love* do not have any access to this sentence, one of the most important parts in the novel. To Julian, the alphabet K has been a significant part of his life, but now this particular alphabet has become something he cannot overcome. Thus, this alludes to the coming catastrophe that leads to the end of his life.

from savagery of the Chinese revolution due to his dichotomous thinking of civilization and barbarism that is originated from the Bloomsbury's influence. He, however, experiences an irony of losing his life in a even more barbaric battlefield; that is his ultimate romantic failure in the novel.

Julian in Hong Ying's novel at least could have prevented the battlefield since he has been invited to attend "a conference of World Writers Against Fascism" in Madrid (*K: The Art of Love* 14). Since he decided not to look back to his Chinese mistress and revolution in the east, the only choice left for him is to participate in a revolution in the west. He still does not realize the brutal reality of revolutions that all of them are bloody regardless of places, the east or the west. He, moreover, has no intent to share any empty talk with other writers so that he rushes into the battlefield short of ambulance drivers. He transfers a wounded soldier to a hospital and drives another ambulance to the battlefield. A bomb explodes by one edge of the ambulance that blows a half the backseat and the driver seat. Julian as a driver who has transferred the injured is now transferred to a hospital as a wounded soldier. He meets a nurse there and tells her his last word. He can die without any regrets since he has fulfilled his two wishes in his life, "to have a beautiful mistress and to see action" (*K: The Art of Love* 15). Ironically, Julian has experienced repeated romantic failure because of love and revolution that eventually destroy the most precious thing to him, his life.

Hong Ying could have placed Julian's death towards the end of the novel in terms of its chronological order, but she employs a type of flashback and begins the novel with his death and will. The doctor, who signs death certificates of soldiers killed in combat including Julian, finds a letter that he prepared two years ago in Shanghai. The will begins with a sentence, "[t]his letter is to be given to my mother Vanessa Bell in the case of my catching a fatal disease or being killed in an accident, or if there is news or a well-authenticated rumour that I am involved in revolutionary activities" (*K: The Art of Love* 16). Julian who escaped from the Bloomsbury's influence predicted his coming death and prepared a will. Since he already expected the romantic failure of the revolution that once served as a refuge

for him, he accepts his death calmly. Hong Ying places the Spanish Civil War in the first chapter side by side with the Japanese invasion of China in Beijing in the last chapter in the same time frame. She also artistically juxtaposes Julian’s death in the first chapter and Lin’s suicide in the last chapter. Such attempt not only portrays her historical awareness, but also her artistry as an author. She begins the novel with Julian’s death, a consequence of his romantic failure and completes it with another result from such romantic failure, Lin’s suicide.

III. An Immature Child in the Adult World

No matter how one analyzes Hong Ying’s *K: The Art of Love* and Sellers’s *Vanessa and Virginia*, these novels cannot be validated in disregard of Woolf. Although they do not directly write about Woolf, her presence and reputation makes their novels popular throughout the world. Woolf and members of the Bloomsbury publicly mentioned in both novels are repeatedly read as a refrain with repeat signs as they have “recycled Woolf” (369) in Latham’s expression. Especially to Julian, a hedge in his adolescent days surrounded under the name of the Bloomsbury Group arose mixed feelings towards it because he could not join the group as a ‘child in the adult world’ and go beyond the confines of its influence. Most of all, it is likely for him to prove himself as a person and a man to all the qualified members of the Bloomsbury. Surrounded by his parents, aunt and uncle, and their renowned circle of friends at all times, he stood on the verge of enjoying their status and advantages as an “heir of their legacy,” but continuing to struggle to prove himself as an independent individual concurrently. In other words, the Bloomsbury provided him with an ironic structure of the pivot of his life and a stepping-stone of centrifugal force to be pushed out that Stansky and Abrahams claim and prove in their biography of Julian.

