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### Notes on Contributors

**James Au Kin-Pong**, a Master's graduate of both Hong Kong Baptist University and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, is currently writing his PhD thesis about the relation between history and literature through close-reading historical fictions both in Japanese and English. His research interests include Asian literatures, historical novels and comparative literature. During his leisure time, he writes poems and fiction in various languages, and translates poems into English. His latest project is to complete a Japanese novel of about three hundred thousand words.

**Ka Yan Lam** is a graduate student in the Department of English at the City University of Hong Kong. She is conducting comparative research for her PhD dissertation on the literature of Japanese novelists and late Victorian writers, including Enchi Fumiko, Ōba Minako, Florence Marryat and Vernon Lee. She taught English in local schools and universities in Hong Kong and spent two years teaching at Ritsumeikan University in Japan. She has published articles in *Journal of Popular Culture* and *Japanese Language and Literature*. Her research interests include British and Japanese literature, cultural theories and comparative and world literature.

**Andrew Wilson** earned his PhD in English in 1996 at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. He has spent 22 years as a full-timer at William Rainey Harper College in Palatine, Illinois, where he teaches writing and literature, and where he has served as the college's Honors Program Coordinator and the English Department's Co-Chair. He has published in the *Mississippi Quarterly*, *The Hemingway Review*, the *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, and *Thirty Years After: New Essays on Vietnam War, Literature and Film*. He lives in Chicago with his wife Amy and their two young children, Sophie and Sam.

**Robert Ono** is a senior assistant professor at Japan College of Social Work. Having received his PhD from International Christian University in 2014 with his dissertation on Ki no Tsurayuki, a tenth-century Japanese poet, he continues to explore various Japanese works of literature and culture, especially from a comparative and theoretical perspective. He is also the translator of several academic volumes, including Nosco et al (eds), *Values, Identity, and Equality in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-century Japan* (Brill, 2015).

**A. Robert Lee**, formerly of the University of Kent at Canterbury, UK, until 2011 was Professor of American Literature at Nihon University, Tokyo. He has held visiting US appointments at Princeton, the University of Virginia, Bryn Mawr College, Northwestern University, the

University of Colorado, and Berkeley. His thirty or so book publications include *Designs of Blackness: Mappings in The Literature and Culture of Afro-America* (1998), *Postindian Conversations*, with Gerald Vizenor (1999); *Multicultural American Literature: Comparative Black, Native, Latino/a and Asian American Fictions* (2003), which won the 2004 American Book Award; *United States: Re-Viewing American Multicultural Literature* (2009); *Gothic to Multicultural: Idioms of Imagining in American Literary Fiction* (2009) and *Modern American Counter Writing: Beats, Outriders, Ethnics* (2010). His creative work includes *Japan Textures: Sight and Word* (2007), *Tokyo Commute* (2011), and the verse collections *Ars Geographica* (2012), *Portrait and Landscape: Further Geographies* (2012), *Imaginarium: Sightings, Galleries, Sightlines* (2013), *Americas: Selected Verse and Vignette* (2015) and *Off Course: Roundabouts and Deviations* (2016).

### Editor

**Richard Donovan** is an Associate Professor in comparative literature and translation studies in the Faculty of Letters at Kansai University. He has also worked as a translator at the Kyoto City International Relations Office. He obtained a PhD in literary translation studies at Victoria University of Wellington in 2012. The title of his thesis was *Dances with Words: Issues in the Translation of Japanese Literature into English*. Current research areas include the translation of contemporary Japanese literature, representations of Kazuo Ishiguro's works in Japanese media, and the transmedial resurgence of *Twin Peaks*. This is his fifth issue of the Journal.

## Introduction to the Issue

I had the opportunity to present recent research at two IAFOR conferences this year: the International Conference on Education in Honolulu in January, and the International Conference on Global Studies in Barcelona in July. I also attended conferences in Kobe. During the year, I developed the idea to devote my fifth issue of the *IAFOR Journal of Literature & Librarianship* to East Asian topics, reflecting the origins of the organisation, even as it continues to expand around the world.

I discovered during the editing process that another common thread linking these papers is the inspiration and guidance that foregoing works and authors afford later generations. These chaotic, and yet ever-hopeful, times can only benefit from the lessons of history that our most agile minds continue to draw in the form of such quality pieces as those of the present issue.

This issue, indeed, sees the introduction of what I expect will be an ongoing commitment in the Journal to highlighting the work of new scholars benefitting from the IAFOR Grants and Scholarships that have been made available from this year. These grants and scholarships help a number of young people from around the world to participate in IAFOR conferences, thereby enriching current and future academe.

It is my pleasure to introduce one of the inaugural scholarship recipients, **James Kin-Pong Au**, who presented a version of the present paper at the 18th Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities. His ambitious, multilingual paper considers the influence of French symbolist poet Rimbaud on the works of two twentieth-century Japanese and Chinese poets.

Our second contributor, **Ka Yan Lam**, returns us to the topic of historiographic metafiction that was explored in Frederik De Vadder's paper in the previous issue, and in my own work on the unusual novel preceding this year's new series of *Twin Peaks*. Her paper reframes Enchi Fumiko's Heian-period literary work *Namamiko monogatari (A Tale of False Fortunes)* as a ground-breaking feminist metafiction.

A perennial topic in this Journal is the writings of Murakami Haruki, and **Andrew J. Wilson** also begins by looking back, in this case to Kamo no Chōmei's Kamakura-period memoir *An Account of My Hut*, for an austere Buddhist counterpoint to Murakami's collection of short fiction *After the Quake*, the latter which, he contends, exhibits a humanistic turn towards the family and community in our disaster-fraught and complex modern era.

Our final paper, by **Robert Ono**, similarly examines the solace, and, beyond that, the potential source of identity, that a literary form of ancient origins offered one of Japan's most marginalised groups, the patients of its leprosariums, in the form of the *tanka*, or short poems, they published in the various institutions' journals in the twentieth century.

Talking of poetry, we end this issue with a literary treat: several standout works from

former Journal contributor and long-time collaborator and mentor **A. Robert Lee**. He has kindly marked this special issue by allowing me to republish five of his Asia-themed long-form poems, some of which have enlivened IAFOR conferences over the past few years. His delight at the endless cultural and linguistic permutations that emanate from a deep engagement with Asian culture is matched by his incisive wit and perceptive eye. Anyone who has lived in Asia, particularly Japan, will read these poems with a powerful sense of recognition of both the potency and the precariousness of the region.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the work of this year's Editorial Board members, who made a significant contribution to the academic rigour and readability of the papers. Thank you as always.

**Richard Donovan**

Editor

## **The Influence of Arthur Rimbaud on Dai Wang Shu and Nakahara Chūya's Poetry— The Construction of their Poetic Decadent World**

**James Kin-Pong Au**

### **Abstract**

This article argues both Dai Wang-shu (戴望舒, 1905–1950) and Nakahara Chūya (中原中也, 1907–1937), as readers of French symbolist Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891)'s poetry, adopted similar stylistic elements because the three of them were trapped in times of turbulence. Rimbaud experienced the decline of the Second French Empire and its collapse after the Franco–Prussian War in 1870. Nakahara was situated in a revolutionary age—the aftermath of the First World War, the world's economic depression and the rise of militarism in Japan—in which politics and rapid cultural change were causing most Japanese to have a crisis of identity; and similarly, Dai's literary life flourished as China was being invaded by Japanese armies. While western scholars such as Gregory Lee and Donald Keene have hitherto, respectively, considered the biographical accounts of Dai's poetry and hastened to label Nakahara as the “Japanese Rimbaud”, with at the same time Asian scholars in unison claiming the uniqueness of the two poets, few have addressed the issue of how a double identity—being both a poet and a translator—affects the stylistics of one's poetry. To this end this article uses close readings of some of Dai's poetry written during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, and Nakahara's *Collection of Goat Songs*, written in the 1920s, to argue further that the reason why they had to narrate and confess their sentiment in such a French symbolist way is closely related to their crises of humanity, culture, war and identity.

*Keywords:* crisis, decadence, Dai Wang-shu, Nakahara Chūya, world wars

## Introduction

“In the world there are only three poets. Verlaine, Rimbaud, Laforgue. How true it is! Only three,” wrote Nakahara (2003, p. 38) in his 1927 diary. In the same year, he also confessed in French, “Rimbaud is more romantic than Verlaine. It is the only difference between them” (ibid., p. 67). In other words, from his perspective, the three symbolist poets serve as his ideal French poets. But among the three, he appreciated Rimbaud the most, saying how he felt “good” (ibid., p. 70) when he read his poetry. Thus, viewed in this light, Noriko Thunman is inaccurate in clearly dividing Nakahara’s works into three periods—one of which, 1928–1933, was what she claimed to be his “Verlaine period” (1983, p. 2)—by neglecting the exalted status of Rimbaud in Nakahara’s mind. His veneration for Rimbaud is further evidenced in his reading and translating Rimbaud’s works, as indicated in his 1937 diary (Nakahara, 2003, pp. 182, 186, 187). Apparently, this matches how Keene (1983) remarked on him as “the Japanese Rimbaud ... in the role of a *poète maudit*” (p. 345), although it may be too hasty a conclusion since Keene ceased to compare each of their works in a biographical, historical and cultural context.

However, it is not only the Japanese translator-poet who admired Rimbaud; the talent of the French symbolist poet also attracted great attention in the Chinese literary world, among which the young poet Dai Wang-shu. When asked which French poet Dai was impressed with, he answered readily, in a letter from 1936, Rimbaud and his contemporary Lautréamont (1846–1870) (Lee, 1989, p. 48). Most scholars celebrated more the influence of Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) and Paul Verlaine (1844–1896) on Dai,<sup>1</sup> but many have overlooked the fact that Dai also translated into Chinese a number of Rimbaud’s prose poems, “Mystique” (Mystery 「神秘」), “Ornière” (Ruts 「車轍」), “Fleurs” (Flowers 「花」), “A une raison” (To a Reason 「致——理性」), “Aube” (Dawn 「黎明」) and “Guerre” (Wars 「戰爭」), which were published in the literary magazine *Wenyi zhoukan* (Literary Periodicals 『文藝週刊』) (Xiong, 2016) on 16th July 1944. Notably, Baudelaire and Rimbaud were introduced to China almost at the same time, the former through the Association for Literary Studies established in China in 1920 (Lee, 2012, pp. 509–513) and the latter in an article by Li Huang (1895–1991), where Rimbaud’s poems were first introduced to Chinese readers in 1921 (loc. cit.). Judging from

<sup>1</sup> For example, Tao’s (2009, pp. 211–224) thesis spends one whole section emphasizing the influence of Verlaine on Dai by comparing works of both; likewise Fang and Zhang’s (2015, pp. 189–194) article judged Baudelaire and Verlaine as strongly influential on Dai, since Dai had translated a lot of their poems into Chinese.

the above evidence, it can be believed that Rimbaud, especially his prose poetry, was inspirational in Dai's literary career.

Rather than completely mimicking the style of others, each poet, I argue, transforms it in response to the era and the society to which they belong. In the Chinese literary landscape of the 1920s and 30s, as Shih Shu-mei pointed out, Chinese writers, including Dai Wang-shu, were struggling between absorbing Western and Japanese culture, and “repudiating the humiliating presence of [such] *colonial* culture” (2001, p. 231; original emphasis). Likewise, Japanese poets were experimenting with different forms and styles of “modern verse” during the Taishō and early Shōwa period.<sup>2</sup> Translating French poems thus represents both Asian poets' attempt to seek ways to incorporate French culture into their own intrinsic literary culture, and to create a new form and style of writing.

### **“Asociability” as Rimbaud’s Reaction toward Tumult**

To provide a common ground for comparison, I wish to first give a brief historical and cultural account of Rimbaud, Nakahara and Dai. The renowned French poet, born into a family with a military background in the mid-nineteenth century, was strictly disciplined by his mother during his childhood. Yet perhaps thanks to such a draconian upbringing, his talent as a child prodigy of poetry writing was exhibited in his academic performance and other awards he received while still in his teens (Ivry, 1998, pp. 11–21). His persistent mental discipline may have motivated behavior that “became outwardly provocative” (ibid., p. 22) from late October 1870, including stealing books and behaving rudely. Meyers (2011) commented that Rimbaud was a poet possessing a “fragmented self” (p. 178), by which he meant that Rimbaud encompasses both the character of rationality and irrationality since he comprehends “I is the other” (ibid., p. 172), which phrase Rimbaud used when writing to George Izambard to express a split self. However, from the new poetic style he adopted in his poetry, I would rather subscribe to the idea that Rimbaud decided to be more iconoclastic and to sever ties to mainstream poetry writing as he was forced by his mother to study traditional Greek and Latin. The construction of his poetic world was thus an attempt to conceal his perceptions of his community as well as the nation. For instance, in the poem “Paris War-Cry” he praised the bravery of French soldiers during the Franco-Prussian War. And even though

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<sup>2</sup> For more about the clear distinctions among various types of modern verse, refer to Makoto Ōoka (1969).

later during his days with Verlaine from 1871 his works concentrated more on his abstract feelings, it was nevertheless his reaction towards the turbulent, ever-changing French political and social landscape as a consequence of the influence of Marx's Manifesto (Ross, 1988, pp. 21–23). As Kristin Ross remarked, “nothing is more social than Rimbaud's asociability” (ibid., p. 20), and his early eight-line poem “Sensation” (1870) did indeed echo his later life as a wanderer escaping from the unstable and eventually crumbling empire.

On blue evenings in summer, down paths,  
 Spiked by sharp corn, I'll trample new grass.  
 Dreaming, I'll feel the cool on my feet,  
 The wind will bathe my bare head.  
 I shan't speak, I'll clear out all my thoughts.  
 But love without end shall fill my soul,  
 And I'll travel far, very far, Nature's  
 Vagabond—happy as with a woman. (Sorrell (trans.), 2009, pp. 10–11)

From “Sensation”, two major themes, as Ruff highlighted, are nature and childhood (1968, p. 28). Rimbaud idealizes how he accessed nature, including “trampl[ing] new grass” (line 2), “feel[ing] the cool on my feet” (line 3) and allowing “the wind [to] bath my bare head” (line 4) to escape from harsh reality. He uses the word “dreaming” (line 3; *rêveur*, literally “dreamer” in French) not only in this piece but also other early poetry such as “Sun and Skin,” “Ophelia” and “My Bohemia (Fantasy),” all written in 1870. However, words and expressions associated with “dream” (*rêve* as a noun and *rêver* as a verb in French) appeared frequently throughout his complete works. Through writing poems, he attempted to isolate himself from the community where he could enjoy “free liberty” (ibid., p. 29), the phrase he used in a letter to his revered teacher George Izambard. The word “liberty” (*liberté*) was laden with a French historical and cultural burden as it was one of the words used in the slogan of the 1789 French Revolution. Unfortunately, the French had not won any peace despite the continuous pursuit of liberty, since civil wars, rebellions, the Franco–Prussian War and the overthrowing of empire followed one after another (Doyle, 2001, pp. 90–92). With his experience of such political uncertainties in addition to his experience of a draconian childhood, it was thereby natural for him to think of leading a life as a “vagabond” (line 8), the original word for which



is *Bohémien*, with its connotation of wanderers in pursuit of like-minded company. In other words, instead of positively participating in society or radically protesting for his rights, he chose to be a social outcast to express his discontent toward everything.

Rimbaud's asociability indeed is sustained in his last set of poems, *Illuminations* (1872–1873), all of which were written in prose form. For instance, in “Aube” (Dawn), which Dai Wang-shu translated into Chinese, Rimbaud endeavored to construct a world of divine, natural peace in his mind. However, such peacefulness transforms from a level of lifelessness to a divine plane. The first two paragraphs of the poem declare:

I have been dawn's summer lord.  
Utter stillness on the palace fronts. Lifeless water. The shadow-camps on the woodland road had not yet been struck. I walked awakening warm and living breaths, and the precious stones looked, and the wings lifted without a sound. (Sorrell (trans.), pp. 286–287)

The word “lifeless” (*morte*), as well as the silent atmosphere surrounding ‘I’ (*je*)—“shadow-camps”, “wings without a sound”—created what Gerry Macklin (2011) called “a sense of pre-dawn deadness” (p. 56), and, similar to “Sensation”, we can still see the image of him as a *Bohémien* from the clause “I walked awakening warm and living breaths.” Such indicates Rimbaud's desire to escape from reality and to seek changes through adventures. Viewed in this light, the pre-dawn deadness may imply a transition, or a channel whereby the poet himself can travel to a place with true tranquility—dawn. When dawn sets in, we can feel the happiness of “I,” as he mentions, in the middle, that “I laughed at the waterfall” (*Je ris au waterfall*), and that “I” engages “myself” in an intimate chase with the goddess. This happiness is nevertheless temporary. As though a song full of harmony suddenly clashes with an abrupt cadence, when “I” sees “the child fell ... in the depth of the wood, dawn,” all visions and images vanish in no time, and “I” ceases to describe anything during the period between dawn and noon.

[...] In the depths of the wood, dawn and the child fell.  
On waking, it was noon. (loc. cit.)

Here we can see that “my” pursuit toward the ideal and dreams has now come to nothing and “I” must wake up and face reality. At a metaphorical level, all visions and imagery are lost in the last sentence: “On waking, it was noon.” Macklin (2011) shrewdly argues that this laconic

sentence is “as if the dream is over and we must now return to reality with the resulting disillusionment over the loss of transcendence being reflected” (p. 60). Unlike Rimbaud’s earlier poems, he wrote “Aube” and many others in the form of a tale, but as this tale also constitutes Rimbaud’s meanderings between reality and dreams, the temporal dimension of the story is extended and suppressed at will, to express his simultaneous desperate hope and helplessness as an individual to change society.

