

Comment on *Ludwig Wittgenstein and G. E. Moore Hidden in Transparent Things*

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Prof. Akiko Nakata argues in her paper that L. Wittgenstein and G. E. Moore, two of the founders of analytic philosophy, are hidden in Vladimir Nabokov's novella *Transparent Things* (hereafter TT). Let me summarize her points. There is an intriguing common ground between Nabokov and the two philosophers in that all three studied at Trinity College, Cambridge University, although there seems to be only a faint relationship between Nabokov and the other two. Interestingly, however, the two philosophers still appear in the novella. What connects Nabokov to the philosophers is, surprisingly to me, Shakespeare.

Let us begin with *Hamlet*. In TT, Wittgenstein appears alongside Hamlet in the phrase "Raining in Wittenberg, but not in Wittgenstein" (91, as cited in Nakata 2021). Wittenberg is the university where Hamlet studies. Hamlet famously says "To be, or not to be, that is the question." Wittgenstein popularized a comparable paradox, which he named *Moore's Paradox*: Moore claimed that it is not contradictory but instead absurd to say that it is raining and I do not believe it is raining (Wittgenstein 1953, Sec. II. x). We can find the Nabokovian paraphrase of this idea in TT: "It was either raining or pretending to rain or not raining at all, yet still appearing to rain in a sense" (91, as cited in Nakata 2021).

Moore also appears in TT with Shakespeare's *Romero and Juliet*. Julia Moore's name acts as a pseudonym for the play. Juliet is a nickname of Julia and Romeo is an anagram of Moore. (Julia is not the only Moore in TT, by the way.) Furthermore, Armande's tragedy can be likened to *Othello*, whose original title is *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moore of Venice*. Thus the name of Moore prevails in the novella. These instances make it tempting to imagine that when Nabokov had the name of Moore in mind while writing TT and someday happened to come across the name of philosopher G. E. Moore while reading Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. That's quite amusing to me.

More connections of Wittgenstein and Moore to TT are pointed out. For instance, Moore is an older friend of Wittgenstein. Hamlet also has an older friend, Horatio. We can liken the former pair to the latter. The teacher who leads a Boy Scout group who gives an Austrian greeting may have been modeled after Wittgenstein, who possibly sometimes dressed like a Boy Scout.

Let me focus on Moore. Moore's position in the history of analytic philosophy is rather complex. Moore is usually counted as one of the four founders of analytic philosophy along with G. Frege, B. Russell, and Wittgenstein. Especially, he is the first who opposed Idealism, which dominated philosophy in the English-speaking world at that time, and Russell immediately followed. This marked the beginning of analytic philosophy in the textbook; Young Moore and Russell are not called analytic philosophers, as the first philosophers with that designation are Moore's disciples.

These disciples insisted that analysis is the primary philosophical method, and founded a philosophical journal *Analysis*, which remains one of the top journals. Some may speculate from these facts that analytic philosophy would not exist without Moore.

However, his name is much less well-known than those of the other three. Even Frege, who is the second-least popular figure among them, is now studied intensely. Most of Frege's works are translated into Japanese, just like Russell's and Wittgenstein's. In contrast, few philosophers study Moore, and although some of Moore's works are also translated into Japanese, most of them are currently out of print. I don't know exactly why Moore is so unpopulated now. Maybe the reason is quite complicated. In any case, his fame is limited even among philosophers, despite his contribution to the beginnings of analytic philosophy.

How did Nabokov get to know of Moore, especially Moore's relationship with Wittgenstein? Prof. Nakata suggests that Nabokov might have recalled a lecturer from his student days at Trinity or that a fellow student might have told him about Moore. Both scenarios are plausible. However, it seems to me unlikely that Nabokov would know of the personal relationship between Wittgenstein and Moore, which mirrored that of Hamlet and Horatio.

I would like to suggest another possibility. Both Nabokov and Wittgenstein were in Ithaca in 1949. Although there is no record of their encounter according to Prof. Nakata, still there remains the possibility of a connection. I think it would have been easy for Nabokov to gather information about Wittgenstein in Ithaca. Many people met Wittgenstein during his legendary visit. In fact, Cornell University at Ithaca was the center of Wittgenstein studies in the 1950s, mostly due to this visit. Wittgenstein is known to have been influential to those around him. In Trinity College, Cambridge, philosophers, especially young graduate students, were heavily influenced by Wittgenstein after meeting him. Even his mannerism was imitated and traveled to other colleges and universities. This happened again at Cornell University (Pitch and Swedberg 2012).

Supposedly, Nabokov could have found a student who knew someone who had actually met the philosopher in person. Wittgenstein often met various people inside and outside of the philosophy department during his stay. Perhaps such a student was so impressed by the legendary philosopher that he imitated Wittgenstein's mannerism. Perhaps he introduced Nabokov to Norman Malcolm, the philosopher who invited Wittgenstein to Ithaca. Malcolm liked to talk about Wittgenstein. If Nabokov talked with Malcolm, he might have become interested in Moore.

Perhaps Prof. Nakata has already examined this possibility. In any case, I would love to hear her thoughts on it.

References

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