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WHEN WEST MET EAST AND BLOOMED ITS CHERRIES

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Abstract

This paper builds on the story of Collingwood Ingram as elaborated by the journalist and non-fiction writer Naoko Abe in her book *The Sakura Obsession – The Incredible Story of the Plant Hunter Who Saved Japan's Cherry Blossoms*, published in the United States in March 2019, after it had been first launched in Japan three years earlier, in the same spring month of 2016. This is the *Story*, with capital S, as C.S. Lewis would have referred to it, in that it bestows upon the reader an "unexpectedness . . . that delights" (Lewis, *On Stories*), describing an epiphanic encounter of East and West which restored the fading colours of cherry blossoms on the woodblock prints of the realm of the Rising Sun.

Keywords: *East-West encounter, Collingwood Ingram, cherry trees, sakura, national heritage, cultural taxonomy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

I'll forget the trail I marked out
on Mount Yoshino last year,
go searching for blossoms
in directions
I've never been before.
Saigyō (1118 – 1190)

In the English-speaking world, Naoko Abe's book came out simultaneously, though under different titles; while the public in the United Kingdom would discover it as *'Cherry' Ingram, The Englishman Who Saved Japan's Blossoms*, in the United States, Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Penguin

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Random House, New York would market it as *The Sakura Obsession – The Incredible Story of the Plant Hunter Who Saved Japan's Cherry Blossoms*. Regardless of the name choice, the book was met with enthusiastic reviews by both the British and the American press; so impressive were the echoes of the story that it even came to be serialised by BBC Radio 4's *Book of the Week* programme, in a somewhat modern reflection of the Victorian tradition of serial publishing. The book introduced Collingwood Ingram to a vast audience of people who, had it not been for the editorial journey trailed by Naoko Abe, would have known little, if anything, about such an exceptionally eccentric personality. It may not be too hazardous to say that not only was Collingwood Ingram the man who saved some of Japan's most treasured species of cherries, but he was also a builder of bridges between nations and cultures and a healer of wounds that scarred the memories of generations of people whose lives had been mutilated by the Second World War. It was his love for nature and its wonders that would restore the dimming beauty of an entire world, while bringing comfort to aching souls and delight to the eyes.

2. *"AND GOD SAID, BEHOLD, I HAVE GIVEN YOU EVERY HERB . . . AND EVERY TREE"* (GENESIS 1:29, KJV)

Collingwood Ingram made his entrance onto the stage of this world on a Saturday, October 30, 1880, in London, as the son of Sir William James Ingram, the managing director of the *Illustrated London News*, the world's first illustrated weekly news magazine (founded by his father, Herbert Ingram), and Lady Mary Eliza Collingwood, née Stirling. It is written in the Book of Genesis that on the sixth day God Almighty made the man in His image, as he also created the herbs, and the plants and the trees; in an allegoric interpretation, the fact that the youngest of the three children welcomed the sunlight on this very special day that would tattoo its legend onto the child's destiny, seems to offer the key that unlocks the story of his life. Due to ill health and a fragile constitution, unlike Herbert and Bruce, his elder siblings 'who took the public school path that would lead them to Oxford and beyond', Collingwood was 'privately tutored' and it was not long before he realised he was to become an ornithologist. "The study of birds . . . and in particular the study of their nests and young became an obsession with me – an obsession that persisted for at least half of my life." (Naoko Abe 33) While in London, the little boy became fascinated by the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, located only a two-minute walk from his home, the place of some of his most amazing discoveries about plants, insects and animals from almost every nook and cranny of the known world. When his family moved to 'Westgate-on-Sea' in order to run away from the hustle and bustle of the polluted, ever-