### **When Nakahara “Met” Rimbaud**

Rimbaud’s “asociability,” to use Ross’s term, drew the empathy of Nakahara. In his translation manuscript, he wrote, “I feel so delighted when I know Arthur Rimbaud. ... Not even one day does my appreciation towards his talent and characters fade” (2000, p. 464, my translation). His encounter with Rimbaud was through his friend Tarō Tominaga, as he confessed in his 「詩的履歴書」 *Shitekirekisho* (Poetic Résumé) that he learnt about French poets in 1924, a year after learning of European Dadaist poetry via another Japanese poet, Shinkichi Takahashi (Nakahara, 2003, p. 184). In many aspects, Nakahara resembled Rimbaud. They matured rather early, Nakahara starting to create poems at the age of eight (Yoshida Hirō et al., 1981, p. 216) while Rimbaud started his poetic life in his mid-teens (Ruff, 1968, pp. 16–17); they both experienced a period of rebellion. Furthermore, in the case of Nakahara, when he was sixteen years old he was affected both by the Kantō earthquake of 1923 and his reading of Takahashi’s Dadaist poetry, and spent almost a year creating several Dada poems by himself. Take 「名詞の扱い」 “*Meishi no atsukaini*” (In the Treatment of Nouns) as an example:

My poems are  
 Symbols which have forgotten logic  
 In the treatment of nouns  
 [...]  
 When the Dadaist says “coffin”  
 It’s a “coffin” that spans the ages  
 That’s the everlastingness of dada  
 But the dadaist doesn’t write the poetry of dada

Out of a longing for everlastingness. (Mackintosh and Sugiyama (trans.), 1993, p. 27)

Here we can see Nakahara is aiming at constructing his own poetic world by using “symbols” in an illogical way—which might signify that he intends to break with the traditional use of images and metaphors, and along with them the old poetic form. Structurally speaking, referring to the source text we find that the first three lines are not in the right grammatical order since they are, chronologically, “In the treatment of nouns”, “Symbols which have forgotten logic” and “My poems are”. Such a bold disruption of normal syntax could be explained by his youthful rebellion in pre-maturity, as he acknowledged in his diary entries about his ennui and the insipid life he had been leading from his early childhood (Nakahara, 2002, pp. 32–33), and therefore poetry was the only space where he could liberate himself and create without any constraints. Probably fascinated also by the revolutionary nature of Dada, Nakahara departed from ordinary diction to give terms new meaning, and this is reflected in his use of the symbol of the “coffin” as well. The long box image is normally associated with death and silence, but it is precedential for Nakahara to think of the alternately changing and eternal nature of the coffin since, on one hand, the shape, structure and patterns of it might change in different times and on the other hand the dead were always buried in it. Thunman (1983) argues that the poem shows signs of the end of his “dadaistic rebellion” (p. 27) and the beginning of this embrace of symbolism since, unlike Dadaism, which regards destruction as an end in itself, Nakahara took destruction as a means to the reconstruction of his world. Thus, his Dadaist-poetry creative period had as short a span as the European Dadaist movement. We can see, however, in his subsequent poems, that he still left traces of Dadaist writing style.

The third similarity that Rimbaud and Nakahara bear is their relatively short literary career. For the French poet, after the tragedy in which Verlaine shot and injured him he decided to rid himself of Verlaine. He wrote his unfinished collection *Illuminations* in 1874 and never wrote any other poetry, ending his pitifully short but brilliant literary life that had lasted for roughly half a decade (Ivry, 1998). The Japanese poet formally started his poetry writing in 1924, when he was seventeen; tuberculosis meningitis took his life in 1936 and ended his thirteen years of poetry writing (Yoshida Hirō et al., op. cit., pp. 379–407). Despite their relatively short literary careers, their respective sorrowful personal experiences always motivated them to write their poems. In the case of Nakahara, many of his works were completed out of his commemoration of his breakup with his girlfriend, and the death of his family, while

Rimbaud's painful experiences can also be felt in most of his works.

### **Nakahara's Asociability as an Anti-reaction**

Considering the social, political and literary landscape, one can observe that Nakahara too belonged to turbulent times. As a poet experiencing the Taishō period in the 1920s and the early Showa period in the 1930s, Nakahara witnessed rapid changes in the Japanese state and society. As historical critic Garon (1994) rightly pointed out, the 1920s were a “time of conflict between a conservative state and a modernizing, urbanizing civil society” (p. 350), while the government was, in response to widespread discontent about living standards expressed, especially, by the middle class, began to implement “daily life improvement campaigns” (ibid., p. 356). But still, influenced by Western ideologies, socialist and proletarian movements were prevalent during that period (Duus & Scheiner, 1989, pp. 654–710). Even though Fundō (1974) commented that “Nakahara was neither a modernist, nor could his works be claimed as proletariat poetry but he pioneered in narrating his solitude frankly in his poems”, (p. 209), I question whether Fundō had put an equals sign, as it were, between modernism and westernization. Nevertheless, “modern” is always relative between the present and the past. Viewed in a literary aspect, it was unfair to negate entirely his modernist attempt by neglecting how Nakahara struggled and experimented with various styles of writing. Sasaki gave a historical background in his chapter to prove that the reform was rigorous yet uncertain as to whether to use poetry in written form or in oral form, and whether to use a fixed form of poetry or free verse (Sasaki et al., 2007, pp. 4–5). In Nakahara's case, he always employed a mixed mode in both his translations of Rimbaud's poetry and his own creative writing. Take his translation of Rimbaud's “Happiness” (*Bonheur*) as an example:

O seasons, o chateaux ...  
 Which soul has no flaws?  
 O seasons, o chateaux,  
 I've made the magic study  
 Of Happiness, no one evades. [...] (Sorrell (trans.), pp. 194–195)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The original poem reads “Ô saisons, ô châteaux / Quelle âme est sans défauts? / Ô saisons, ô châteaux, / J'ai

Originally, Rimbaud unhesitatingly and unselfconsciously extolled the beauty of seasons and castles, and practiced his free power in the poetic world where “I” can create happiness by oneself. However, the spontaneous release is lost in sacrifice to his clinging to Japanese poetry’s musicality:

*toki ga nagareru oshiro ga mieru*  
*mukizuna mono nazo doko ni arau*  
*toki ga nagareru oshiro ga mieru*  
*watashi no tegaketa kōfuku no*  
*hihō o darega nogare eyō*  
 [...] (Nakahara (trans.), pp. 126–127)<sup>4</sup>

Considering the first line of both the original and translated text, instead of rendering a direct translation of *Ā kisetsuyo, ā shiroyo* (French: *Ô saisons, ô châteaux*; English: O seasons, o chateaux ...), Nakahara adds the two verbs *nagareru* (‘pass’) and *mieru* (‘are seen’) so that each phrase encompasses seven syllables. Scholar of French studies Usami contended approvingly that such a supplementation strengthened the vivid temporal and spatial images for readers (Sasaki et al., p. 79), but irrespective of the effects evoked by his translation, I would suggest he might be inextricably attached to the conventional 5-7 syllabic poetic pattern. Indeed, similar attempts to translate Rimbaud’s works could also be found in 「感動」 “*Kandō*” (Sensation) and in 「わが放浪」 “*Wagahōrō*” (My Bohemia (Fantasy)). His early education certainly contributed to it, but such a choice could also be explained by the uncertainty of the Japanese poetic literary world, as well as the ongoing mediation process between local classical works and western works. For example, in his own piece “Asa no Uta” (Morning Song), he writes:

On the ceiling, reddish

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fait la magique étude / Du Bonheur, que nul n’élude. [...]”

<sup>4</sup> The original translation reads 「季節(とき)が流れる、城寨(おしろ)が見える、/ 無疵(むきず)な魂(もの)なぞ 何処にあらう? / 季節が流れる、城寨が見える、/ 私の手がけた 幸福の / 秘法を誰が脱(のが)れ得よう。」

light leaked through        the chink in the door,  
 redolent of rustic martial music;  
 my hands have nothing to turn to.  
 The small birds' song        is inaudible  
 the sky today        is a pale indigo;  
 the weary        man's heart  
 —no-one        would reproach it.  
 The morning is vexed        with the odour of resin;  
 lost,        the various dreams;  
 the serried woods        sound in the wind.  
 [...] (Mackintosh and Sugiyama (trans.), p. 7)

The mediation between East and West can indeed be manifested in this poetry, as we can see that “Morning Song” resembles that of Rimbaud’s poem in terms of form, while in terms of content it delineates more about sensory stimuli, including the vision of the leaking light (line 2), the audio perception of small birds’ song (line 5) and olfaction of resin (line 9). Such sensory appeals as well as the intentional portrayal of various colors are undoubtedly imitations of Rimbaud. In addition, in terms of poetic form, “Morning Song” was written like some European sonnets, as were most of Rimbaud’s early works such as “Evil” (*Le Mal*) and “Winter Dream” (*Rêvé pour l’hiver*). However, unlike Rimbaud’s poems, in which either first-person or third-person narrative was employed, most of Nakahara’s narratives are rather vague. In “Morning Song,” instead of telling readers an abstract story, it shows them a series of pictures with each verse representing one image as if the poem can be split into four tanka-length poems. Such unique delineation of image is possibly due to his early education in old Japanese classics and tanka—a Japanese verse containing five lines, each line of which consists of five, seven, five, seven and seven syllables—as well as to his enthusiasm toward tanka writing (Fundō, 1974, pp. 44–45).

Likewise, Nakahara’s “dreams” differed from those of Rimbaud, too. While Rimbaud’s dreams are mostly positive and idealistic and his dream of creating a world free of ennui and pressure is clear, the Japanese poet here had ambiguous, “various dreams” (lines 10 & 14). So what do these dreams represent? Read together with “rustic martial music” and a “weary man’s heart,” they might symbolize his nostalgia toward either wartime or his heyday with his

old friend and lover. Born into a family whose father was a military doctor, Nakahara had led his elementary-school life in various cities in China and Japan (Sasaki et al., op. cit., pp. 6–7). One of the dreams might thus refer to his reminiscences of childhood. Another dream might also imply his yearning for his lost love, since his ex-girlfriend Yasuko Hasegawa left him and eloped with Hideo Kobayashi in 1924. In his *zuihitsu* (隨筆) essay “My Life,” he derided himself as a person with no consciousness (Nakahara, 2003, p. 352) and confessed that “I always make dreams. Those dreams are, as if sometimes blue in colour, and sometimes red in colour, dreams that I cannot ensure whether they are really dreams” (loc. cit.). The complexity of his dreams, then, not only implicitly reflected him as an individual but also the Japanese poetic community itself. From Nakahara’s constant negotiation between classical poetry writing and Western poetic techniques—how he conformed to the Japanese 5-7 syllabic form in many of his poems while trying to employ symbolist style—we could contend that modern Japan experienced in the 1920s “a crisis in the forms of literary representation” (Lippit, 1997, p. 3) across all genres of Japanese writing, and such movement between genres also brought forth the issue of identity: for example, a crisis about what constitutes a modern Japanese.

Nor is the structure of “The Morning Song” an entire imitation of Rimbaud or some other symbolist poet. While employing externally the form of a sonnet, Nakahara persists in the Japanese traditional musicality, i.e. the 7-5 or 5-7 syllabic convention, in the source text. Sugaya treated such persistence as an act to “establish new anachronism” (Yoshida et al., 1981, p. 293), the reason for which was “a spell” (ibid., p. 295) cast on Nakahara himself. In other words, he could hardly detach himself from his traditional education of the classics, and his poetry alone can be viewed as an allegory of conflict between westernizing Japanese poems and retaining the old customs of writing.

### **Dai’s Encounter with Rimbaud and French Literature**

If Nakahara resembled Rimbaud in terms of biographical background, then the initial French learning experience of Dai Wang-shu also echoes that of Nakahara. Born in Hangzhou, China in 1905, Dai was educated there by his mother in classical Chinese before studying French literature at Aurora University in Shanghai in 1925 (Tao, 2009, pp. 198–205). Unlike Rimbaud, Dai did not hate classical literature, instead making use of his knowledge of Chinese and French literature to create his own work. Nevertheless, Dai’s encounter with

works of Rimbaud and other French poets was never coincidental. The late 1910s and the 1920s were a tumultuous era in China after the abolition of the Qing Empire in 1911. In 1919—the aftermath of the First World War and the year when the Versailles peace conference was held—for instance, a large-scale demonstration broke out on 4 May against Japan’s occupation of Shantung.<sup>5</sup> Fear that China might not only lose her international status but would soon be colonized by western nations and Japan thus mounted. Many intellectuals therefore began to think of revolutionizing Chinese literature through absorbing western culture and style, in the hope of using words to save their nation. One famous example is Hu Shih’s vernacular movement in the late 1910s, during which he pioneered writing poems in free verse.<sup>6</sup> Since it was in this age of literary revolution that Dai Wang-shu was raised and educated, it was thus justifiable for him to write new poems instead of classical ones.

But through his translation of numerous poems of French and other European origins, we can also see that Dai did not simply follow blindly foreign styles but rather incorporated and transformed them into something distinct from the original. For instance, in “古意答客問” (“*Guyi da ke wen*”, Classic answers to a friend), written on 5th December 1934, his third year into a sojourn in France, we can find the traces of classical style in the form of free verse:

My lonely heart follows the radiant mutations of the floating clouds.  
 Eyes used to watching the blue sky are pleased by the green grass invading the threshold.  
 You ask me where I find my happiness?  
 In the bright moon at the window and the books beside my pillow.

At early dawn watching the mist lingering on the mountain tops,  
 At dusk listening to the wind hovering among the flowers.  
 You ask me where my soul takes its rest?  
 Look at the smoke curling upwards from the chimney.

Drinking dew when thirsty, eating petals when hungry,  
 The deer guards my dreams, the bird greets my waking,

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<sup>5</sup> Read Shinkichi Etō’s article (1986, pp. 74–115) for more details about the political and social unrest that happened during that period.

<sup>6</sup> Detailed explanation of Hu Shih’s experience learning overseas and his concrete ideas about writing “new” poetry can be found in Jenine Heaton’s article (2012, pp. 35–55).



You ask me whether I have worldly worries?

Listen to the fading footsteps of the traveler of a hundred generations.

(Lee (trans.), 1989, p. 239)

Although the poem is written in vernacular Chinese in a relatively freer verse, we can observe rhymes in most lines in the original. Antithesis is quite noticeable in a couple of lines: the first line of the second stanza forms an antithesis with the second of the same stanza, while the first line in the third stanza forms another with the second line in the same stanza. While antithesis is rare in continental literature, it is more frequently used in classical Tang poetry.<sup>7</sup> Like the poems of Rimbaud, this poem is also rich in natural images, such as “floating clouds,” “bright moon” and “mountain tops,” but upon a closer look, these images are possibly old Chinese literati allusions. For example, the third line “In the bright moon at the window and the books beside my pillow” might evoke in readers’ minds an archetype of a traditional Chinese literatus, who had to borrow the moonlight and study at night for the official examinations.

Reading the poem again but more macroscopically, we would agree that this poem is philosophical, which also reminded readers of Dai’s other poem “My Thoughts” (我思想, “Wo si xiang”), where he incorporated Zhuangzi’s thoughts along with Descartes’ in his work. But in terms of form, I suggest that it is quite similar to the poem in Rimbaud’s “Délire II” (1873) (Second Delirium) (pp. 234–235), where the persona asked “what was I drinking” (*Que buvais-je*; line 2), “what could I be drinking” (*Que pouvais-je boire*; line 5), and finally answered in the last line “Full of tears ... I could not drink” (*Pleurant, je ... ne pus boire*), just as Dai’s writing is in the form of question and answer.

From the above poem, we can thus observe how Dai flexibly and shrewdly put his classical Chinese knowledge to good use in his poetry. As the etymology of Chinese characters starts from pictographic images (Fang & Zhang, 2015, pp. 189–190), the language is seemingly compatible with French symbolist poetry too. Indeed, Dai wrote a set of seventeen poetic principles in “*Wangshu shilun*” (“望舒詩論” Wangshu’s Poetic Theory, 1932), where Dai emphasizes more the overall mood than musicality. Of most relevance are

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<sup>7</sup> For example, a lot of antitheses can be found in Du Fu (杜甫)’s “Prospect of Spring” (“春望”), and antithesis is even compulsory in the second and third lines when it comes to composing Five-Character and Seven Character Regulated Verse. For more examples of Tang poetry, refer to C. K. Ho’s book (2015).

his first, sixth and seventh principles:

1. Poetry cannot rely on musicality and should discard its musical qualities.  
[...]
6. What is most important for new poetry is the “nuance” of poetic mood and not the “nuance” of characters and phrases.
7. Rhyme and regularity of lines may obstruct poetic mood, or deform poetic mood.  
(Denton (trans.), pp. 316–217)

Obviously, in Dai’s mind, “poetic mood” should not lie in the rhyme and meter of the poem, but in the overall atmosphere felt by the readers. In this sense, it is understandable why Dai admired more Rimbaud’s narrative poems and translated them in veneration. Meanwhile, Dai does not relinquish everything of classical Chinese poetry, for he also writes that “diction of the old classics cannot be opposed when it bestows on us a new poetic mood” (loc. cit.) in the eleventh principle. This also explains why, in the previously analyzed poem “Guyi da ke wen”, Dai employed a lot of old phrases such as 躑躅 *zhizhu* (lingering) and 罌慮 *gualu* (worldly worries). Perhaps such an incorporation of the past language into the present, and such a French-symbolist style of Chinese new poetry is exactly what Dai aims at to achieve the co-existence of “*originalité*” and “cosmopolite” (ibid., p. 317).