Julian was always conscious of Bloomsbury, of its values and standards, from which he knew he was not to be exempted, and conscious also of its high expectations for him: that he was to be not less than its son. ... There is no question that Julian loved and admired Bloomsbury, and respected it, and even believed in it; yet at the same time, although only rarely explicitly and openly, he was in rebellion against it. (2-3)

Whether he was willing to go into the battle of life under the umbrella of the privileged group of the preceding generation, Julian appeals the readers as an attractive person both historically and fictionally. The main reason for his personal magnetism is that he finished his life as an incomplete prodigy in spite of his fullest potential including his personal, artistic, genealogic and social backgrounds. The word, 'incomplete,' not only means that it has a lot of rooms to be supplemented or replaced by something else, but also signifies that it is half empty to add a number of other possibilities and imaginative ideas. Since Julian dies a tragic death without realizing his multi-layered nature, it is appropriate for Sellers to pay attention to him and use him as the protagonist in her next novel.

Notwithstanding that, Julian is not the protagonist in *Vanessa and Virginia* unlike *K: The Art of Love* and Sellers wrote only about twenty pages to focus on him. However, the mother-son relationship compressed in those twenty or so pages provides the reader with implications in various points of view. The grown-up Julian, who is someone's companion in Hong Ying's *K: The Art of Love*, does not exist in Sellers's novel. Although his physical age reaches the age of an adult, the son is always the mother's 'child' to her. In this aspect, it is interesting to disclose the relationship between the mother Vanessa and the son Julian to back-track what type of an adult the child has grown up to become a woman's lover. What is coming to our mind as the authors is what Raymond Williams mentions about the Bloomsbury that is exquisitely applied to Julian as well.

We have still to see the difference between the fruit and its rotting, or between hopefully planted seed and its fashionably distorted tree. (246)

As Williams’s expression, Julian has grown up in the form of distorted tree with time. Notwithstanding the tree of reflecting the spirit of the age, he is an immature and withered tree. The absolute reason for him to be in such a distorted form is that the biography and two novels clearly reveal his mother’s influence on him. Vanessa, who showers her son, Julian with bizarre love under the name of motherhood in order to reach him, is to be examined from now on.

Vanessa in *Vanessa and Virginia* is created to utter a soliloquy in an epistolary style to Virginia and call her “you” even though she has already been dead and gone. Who is her confession directed to? The answer is revealed in the last scene of the novel. Vanessa decides to float her written confession a piece by a piece down the river which Virginia walked into and disappeared. The end of this confession, as always, is the truth directed to her. In this aspect Vanessa does not direct her confession to Virginia, but to the very Virginia within her. Through this act, she makes an attempt to reconcile with herself that she has not even recognized. Julian surely does not stand in the heart of the matter, but it is certain he is occupying a significant position in her attempt to reconcile with her sister. That a child grows up to be an adult is to face the world and have one’s own public self. Especially in case of a man, it is considered as a measure of accomplishment. His public self and private self are dissociated in Julian’s case since Vanessa is placed in the core of the very dissociation. In a peculiarly complicated family relationship—she happened to have three different combinations of brothers and sisters, each with a different father and a mother due to their father and mother’s previous divorces—Vanessa is the one with extremely bizarre and special attachment. She sees her most beloved mother, Julia, her younger brother, Julian Thoby and her son, Julian who has inherited the two closest people’s names as a collected group of the beloved and does not let them even until the end. She insists a compulsive attachment with Julian and does not want to lose him because the other two have passed away too early. It is known for women to obsess over relationships, especially emotional ones comparing to men. She is in a mix of an ongoing state of disorder with her husband, Clive Bell, a companion, Roger Fry and