expanding capital, the beauties of the world escaped the tyranny of pins and display cases only to paint the most breath-taking and pristine sketches anyone has ever dreamt about. It is here where he would roam the fields in search for birds, 'blackcaps, linnets, nightingales and warblers' and by the time he turned eleven "he could distinguish the songs of most British birds. No one would expect any less from someone who shared his golden years with Darlie, a pure albino jackdaw, Isidor, Tiny, Wildie and Zimbi, four albino sparrows, and Albine and Bil-Bil, two pink-eyed albino blackbirds, feathered family members that accompanied the Ingrams wherever they went, from the dining table to holiday resorts. With such great masters, when Collingwood turned fifteen he wrote his first, though unpublished book, *English Birds*, complete with illustrations" (Naoko Abe 40) and one cannot help admiring the drawings and sketches that accompany the text of his notes, diaries and manuscripts, for either in pencil or in watercolours they talk about a passionate trainee and an insatiable explorer. His entire life was scattered with symbolic encounters with what we may refer to as *beacon people*, kindred spirits who would guide a young artist's way into the miracles of the world – the gift for drawing evolved under the close guidance of Louis Wain, one of 'the most acclaimed artists of the 1890s' in Britain, 'who not only worked at the *Illustrated London News*, but was a close family friend.' (41) Collingwood's love for nature was blessed with an almost chance meeting with John Jenner Weir, in 1891, a friend of Charles Darwin no less, he himself 'one of Britain's most accomplished ornithologists and botanists.' (34) That is how he recalls their meeting and the way in which he mastered the strength to approach a complete stranger and inquire about his interest in birds:

> I was wandering about the countryside by myself in search of birds, when I saw coming towards me, also alone, an elderly gentleman dressed from head to foot in urban black. He might have been anything – a lawyer, a doctor, a businessman. There was therefore no ostensible reason why I should have suddenly felt irresistibly drawn towards the man. Was it telepathy or was it intuition? I know not. Anyhow, something seemed to tell me that here at last I had found a kindred spirit. Impelled by an uncontrollable urge, I walked straight up to him, and without so much as a word of explanation, bluntly asked him if he was interested in birds – a fatuous question since I already instinctively knew the answer. (Naoko Abe 34)

Although their friendship was short-lived, as John Jenner Weir died in 1894, it was nonetheless intense, its magic pervading throughout Ingram's entire life and accounting for the unquenchable thirst for the marvels of the animal and plant kingdom. No wonder that *Random Thoughts on Bird Life*, Collingwood Ingram's last book, may be read as the final testimony to the love and gratitude he felt

towards his *peripatetic* master. Weir was not the only scholarly figure that would deeply influence his early years of training, for among the names that left a mark on his personality was that of Henry Seebohm, amateur ornithologist, whose writings particularly influenced Collingwood as a boy and 'sowed the seeds of restlessness that later made [him] travel to far lands in search of birds.' (Naoko Abe 41) Like Icarus, he longed for wings of his own, and smitten as he was with the aviary world, we would long to explore faraway places where stories from the books he read took him; much to his surprise, from one of Seebohm's books he discovered that "130 bird species in Japan and Britain were 'absolutely identical or so closely allied that they are not regarded as more than sub-specifically distinct. The birds of Japan do not differ very widely from the birds of the British Islands.'" (41) Following his first two visits to Japan, in 1902 and 1907, his words only enlarge the perspective, embracing the kinship between the two countries:

> Because there is a certain similarity in their insular climates, many parallel forms of plant and animal life have evolved. This resemblance has a certain fascination. One meets, as it were, old friends in a new guise. They are the foreign counterparts of things one has learnt to know and love at home – the same, and yet not the same. Possibly it is for this reason I have always been attracted to Japan. (Naoko Abe 76)

That could have been the spark that ignited the bonfire of curiosity and endless questions that came to fuel, in time, Collingwood's infatuation with the mysterious lands of Japan. The timing could not have been better, for the end of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century provided the generous matrix for some unprecedented interest of the Western civilisation in a country where 'land, life and sky are unlike all that one has known elsewhere.' (54) The whole phenomenon was so infectious, that it almost designed a fashion on both shores of the Atlantic, with people interested to discover as much as possible about 'Japanese arts, crafts and culture.' (54) Once again it was Paris and its artistic melting pot that was destined to become the epicentre of the so called 'Japonisme' craze, although the syndrome would soon travel to London, New York and beyond; famous Japanese artists such as Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) and Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858) influenced their European 'Inklings', should we borrow the equally famous term referring to the legendary gathering of the Oxfordian friends, only this time we refer to Edouard Manet (1832-1883), Claude Monet (1840-1926) and Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890).