The perfect amalgamation of old diction and the new style of poetry, and of reality and ideals, can be exhibited in Dai’s “*Yu zhong ti bi*” (“獄中題壁” Written On a Prison Wall), composed on 27th February, 1944 and compiled in his collected poetry *Zai nan de shui yue* (『災難的歲月』Years of Disaster, published in 1948) during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong in the midst of the Second World War. During the Sino-Japanese War, Dai worked as a newspaper editor in Hong Kong, but in late 1941 he was arrested and put in jail. Gregory Lee (1989) commented that these poems, mostly written in prose, contain heavily nostalgic feelings (pp. 65–88). If true, I would argue that such an emotion originated from his pain over his vain resistance to the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong and their invasion of China.

If I die here, friends, do not be sad,  
I shall always exist in your hearts.

One of you died in a cell in Japanese occupied territory.  
He harboured deep hatred, you should always remember.

When you come back dig up his mutilated body from the mud,  
Hoist his soul up high with your victory cheers.

And then place his bones on a mountain peak, to bask in the sun  
And bathe in the wind.

In that dark damp dirt cell that was his sole beautiful dream. (Lao & Goldblatt (trans.),  
1995, p. 514)

The poem begins with the conditional “if,” the poet envisioning the worst-case scenario, his death in the war. However, we find the mood gradually changes from extreme anguish to optimism. The death of the representative “he” is transformed to a future victory, and when his bones are placed at the peak and unified with the earth, his “beautiful dream” can finally be realized. In the first few stanzas, Dai uses very simple words to describe his antagonism towards the Japanese armies. But then in the last stanza Dai envisions that the Chinese would finally win the war. Just as Rimbaud moved his pen freely from the prosaic to the poetic, so does Dai in the last stanza, where the “bones” of his dead companion “bask in the sun / And bathe in the wind.” Despite facing great mental and physical pain, Dai is able to shuttle from the desperate to the positive through the poem.

### **Desperate Literary Pursuits of the Three Poets**

Similar to Rimbaud, Dai also traveled extensively. Dai lived in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Paris and Lyon, and his cosmopolitan experience enabled him to write poetry rich in imagery. His experience also inspired him to revise his poetic theory. Although his poetic principle had already been established in 1932, he published second and third editions of the theory, namely *Shi lun ling za* (『詩論零札』The Odds and Ends of Poetic Theory), which are slight variations on his first (Dai, 1991, pp. 691–693; 701–703). Viewed in this aspect, we can see Dai’s continuous pursuit of an ideal form of new poetry. Such a pursuit somehow resembles that of Nakahara as well, as most of his nostalgic poems seemed to be a desperate attempt to reconstruct his ideal past. We can nevertheless see a difference between Dai and Nakahara. The former is more like a positive-minded wanderer aiming at a better future, or hoping that

the future can move nearer to his ideals, while the latter is a pessimistic mind-traveler. The loss of his love, and later the death of his son, dealt a great blow to Nakahara, and because of this, most of his poems are colored with a layer of melancholy.

The Japanese Bohemian, however, unlike Rimbaud, is not a physical wanderer but more like a mind-wanderer, as the former let his mind ramble freely, while the later physically traveled in a substantial way. The French poet is perceived as a figure of physical exile, while Nakahara did not travel on foot but through his psyche. For instance, Rimbaud's "Festivals of Hunger" (*Fêtes de la faim*) and "Comedies of Thirst" (*Comédies de la soif*) were written during his journey with Paul Verlaine in September 1872 to London (Ivry, 1998, p. 58). Unable to earn any money, he expressed through these two pieces his lust for food and alcohol. If, as Ruff (1968) suggested, "sad softness and aerial purity dominates his life, and it is his distaste for life that composes the tonality [of his poetry]" (p. 132), his pessimism toward reality enabled him to create a Bohemian image and to travel to the supposedly pure countryside as a way to escape from the heavily polluted cities. The miserable poet, as a result, expressed not only his physical thirst but also that for happiness. In the last section of "Comedy of Thirst," he writes:

The pigeons which tremble in the field,

Game, on the run, seeing night,

Water-creatures, bidden beasts,

The final butterflies ... are thirsty too. (Sorrell (trans.), pp. 174–175; original ellipsis)

We can see how Rimbaud captures the frightening moments of the forest including the trembling pigeons and the thirsty butterflies. Though translated into "game" by Sorrell, the original term *le gibier* also signifies "prey," and the first verse suggests panic and fear: he seems to signal to himself that danger is inevitable in nature, let alone in the human world. I suppose it is his confession of "the weak being the prey of the strong" (Ruff, 1968, p. 132) that wins Ruff's commendation of his "pure" poetry writing. Likewise, the verse can also be interpreted as portraying the disappearing natural habitat because of the negligence of a demoralizing rural society (Harvie & Matthew, 2000, pp. 83–84) followed by rapid industrial development. Thus, in the last line of the second verse his rhetorical question of "Whose burgeonings fill these forests" (line 8) expresses his desperate hope for a re-invigorated nature.

In contrast to Rimbaud's figure of exile in his poems, Nakahara always presented to his readers veritable photomontages to enable them to travel in mind with the poet. Take "Circus" as an example:

There were several eras;

There were brown wars

There were several eras;

In winter, gales blew.

[...]

The fool parachute's nostalgia;

yu-an, yu-yon, yu-ya-yu-yon.

(Mackintosh & Sugiyama (trans.), p. 5)

'Circus' highlights strongly the theme of nostalgia by presenting the images of an old, disused circus. The second line's "brown wars" might represent the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, while the color itself evokes the old and the past. Keene (1983) was puzzled by the last line "yu-an, yu-yon, yu-ya-yu-yon" and conjectured the "rhythm ... evokes the emptiness and futility of his life at the time" (p. 348). Fundō (1974), however, suggested it was a melody both imitating traditional Japanese folk songs and simulating the sound of a swing (p. 87). The employment of onomatopoeia might also be due to the influence of Dada, as, in "Jimetsu" (「自滅」 Self-destruction, 1924), for instance, he repeats the word "leg" (*ashi*) in three consecutive lines and in a disorderly manner, perhaps to simulate the sound of walking. But irrespective of interpretations, it is valid to say that the works of Nakahara are not a mere mirror image of those of Rimbaud but encompass a pastiche of poetic techniques that formulates the uniqueness of Nakahara.

Overall, then, through creating pictures of desolateness, Nakahara on one hand takes us back to his reminiscences of encounters with an old circus, and on the other hand exhorts us to lament the rapid changing of time. Both Rimbaud and Nakahara portray to their readers their Bohemian image, but the French poet expresses very often his bodily despair and languor, while Nakahara narrates his mental ennui unconsciously.

**Conclusion: Crisis Creates New Styles of Writing**

The uniqueness of Rimbaud's poetry is not simply a product of a miserable childhood and unfortunate encounter with sexual abuser Paul Verlaine, but also of the social unrest in late-nineteenth-century France and its rapid urban development. Likewise, Nakahara's portrayal of the *poète maudit*, or social outcast, is ascribable to the turbulent era he belonged to. He touches several times upon the subject of humanity in his diary and emphasizes the importance of the "poetic mind" (2003, p. 45) in one of his essays, all of which are his subtle responses to a modernizing Japan. Seemingly he suggests it is important not to lose our morality in the face of any changes. Dai belonged to a turbulent era, as I have mentioned earlier. It is perhaps because of the turbulent literary world that the two Asian poets could experiment with Rimbaud and many different styles of writing, and ultimately make him a poet uniquely relevant in the early twentieth century. Indeed, while the translation of western works often seems to transform the local tradition of literary writing, one should not neglect how the translation of other poems affects the stylistics and form of one's creative poetry writing. Dai Wangshu is clearly a very good exponent, and I have shown how his unique historical, cultural and biographical background likewise led to negotiation between French symbolism and Chinese classics. An ongoing examination of this process will eventually deepen our understanding of cultures in mutual contact.

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**More Than a Historical Novel:  
Women, History, and Metafiction in Enchi Fumiko's *Namamiko Monogatari***

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**Abstract**

The very nature of the historical novel that rests on the ambiguity between history and fiction contributes to the obscure boundary between fictional and historical discourses. Using a historical setting with people and events of historical fact, female historical novelists are capable of articulating their feminist concerns and making social protests on forbidden modern-day issues. While historical discourses mirror literary writing, the value of narrativity in historical representations of reality is merely as an aesthetic effect. Many authors of historical discourses interpret and report their materials in narrative form, in the process of which the representation is governed by certain factual criteria but also some degree of imagination. The resulting ambivalences create a space of ambiguity for women writers to address gender inequality and questionable social practices. Although Enchi Fumiko's *Namamiko monogatari* (*A Tale of False Fortunes*) has been regarded by critics as a historical novel, the objective of this essay is to defend her novel as a work of feminist historiographic metafiction. Enchi intertextually incorporates fictional and historical texts to expose the problematic conventions of the historical novel. Whereas emplotting the chronicle and the romance structures adds plausibility to the narration, the metafictional narratorial interventions undermine the truthfulness of the narrator's recounted tale. Hence Enchi has created a new form of historical fiction that uncovers a different, more inclusive version of Heian women's 'history'.

*Keywords:* Enchi Fumiko, *Namamiko monogatari*, the historical novel

## Introduction

As one of the most acclaimed prose writers in post-WWII Japan, Enchi Fumiko (1905–1986) produced over a hundred plays, short stories, novels, and essays, and received six major awards in literature (Mikals-Adachi, 2001, p. 197). Under the influence of her father, Ueda Kazutoshi, a renowned professor in Japanese linguistics, she developed from her childhood a passion for classical Japanese literature. With her unrivalled knowledge of the Japanese classics, her literary works are fraught with motifs of pre-modern elements which are reconfigured by re-situating the characters of the past in a modern setting. Her narratives not only address the social and cultural conditions of her time but also explore the psychological workings of her female characters, marking her works as among the most prominent women's literature that challenges the literary conventions and the stereotypical representation of woman. Intertextual references to classical texts and historical discourses are found in her short stories and major novels such as “Himojii tsukihi” (「ひもじい月日」 “Days of Hunger”, 1954), “Yō” (「妖」 “Enchantress”, 1957), *Onnazaka* (『女坂』 *The Waiting Years*, 1957), *Onnamen* (『女面』 *Masks*, 1958), and *Namamiko monogatari* (『なまみこ物語』 *A Tale of False Fortunes*, 1965), the work most replete with historical fictional elements.

*Namamiko monogatari* is a fictional story that mocks the historical chronicle *Eiga monogatari* (『栄花物語』 *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes*, late eleventh century). Although historians and scholars hold various opinions on the dates of publication and the identity of the author, according to Helen Craig McCullough (1990), *Eiga monogatari* is the earliest Japanese vernacular history, written between 1030 and 1045 by Akazome Emon (赤染 衛門, 960–1040s), a Japanese *waka* poet who served the Fujiwara family as a lady-in-waiting. It was conjectured that Akazome wrote the first thirty chapters of the work but the last ten chapters are of anonymous authorship (ibid, p. 200). Akazome's section consists of a panegyric account of the eleventh-century regent Fujiwara no Michinaga (藤原 道長, 966–1028), focusing on the glorious life of Michinaga and his family. *Namamiko monogatari* unfolds with a prologue-narrator who recounts how she came to read the manuscript of an ancient love story titled *Namamiko monogatari—shui* (hereafter shortened as *Namamiko-shui*) forty years before. When she reads *Eiga monogatari*, the discrepancies with *Namamiko-shui* that she observes motivate her to recall her memories of the latter story, in which Michinaga is portrayed as a calculating and power-obsessed individual. In the chapters that follow, the

narrator recounts the tale of *Namamiko-shui*, but the narration is interspersed with the narrator's metafictional intrusions. *Namamiko-shui* is a tale embedded with multiple narratives, based on historical figures and events that took place in the Heian court under the reign of Emperor Ichijō (一条天皇, 980–1011). *Namamiko-shui* gives a fuller account of the empress consort Teishi than the historical chronicle, and is infused with the stories of other fictional characters, including the shaman sisters Ayame and Kureha. The story also depicts the machinations of the regent who rises in power and status by insinuating his people among the court and instigating plots to denigrate the household of Teishi. Amidst the downfall of Teishi's family and a series of fabricated spirit possessions, the ladies-in-waiting who claim to be possessed by vengeful spirits accuse the empress consort of plaguing other royal family members with her living spirit. Nevertheless, the genuine love between emperor Ichijō and Teishi stands undefeated. Ultimately, Michinaga's conspiracy is doomed to fail. In a nutshell, this version portrays Michinaga negatively and creates a more resplendent image of Teishi.

*Namamiko monogatari* qualifies as a historical novel as the story is set in a real historical period with people and events of historical existence. As a historical novel, it also reveals “the essential and causal links between the historical setting of the novel and the events and characters depicted in it” (Bowen, 2002, p. 247). The Japanese literary genre *rekishi shōsetsu* (歴史小説) puts more emphasis on the author's research into the historical facts while writing the story and how faithfully s/he represents the history (Zhao, 2015, pp. 10–11). This understanding was strongly advocated by Mori Ōgai (森 鷗外, 1862–1922), who made pioneering contributions to the literary genres of both modern and historical fiction. As discussed in his famous essay “*Rekishi sonomama to rekishi banare*” (『歴史其儘と歴史離れ』 Faithfulness to History and Departure from History), *shizen* (自然) or naturalness in historical facts is what he feels unwilling to alter, asserting it be maintained in a faithful manner even though the author's subjective interpretation is inevitable (Mori, 1915, p. 106). Half of Mori's thirteen historical novels tend to follow history, but those after *Sanshō dayū* (『山椒大夫』, 1915) become more detached from history, having sensed the limitations imposed by the “*rekishi sonomama*” (faithfulness to history) approach. The difficulty in preserving faithfulness in his historical novels rests on the indelible presence of fictionality, hence driving him towards adopting the alternative of “*rekishi banare*” (departure from

history) (Mori, 1915, p. 107). Mori's struggle with the two methods of historical exposition genuinely informs the ambiguous nature of the historical novel. Although the boundary between fictional narrative and historical discourse is crossed, the genre is more than merely the mingling of fiction and history.

Since the historical novel concerns a preoccupation with the past and how it is situated within the present, it subsumes the potential for social protest and feminist criticism. As Diana Wallace (2005) aptly summarizes in *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900–2000*:

Any historical novel is 'historical' in at least four senses: in its use of a particular period for its fictional setting; in its engagement with the historical moment (social, cultural, political and national) of its writing; in its relation to the personal life history of the writer herself; and in its relation to literary history, most obvious in the intertextual use of earlier texts. (p. 4)

Apparently, the nature of historicity obscures the boundary between historiography and literature in the historical novel. Wallace further notes that using the historical setting as a "fantasy space" the author can "centralise a female consciousness and explore female fears and desires" (ibid, p. 2). For women writers, the genre permits "writing about subjects which would otherwise be taboo" and "a critique of the present through their treatment of the past" (loc. cit.). Linda Hutcheon (1988) shares the view and adds a self-reflexive dimension to the characteristics of historical fiction. She defines "historiographic metafiction" as novels that "are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages", highlighting their "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" (p. 5).

Considering Wallace and Hutcheon's approach to historical fiction, the objective of my essay is to highlight the characteristics of the historical novel as manifested in *Namamiko monogatari*. By means of the intertextual incorporation of historical and fictional discourses and the strategy of emplotment, coupled with the metafictional interventions of the narrator, Enchi not only exposes the problematic approach of the conventional historical novel, but has also created her own form of historical novel to articulate feminist concerns over the suppressed women in the Heian era, rendering her masterpiece a 'feminist historiographic metafiction'.

### **Incorporating historical and fictional discourses**

First and foremost, the incorporation of historical people, events and places as well as historical narratives is imperative in historical fiction. At the beginning of the prologue, the narrator mentions her family's acquaintance with Dr Basil Hall Chamberlain during her childhood. Referring to the Japanologist active at Tokyo Imperial University in the late nineteenth century, she marks her first narratorial intention in establishing the authority of her accounts. This approach of incorporating people and events of actual historical existence has been pervasively adopted throughout the novel. For instance, when the prologue-narrator is speculating on the period in which *Namamiko-shui* might have been composed, she concludes that the work might be derived from a more obscure piece of writing from the Tokugawa period:

私は読んだその物語は、鎌倉か室町期の古書を更に写しかえたものか、或いは徳川時代の余り有名でない国文学者の戯作の一つで、建部綾足の垂流の筆ずさみかも知れないのである。  
(Enchi, 2004, p. 12)

Judging from that, the story must have been a transcription of an older book from the Kamakura or Muromachi period, or possibly a fictional work by a not-so-famous literary scholar of the Tokugawa period—perhaps a second-rate work by Takebe Ayatari. (Enchi, 2000, p. 11)

Here the mention of Takebe Ayatari no longer seems such a random act if we are informed that Takebe was one of the instigators of the *yomihon* (読本), the earlier form of the historical novel that pervaded Kyoto and Osaka between the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Zolbrod, 1966, p. 486). Takebe made an invaluable contribution in the early period between 1750 and 1800 to the *Kamigata yomihon* (上方読本), with *Nishiyama monogatari* (『西山物語』 *Tale of Nishiyama*) (1768) being his representative work. *Kamigata yomihon* consists of “adaptations of Chinese vernacular fiction, collections of tales with a historical setting, Buddhist narratives, or anthologies of supernatural stories” (Zolbrod, 1966, p. 487). The indication of historical periods and actual figures has implanted into the fictional narrative a sense of historicity.