another lover, Duncan Grant though her romantic relationship with all three of them varies at different degrees. She has unwittingly handed reins in Julian's hands to prevent the disorder and chaos so that he has assumed responsibility to buffer his mother's state of disorder and mood swings. Due to the unconscious pact between the mother and the son, Julian grows up as a man who cannot share his emotional status with anyone except his mother. That is, he has become a person that cannot endure to have any sort of deep relationship. This is especially difficult and distressed because his mother in his mind acts as the mechanism unconsciously pushing such close relationship. In other words, he is physically separated from his mother, but is not mentally independent of his mother and his autonomy has not been completed yet. He is cut off to enter Lacan's so-called symbolic order. He must have observed his mother filled with much anxiety at all times ever since he was a child. It was her daily routine to be anxious of struggling with her three children, Julian, Quentin and Angelica, losing her lover, Duncan and spending enough time and vitality on her artistic activities. The carefree and emotionally unadjusted mother's hopelessness, sadness and agony, who forgets her son's birthday and spends time with her lover, is inevitably transferred to the-poet-to-be-son's sensitivity. His mother's exceedingly abnormal love and attachment under the name of motherhood in complicated states must have driven him into grief and despair. As he sees his mother's life in agony surrounded by a privileged intellectual group of people rather than general public in England in the period between two world wars, he seeks a new breakthrough. His unconscious will to separate himself from his family and the Bloomsbury leads him to China, a Chinese woman, and eventually a battlefield in the midst of the Spanish Civil War. Vanessa senses a sign of his departure not long before he leaves for China. While preparing to compose her painting, she talks to herself "[i]t is as if she knows that in order to detach herself she must restrain from loving him" (*Vanessa and Virginia* 179).

As Julian, who is desperate to locate himself to place his stance and position, receives a job offer from a university in China and leaves England, he describes

his escape as a “genteel form of suicide” (Stansky and Abrahams 182) and his departure for China as a “terrific slice out of life” (Stansky and Abrahams 183) in his letter to his mother. According to his letter from China to his friend in England, such problem with his positioning remains lukewarm judging from its serious nature.

I thought China would be an adventure, but I see its going to be a period of self-inspection and meditation—perhaps a good thing, but not what I wanted. (Stansky and Abrahams 9-10)

Vanessa also recognizes his departure for China as “he’s bent on proving himself” (*Vanessa and Virginia* 190). Then, she becomes remorseful and pours out her heart to Virginia.

I do see that I’ve hung on to him too hard. I wanted the best for all my children, but perhaps especially for Julian. He was my firstborn. Sometimes I think that everything I do ends up damaging them. Its as if I can’t see them as separate people—only as part of myself. The best part. (*Vanessa and Virginia* 192)

Vanessa now is physically far way from Julian. She feels she is establishing a new relationship with him as they exchange letters. She, on the one hand, does not acknowledge his son’s relation with Lin and asserts “[i]t isn’t real relationship. None of his affairs are. ... He’ll be forced to leave. I’m certain” (*Vanessa and Virginia* 192). Her declaration comes true in reality and Julian is forced to leave his lover and China. Their attached relationship is clearly revealed in Julian’s letter to his mother on April 13, 1936.

I’m far more devoted to you than I’ve ever been to a mistress, and indeed so much so that I shall find it very difficult to marry because none of my friends and mistresses can begin to compare with you. (Stansky and Abrahams 207)

Eventually he does not acquire a meaningful answer from either his passionate affair with a Chinese woman in China or an underlying and painful question to find his public self, “what and how should I live?” He, then, leaves for another battlefield, Spain to avoid an inner war within himself and ends his life at the age of twenty-nine.