On September 5, 1902, Collingwood Ingram caught his first glimpse of the country that began to exert a mesmeric attraction upon himself, and his personal diary gave evidence that only after fifteen days and a journey that took him to Kobe, Osaka, Kyoto, Hakone, Tokyo, Kamakura, Yokohama, the

enthusiast 21-year old was completely infatuated with his newly discovered Arcadia-land across the Pacific.

> My visit to Japan has been so enchanting that I have had no time to do else than stand agape and watch the different vistas pass away without record in my journal. But a brief fortnight has left me with more memory pictures than months of travel elsewhere. (Naoko Abe 60)

Birds lent him their wings but cherry trees bloomed what was to become the grand passion of his life. A bird-watching expedition took him for the first time to Japan, but it was the flowering cherries that beguiled him for the rest of his centennial life. Who would have imagined that a foreigner would sail seas and oceans to save the symbol of a nation and its most iconic expression, the delicate, silk-like blossoms of cherry trees (sakura)?

3. "YOU MUST GO SEE THE MOUNTAIN CHERRIES / BEFORE THE BREEZE SCATTERS THEIR PETALS" (MURASAKI SHIKIBU, *THE TALE OF GENJI 159*)

In one of the world's first novels, *The Tale of Genji*, authored in the early eleventh century by the poet and noblewoman Murasaki Shikibu, there is a short but most accurate description of different cherry trees varieties and their blooming stages, which prolong the fluttering tapestry of petals and their dazzling beauty into the heart of spring. "The single-petal cherry blossoms had scattered already, the double-petal blossoms were past their peak, and the mountain cherries were now in bloom." (Ch. XLI) Collingwood Ingram would not have jotted them down better in his diary, had he had the quill in his hand and the landscape at his feet. From the very dawn of time, the history of *sakura* has been a story of love and hope, as there is a local legend which speaks of the true love between a girl named Sakura and a tree called Yohiro (hope). Gods must have known all along that only hope and endless love will come to save Japan's national tree. Hope was organically interwoven within the fabric of the legend; hope was what an amateur but passionate plantsman from Britain brought to the cherry blooming coasts of Japan.

The legend of cherry blossoms dates back thousands of years ago in ancient Japan and starts with … once upon a time there was a tree that could not bloom. So deep was its despair that not even the grass grew at its feet. It seemed that only loneliness was its silent companion. One night, a fairy cast a spell upon the unhappy tree and promised to turn him into a human for the following twenty years; it was love, she thought, Yohiro would search and find among people. Years

passed and not a single word of the fairy's prophecy came true. Among humans, Yohiro could only listen to the voice of hatred and to the sounds of war. One afternoon, while strolling along a riverside, he caught sight of the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. Her name was Sakura and she was soon to become his friend and the love of his life. Time passed and the twenty years soon came to an end, turning Yohiro into what he used to be; without the love he had already sipped from, while a man, sadness engulfed the tree he once was. Everything changed the moment Sakura hugged Yohiro the tree and confessed her love to him and that she wanted to remain forever by his side. Hearing this, the fairy returned to unite the two lovers in just one sapling that miraculously bloomed for the first time.