Apart from proper names of historical existence, historical narratives are intertextually referenced in *Namamiko-shui* as part of the reconstructed story. Developed from historical facts depicted in the chronicle *Eiga monogatari*, the embedded tale is re-created in a cut-and-paste manner, meaning that excerpts allegedly taken from the historical document are interpolated with the narrator's recounting, the narratorial commentary and the quotations

taken from other historical narratives such as *Makura no sōshi* (『枕草子』 *The Pillow Book*), *Genji monogatari* (『源氏物語』 *The Tale of Genji*) and some Chinese poetry. For instance, when the narrator attempts to support her narration about the attractiveness of Teishi, she references a passage taken from *Makura no sōshi*, wherein Teishi's exquisite beauty is likened to the depiction of a lute-playing woman in a Chinese poem, "Song of the Lute", written by the Chinese poet Po Chu-I. Likewise, while vouching for the greater credibility of the depiction of Teishi in *Namamiko-shui* than that in *Eiga monogatari*, the narrator makes reference to a (fictional) passage purportedly quoted from *Makura no sōshi*, a collection of tales and anecdotes written by another of Teishi's ladies-in-waiting named Sei Shōnagon (清少納言, 966–1025). The adulation of Teishi supports the narrator's complimentary recounting of the physical appearance and extraordinary talent of the empress consort. It is apparent that the intertextual references serve to enhance the authority of the fictional narrative.

Against the traditional approach of historical fiction that stresses faithfulness to real histories, Enchi's *Namamiko monogatari* represents an unconventional form of historical novel that challenges this positivist nature of historiography. By parodying the historical chronicle *Eiga monogatari*, Enchi problematizes the traditional mode of representing reality. As the prologue-narrator perpetually declares the accuracy of her recount and her certainty of the manuscript as a source of history that is unique and covers the 'historical facts' more comprehensively, she is exploiting the self-reflexive truthfulness inherent in the moniker 'history'. However, her inconsistent reliability and self-contradictory narration expose the limitations of historical narratives. The self-established authority of history is actually an illusion made possible by its own nature of incommensurability. When a discourse is labelled as 'historical', it immediately stands as if it represented truth. Yet the fact is that historiographic representations could provide "a mediated form of access to the past" but never "a transparent reflection or a reliable account of any historical event" (Nünning, 1997, p. 235). The truthfulness of actual past events could never be verified by historians, whose unavoidable subjectivity "lies behind the process of selecting, integrating, and interpreting the 'facts'". Thus the claim of historical truth and objectivity is nothing but a pretension (Nünning, 1997, pp. 227–228). Masuda Yūki (2013) shares a similar perception with Nünning that what proper history shows cannot fully reveal all histories. Such history is a kind of 'surface history' (表の歴史 *omote no rekishi*) which undoubtedly leaves out to a certain



extent things forgotten or unrecorded in historical discourses. This kind of history, the ‘inside history’ (carrying the meaning of ‘behind-the-scenes’: 裏の歴史 *ura no rekishi*), is traced and recovered in the way *Namamiko monogatari* has been narrated: the conscientious manner of the narrator, who recounts the tale and speculates on such details as its author, the period of composition, and the unknown whereabouts of the manuscript, represents the way history is interpreted by subsuming the ‘inside history’ into the so-called ‘true history’ (真の歴史 *shin no rekishi*). And by so doing, such narration challenges the traditional approach of historical writers who conduct research on historical facts before composing their novels. Enchi has produced a new and unconventional framework of the historical novel (op cit, pp. 43–44).

### **Emplotting plot structures**

The intimate relationship between fictional and historical representations in the historical novel can be achieved by another narrative ruse—emplotting the events in typical plot structures. By means of emplotment, narrativity is added to history. According to Hayden White (1996) in “Storytelling: Historical and Ideological”, emplotment means to “endow historical events with a figurative meaning by endowing them with the structure of a generic plot type, such as farce, romance, tragedy”, etc. (p. 74). These generic plot types possess the narrative coherence found in real events, which is that of “structures, tonalities, auras, and meanings” (p. 65). In other words, when historical events are represented in generic plot types, the value of reality is attached to the historical discourse. Representing history with narrativity exerts an effect of immediacy or an illusion of the reader’s experiencing the events ‘realistically’, and this value “attached to narrativity” is an aesthetic effect of the emplotment of real events within the model of “imaginary” life (White, 1980, p. 27). The aesthetic effect is made possible by the fact that history borrows from fiction the figurative imagination. Paul Ricoeur (1984) enunciates in *Time and Narrative* that in composing historical discourses historians can only imagine what happened, without having witnessed the events themselves. They intentionally write as if the past had taken place. This fashion of writing to some extent imitates what Ricoeur indicates as the “metaphorical reference” in poetic writing, when the reconstruction of the past is achieved metaphorically by the historian’s re-imagination of history. Conversely, “[h]istorical intentionality” is borrowed by historical novelists who tell

their narrative as though it had actually occurred, as evident from the use of “verbal past tenses” in narrating the unreal events as if the actions had happened or the state had previously existed. This “reciprocal borrowing” reveals that fiction borrows “as much from history as history borrows from fiction” (op cit, p. 82). Enchi’s historical novel illustrates what Ricoeur contends to be the “interweaving reference between history and narrative fiction” (loc cit). The events in the recounted tale formally and stylistically imitate the chronicle of *Eiga monogatari*. Other than the chronicle plot, history is also represented in the typical romance plot of Emperor Ichijō and Teishi. These typical plot structures greatly enhance the plausibility of the fictional narrative.

The use of the chronicle framework in *Namamiko-shui* is pivotal since chronicles are important sources of court history. Unlike national histories, chronicles tend to record the “realities of aristocratic existence” and ordinary daily subject matter, which are believed to reflect actual history (McCullough & McCullough, 1980, p. 8). The way Enchi mimics the discursive style of the chronicle form in the composition of *Namamiko-shui* evidently indicates her intention to harness the authoritativeness of the historical chronicle. For example, the linearity of the narrative is maintained and temporality is frequently stressed by giving the exact time, date, and month in the calendar (e.g. 正暦五年二月二十一日 *shōryaku gonen nigatsu niyūichinichi* (the twenty-first day of the second month of Shōryaku 5), 巳の時 *mi no toki* (the hour of the serpent)) (Enchi, 2004, p. 47; p. 98), the season (e.g. 夏の盛り *natsu no sakari* (the middle of summer)) (ibid, p. 115), and festive and ceremonial events (e.g. 元服 *genpuku* (the Coming-of-Age ceremony) (ibid, p. 19). The theme of *Eiga monogatari* centres on the splendour of aristocratic life, but the events are often organized in a disjointed, episodic manner. Since the Heian language style has been adopted in the passages allegedly quoted intact from historical documents, the contrast in style is particularly marked in its comparison with the narration of the tale retold by the narrator. S. Yumiko Hulvey (1995) describes the imitation as a “pseudo-classical” style that adds an authentic and archaic flavour to the narratives (p. 180). The embedded quotations are interspersed with classical Japanese suffixes, for instance, the final predication marker *-i* as in おはしましけり *ohashimashikeri* (*ohasu* is the honorific form of ‘to be/go/come’) (Enchi, 2004, p. 18). Other features include honorific prefixes attached to nouns like *mi-* in 御髪 *migushi* (hair) (ibid, p. 19) and certain special vocabulary like まゐる *mawiru* (the humble

form for ‘to go/come’) (ibid, p. 25). Further, as noted earlier in general, adopting the chronicle plot structure significantly contributes to the credibility of the fictional representations of the events in the historical novel (White, 1996, p. 67). By depicting events resembling the style used in *Eiga monogatari*, that work’s plausibility can extend to the recounted tale. Since the retold story conforms to the general outline of the historical events and people, the illusion of literal truthfulness is naturally maintained (loc cit).

Although the narrator has constantly emphasized the veracity of the tale, her unreliable accounts and narratorial interventions simultaneously expose its fictitiousness. Right from the beginning of the prologue, the narrator frequently stresses the truthfulness of her narration. For instance, she stresses the accuracy of her account while reminding the reader that her memory is deteriorating:

もし私のこの記述がもとになって「生神子物語」の原本がどこかから探し出されるとすればこれほど有難いことはないし、そうでないにしても、私ももう知命をすぎて、記憶力など若いころに較べて著しく減退していることを思えば、幼い頃私だけが読んで比較的正確に暗記している「生神子物語」の内容を、「栄華物語」その他の文献を参考にして一応補修し、書き残して置くことも満更無駄ではないように思われるのである。(Enchi, 2004, pp. 14–15)

If, based on this description, the original copy of *A Tale of False Fortunes* should turn up somewhere, there could be nothing more gratifying. But barring that possibility—and considering that my life is half over and that my memory is rapidly deteriorating—there may be some value in my recording for posterity the contents of *A Tale of False Fortunes*, a work no one but myself seems to have read and that I have committed to fairly accurate memory. I shall fill in gaps by referring to *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes* and other documents. (Enchi, 2000, p. 13)

On other occasions, claiming that the manuscript is the sole copy and she is the only person who has read it, she expresses regret that nobody has heard of it and its whereabouts remain unknown. Despite her asserting the infallibility of her memory, the unreliability of her narration is exposed when she admits the possibility of having conflated her childhood memories and personal emotions with the historical facts. Most importantly, all verisimilitude is virtually destroyed by the metafictional closing, when the narrator intervenes immediately after quoting the final sentences taken intact from *Namamiko-shui*:

「生神子物語」の本文はこの文章で終わっている。年譜を調べると道長の薨じた万寿四年はまだ後一条帝の後世であるから年代の記述に誤りがあるが、これは物語のことで作者の語りたいたい諷諭をのべる手段に歴史を前後させたものであろうか。(Enchi, 2004, p. 196)

*A Tale of False Fortunes* ends with these lines. An investigation of the chronologies reveals that when Michinaga died in the fourth year of Manju (1027), it was still the reign of Emperor Go-Ichijō, so there is some error in dates. But then it is a work of fiction, and perhaps the order of historical events was inverted as a means for its author to suggest something. (Enchi, 2000, p. 150)

The inconsistency in the year of death and the reign of the emperor irrevocably refutes all the kinds of authority and credibility established throughout the narrative. Here the implication of the closure is not about the overriding of factuality by fictionality, but instead about the major concern in the historical novel: the inseparability of and interdependence between fiction and history.

The resulting ambivalences between fictional and historical discourses create a potential literary realm for women writers to transform history into romance for the “reinsertion of women’s concerns” (Wallace, 2005, p. 20). Emplotting the historical events in the romance plot structure makes the portrayal of Teishi’s gentle and uncalculating personality more natural, which is unlike the unfavourable characterization of Teishi in *Eiga monogatari*. The laudatory depiction of Michinaga in *Eiga monogatari* represents ‘proper’ histories that do not privilege women’s subjectivity but glorify men’s power and the patriarchal domination in Heian aristocratic society. In contrast, *Namamiko-shui* foregrounds the denigrated status of the female characters and exemplifies “an imaginary recovery or recreation of women’s lost and unrecorded history”, disrupting the exclusive view of history itself as “unitary and closed” (Wallace, 2005, pp. 16–18). In woman’s historical novels, it is common to incorporate “romance, fantasy, the Gothic, the adventure story and the detective novel”; particularly, romance has its roots in the Gothic historical novel (ibid, p. 3). The feminist concerns in the novel involve not just the appealing account of Teishi but more broadly the roles of Japanese women in the eleventh century. Under the practice of a polygynous and patriarchal family and social system, Heian women suffered from an inferior position bereft of agency. Having to share their husbands with other women, they were doomed to be unhappy in marriage, their identity and obligations attached to “family, clan, and country rather than to themselves as individual moral beings” (Lewell, 1993, p. 78). Taking on the roles of mother and wife, they were often manipulated by men to obtain political power. To endure life in such a society, they had to maintain their composure while suppressing their own anger, jealousy and misery. Hence it is not surprising that the women in the novel should be associated with the vengeful spirits that haunt other royal members. Although the female mediums possess more autonomy in a trance possession since they are allowed to voice their sufferings, they are depicted as horrid beings in the story. Enchi challenges these masculinist assumptions by incorporating fake spirit possessions and establishing an unconventional image of Teishi, as a result creating a genuine and invincible romantic relationship between the emperor and his empress consort.

## Conclusion

The narrative ruse of fusing fictional narrative with historical discourse greatly reinforces the tension between history and narrativity. The novel should be read by considering both writerly domains and their relationship, because history and fiction are intimately connected and virtually inseparable. While it is claimed that *Namamiko-shui* is the true version of the history of Michinaga and Teishi, the tale is contrasted with Akazome's historical representation in *Eiga monogatari*. The presence of the two versions suggests that the author, whether of the fictional narrative or the historical discourse, could give different interpretations of the same history. Hence the activity of emplotment might “generate alternative and even mutually exclusive interpretations of the same set of phenomena” (White, 1996, p. 68), indicating that history is not about “one authentic representation of the past but a plurality of competing versions” (Nünning, 1997, p. 227). Further, the contrasting characterization of the main characters encourages the formation of a different image of Michinaga and Teishi. Takenishi Hiroko (1967) supports this view in her contention that the incorporation of the fabricated ancient tale functions to create a more vivid image of Teishi (p. 168).

Enchi employs a variety of narrative strategies to address the question of truthfulness and falsehood between the historical and fictional accounts. Plausibility is attached to the chosen plot type. There is no pure history or pure fiction, and history is simply the presentation of an image of the past. Incorporating the chronicle and romance plot structures poses questions of the evaluative criteria about how faithfully historical novelists represent historical facts. The style of narration in *Namamiko-shui* aims to reconstruct a ‘history’, whereas the metafictional interventions undermine the credibility of the narration. The ambivalences present the novel with a multivalency that allows the exploration of gender issues and the rewriting of history from a perspective that foregrounds women's concerns. Therefore, by means of the historical novel, women readers are presented with “the imaginative space to create different, more inclusive versions of ‘history’” (Wallace, 2005, p. 3). Historical novelists “supplement those incomplete and partial accounts of the past which systematically ignore the viewpoints and roles of women” (Nünning, 1997, p. 223).

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## Murakami and the Celebration of Community

Andrew J. Wilson

### Abstract

In *An Account of My Hut*, a 13th-century classic of Japanese literature, Kamo no Chōmei honors the Buddhist practice of non-attachment, of stripping down to the basics and releasing one's illusions that physical comforts, especially a large home with servants and multiple rooms, will bring permanent happiness. Whirlwinds and earthquakes remind Chōmei of the fragility of the world, and in beautiful prose he tells of his retreat from the planet's material lures. At last, at the age of 60, he leaves virtually everything and everyone behind to build a simple mountainside hut, a human "cocoon," a place where he is less afraid to face unpredictable natural disasters and a constant lack of solidity. He asks for nothing; nor does he want for anything. Centuries later, another great Japanese author, Haruki Murakami, also offers counsel to a nation in the wake of disaster, the earthquake that struck the city of Kobe in 1995, killing over 6000 human beings. Though it is fiction, Murakami's *After the Quake* is as well an attempt to provide real-life Japanese with a way forward, though his argument seems contrary to Chōmei's sense that since nothing beneath our feet is solid, all must be forsaken. In fact, Murakami worries that Japan has lived for far too long in the Chōmei-like spirit of distrust (however understandable) and isolation; he counsels a new beginning, one steeped in the hope of community and in the beauty of family.

*Keywords:* Chōmei, earthquake, family, Japan, Murakami, trauma

In *An Account of My Hut*, written in the year 1212, Kamo no Chōmei<sup>1</sup> recalls a series of natural disasters that destroyed pockets of Japan across his life-time: a great fire, a whirlwind, a famine, and “the great earthquake of 1185, of an intensity not known before. Mountains crumbled and rivers were buried, the sea tilted over and immersed the land. The earth split and water gushed up; boulders were sundered and rolled into the valleys” (1955, p. 203). The physical world, Chōmei explains in his *Account*, might at any moment rise up like a living nightmare and, in a relative instant, kill the life-long efforts of men and women—and smash to pieces the men and women themselves.

As Japanese-literature scholars know, Chōmei’s old-age response to that lack of stability is to renounce the world, retreat, and embrace seclusion. He had spent the early years of his life in a palatial ancestral home, which he eventually lost to political upheaval. Chōmei thereafter lived in a modest-sized cottage, but in his declining years—when he writes *Account*—he chooses at last to accept what he calls “the fragility of . . . [his] life” (ibid., p. 206): he builds and moves into a hut, “like the cocoon spun by an aged silkworm. This hut is not even a hundredth the size of the cottage where I spent my middle years” (loc. cit.):

Only in a hut built for the moment can one live without fears. It is very small, but it holds a bed where I may lie at night and a seat for me in the day; it lacks nothing as a place for me to dwell. The hermit crab chooses to live in little shells because it well knows the size of its body. The osprey stays on deserted shores because it fears human beings. I am like them. (ibid., pp. 209–10)

One could describe Chōmei’s pessimistic reaction to a life-time of disasters as the maudlin depression of a Thoreau-like curmudgeon, a man who bears the mark of crushing disappointment. In fact, some of my Chicago-area students contend that Chōmei looks like a modern-day sufferer of post-traumatic stress disorder. He is, those students claim, like a U.S. soldier freshly back from the front lines of Iraq or Afghanistan—but disengaged, morphinelike, permitting no one and nothing to approach his heart.