The Bloomsbury and Julian’s mother are placed in the center of his life filled with ironies continuing to deviate from his legacy that has established and defined himself as mentioned before. Julian has felt that the artists and intellectuals of the Bloomsbury have extensively asked and answered all the problems without leaving him to proclaim anything new. In order to free from the despair, he has tried to leap over a fence encircled by them. The tool to surpass their influence is ironically the romantic dream of the revolution acquired in the fence and the reality he faces outside the fence with his romantic dream of the revolution in the world is nothing more than romantic failure. Another contradiction leaning on the failure is his pride of and scar from his mother as he lives in the midst of irony without realizing the fact that she herself is an irony. Julian does not differentiate such scar and pride consciously while continuing to find confidence from his mother’s source of pride at all times. Such confidence, nonetheless, is another side of the scar in which his obsession over clinging to his mother to evade his loneliness as a child from her freewheeling lifestyle has countered a burden on him to be the source of bigger pride and self-esteem for her. He attempts something impossible for others to prove his potential, but he dies an untimely death even without exhibiting his ability and realizing what kind of person he is. His untimely death at an early age leaves his mother with an even bigger scar than his from her.

As Woolf always employs the fact that it is hard for a person to get to know another person thoroughly, even for people in an intimate relationship to find someone’s true character as the theme for her novels, the true nature of the layers of the mother’s inner self and the son’s unsorted psychological world revealed from the novel will still remain as a mystery in a sense. Notwithstanding such labyrinth, that it is possible for life-writing about Julian is that the Bloomsbury, his mother,

and most of all, Woolf exist behind him as his backgrounds. “[N]arrating the imaginary lives of people who really existed” (Latham 355) has also enabled Sellers to mix the fact and fiction to create a new reality which is more realistic than the fact. In this aspect, Julian is an appropriate figure to imagine probability of fictional reality within his inner consciousness based on factual documents. Julian of *K: The Art of Love* and Julian in *Vanessa and Virginia* are presented as a good example to compare and contrast how he as an identical fictional character may be portrayed differently by each author.

IV. Conclusion

In Latham’s expression of “recycled Woolf,” Hong Ying and Sellers as authors have recycled Woolf through their imagination and revived or resurrected the members in the circle of the Bloomsbury including Woolf as vivid fictional characters. Unlike the members of the Bloomsbury, Julian is an incomplete prodigy who ended his life at an early age without exhibiting his potential and possibility. His incomplete life contains ‘plastic elements in various forms’ so that Hong Ying and Sellers have mixed the fact and fiction to create a new and vivid reality out of his incomplete nature. As a result, Hong Ying’s Julian, especially, draws closer to the readers as a more realistic character. As Stansky and Abrahams lament his death as “a terrible waste” (285), Julian may be viewed as the greatest victim of the Bloomsbury in a sense. Looking at this aspect of Julian, Hong Ying and Sellers have used his romantic failure as a motif to revive him as the greatest victim and failure of the Bloomsbury.

Two factors have mainly attributed to his romantic failure. First, it is always difficult for anyone to succeed one’s legacy. Several documents written by Julian verify such fact that succeeding the tradition and legacy of the Bloomsbury of his parents’ generation successfully is a great burden on him. As a result, he escapes to China to evade the Bloomsbury’s influence that is the beginning of his romantic

failure. In addition to the trouble of succeeding the legacy, an even greater burden for him is to surpass the renowned and prestigious group of his parents' generation. As Hartley, the eldest son of the Coleridges, experienced a similar predicament 100 years prior to Julian, Julian also displays archetypal nature of romantic failure who "wasted [his] manhood" (Plotz 133) and failed to surpass his father and mother's reputation. Unlike Hartley, Julian died an untimely death at an extremely early age even before the critics could begin to assess the Bloomsbury's accomplishment. As he ended his life without revealing his potential, it was inevitable for him to become nothing but a romantic and incomplete failure at the same time.