Since then, the love of Sakura and Yohiro welcomes the spring song of new life and fresh beginnings, while subtlety intoxicating the air with sweet perfume and colouring the sky in delicate hues of white and pink, as in one of Basho's haikus "After the chimes fade / cherry fragrance continues: / evening dusk." Japanese people paint the world in what they consider to be the only genuine and primary colours, namely white, black, red, and blue; somehow, the story of cherry blossoms dips the brush in all four and paints canvases of breath-taking beauty. *White* comes with its infinite, absolute purity, simplicity, and humility, and it seems that the whole philosophy of the Nippon spirit draws upon these principles, as it relies on the wisdom and knowledge of the gods, equally symbolised by it. *Black* is the ink in the Sumi-e painting and calligraphy that creates simplistic yet beautiful pieces of artwork that tattoo on rice paper, along with every stroke, some profound meditation on such concepts as human destiny, cosmogenesis, and the relationship between man and the Universe. *Red*, one of the most dominant colours in the Japanese chromatic code brings joy and strength, though it also speaks of sacrifice and loss, and in the cherry blossom festival it dims its tones in the welcoming infinity of white, only to create the delicate, hope-inspiring pinkish shades. *Blue* is the absolute passe-partout that frames one of nature's most sublime masterpieces, for no better colour could welcome the whole scene with a more serene, peaceful and gently-contrasting attitude. His diary entry of May 6, 1926, while on a visit in Japan paints the day in exactly the same colours and tones:

> Viewed against the dazzling blue of the sky, the trees' flower-laden boughs seemed as though illumined by a soft glowing light – rosy-hued like the tint of dawn-flushed snow. Even the trunks and branches were things to admire. Naturally glossy, where a shaft of sunlight fell upon their surface, they were transformed into glistening columns of burnished bronze. (Naoko Abe 125-26)

The eighth chapter of *The Tale of Genji* offers one of the earliest accounts of the *hanami*, or cherry viewing season in the Japanese literature, wrapping the

description in the warm light of an early spring day, "[t]he day was bright and clear, and the appearance of the sky and the chirping of the birds created a delightful atmosphere." (237) It is said that Emperor Saga (786-842), struck by the beauty of a particular cherry tree, held the first cherry blossom-viewing ceremony, complete with food, music and poetry writing. Although the practice was first associated with plum blossoms, the Heian Period (794–1185) placed the cherry blossoms at the very heart of this unique event that would be celebrated with strict religiosity year after year after year, for year and centuries to come, engraving it deeply into the nation's cultural identity. During those days, Japan's spring came into bloom with ten known wild species of cherries, the most popular of which was *Yama-zakura*, sung and immortalised by the poet and Buddhist monk Saigyō. *Yama-zakura* remained the species revered by the Japanese literati until the late nineteenth century, when it was toppled down by the cultivated *Somei-yoshino* variety. Alongside bloomed the umbrella-shaped Fuji *Mame-zakura* species, with its small white to light-pink flowers, *Ōshima*, known for its large white flowers, or *Ōyama-zakura*, one of Collingwood Ingram's favourite cherries for its spectacular crimson blossoms. The Heian Period remained in the history of the nation as one of those early moments that stirred a sort of local *cherry mania* which was to continue throughout the centuries and never cease. Naoko Abe speaks of the fact that "from the initial ten wild cherry varieties, more than 400 flowering varieties had been cultivated by humans in Japan over the previous 1,200 years." (79)

In fact, domestic cultivation began in the Heian period and the first-known cultivated cherry in Japan was a weeping cherry […]. Aristocrats were enchanted by the way in which the thin, supple branches bent over towards the ground, giving the illusion of tears when the tree blossomed." (79) The transient ephemerality of cherry blossoms, their fleeting beauty and the twisted, bent shape of the tree sketched one of nature's simplest yet most profound haikus. "The spring night / With cherry blossoms filled / Has ended" lamented Matsuo Bashō, *the* poet of the Edo Period, one of the most refined cherry-blossom enthusiasts of all times. With the Edo Period the cherry-blossom viewing escaped the restrictive confinement of the aristocratic lodgings and made its way into the heart of the nation, welcoming commoners as well as noblemen under the blue passe-partout of the sky. "During the Edo period of 1603–1868 thousands of trees were planted in public places for ordinary people" (81) and more than 250 cherry varieties were created. (153) The spectacle cherries put on every spring would soon become a sort of allegoric *axis mundi* for the people of the Realm of the Rising Sun; meanwhile, Westerners failed to seize and appreciate the aesthetic beauty of a crooked cherry covered in small whitish flowers. The common pattern of thinking was that any fruit tree should bear edible fruits, or else its value ceases to exist. Travelling East towards