I try in those teaching moments to point out the Buddhist-minded beauty of Chōmei’s *Account*, and of course my students listen with respect. Some are even persuaded to agree, but another part of me privately, silently suspects that my students’ initial skepticism of Chōmei is not entirely off the mark. Chōmei is no nihilist, but his detachment unsettles the soul—or at least it seems not to apply to the complicated lives so many of us experience in the twenty-first century. Chōmei’s retreat into mountainside privacy works for him, perhaps in part because he

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<sup>1</sup> 『方丈記』 *Hōjōki*, 鴨長明 Kamo no Chōmei.

has, as he says, no family, “no ties that would make abandoning the world difficult,” nothing “to cling to” (ibid., p. 206). But many or most of us do indeed have “ties.” For example, as students respectfully like to remind me when we read and discuss *Account*, I have a wife and two small children; no matter how weary I might be of the world, I cannot retire to a mountainside hut, and I understand this to be true, as well, of virtually everyone I know. And thus does a thinking reader of Chōmei’s “Account” wonder: how should one respond to disaster, even a life-time of it? If we are without the luxury of building a simple hut, ten feet square, and spending the remainder of our days in a state of divorce from the world—if, for example, we have family members and loved ones and friends who depend on us—what can we reasonably feel, and what can we sensibly do?

Those, I believe, are the questions that Haruki Murakami confronts in his small collection of stories titled *After the Quake*, first published in Japanese in 2000.<sup>2</sup> *After the Quake* is of course not the only book in which Murakami wrestles with how one might continue to live (with at least a modicum of passion) in the wake of disaster—he pursues that theme, or a cousin of it, in much of what he writes: especially, and aggressively, in his most remarkable novel, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, a veritable labyrinth in which the main character, Toru Okada, or Mr. Wind-Up Bird, “must move beyond escapist detachment” (Welch, 2002, p. 58). But Murakami’s *After the Quake* was principally triggered by the earthquake that rocked Kobe, Japan in 1995, and “Murakami’s reaction to the . . . Kobe earthquake was real—its epicenter, in fact, was directly under his neighborhood in Ashiya ” (Strecher, 2002, p. 213). In other words, *After* is Murakami’s ostensible “earthquake book,” perhaps his most succinct investigation into how we must, in the wake of the kind of trauma that Chōmei laments, continue to build and live meaningful lives. In *After*, a small but electric collection, Murakami offers advice that transcends the spirit of Chōmei’s *Account*. It will not do, Murakami counsels at last, to recoil from the world, especially as the world has a way of continuing to pester one’s door, regardless of whether he or she retreats. Murakami understands and even sympathizes with the post-earthquake, post-traumatic temptation to surrender to solitude, even emotional anesthesia—but he asks gently that we resist this temptation. Most of all he predicts that we can find little or no true peace in a state of disconnectedness. Though he offers no guarantee, Murakami suggests,

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<sup>2</sup> 『神の子どもたちはみな踊る』, *Kami no kodomo-tachi wa mina odoru*, 村上春樹 Murakami Haruki. Translation published in 2002: note that the author insisted that the English title be all-lowercase (*after the quake*).

rather, that we might locate something as grand as salvation, modest in form, in reconnection not only with nature but also, and especially, with our fellow human beings.

In that spirit, and in the interest of space, let us look at three of the six stories that make up *After*—the first, the third, and the last.

### “UFO in Kushiro”

The opening paragraph of “UFO,” the collection’s leading story, provides a clear portrait of disengagement and emotional paralysis:

Five straight days she spent in front of the television, staring at crumbled banks and hospitals, whole blocks of stores in flames, severed rail lines and expressways. She never said a word. Sunk deep in the cushions of the sofa, her mouth clamped shut, she wouldn’t answer when Komura spoke to her. She wouldn’t shake her head or nod. Komura could not be sure the sound of his voice was even getting through to her. (Murakami, 2002, p. 3)<sup>3</sup>

The Kobe earthquake has just occurred, and the narrator, in that passage, describes its numbing effect on a young Tokyo couple, Komura and (especially) his unnamed wife, who is entirely drugged by the earthquake’s television coverage and non-responsive (“mouth clamped shut”) to her husband’s attempts at communication. Even her physiology seems comatose: “she stayed rooted in front of the television from morning to night.”<sup>4</sup> In his presence, at least, she ate nothing and drank nothing and never went to the toilet. Aside from an occasional flick of the remote control to change the channel, she hardly moved a muscle” (p. 3). Before a full page passes by, and as spouses sometimes do in Murakami’s fiction,<sup>5</sup> Komura’s wife vanishes from her husband’s life: she returns to her parents, who live “way up north in Yamagata” (p. 3), taking most of her things and leaving her husband an ice-cold good-bye note:

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<sup>3</sup> Hereinafter citations consisting only of page numbers refer to this work.

<sup>4</sup> Television in general fares poorly in Murakami’s writing, not only in *After the Quake* but, as well, in his larger novels: *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, for instance, in which a malignant brother-in-law (Noboru Wataya) deftly exploits television for purposes of demagoguery, to lull viewers into a kind of semi-consciousness—and television also permits the same character to deliver encoded messages meant to terrorize the novel’s protagonist.

<sup>5</sup> One of Murakami’s interviewers claims that the author’s work contains “two distinct types of women”: “those with whom the protagonist has a fundamentally serious relationship—often this is the woman who disappears and whose memory haunts him—and the other kind of woman, who comes later and helps him in his search, or to do the opposite—to forget. The second type ... tends to be outspoken, eccentric, and sexually frank” (quoted in Murakami 2009, p. 353). I feel that that oversimplifies and ignores, for example, *After*’s “Thailand,” in which the lonely, embittered female lead fits neither of those categories. (See Hansen, 2010, for more on the diversity of female characterization in Murakami.) At any rate, Komura’s wife clearly belongs to the first type, the type that “disappears.”

*The problem is that you never give me anything, she wrote. Or, to put it more precisely, you have nothing inside you that you can give me. You are good and kind and handsome, but living with you is like living with a chunk of air.* (pp. 5–6; original emphasis)

Komura's wife's catatonic fixation on the earthquake's after-effects remains a puzzle. The narrator tells us that "she had no friends or relatives who could have been hurt in Kobe" (p. 3), and there is little evidence that she is an especially sympathetic soul, one who weeps at the suffering of strangers. The above-quoted note suggests, indeed, that for her it is not difficult to be blunt to the point of semi-cruelty, but in fairness there are no suggestions that she is fundamentally vicious. We know little of her at last: only that her relationship with her parents and siblings is strong, that she spent a good portion of her courtship and marriage wearing "a sullen expression" (p. 5), and that she cheaply values her bond with Komura, abandoning her life with him with the apparent ease of a phantom. It is possible that Komura's soon-to-be ex is, in the earthquake's aftermath, beset by a Chōmei-like existential crisis: the sense that there is no solid footing in the world, nothing of any permanence or substance; thus, she moves backward to the nuclear family of her childhood, the only semi-solid "space" upon which her heart can depend. But once more, we know little about her past, her present, or the reason(s) why she loses herself so completely in the television coverage of the earthquake's destruction.

Of Komura, we know somewhat more, but not a lot more—Murakami's narrator is careful to keep the reader largely unfamiliar with him. After his wife's disappearance, Komura is at the center of each page of "UFO," though he himself seems to have no "center," no purpose or rootedness. In real-life terms, his wife's above note is likely too harsh; it seems unfair to conclude that he or any person is little more than "a chunk of air." However, Komura does in fact strike the reader as being somewhat ineffable (i.e., as difficult as air to pin down): he is a salesman in the neon intensity of Akihabara, but we do not learn that he is committed to the products he sells or to his customers, whose "wallets were bursting with ten-thousand-yen bills, and everyone was dying to spend them" (p. 4)—and thus does he illustrate the disembodiment (from product and public) that Marx (2017) warns us of in his *Manifesto*. He has a likable personality, but there is no evidence of even one close associate or intimate friend. He puts "a small amount of sugar in his coffee" (p. 10), but he tastes almost nothing. He is due for a vacation, and even requests one, but we find that he has no particular place to go.

And since he lacks a destination, a co-worker—"a bachelor, three years younger than Komura" (p. 7)—asks Komura to hand-deliver a mysterious package to Kushiro, in Hokkaido.

Having nothing better to do with his week-long vacation, manifesting a kind of drifter's indifference, Komura blandly agrees: "Hokkaido in February would be freezing cold, Komura knew, but cold or hot it was all the same to him" (p. 8). He lacks any noticeable agency, even the small initiative required to account for his own airfare and accommodations, which the aforementioned co-worker, named Sasaki, both arranges and pays for. Instead of *going* to Kushiro, in other words, Komura is carried or directed there—and he is content to abide by that direction and to deliver the package, which weighs "practically nothing," a box somewhat "like the ones used for human ashes, only smaller, wrapped in manila paper" (p. 8), to Sasaki's sister and her friend, who are waiting for him at the Kushiro airport. Soon, but not because of any initiative on Komura's part, the three of them—Komura, Sasaki's sister, and her friend Shimao—find themselves at "a nearby love hotel. It was on the edge of town, on a street where love hotels alternated with gravestone dealers" (p. 16). The stage is set for the story's eerie final scene.

Komura and Shimao are alone in the hotel room (Sasaki's sister has exited the stage, taking with her the package that Komura delivered). The two are lying on an "absurdly big bed" after trying unsuccessfully to have sex (p. 16). An instance of sexual dysfunction "had never happened to him before," the narrator explains, but it appears that Komura's potency has been compromised, somehow, by images of the earthquake's destruction:

what he had been thinking about was the earthquake. Images of it had come to him one after another, as if in a slide show, flashing on the screen and fading away. Highways, flames, smoke, piles of rubble, cracks in streets. He couldn't break the chain of silent images. (p. 20)

There is of course good news there: Komura, who earlier on seemed untouched by the "far-off monotonous echos" of the news reports concerning the earthquake (p. 9), is human after all. He is penetrable—a feeling, complicated human being who cannot remain unmoved by the mass suffering in Kobe, and who is gradually less consumed by his own problems: namely, his wife's departure and her painful good-bye note. Therefore, the reader is perhaps not altogether displeased to learn that Komura is unable to have sex with Shimao, but when the latter tries to soothe his ego with well-meaning teasing—and especially when she interprets the mysterious, almost weightless package that he has just delivered to Sasaki's sister as the "the something that was inside of you" (p. 22), the yet-unidentified essence of him that, given away, cannot be gotten back—Komura experiences an adrenaline-rush of rage:

Komura lifted himself from the mattress and looked down at the woman. Tiny nose, moles on the earlobe. In the room's deep silence, his heart beat with a loud, dry sound. His bones cracked as he leaned forward. For one split second, Komura realized that he was on the verge of committing an act of overwhelming violence. (pp. 22–23)

He does not attack Shimao, thankfully. Murakami has a penchant for easily overlooked, quietly decent and finally non-violent male characters, and Komura is one of these: “He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. The huge bed stretched out around him like a nocturnal sea” (p. 23).<sup>6</sup> But beyond that, there is little in the way of concrete resolution. As Shimao correctly tells him, “you’re just at the beginning” (p. 22), and the reader, too, is “at the beginning,” unsure of precisely how to unpack the ending of “UFO.” We can be guardedly certain of but one thing: that a little growth, a bit of healing, does occur in Komura’s heart: but no more than a bit. He remains alone, even in the physical company of Shimao. On the over-large bed, he is very small and only beginning to find his way, which is dark and yet-uninterpreted (“nocturnal”), vast and potentially fatal (a “sea”).

To be fair, “UFO,” notwithstanding its blatantly depressing overtones, does feature glimpses of the redemptive power of human connectedness; it is not merely confusion and disconnection. Komura’s wife’s return to her parents is a subtle invocation that something—namely her original family—still matters to her, even after her near-bodily plunge into the 24-hour news cycle. As well, Komura, the main character, is described early on as a kind of former playboy, “tall and slim and a stylish dresser,” a “salesman at one of the oldest hi-fi-equipment speciality stores in ... ‘Electronics Town’” (p. 4); yet, he prefers his quiet marriage to an “ordinary”-looking wife (p. 5), and perhaps this, together with the collective gravitas of the earthquake’s widespread damage, helps to explain his failure to experience an erection with Shimao, a woman whom Komura has known but a few hours. To put it another way, Komura does not lament the loss of his free-styling youth: he is happy to have concluded his bachelor days. He “always felt his tension dissipate when he and his wife were together under one roof; it was the only time he could truly relax. He slept well with her, undisturbed by the strange dreams that had troubled him in the past. His erections were hard; his sex life was warm. He no longer had to worry about death or venereal disease or the vastness of the universe” (p. 5).

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<sup>6</sup> All of the principal male characters in *After* are fundamentally decent; equally, all are either somewhat or exceedingly lacking in confidence. All possess rather decidedly non-aggressive natures. Matthew Carl Strecher (2002) speaks to the like-minded heroes of Murakami’s novels, but the same could probably be said of the protagonists of his short fiction: “If one has encountered the Murakami hero in one novel, one knows something about most other Murakami protagonists as well” (p. 213).

Actually, and somewhat conversely, the mere fact that Komura even tries to have sex with Shimaō is arguably a positive sign that the main character is not solely an embodiment of isolation. Sex is plentiful, sometimes strange, but often life-affirming in Murakami's fiction (see Hurlow, 2015). Sex, says Murakami, is "a kind of soul-commitment. If the sex is good, your injury will be healed, your imagination will be invigorated. It's a kind of passage to the upper area, to the better place" (2009, p. 353).

But more generally, "UFO" obviously begins Murakami's collection in a state of malaise, with many questions and few or no answers—and, as well, in a state of detachment, with an abandoned husband, otherwise virile, who is suddenly unable to communicate sexually with another woman: unable, that is, to take the just-referenced "passage to the upper area, to the better place." Yet at the same time, for a brief moment, he seems all too capable of extreme violence (the ultimate form of non-communication) against that same woman. While that violence does not occur, nothing particularly redemptive fills the void, and the hopeful reader is eager to turn the page.

### **"All God's Children Can Dance"**

One way of coping with loneliness and despair, or the despair of loneliness, is of course to give way to substance abuse—to binge. And that is precisely how the curtain rises on a young man named Yoshiya, the main character in "All God's Children Can Dance," *After's* third story, which in this writer's view is as good as any piece of short fiction across space and time. "Yoshiya woke with the worst possible hangover," the narrator begins:

He could barely open one eye; the left lid wouldn't budge. His head felt as if it had been stuffed with decaying teeth during the night. A foul sludge was oozing from his rotting gums and eating away at his brain from the inside. If he ignored it, he wouldn't have a brain left. (p. 47)

By drinking so heavily (and repeatedly), even to the point of memory loss, Yoshiya might be hoping to dodge a handful of concerns: his weird, hyper-Freudian relationship with his youthful and beautiful mother, for instance. His mother's sex appeal is frequently referenced in "God's Children." She is profoundly enigmatic: a Christian believer who is, in the story's present tense, on an altruistic missionary venture to Kobe to assist the victims of the earthquake. However, she also "walk[s] around the house wearing skimpy underwear—or nothing at all," her "great figure" fully on display (pp. 49–50); and "whenever she felt lonely at night she would crawl under ... [Yoshiya's] covers with almost nothing on," thereby confounding her grown



son: “He would have to twist himself into incredible positions to keep his mother unaware of his erections” (p. 50).

There is no doubt, again, that Yoshiya’s messy co-existence with his mother—at once innocent and disturbingly sexual—is partly what induces him to drink so heavily. But he faces another, more pressing difficulty: “Yoshiya had no father” (p. 51). His mother—with the help of a well-meaning but distracted family friend and surrogate father-figure, Mr. Tabata—has informed him that God, literally, is his father: he could not (his mother argues) have been fathered by the obstetrician whom she had been dating at the time of Yoshiya’s conception: “His contraceptive methods were absolutely foolproof!” (p. 56). She casts herself as a kind of modern-day Japanese Virgin Mary, and Yoshiya as an actual (not merely symbolic) child of God, telling her son, “your father is our Lord. You came into his world not through carnal knowledge but through an act of our Lord’s will!” (p. 56). She adds, bizarrely, that Yoshiya’s large penis is supposed proof: “‘Your big wee-wee is a sign,’ his mother used to tell him with absolute conviction. ‘It shows that you’re the child of God’” (p. 65). But even as a child, even while he loves his mother too much to debate with her, Yoshiya quietly disbelieves that he was immaculately conceived. “His mother’s faith was absolute,” Murakami’s narrator reasons, “but Yoshiya was just as certain that his father was the obstetrician. There had been something wrong with the condom. Anything else was out of the question” (p. 56).