Julian's main and overall problem stated throughout this paper is his impetuous attempt to pursue and achieve artistic excellence as an independent individual while leaping over the fence encircled by his parents' generation that has confined him. Such attempt always destroys everything he loves—even his life eventually. His initial romantic failure originates from his escape from the Bloomsbury's influence. He chooses China as a refuge and falls in love with a Chinese woman there. His romance, however, does not serve him as a breakthrough and leaves her for the heart of the Chinese Revolution. The legacy and tradition of his parents' generation is the cause of his initial romantic failure in England whereas his romance is the cause of his romantic failure in China. As he sees bloody dead bodies in the battlefield of the revolution that he has looked forward to, he begins to question the true identity of his quasi-heroism and to doubt about his authenticity to the revolution. He has fallen in love with a woman regardless of his initial reason to come to China and run into the core of the Chinese Revolution to flee from the romance; nevertheless, he finally realizes the reality of the revolution. As he recognizes the true nature of the revolution, he expresses "[a] war is war, and a revolution was a revolution. There were no nice ways to kill people" (*K: The Art of Love* 221). That is, a revolution or a war is not a leisure activity of playing soldiers with his younger brother, Quentin in his childhood, but a brutal fact. He faces the fact that life as an adult cannot consist of adventures or dreams from the childhood. Julian, however, cannot rid himself of the sense of defeat and

disillusionment. He, instead, decides to join another revolution in the west to leave the romance and revolution in the east that have caused him to experience a series of repeated romantic failure. His immediate decision leads to an ultimate catastrophe in which he destroys his life, the most precious thing in his life at the end of romantic failure.

The Bloomsbury’s influence, which Julian cannot dispel throughout his life, and his mother’s peculiar love towards him always overlie his tragic choice. Woolf, his aunt, tells her sister, Vanessa about her obsession over her son that summarizes Julian’s life well and leaves the readers with an aftertaste.

It occurred to me that this was the crux of the problem: how does a young man surrounded by a family who adores him ever succeed in breaking free?
(*Vanessa and Virginia* 191)

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Abstract

“I Always Destroy What I Love Most”:
Julian Bell’s Romantic Failure

Joseph Yosup Kim · Jung Kim

The aim of this paper is to examine how Hong Ying and Susan Sellers sublimate Julian Bell’s spontaneous nature and what he destroy including people into artistic novels rather than biographies or memoirs in *K: The Art of Love* and *Vanessa and Virginia*. This research is significant for it serves as an example to show extended nature of Virginia Woolf studies. Through their imagination as authors, Hong Ying and Sellers have recycled Woolf to recreate or revive members of the Bloomsbury including her as vividly fictional characters. They keep a fictional gap or aesthetic distance and attempt ‘defamiliarization’ with their fictional characters in order to overcome the limits of biographies and memoirs. In Hong Ying’s case, she aligns a series of events in which Julian’s spontaneous nature continues to lead him to unfamiliar territories repeatedly. He initially leaves for China to evade his parents’ and the Bloomsbury’s influence. He falls in love with a Chinese woman named Lin, but cannot keep a monogamous relationship with her. He, then, escapes from a suicidal woman to the heart of the Chinese Revolution that is the beginning of his romantic failure. He is shocked by the bloody battlefield of the revolution and ironically decides to return to his initial point of romantic failure, Lin to deviate from the revolution. His immediate decision portrays his spontaneous nature and his act of returning to his initial romantic failure ruins his authenticity to the revolution. His repeated failure leads to another catastrophe that takes him to another revolution in the west. His continual pursuit of seeking his public self as an independent individual overcoming the influence of his parents’ generation drives him to destroy what he loves most including his precious life.

Julian, who fails to surpass his parents' reputation, is a paradigmatic romantic failure that assumes the burden and expectation of his parents' generation. As he dies an untimely death, he has become a romantic failure and the greatest victim of the Bloomsbury at the same time.

■ Key words : Hong Ying, *K: The Art of Love*, Susan Sellers, *Vanessa and Virginia*, Julian Bell, Virginia Woolf, defamiliarization, romantic failure

(홍잉, 『케이』, 수잔 샐러스, 『바네사와 버지니아』, 줄리안 벨, 버지니아 울프, 낯설게 하기, 낭만적 실패)

논문접수: 2014년 11월 16일

논문심사: 2014년 12월 1일

게재확정: 2014년 12월 12일