the Western geography of Europe, one happens to discover a rather similar comment recorded in a book of laws, the so called *Pravila* of Vasile Lupu, the Prince of Moldavia between 1634 and 1653, which speaks about the state intervention with regard to the protection and development of fruit trees, whereas Demetrius Cantemir, in his famous Descriptio Moldaviae (1715) "offers valuable data on the distribution of fruit trees and fruit quality." (Pomologia Republicii Populare Române) No wonder then that it was not until the Victorian Era that Europeans sparked an interest in the Japanese cherries, splendid only in their short-lived, bloomed apparel, though utterly "useless" afterwards.

> Interest in Japanese cherries also benefited from the growth of gardening as a leisure pursuit in the Late-Victorian and Edwardian eras. This was a time when gardening clubs and horticultural societies proliferated, with the nouveau riche especially eager to obtain, grow and display rare Oriental plants that didn't exist in northern Europe because it was too cold." (Naoko Abe 77)

Sadly, Europe would soon be swept by the frosty gales of The First World War, and those cherry varieties "that bore no edible fruit took a back seat to each nation's war effort. It wasn't until the early 1920s that several wealthy cherry aficionados in Europe once again started importing, planting and collecting the trees." (95) That was also the moment when one *Yama-zakura* or Japanese wild mountain cherry tree found itself a new home at *The Grange*, the private residence of Collingwood Ingram, in the county of Kent, as the first of its kind in the whole kingdom. (103) When Collingwood bought the estate, he thought of turning it into a cherry tree h(e)aven, a unique replica of Japan's most iconic vegetal and cultural patrimony, transplanting East into the western gardens of Britannia. The famous Yokohama Nursery, a company that still exists today, the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, the Donard Nursery Company in Northern Ireland's County Down, W.B. Clarke & Co. Nursery in San Jose, California, the British cherry enthusiast Ernest Henry Wilson, Colonel Robert Stephenson Clarke, and Clarence McKenzie Lewis, a trustee of the New York Botanical Garden were among those who supplied him with precious saplings of some of Japan's most special cherries. Others would come from the United States, a nation already in love with *sakura* at least since 1909 when the wife of President William Howard Taft, the First Lady, Helen Herron Taft, embraced Eliza Scidmore's idea, a skilled writer for the National Geographic Society's magazine, to plant cherries along the Potomac River. Nowadays, "the National Cherry Blossom Festival is among the most spectacular and popular events" that takes place each spring in Washington, "attracting one and a half million visitors annually." (94)

4. "KINDRED" TAXONOMY

So intimate was the relationship between Collingwood Ingram and his trees that, on more occasions than one, he would refer to them as his dearest offsprings, to whom he seemed to have dedicated considerably a larger share of his time than to his own flesh and blood descendants. As any respectable researcher and plant enthusiast, he would try to design a rigorous taxonomy for any western botanist to use, since many varieties of trees would bear two or several different identities, conjugated in either Japanese or English.