As so many of Murakami’s characters do, that obstetrician possesses a physical attribute that sets him apart. He is missing a right earlobe: “A dog chewed it off when he was a boy” (p. 54). And Yoshiya, after forcing himself to rise and spend a day at work on “wobbly legs” (p. 49), is astonished to see an older man with a missing earlobe later in the evening, as he returns from work (the story’s present-tense plot-line spans less than 24 hours). Knowing the tale of his probable biological father’s damaged right ear, Yoshiya aggressively begins following the man, confident that the latter is indeed his father. He follows him on the train. He follows him in a cab. At last, he follows him on foot, past scrap yards and through the byways and alleys of a deserted Tokyo district. He does not know what he might say to the man, should he catch up with him. But he finds himself unable to stop his pursuit, and the entire second half of the story becomes both an interior Jungian journey toward the parental archetype and, more literally, a suddenly invigorated young man’s hot, maze-like search for his real-life father.

Iconically speaking, at least, few things capture the father–son bond with its joys and its losses more than the game of baseball, so it is unsurprising that this is where Murakami ends

“God’s Children”: with baseball, very late on a freezing February night. Just as he failed to catch fly ball after fly ball as a non-athletic, clunky youth, Yoshiya fails ultimately to catch the man without a right earlobe. Chasing him through a gap in a sheet-metal fence, Yoshiya finds that the man has vanished “without a trace” (p. 63), and that he himself is standing “in a baseball field, somewhere way out in center field amid a stretch of trampled-down weeds” (p. 62). He is disconcerted and deflated—and for a moment, so too is the reader. It is another familial breakdown; Yoshiya is another semi-orphan in a (very) long line of children without parents in Murakami’s fiction,<sup>7</sup> another permanent break in the chain. For that instant, in fact, he is a poster-child of orphanhood: a now-solitary son whose well-intentioned mother is too immersed in her religious convictions to be of much emotional help to him, and whose father leads him to but then abandons him at the ballpark. Yoshiya seems no better off than Komura: far from home, stranded, surrounded by the vastness of yet another “nocturnal sea” (p. 23).

But then, after approaching the pitcher’s mound, Yoshiya begins—first slowly, then with increasing intensity—to dance. He feels certain that somebody (perhaps the man with no earlobe, the man who might be his biological father?) is watching him: “His whole body—his skin, his bones—told him with absolute certainty that he was in *someone’s* field of vision” (p. 66; original emphasis). But he does not care—“Let them look if they want to, whoever they are. All God’s children can dance” (p. 66)—and this, again, is precisely what he does:

He trod the earth and whirled his arms, each graceful movement calling forth the next in smooth, unbroken links, his body tracing diagrammatic patterns and impromptu variations, with invisible rhythms behind and between rhythms. At each crucial point in his dance, he could survey the complex intertwining of these elements. Animals lurked in the forest like trompe l’oeil figures, some of them horrific beasts he had never seen before. He would eventually have to pass through the forest, but he felt no fear. Of course—the forest was inside him, he knew, and it made him who he was. The beasts were ones that he himself possessed. (p. 66)

In “God’s Children,” and especially in the outstanding passage just above, we see that Yoshiya somehow possesses the agency that Komura lacks: Yoshiya wills himself to follow the man with a missing right earlobe; and when he cannot catch up with that man, he wills

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<sup>7</sup> The majority of *After’s* characters are noticeably separated from their parents. Junko, the young female protagonist in “Landscape with Flatiron,” has run away from home, apparently because his daughter’s pubescence triggered her father “to look at her in a strange new way” (p. 33). Moreover, Miyake, the middle-aged gentleman who artfully builds beach-fires and platonically befriends Junko, has abandoned his wife and children, who may or may not have survived the recent quake in Kobe (Miyake shows little interest in finding out). The childless female protagonist of “Thailand,” *After’s* fourth story, also lacks a healthy connection with her mother (her father passed away in her youth). And as I discuss below, the protagonist of “Honey Pie,” *After’s* final piece, is decidedly cut off from his parents.

himself to dance, despite the fact that his college-era girlfriend told him, once upon a time, that “he looked like some kind of giant frog when he danced” (p. 65). There is no Disney-style ending to “God’s Children”: Yoshiya is alone throughout, and likely fatherless forever, but his ability to self-direct seems to leave him grounded (quite literally: he is in step with the “rhythms” beneath his feet) rather than adrift. As he dances, he understands that there is trouble in abundance in his future: he must “pass through the forest,” walk a gauntlet of “horrific beasts” he has never before seen—as each of us, at one time or another, must. Moreover, Yoshiya is aware that the ground beneath his feet could break apart and swallow him and everyone and everything he knows: “it struck him what lay buried far down under the earth on which his feet were so firmly planted: the ominous rumbling of the deepest darkness, secret rivers that transported desire, slimy creatures writhing, the lair of earthquakes ready to transform whole cities into mounds of rubble” (pp. 66–67). Yet, the hopefulness of the last pages of “God’s Children” once more signals a rootedness on the part of the formerly rootless Yoshiya: a clear departure from the gloominess that concludes “UFO.” Frog-like Yoshiya—who “tr[eads],” but who is also “graceful” (p. 66), one of Murakami’s numerous Faulknerian paradoxes—is finally in sync, in his middle twenties, with the music of the unpredictable earth on which he dances; and he begins to impose his own improvisations onto that music: his own “diagrammatic patterns and . . . variations” (p. 66). Like an emerging jazz artist, in other words, he is beginning to find a voice of his own. He employs trauma, as Strecher (2002) astutely observes, as a means of forging a “radical transformation of identity” (p. 214).

So the ending of “God’s Children,” especially when considered alongside “UFO,” features a positive trajectory and more than a glimpse of optimism in the form of a young man who begins to accept his allegedly clumsy body and his lack of a biological father—and who begins as well to make peace and even identify with the too-often-inexplicable, sometimes-unjust universe. That universe is “inside him, he knew, and it made him who he was” (p. 66). Though over-optimism is unwise, one does not suspect, upon finishing “God’s Children,” that Yoshiya is about to build a mountain-side hut and renounce the world.

### “Honey Pie”

Despite those improvements in Yoshiya’s psyche, however, he is strictly speaking still alone—as my above-mentioned students, ever on the lookout for a palpably happy ending, complain. The ending of “God’s Children” marks the halfway point of *After*; by now, there has been real

progress toward community (a young man's re-communion with both himself and the earth), but there is more development needed, and more ahead: development that is most apparent in the book's final story, "Honey Pie." The Kobe-born protagonist—a 36-year-old fiction writer named Junpei, a man who has coveted the warmth of family all of his adult life—finally seizes human connectedness in its fullest form, intending never to let go.

The title, "Honey Pie," refers to a story that the creative Junpei fashions to soothe four-year-old Sala, the precocious child of his long-time best friends, Takatsuki and Sayoko. Sala's dreams are haunted, eerily and almost nightly, by the television coverage of the Kobe earthquake: "Sometime after midnight she gets these hysterical fits and jumps out of bed. She can't stop shaking. And I can't get her to stop crying," explains Sayoko, Sala's mother:

"I think she saw too many news reports on the earthquake. It was too much for a four-year-old. She wakes up at around the time of the quake. She says a man woke her up, somebody she doesn't know. The Earthquake Man. He tries to put her in a little box—way too little for anyone to fit into. She tells him she doesn't want to get inside, but he starts yanking on her arm—so hard her joints crack—and he tries to stuff her inside. That's when she screams and wakes up." (p. 119)

Sayoko, whose marriage to an unfaithful Takatsuki has recently ended, now relies upon Junpei as "the only one who can calm ... [Sala] down" with his make-believe tales (p. 118). The story that Junpei tells Sala, this time, involves two bears, Masakichi and Tonkichi: Masakichi is an expert at collecting honey; Tonkichi, Masakichi's best friend, has a talent for turning Masakichi's harvest into "crisp, delicious honey pies" (p. 147), though circumstances sadly force the two bear-friends apart.

"Honey Pie" begins, then, with yet another reference to divorce (Takatsuki and Sayoko's); it begins, as well, with yet another sign of the psychic after-tremors of the Kobe earthquake, the television coverage of which chills the blood of adults and children alike. But even from the outset, there is a new mood compared with *After's* previous stories: we see that each principle adult in "Honey Pie" possesses a native appreciation for friendship and intimacy, platonic and romantic. They fail as much as they succeed in realizing that appreciation, but the fact that it is present, from beginning to end, signals that *After's* sixth and last story, even prior to its redemptive conclusion, is peopled by healthy souls, and that it therefore departs from "the general malaise" that characterizes much of the rest of the book (Strecher, 2002, p. 214).

The story's three adults—Junpei, Takatsuki, and Sayoko—have been close friends since their freshman year of college. In a chunky flashback, Murakami's narrator explains that years before, upon first meeting Sayoko at Waseda University in Tokyo, Junpei "knew that this was

the girl he had been searching for. He had never fallen in love until he met Sayoko” (p. 122). However, the assertive and outgoing Takatsuki, who remains Junpei’s closest friend, “was the first to make a move” (p. 123). Initially, the loss of Sayoko plunged Junpei into zombie-like despair, to the point of skipping classes and nearly dropping out altogether; but he gradually adjusted. Already inclined to view himself over-critically, he began to accept his friends’ love affair. He even, with time, experienced his own relationships with women who could not, in his mind, compare with Sayoko. Similarly, he accepted Takatsuki and Sayoko’s post-graduation marriage, resigning himself to a lifetime of second place. And later still, a bachelor and hard-working writer gaining better-than-average reviews, Junpei gladly welcomed Takatsuki and Sayoko’s charming daughter, Sala, into his life: “The four of them were an odd pseudo-family” (p. 134).

But now, Takatsuki and Sayoko’s marriage has ended, Sayoko is a single mother, and Junpei’s thus-far barely passable bachelorhood is becoming emotionally untenable. When the earthquake strikes, the latter is too estranged from his Kobe-based parents to call them, to see if they have survived (“[t]he rift was too deep” (p. 138)), and he worries in a near panic that he has no one to protect, perhaps no one, even, for whom he owns the right to grieve: “Junpei felt an entirely new sense of isolation. I have no roots, he thought. I’m not connected to anything” (p. 138). In fact, and in important ways, he is reminiscent of Komura (from “UFO”): Junpei is far more defined, but both are men without women,<sup>8</sup> and men without families; both are compliant (at times exceedingly so) rather than dynamic when it comes to conducting their lives. But what sets Junpei apart at last is that he, unlike Komura, perceives the destruction in Kobe as a call to action, and his urgency reaches a pitch when his first-ever, long-awaited sexual interlude with Sayoko is abruptly interrupted by four-year-old Sala, whose night-terrors have grown worse: the “Earthquake Man” who visits her dreams is now attempting to stuff not only her but “everybody” into his box:

“He came and woke me up. He told me to tell you. He said he has the box ready for everybody. He said he’s waiting with the lid open. He said I should tell you that, and you’d understand.” (p. 145)

Sala’s nightmares, brought on by reports and images of ruin from a real-life box (i.e., the television); the recently divorced Sayoko’s lonely, transparent desire; his own creeping

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<sup>8</sup> This, *Men Without Women*, is the title of Murakami’s 2014 collection of short stories—and the well-known title of a Hemingway collection, too.

desolation, coupled with the shame of knowing that he himself, in his passivity, is chiefly responsible for his lack of “roots” (the story makes it clear that Junpei could have had Sayoko all those years before, when they first met: Sayoko preferred him over Takatsuki, but Junpei “just didn’t get it” (p. 144))—these things, together, send an electric charge coursing through Junpei. He decides at last, nearly 20 years after meeting her, to ask an obviously willing Sayoko to be his wife:

As soon as Sayoko woke in the morning, he would ask her to marry him. He was sure now. He couldn’t waste another minute. Taking care not to make a sound, he opened the bedroom door and looked at Sayoko and Sala sleeping bundled in a comforter. Sala lay with her back to Sayoko, whose arm was draped on Sala’s shoulder. He touched Sayoko’s hair where it fell across the pillow, and caressed Sala’s small pink cheek with the tip of his finger. Neither of them stirred. He eased himself down to the carpeted floor by the bed, his back against the wall, to watch over them in their sleep. (p. 146)

For Junpei, the earthquake therefore prompts positive rather than neutral or backward action. As the story (along with the larger book) concludes, he is poised to create a family—a non-traditional family to which he is already fiercely committed, a family already firmly grounded upon years of friendship and genuine love: a family “to watch over.” Perhaps my only gentle dispute with Strecher, an invaluable Murakami scholar, is rooted in his contention that the stories in *After* are “really about darkness, alienation, and flight from Kobe” (2002, p. 197). It is true that the Kobe-born Junpei has no intention to return to his hometown, and no intention, sadly, to rekindle relations with his parents or even to check on their post-quake well-being. It is not quite true, however, to say that Junpei (or the larger collection, *After the Quake*) embodies “flight from Kobe”: Junpei does not seem to be running in fright or drifting away from person-to-person connectedness after the fashion of Kamo no Chōmei. Rather, he flies *toward* that connectedness; and, albeit briefly, before the two are interrupted by Sala’s report of another earthquake-man nightmare, he literally, sexually connects with Sayoko—an improvement over Komura’s sudden sexual bankruptcy at the end of *After*’s first story, “UFO.” Junpei is poised, even, to become a somewhat different writer, and he begins this effort straight away by imagining a fresh and happier ending for the bear-friends he devised for Sala, an ending in which “Tonkichi and Masakichi never had to separate again: they lived happily ever after in the mountains, best friends forever” (p. 147). The very last passage of “Honey Pie” reads as a near-manifesto of newfound agency and grit, the likes of which the reader of *After* has not seen in any earlier story:

Sala would be sure to love the new ending. And so would Sayoko.

I want to write stories that are different from the ones I've written so far, Junpei thought: I want to write about people who dream and wait for the night to end, who long for the light so they can hold the ones they love. But right now I have to stay here and keep watch over this woman and this girl. I will never let anyone—not anyone—try to put them into that crazy box—not even if the sky should fall or the earth crack open with a roar. (p. 147)

\* \* \*

I have argued that *After* was composed with a lesson in mind, something to teach the Japanese people, just emerging at the time of the book's appearance from the "lost decade" of the 1990s, suffering from Strecher's "general malaise", stricken by the bubble economy—and oppressed most of all, perhaps, by a Chōmei-like sense that the ground beneath their feet might at any moment liquefy, that they might be swallowed whole by something mammoth and disastrous, like the hell-bent Worm featured in *After*'s most well-known story, "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo." What remains, then, is to address any doubt my reader may have that literature can play a role, however small, in soothing a nation and suggesting to its people that agency is preferable to passivity, that meaning can be found in community, despite the enduring paralysis of Japan's economy in the 1990s, despite the Kobe earthquake, despite the baffling terror of Aum Shinrikyo's mid-1990s "doomsday" attacks<sup>9</sup>—and more recently, despite the 3.11 quake that birthed the tsunami that devastated the Tohoku region, claimed thousands of lives, affected millions more, and generated infamous nuclear havoc in Fukushima. What remains, in other words, is the matter of whether art has any influence at all in actual experience—whether Murakami's message in *After* can, at last, sink in and reverberate across Japan.

While it will never do to deify the Shakespeares and Tolstoys—the Kawabatas, Ōes, Murakamis, and all the rest—neither will it do to surrender entirely to a categorical distrust of such writers or of literature more generally, to give way to a trendy dismissal of artists across the Humanities as little more than fallible products of their places and times. Murakami offers, in *After*, a message worth heeding; more than that, I believe that readers of *After* are capable of and sometimes intent upon locating that purpose—or, at least, that upon cracking the spine of

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<sup>9</sup> Murakami devotes an entire work of nonfiction to the 1995 sarin-gas attacks: *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche*. *Underground* features interviews with victims and with members of the apocalyptic cult that launched the attack.

*After* or any other work, a reader does not solely pursue historical or theoretical understanding or a chance to unearth the author's biases and deconstruct the author's efforts, as important as these ventures surely are. The act of reading occasionally ministers to the spirit; perhaps it taps Jung's collective underpinnings and does so no less than does music at its pinnacle, a stunning work of visual art, or a deeply moving film. That writers as capable as Murakami can and do offer sound advice, advice regarding how one might navigate the path toward becoming a complete human being, is well known. Still, it sometimes bears repeating.

Turning to the related matter of whether literature is reflective of or influential in life, I find that I cannot trace this question to an unimpeachable conclusion. It is true enough that for close to 30 years of college-level teaching, I have borne witness to literature's power, its resonance in what my students call "real life." I have watched so many students grow—I have seen them expand their world-views and even their moral compasses—from reading, thinking about, and finally writing about the likes of Faulkner, Baldwin, Morrison, Murakami, and more.<sup>10</sup> My students have wrestled the destructive effects of alcoholism, and they are children who have been betrayed by sometimes-narcissistic parents, as is oppressively the case in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. They have lost and then regained siblings, as is beautifully the case in Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues." They have never been slaves, but many have felt the stings of racism and in some cases even the enduring scars of rape and dehumanization, as befalls so many of the characters in Morrison's *Beloved*. They have found, lost, and re-found love, covering actual and psychic miles along the way, as is the case with the persistent main character of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Those students have located deep connections and paths of healing through reading, considering, and responding to literature.

Yet that is anecdotal; it cannot stand as scientific proof of literature's connectedness to life. Besides, most of my students, even the best and most openhearted among them, have been more or less compelled—by their parents, the arc of traditional American education, the specter of a future without a college degree, or all of these and more—to take my classes. The point is, how many of them would have freely stepped into my classrooms? How many were dying in the first place to read plays, poems, and stories and then unpack these in seminar-style discussions and in essays and exams? I will not say none at all; but my reader might understandably resist

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<sup>10</sup> And by the way, all of the just-mentioned Western writers are, like Murakami, proponents of community; all expose the dangers, either physical or psychic or both, of a life of isolation — and this suggests that Murakami, in *After*, takes up and expands upon a Western (or global?) literary theme.



an over-emphasis here on what students at any level can gain from literature, since students almost everywhere are not necessarily, or not always, in Humanities-driven environments by choice.

Of course the real question is whether literature, which for better or worse is largely ensconced in the global academy, has much to say to those who dwell beyond academia. I think it does; I believe again that the arts possess spectacular potential for anyone truly receptive to them. But I grant, too, that there is a divide between the academy and the larger populace. For example, poet and critic Dana Gioia (2002) laments that most Americans are sadly unfamiliar with poetry, past and especially present. Speaking primarily of verse in the U.S., Gioia points out that there is an abundance of creative writing going on, perhaps more than ever before. But poets, he says, write mainly for other poets, and thus there is “little coverage of poetry or poets in the general press”, a steep decline in “general readership”, an increasingly “inward” focus (2002, p. 2), and, at last, a kind of “clubby feeling” in which poetry matters, yes, but too frequently only to those residing squarely within the aforementioned subculture (ibid, p. 7). Once more, Gioia’s argument ostensibly concerns a single genre, poetry, and his contention seems confined to North America, but one can perhaps extend his remarks to fiction and the other genres—and one might also apply his remarks, making necessary adjustments along the way, to other nations, including Japan.

Yet Murakami does not easily fit the type of writer that Gioia has in mind: the product (and the property, so to speak) of the academy’s many outstanding MFA/creative-writing programs. Murakami seems indeed to be difficult to categorize. There is a uniquely broad Murakami appeal—and yet he is also a recent Nobel finalist, unequivocal evidence of how respected he is in the highest echelons of the global intelligentsia. There is, in other words, a well-known and diverse international popularity where Murakami’s works are concerned. And of course he is exceedingly popular in Japan, even while Japanese book sales in general have softened in recent years. Consider, for instance, reports of devotees lining up outside of Japanese bookstores on the release dates of Murakami’s books, including his 2013 novel, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* (which, by the way, responds to another national event, the 3.11 crisis that led to the Fukushima disaster):

Just after midnight on April 12 [2013], when the sales embargo was lifted, some people were seen reading copies on a street outside a Tsutaya bookstore in the Daikanyama area of Tokyo, while the social-

networking service Twitter was abuzz with fans' thoughts on the long-awaited story. ("Mystery fuels", 2013)

Similar accounts are abundant, suggesting that Murakami fires imaginations across varied spheres of class, education, occupation, age, national identity, and more—and this seems important here. Somehow, even in translation, Murakami speaks in a literary language that millions can understand. Gioia's argument is that excellent literature is still being produced, but few outside an elite, academia-informed community are listening—few are even offered the *opportunity* to listen. But something else, something unique, seems to be at play with respect to Murakami. And to varying degrees, depending on the book, that has been the case since his literary arrival several decades ago. Many are clearly listening to him; and my hope is that they are listening carefully, and listening especially to his celebration of community.

### Conclusion

Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl (1984), in *Man's Search for Meaning*, underscores human beings' responsibility, both during and after trauma, to *choose* a way forward: to refuse to surrender to despair no matter how difficult the circumstances.<sup>11</sup> That, I argue, is the spirit that emerges, gradually, believably, in Murakami's *After the Quake*, a book that departs from the self-imposed isolation that characterizes Chōmei's "Account." Psychologically speaking, *After* is a Frankl-like book that begins and ends with worrisome boxes: first, the television set that renders Komura's wife bodily and emotionally lifeless in "UFO in Kushiro"; then, the unidentified, seemingly empty box that Komura himself hand-delivers to a co-worker's sister in a far-away city; last, the "Earthquake Man's" macabre, coffin-like, "crazy box," which waits ominously for bodies in "Honey Pie"—although the latter box, as I have argued, is finally repudiated by a newly inspirited Junpei. A box is an enclosure, a way of preserving dystopia, a way of containing, but *After* is about emancipation from enclosures—leaving the hut, rejecting surrender, venturing into the vulnerable open space of human feelings, *choosing* to risk human connectedness, similar to the way in which Murakami himself, who had been living abroad through the first half of the nineties, "decided to return to Japan permanently and face the ghosts of Japan's past through a variety of works that considered the contemporary cultural vacuum" (Welch, 2005, p. 58). For Patricia Welch, Murakami's "protagonists are ordinary individuals"

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<sup>11</sup> Frankl decidedly stresses the power of choice and argues boldly that the most imprisoned, most victimized, among us can still choose what to do, psychologically, with suffering.

who “can do extraordinary things if they live their lives meaningfully” (ibid., p. 59). And Welch seems to have Junpei in mind when she adds that Murakami creates characters who are “finally alive to their emptiness and the interconnectedness of being,” and are finally prepared to “take the tentative first steps that might enable them to conquer their emptiness within and reach out to others”. They are characters “whose struggle, though lonely, is not in vain—characters who do, in fact, try to forge meaningful connections in their lives and with others around them” (op. cit.). Strecher, who is otherwise a bit more bleak than Welch about the Murakami landscape, adds that after the mid 1990s, Murakami’s work is populated by characters who become “more demanding, more insistent on having answers to the pressing questions in their lives” (2002, p. 213).

None of the above is meant to disparage those who cannot find a way out of post-traumatic despair. Frankl, in *Man’s Search*, is firm on that point; most Holocaust victims, he says, succumbed to lassitude and never found a way to exercise their humanity, their power to choose. It is cruel indeed to withhold extraordinary compassion for them or to over-critique those who cannot “forge meaningful connections”, to hold at arm’s length the innumerable souls who cannot find a path beyond trauma. The point, instead, is to celebrate Haruki Murakami’s life-affirming portrait of “ordinary individuals” who *do* find that path, since they provide a hopeful lesson for us all.

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## Circle within Walls: A Comparative Study on Poets of Leprosariums

Robert Ono

### Abstract

Many forms of literature are nurtured in circles or salon-like environments, where participants with mutual interests serve alternately as creators, readers, and critics. This was especially true with *waka*, a poetic form with 31 syllables, during the Heian period, which had an immense impact on the formation of Japanese literature. Since the modernization of Japan, mainstream writers have formed a much more large-scale and sophisticated literary establishment called the *bundan*. However, it must not be overlooked that many writers were active outside such mainstream currents. Literary circles within leprosariums, to which this paper pays special attention, are a good example. A dozen or so leprosariums were home to tens of thousands of patients who were forced to leave their families. In such facilities many sought refuge in literature; they expressed themselves freely through *tanka*, the modern version of *waka*, in intramural magazines, and strived to enrich the culture of their very own “leprosy literature.” Using magazines such as *Kikuchino*, *Kaede*, and *Aisei* as primary sources, this paper clarifies that many patients were eager to express their identities through depicting their illness, but were at the same time mindful not to go against authority, since the magazines were scrutinized by staff members of the leprosariums. It must also be noted that for some patients who were seriously committed to literature, the fixed verses of *tanka* were considered insufficient as a means to express one’s true self, compared to more highly regarded forms such as the novel.

*Keywords:* leprosy literature, *tanka*, literary circle, Hansen’s disease, leprosarium

## Introduction

Writing is often done alone, but at the same time, communication is the essential factor in the art of writing, or perhaps any form of art. What is written must be read by the *other*, and what is read, in turn, becomes the source of the next writing. It is, therefore, natural to see literature flourishing in tandem with the development of social ties among writers who cherish similar values, sharing and critiquing each other's works and forming what is often called a salon culture.

For those familiar with French history, it is a well-established fact that it was in such salons, especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where poems, plays, and novels developed dramatically. Poems and prose fiction now came to be recognized as important parts of intellectual discourse (Craveri, 2005). In the salons of notable women, such as the Marquise de Rambouillet and Madeleine de Scudéry, many have gathered to exchange their works and ideas, thereby building a refined corpus of poetic language.

Something similar happened in Japan much earlier. It was during the ninth century that aristocrats began to gather and exchange their *waka* (和歌) poems, short but rich texts of 31 morae (syllables) that often deepen their semantic value when aligned with poems prepared by other participants present at the session (Shirane, 2012).<sup>1</sup> Such gatherings, called *uta-awase* (歌合), were crucial for *waka* to reach the position of a means of artistic and even philosophical dialogue among sociopolitical elites. In 905, over a thousand *waka* was compiled into the *Kokin Wakashū* (古今和歌集), or *Anthology of Ancient and Modern Waka*, an official volume of poetry commissioned by Emperor Uda.

Naturally, different genres of literary arts also flourished in the following centuries. In terms of verse, *waka* developed into *renga* (連歌), or linked verses, a form which reached its height during the Medieval period (roughly 1185-1568), while *haikai* (俳諧), another form of linked verse with shorter blocks of 17-syllable *haiku* (俳句), came into fashion during the Edo period. Traditional *waka* was still appreciated then, but it was often composed in the style of *kyōka* (狂歌), or satirical and parodic verse. As Ikegami claims, these forms of verse played an important role in the “surprising number of hobbies and interest groups” that emerged in

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<sup>1</sup> Verse with more syllables, such as *chōka* and *sedōka*, may also be included in *waka*, but these forms will not be discussed in this paper.

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Japan, which covered a wide range of topics from “*haikai* and *kyōka* poetry to appreciating and competing to grow perfect morning glories” (2015, p. 45).

After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, in now-modernized Japan, Western-style novels quickly became the central form of creative writing. Forms of prose such as *ukiyo-zōshi* (浮世草子, lit. “books of the floating world”) and *kusazōshi* (草双紙), or illustrated literature, circulated widely during the Edo period, but the torrent of new ideas and cultures that flooded Japan in the early Meiji period inevitably and overwhelmingly impacted Japanese writing. As Ivan Morris argues, the changes Japan went through in such a short time caused “a major break with the past that has no parallel in any of the important literatures of the West” (2005, p. 11).

Aspiring writers who sought fame in the new literary world strived to publish their tours de force in magazines with nationwide circulation. Prizes were given out to promising talents, and successful writers were now celebrities. The literary circle has now evolved into a much more sophisticated and large-scale literary establishment, or *bundan* (文壇), which definitely played a significant role in Japan's artistic and intellectual domains until the late Showa period (1926–1989).

It must not be overlooked, however, that many writers were also active outside such mainstream currents. Of course, there were many who just did not make the cut; but for some, it was simply impossible to join the mainstream. A good example of the latter would be literary circles within leprosariums.

Leprosy has been documented throughout Japanese history. The *Kojiki* (古事記), the earliest book of history, compiled in 712, recounts emperors accommodating patients in temples to save their souls; leprosy was widely believed to be a result of bad karma, and salvation could only be achieved through prayers. Because of this, many patients lived as hermits, and were often treated as untouchables.

During the Meiji and Taisho periods, a number of leprosy colonies were established by Christian missionaries. However, instead of enlightening the public to the scientific fact that leprosy is neither deadly nor highly contagious, the government labeled leprosy as a hindrance to the nation's development. As the Second World War approached, the government was more inclined to eugenics, as was Nazi Germany, and stressed the importance of a

leprosy-free nation. In 1931, the Leprosy Prevention Law was enforced, and this allowed the police to send patients to colonies by force, with virtually every prefecture in Japan competing to realize a leprosy-free community, in a movement labeled the *muraiken undō* (無癩県運動). During the next five years, the number of patients residing in these colonies tripled, and by 1940 there was a total of 8,855 patients living in designated colonies in each region of the country (Ōtani, 1996).<sup>2</sup>

Since many patients left their families and moved to colonies with the notion that they would never return, colonies were established as something of a miniature city. Churches, temples, and shrines of various denominations were erected next to each other. There were schools for children, usually taught by adult patients. There were spaces to farm. Colonies even minted their own currency so as to control economic activities within the walls, and to prevent the patients from deserting.

Many patients were occupied with manual labor, nursing of patients in critical condition, and farming, but most of their chores were completed in the morning, leaving ample time for the patients to spend on their own (Aoyama, 2014). Therefore it was only natural for them to form various circles, or gatherings of mutual interests. Some were devoted actors and musicians. Some kept improving their vegetable gardens. Some preferred simpler hobbies such as *shōgi* and *go* games. And many others came to enjoy expressing themselves poetically, especially in the form of *tanka* (短歌), the modern *waka*.<sup>3</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s, colonies started publishing intramural magazines one after another. Although most of the space was dedicated to articles concerned with reports on current events inside the colonies and essays regarding the lives of the patients, penned by both the patients and resident doctors, a certain number of pages was always allocated to sharing the artistic achievements of the patients.

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<sup>2</sup> A detailed history of policies regarding leprosy, compiled by the Japan Law Foundation in 2005, is available online at the website of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. [Http://www.mhlw.go.jp/topics/bukyoku/kenkou/hansen/kanren/4a.html/](http://www.mhlw.go.jp/topics/bukyoku/kenkou/hansen/kanren/4a.html/).

<sup>3</sup> The difference between *waka* and *tanka* is purely temporal. Any verses created after 1868—the Meiji Restoration—are called *tanka*.



## Tanka by Leprosy Patients

### Magazines before 1945

The first magazine to be published was *Yamazakura* (『山桜』) at Zenshō Hospital, one of the largest colonies, located in the Tama area of Tokyo. It was first published in April 1919 as a handcrafted magazine, produced by duplicating manuscripts using a mimeograph machine. The magazine called for readers' contributions, ranging from thoughts on religion, essays, and short prose, to *tanka*, *haiku*, anecdotes, and jokes.

In the first issue, we can only find five *tanka*. One of them is composed by a certain Kakotsu (鹿骨), an avid writer contributing to almost every volume in the earlier issues of *Yamazakura*. One of the *tanka* reads:

畑打てば今年も此所の畔の樹で鶯か何か物語るらし

While working on the fields I hear ...

A bush warbler perhaps?

Telling a story

On the tree by the furrow

It is that time of the year again<sup>4</sup>

(Kokufūkai, 1919a, p. 19)

Here it is clear that the poem focuses on nature and the changing of seasons, which are the central topics of traditional *tanka*. Although we do not see any direct expressions pertaining to the poet's illness, we can still sense, through the serene scenery depicted here, the happiness of the poet to have lived through another year.

In some poems, however, we see more straightforward expressions. For example, here is a *tanka* by Majima Rika (間島梨花), published in the July issue of the same year:

罪重く世の道登る老の坂是に乗れやと極楽の籠

With my heavy sins

I climb the worldly path

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<sup>4</sup> All English translations are my own. The original Japanese text for sources other than *tanka* will henceforth be provided in footnotes.

The hills of my old age

Then someone offers me a ride:

The palanquin of heaven

(Kokufūkai, 1919b, p. 13)

We must note that it was commonly believed that leprosy was caused because of gods' wrath, or karma from one's doings in a past life. Here the poet is finally greeted with salvation, although it is quite clear that salvation signifies death.

In January 1931, another magazine, *Aisei* (『愛生』), was established in Nagashima Aisei-en, a colony on the island of Nagashima in Okayama Prefecture. Again let us take a look at a couple of *tanka* from the earlier volumes.

海を背にたたずみ仰ぐ島の山かすめる如し眼は病みてけり

Standing with my back to the ocean

I look up to the mountain

The mountain on the island

It appears to be covered with mist

For my eyes are sickened

(Oguma, 1931, p. 15)

Here the poet Katsumata Iwao (勝俣巖) depicts the landscape of the colony, now his home, and observes it through his failing eyesight, a typical symptom of leprosy.

足病の子ら見てゐしがそのあまり淋しくなりて吹くことをやめり

I was watching the children

With their withered legs

Soon I became so lonely

And stopped blowing

My harmonica

(Oguma, 1935, p. 37)

Regarding the *tanka* above by Ōtake Shimaō (大竹島緒), we can learn from the preface that the poet was cheering for the children at a sports event hosted at the school inside the colony; however, his mood starts to decline when he notices the poor physical condition of the children.

The last magazine I would like to introduce from this period is *Kaede* (『楓』), established in May 1936 at Oku Kōmyō-en, the second colony on Nagashima, opposite Aisei-en.

純といふ名のごとく子よいつまでも純であれかし罪の世に出て

Jun, my son

Stay pure my child

Even though you are born

Into this sinful world;

For your name is “pure”

(Harada, 1936, p. 33)

This *tanka* by Tsunoda Kazuo (角田和夫), from the very first issue, also references the notion of sin, which we have seen in the earlier example. But here the poet seems more confident because he sees a light of hope in his son. The poet knows that the sin is not in his son, but is in the world that surrounds him.

It is most likely that his son was born in the colony. This means the poet probably married in the colony to a fellow patient. The patients were allowed to marry, but only each other. Also, having a child was not something the doctors recommended. On the contrary, sterilization was often enforced in the colony to keep the genes of patients from being carried down—an astonishing injustice given that doctors were well aware of the fact that leprosy is not hereditary. Such background, albeit ironically, adds to the hopeful message of this poem.

懼りたる病ひは古りて悲しくも指次ぎ次ぎと蝕みてゆく

The illness has aged

And so have I

Oh how it makes me sad

To see my fingers

Eroding away one by one

(Kameyama, 1936, p. 30)

In this *tanka* by Miki Jakuka (三木寂花), from the July issue of the same year, the poet counts the years of his sickness. However, it is not easy to count, because tissue loss, another typical symptom of the disease, has deformed his fingers.