> In attempting to create order out of the chaotic confusion of cherry names that exist in Japan and Europe, I find I have set myself an almost impossible task. […] My greatest difficulty is the pernicious practice in vogue among European and American nurserymen of inventing their own names. It is very discouraging to buy the same plant, as I have done, under a dozen different names. The Japanese themselves are often equally to blame. (Naoko Abe 100)

He embarked upon what might be regarded as a Cretan Labyrinth investigation, and he would have been lost had it not been for the help he received from two accomplished Japanese cherry experts; the first was Manabu Miyoshi, Professor of Botany at Tokyo Imperial University, also known as the 'cherry professor' while the second was another academic, Gen-ichi Koizumi, who taught at Kyoto Imperial University. Little hope was there to discover a virgin, unexplored territory in the kingdom of sakura trees; nevertheless, the miracle did happen when Collingwood Ingram received Professor Miyoshi's answer to his question related to the unknown (for him, at least) cherry tree variety that grew in his garden, at *The Grange*. His bewilderment was shared across the Pacific, thus providing the passionate Englishman with the chance to think of a name for his two tall cherries and for their common botanical heritage. "He called the variety Hokusai, after the world-famous Japanese woodblock painter whose work he loved" (101) and whose passion for the magnificent Mount Fuji he so ardently shared. As for the Hokusai tree, Ingram described its splendour in the following words "in the spring, every branch is literally smothered in pale-pink blossom" [and] "it would be difficult to conceive a more striking floral display." (102)

During the trip of 1926 to Japan, at the foot of Mount Fuji, he made one of his most exciting findings that led him to a new choice of names. "There, in the garden of a house near the Osakabe Hotel, towering above a tall wooden fence, stood a tree with narrow leaves and bunched clusters of double mauve-pink blossoms with close to 100 petals" (127) of unknown descendance and intriguing taxonomy. Fascinated since childhood by samurai warriors and their code of honour, he named the recently discovered variety *Asano*, after the Forty-Seven

Rōnin saga. The amazing story of the brave men who chose death over life and honour over defeat still lives today, blooming in the spring at Kew Gardens, in London, as Naoko Abe writes in her book. "Today the Asano cherry is a popular variety in Britain and forms the centrepiece of the Asano Avenue at Kew Gardens in London." (128) *Daikoku* was another cherry tree variety of "large pink, almost purplish, double-blossom flowers" (143) named by Collingwood Ingram, as was *Veryan*, named after his granddaughter, Veryan Harden. (226) Nevertheless, he was far from merely being a taxonomist, as he was also a gifted plant breeder, one who successfully mastered the pioneering (at that time) art and science of hybridisation, a reminder of "my all-too-often futile attempts to improve on Nature" (154); against all odds, one of his greatest accomplishments was the cross-pollination of two wild species, one originary from Taiwan (*Kanhi-zakura*) and the other one from the area around Mount Fuji (*Mamezakura*). "Ingram named his creation *Okame*, after a Japanese goddess of good fortune and mirth." (155) So pleased was he with the outcome, that he admitted that "[t]he offspring of this union" which would be admired "by all who have an eye for elegance of form and unpretentious beauty" "has more than fulfilled" his "expectations." (155)

Nature followed its course and continued to do what it has done for millennia, namely to deck the world with countless wonders and tell stories of great beauty and diversity in various colours, textures and fragrances. One day, while strolling in his garden at *The Grange*, Collingwood Ingram noticed that a cherry tree bloomed in amazingly pure-white petals for the first time. The name he decided to choose reflected his long-time interest in birds – *Umineko* or black-tailed gull. "In full bloom the blossoms looked like an enormous flock of gulls nestling on top of a small tree" wrote Ingram in his notebooks. (152) Since 1928, when he first exhibited the blossoms at the Royal Horticultural Society's annual flower show in London, "Umineko cherries have often been planted as street trees in England, but have also become popular in parks around the world, from Kew Gardens in London to Queen Elizabeth Park in Vancouver." (152) Yet, at *The Grange*, there was another marvel which waited patiently to be introduced to the world in all its splendour of large snow-white blossoms: that was *Taihaku* – the 'Great White Cherry', for that was the name Duke Nobusuke Takatsukasa gave it in the spring of 1925. For Ingram, *Taihaku* was 'by far the most beautiful of all the white cherries' (145). Only one year later, on April 20, 1926, while in Japan, Ingram was surprised to discover that the cherry *lord* of his garden, the one he came to refer to as *Taihaku* belonged in fact to a variety called *Akatsuki*, one which, according to cherry expert Seisaku Funatsu, seemed to have disappeared completely from the country. What happened was that one week later, in his speech addressed to the Cherry Association in Tokyo, Ingram pledged to repatriate the long-lost variety of *Taihaku*, as he would *Daikoku*. Both varieties, in 1926, no longer bloomed under the Nippon sky. The journey back, which began in early

1927, like in all Stories, was scattered with threats, disillusions and hardships, but in the end, Taihaku came to (re)unite its roots with the soil of its ancestors, near the sacred temples of Kyoto, in the 1930s. (227)

The Second World War would once again sow the seeds of hatred, desacralizing the whole world of its values and humanity, scorching everything under the blazing flames of conflict. In Japan, cherry trees too paid the price of madness, as although wild cherries managed to survive, up into the mountains, their "urban cousins […] had been bombed or burned; uprooted to clear space for crops; chopped down for firewood to provide heat for homes and for cooking." (225) "And while the cherries in England still bloomed as if to salute the Allied victory, the cherries in Japan vanished amid the ashes of defeat." (225)

5. CONCLUSIONS

In one of her conversations with the sixteenth Tōemon Sano, the descendant of the Sano family who helped Ingram with grafting the scions, Naoko Abe speaks about an infused cultural legacy that now flows with the sap of the *Taihaku* cherries, describing the tree as 'dignified' and 'elegant'. "Even though it was originally brought to Britain from Japan, it seems to have acquired a gentlemanly grace while it was over there." (148) That seems to sum up the Story of an encounter between West and East, in a fluid geography of (re)encounters and magic symbolism. Collingwood 'Cherry' Ingram, as he was called by his daughter-in-law, Daphne and as he came to be known by the whole world due to Naoko Abe's book, lived a long and meaningful life determined as he was to accomplish his dream, that of becoming an acknowledged sakura expert and to collect as many cherry tree varieties as possible. Throughout his fabulous centennial life, he was blessed with the chance of being able to respond to other three key ambitions – "to return extinct cherry varieties to Japan from England, to propagate Japanese varieties in his Benenden garden and to spread the cherry tree throughout the UK and beyond." (139) When cherries are in bloom along the Potomac River, or in the secluded Savill Garden of the Windsor Castle, or around the temples of Kyoto, the answer to his pledge comes in the silky texture of cherry petals dancing against the bluish passe-partout of the clear sky. "Ingram would have been pleasantly surprised to see the Asano trees at Kew Gardens. He would be even more astounded by the 350 Taihaku trees that grow in the gardens of Alnwick Castle in Northumberland, near England's northern border with Scotland. It is the world's largest collection of 'Great White' cherries. They are all descendants of trees that once grew at The Grange." (259)

The amazing Story of 'Cherry' Ingram is that of an almost samurai-like lifelong devotion to sakura, the delicate flower that turned out to be not only

destiny, but signature as well, since "[i]n his books Ingram also included a simple but elegant drawing of a cherry with its stalk. The 'C' stood for 'Cherry' and 'Collingwood', while the stalk stood for 'Ingram'." (249) In a world that seems to be dangerously drifting away, Collingwood Ingram's own words, as written down in his personal diary in the early 1920s, speak of the present and most importantly, of the future, equally delicate and fragile like a sakura blossom:

> Progress, improvement, development – call it what you like – is rapidly reaching even the remotest corners of the globe. Wherever modern man comes into contact with Nature, he leaves a disfiguring mark. As his numbers multiply, so the fundamental beauty of the universe decreases. The passing of beauty and romance from this world is, to me, a source of endless regret. (Naoko Abe 283).

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