By the end of the Second World War, ten intramural magazines had been published in colonies all over Japan.<sup>5</sup> These magazines have similar structures, with all magazines allocating some space to poems and prose written by the patients. Also, it is important to note that these magazines were available to the patients of other colonies, so literary enthusiasts were aware of the talented poets scattered throughout the country. Some magazines, like *Yamazakura*, published a special volume featuring larger numbers of poems and prose every year, dubbed *bungei tokushū-gō* (文芸特集号), and called for works from other colonies as well. In this way, patients from different colonies could communicate through their literary expression, and share their hopes and struggles. The patients of each colony formed their own circles within walls, but these walls were never completely exclusive.

### Post-war magazines

With the discovery of new drugs such as Promin, leprosy became curable, at least medically, in the late 1940s. Although most of the patients stayed in colonies and remained segregated from society, at least they no longer had to fear an untimely and gruesome death. But it would be too optimistic to state that the end of the Second World War also marked the beginning of a hopeful era for the patients.

It was also after the war that patients began to stand up for their rights; they deemed the Leprosy Prevention Law to be unwholesome and discriminatory, and requested the government to abolish it. This battle would end only in 2001, with the total annulment of the law in 1996 and the subsequent lawsuit that resulted in the victory of the patients. The government has admitted that their policies were not only wrong but also unconstitutional, and they have publicly apologized to all the patients and their families.

Under such circumstances, writing remained an important part of their lives. The magazines, including new ones, were regularly published, and little had changed in terms of their content. Let us take a look at few examples.

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<sup>5</sup> Many of the documents pertaining to the disease are indexed in the database managed by the publishing house Kōseisha, the publisher of *Hansenbyō Bungaku Zenshū* (Collected Works of Hansen Disease Literature). [Http://www.libro-koseisha.co.jp/cgi-bin/libro/raisch/raisch.cgi](http://www.libro-koseisha.co.jp/cgi-bin/libro/raisch/raisch.cgi).

院内重監房設置反対の訴へも弱々しかりき警官の前に

The voice is raised

To protest against

The new maximum-security cell

The voice is weak, however

In front of the police officer

(Nakano, 1955, p. 32)

This *tanka* by Usami Akira (宇佐見章), who lived in the Suruga colony in Shizuoka Prefecture, was published in the October issue of *Kikuchino* (菊池野) in 1955. It was a special issue, or *bungei tokushū-gō*. Since it is unlikely that a maximum-security cell was to be built anew in the 1950s, he is perhaps remembering the 1930s, when the colony in Gunma housed such a notorious facility (Miyasaka, 2006).

Something similar regarding the conflation of eras can be said about the following *tanka* by Araki Sueko (荒木未子) in the same issue:

手足捕え検束されしと慄ふ声真を伝へ呉れよと寄りぬ

I approached

To hear the voice

The voice that is telling the truth

It is shaking

Her hands and legs are tied

(ibid.)

The last line refers to the practice of *kensoku* (検束), a right reserved for the doctors to physically detain or imprison patients at their will. This too must have been practiced more strictly before or during the Second World War.

Of course, not all *tanka* look back into the past. Some discuss daily life with a tranquil, and often sad, tone:

忙しき勤めの中に点字習ひ我等に便りくれたまふなり

They have sent letters to us

They are written in Braille

They have learned it  
 Amidst their busy work  
 So they can write to us (Ōmura, 1960, p. 15)

This *tanka* by Tanikawa Akio (谷川秋夫), published in the New Year's issue of *Aisei* in 1960, expresses the heartfelt thanks of a blind patient, thirsty to communicate with the outer world.

黙々と萎えし足あゆますにふさはしけれ明暗に冬の月照る

The winter moon  
 Shines in the darkness  
 A becoming scene  
 Through which to walk silently  
 On my withered legs (Kameyama, 1959, p. 39)

And finally, this *tanka* by Ōmichi Tadashi (大路匡), in the March issue of *Kaede* in 1959, depicts the serene state of a patient's mind through nature.

### Discussion

With the series of *tanka* we have considered, it should be safe to say that patients were eager to express themselves through poetry, and they were not afraid to share the painful state they were in. While some patients chose to use straightforward phrases such as “illness” and “sin,” others resorted to euphemisms. Both styles, however, demand that readers connect with the health issues and struggles of the patients. As Burns (2004) has argued with the case of more successful writers who suffered from leprosy, such as Hōjō Tamio (北條民雄 1914–1937), who we are going to take a closer look at later, the illness constituted an important part of their identity.

The poetics accumulated through *waka*'s long history naturally offered patients an ideal starting point. When Kakotsu uses the bush warbler to express his joy at having lived through another year, for example, the reader is simultaneously reminded of the negative aspect of the motif. Although the bush warbler, which chirps enthusiastically in early spring, was usually used in *waka* to celebrate the commencement of a new year, it was also used to express desolation, since the phonetic value of the Japanese word for bush warbler, *uguisu* (鶯), is

closely associated with that of the adjective *uku* (憂く), or melancholy (Katagiri, 1999). A classical example for this would be the poem composed by Ariwara no Muneyana (在原棟梁), included in the *Kokin Wakashū* (vol. 1, no. 15):

春立てど花もにほはぬ山里は物憂かる音に鶯ぞ鳴く

Here in the mountains

We smell no flowers

Although the Spring has risen

Only the bush warblers

Chirp in languorous tone

(Ozawa and Matsuda, 1994, p. 36)

This classical association adds duality to Kakotsu's *tanka*; the poet is happy in the sense that he has survived another year, but at the same time he feels lost because the illness is also here to stay.

What makes the *tanka* of the patients more unique and relevant is, however, an entirely new semiotic layer pertaining to leprosy that was added to the existing sets of poetic resources. It should be noted, for example, that the poets are almost unanimous in dealing with leprosy with some sort of resignation, since the illness is seldom the result of the choices they have made. In this sense leprosy was preordained, and therefore had to be accepted as a god-sent ordeal. As a matter of fact, the Chinese character for leprosy, *rai* (癩), already entails the meaning that the disease is imposed by heaven, since while *yamai-dare* (災) signifies illness, *rai* (癩) often implies that something is heaven-sent (Shirakawa, 2007).

Such a view of leprosy should further clarify the connotations of the word “sin” or *tsumi* (罪) that is often used by the poets. As Majima deplures in his *tanka*, the sin was obviously an unbearable burden. However, like all sins, there is a chance that its weight could be lifted. In Majima's case, the salvation took the form of death; but in Tsunoda's work, his immaculate son sheds a ray of hope on the otherwise darkened world. Sin, like the disease itself, will not let go of the poet, but would not necessarily affect the next generation. In other words, it is possible to break the karmic cycle.

Although the handling of leprosy as a sin in Japan largely has its roots in Buddhism and Shintoism, a similar view was held by Christian patients as well. In the collection of *tanka*

composed during the years 1933–43 by Ito Tamotsu (伊東保), who resided in Kikuchi Keifun-en in Kumamoto Prefecture, there is a following piece:

病む身契りて看護りあひつつ睦めればわが主イエスの許し給ふべし

However diseased I am

Jesus our Lord shall forgive

With my resolution to nurse the sick

And to befriend them

Out of our mutual respect

(Ōoka, 2006, p. 107)

Although modern scholarship suggests that what was thought to be leprosy depicted in the Bible may refer to other medical issues (Pilch, 1981), it could, however paradoxically, encourage the patients to endure their illness, since in the end God will wash away their sins and save their souls. Regardless of religious beliefs, therefore, patients have manipulated the notion of “sin” in their works to better cope with the reality and, if possible, to give sense of mission to their struggles.

One difference between poems from before and after the war would be that post-war poems are less afraid to challenge authority, as we have seen in the works of Usami and Araki. Up until this point it would have been impossible for the patients to compose a poem that would criticize the colony’s policies. Before the end of the war, especially from the 1930s, censorship was enforced both inside and outside the colonies (Arai, 2011). Any negative sentiments against the government, especially ideas even remotely related to communism or socialism, were thoroughly expunged from the text (Maki, 2014). So even when the patients were supposedly expressing themselves freely, they had some bottom-line rules to abide by.

On top of this, even though the patients did play a major role in the editing process of the magazines, we must not overlook the fact that they were carefully supervised by the doctors. As a matter of fact, many of the colony doctors themselves contributed articles about their views toward leprosy and their recent findings about the disease. Some doctors were also casual poets, and these doctors played the role of editors; many of the poems published in the magazines were, in fact, chosen by none other than the doctors (Tanaka, 2015).



One example is Hayashi Fumio (林文雄 1900–1947). A doctor and a devout Christian, Hayashi served in three different colonies. While working at Aisei-en colony at Nagashima, he was the editor of the *tanka* section in the magazine *Aisei*, under two homophonic assumed names romanized as Oguma Sei (小熊生 and 小熊星). When he left Aisei-en in 1935 to serve at Keiai-en, a colony in Kagoshima Prefecture, patients of Aisei-en contributed an article in the November issue to thank Hayashi for his guidance, and even dedicated a series of *tanka*, of which one by Horikawa Sunajirō (堀川砂二郎) reads:

若き師が力のかぎりうち拓く薩摩の国は住みよからまし

Oh how nice it should be  
To live in the land of Satsuma  
For the land shall be doubtless  
Cultivated by our young master  
With all his might!

(Nagashima Tanka-kai, 1935, p. 65)

So what did the colony staff think about the literary endeavors of the patients? In the August 1934 issue of *Yamazakura*, Ishibashi Ihachi (石橋伊八), a superintendent of Zenshō Hospital, writes in an article that “it is nice to have a hobby or two,” and literature is an especially admirable pastime, because:

Literature has the capability to let us stay within certain norms, and it allows us to introduce to the reader elegant and wholehearted thoughts, which would move their hearts along with ours. That is why literature is so intriguing, and that is why having a hobby is valuable. (1934, pp. 5)<sup>6</sup>

In other words, Ishibashi believes that writing can serve as a spiritual training of sorts, and it will, in a way, improve one’s nature. Allowing some freedom of expression was no doubt a great way to vent the frustration of patients, and at the same time it could serve as a catalyst for communication between patients and staff members.

Let us also take a look at a patient’s opinion. Mitsuoka Ryōji (光岡良二 1911–1995), one of the few poets in Zenshō Hospital who would actually gain some popularity outside the

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<sup>6</sup> そうして我等は苟且にも常軌を逸するが如きことなく、常に品性を陶冶し真心から出た、偽りのなき思想を紹介し、そうして自分を動かし、人を動かすだけの努力をしたい、其処に文学の興味津津たるものがあり、又趣味を持つ人の生活として価値があると言へやう。

colony, shared his thoughts about *ryōyōjo bungei* (療養所文芸), or “colony literature,” in the July 1934 issue of *Yamazakura*. On *tanka*, he says the following under the pseudonym Kishine Mitsuo (岸根光雄):

I see that the *tanka* section is the most powerful in all magazines. We do love this short form of poetry, which we have carried down for more than 12 centuries, from the time of the *Manyōshū*. On top of that, it is natural for the patients, weakened by the disease, to hide behind the flower bed of fixed verses; one needs so much more energy to write prose. (Kishine, 1934, p. 11)<sup>7</sup>

As a young writer with ambitions, Mitsuoka was more concerned with the literary movements outside the colonies. Therefore he wishes that more patients would work on freestyle poems or prose, rather than on traditional genres. From his viewpoint, intramural magazines with a strong focus on short, fixed poems, which sometimes seem to be too easy, and often seen as a hobby rather than serious work, was not sufficient as a platform for expression. However, his tone is moderate compared to the radical voice of his close friend, the writer Hōjō Tamio.

Hōjō is arguably the only Japanese short-story writer diagnosed with Hansen’s disease who has won significant critical acclaim and popularity among contemporary readers. Right after he hospitalized himself at Zenshō Hospital, Hōjō, 19 years old at the time and full of ambition, joined the *Yamazakura* circle. His debut in the magazine was in the July issue of 1934, where he contributed a short piece of prose.

But apparently, he was promptly disillusioned by the small scope of the intramural magazine. On August 27, 1934, he wrote this in his diary:

In this kind of atmosphere, literature should be fed to dogs! That is why literature at the hospital is so detached. And decent enthusiasts take refuge in the world of verse; they have lost the passion for struggling in the world of fiction (the novel). (1980, p. 154)<sup>8</sup>

Like Mitsuoka, Hōjō considered fixed verse like *tanka* or *haiku* rather out-of-date, and insufficient as a means to express the true struggle of one’s spirit. And perhaps this is why he decided to form a smaller circle within the circle of *Yamazakura*, with friends such as Mitsuoka and Tōjō Koichi (東條耿一 1912–1942).

<sup>7</sup> 各誌とも短歌が最も盛んなことが目につく。実際万葉以来千二百年の間私達の祖先の血の中を流れて来た此の少詩形への愛着はなかなか根強いものらしい。散文の世界よりは、瞬間的抒情を、もるにふさはしい此定型の花園に隠れ家を求めるのは全く自然なことなのであらう。

<sup>8</sup> この雰囲気の内では文学など糞喰えだ。だからこそ、こうこの院内の文学が断れ断れなんだろう。そして本気でやっているものは詩か歌の世界に通れて、創作（小説の）世界に戦おうとする熱意は消失してしまっている。

In the following year, Hōjō would achieve large acclaim outside the colony thanks to his short stories “Maki Rōjin” (間木老人, Old Maki) and “Inochi no Shoya” (いのちの初夜, The First Night of Life). Backed up by Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972), a prolific writer who was in his late thirties at the time, and already a prominent figure in the literary world, Hōjō became the central figure of so-called *rai bungaku* (癩文学), or “leprosy literature.”

Such success of a patient, however, was a bit of a nuisance in the eyes of the colony’s authorities. Hōjō was now in a privileged position of being able to share his views with possibly thousands of readers outside the colony. He could easily tarnish the reputation of the colony and its doctors by simply depicting his life at the colony in a melancholic manner. The authorities, therefore, had to keep a keen eye on his manuscripts and, if necessary, make corrections.

The censorship, of course, enraged Hōjō. He wrote in his diary on September 4, 1936:

I have finished my thirty pages for Kaizōsha, so I have passed them over to the censorship office. No matter how you look at it, the idea of censorship irritates me.... He is a lovable character at heart, but he makes me \*\*\* once I look at him as a \*\*\*. By censoring our works, he feels \*\*\*. What kind of a \*\*\* man would \*\*\* working at the censorship office? (ibid., 253)<sup>9</sup>

Note the erasure of proper nouns and harsh words. This was probably done after Hōjō’s death in 1937, when the diary was passed on to Kawabata. It is an ironic example of censorship of a document that deplores censorship.

But Hōjō’s achievements also brought on a positive change, at least in the eyes of fellow patients in the colony. Renowned authors and critics were now joining the community, and started to serve as editors of intramural magazines. This meant that the circles within walls were now less secluded; the walls were still there, but at least they were lowered a little.

Shikiba Ryūzaburō (式場隆三郎 1898–1965), a psychiatrist and a critic, was one of those “outside authorities” who joined the community of “colony literature.” In January 1936, he served as an editor for another *bungei tokushū-gō*. Perhaps he was greatly interested to participate in a magazine full of poems and prose composed by leprosy patients, given that he

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<sup>9</sup> 改造社からの依頼の原稿三十枚が昨夜書き上がったので、今朝検閲に出した。どう考えて見ても検閲は腹立たしい。[中略] 根は可愛い男なので憎めないのだけれども、××としての彼を見ると××を覚える。我々の原稿を検閲することに彼は××を満足させているのだ。検閲官であることに××を覚えるとは、××の男であろう。

was also a member of the medical community. Let us take a look at an essay he contributed to the same issue:

Not only works of leprosy patients, but also those of people with health issues in general, have a tendency to become masterpieces that surpass the works of professional writers, because of their peculiar material and rich experience.... I truly hope to see many more intellectual achievements, even those outside the realm of creative writing, among leprosy patients. (1936, p. 67)<sup>10</sup>

Although his statement can be viewed as empowering for the writers within walls, we must note well his bias against the patients. It is very much possible to interpret his words as suppressing voices of power. That is to say, he sees value in the writings of the patients only because they *are* ill. In other words, Shikiba might not have found their works intriguing if they were written in such a manner that no reader could associate them with leprosy.

Here lies the greatest paradox of “leprosy literature.” It is as though the patients can only be an asset to the world of literature as long as they are ill. But how can artists freely express themselves if they are only expected to produce works with a single theme? Hōjō, though unable to escape such paradox, was very much aware of it. As early as July 4, 1935, he wrote this in his diary:

Most importantly, our lives here have no sociality. Therefore, our works, written in such an environment, also lack sociality. Does society even need our works? Even if it did, on what terms? This is what I think: people will be interested because of the peculiarity of “leprosy,” before anything else. (1980, p. 206)<sup>11</sup>

Even before his stories were published, he already knew that, to some extent, his “market value” as a writer depended on the fact that he suffered from leprosy.

Even after the war, professional artists, both famous and obscure, often supervised poems and prose written by the patients. And most of them, although perhaps unintentionally, kept segregating the patients. For example, Maruyama Yutaka (丸山豊 1915–1989), who advised on freestyle poetry in the October 1955 issue of *Kikuchino*, made the following comment:

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<sup>10</sup> 癩者の文学ばかりでなく、病者の文学は、その材料の特異さと経験の深さによつて、職業的文人の及ばない傑作が生れるものである。[中略] 私は文芸のみならず、もつと多方面な知的作物が癩者の中々からも続々生れるやうに希望する。

<sup>11</sup> 先ず第一に僕達の生活に社会性がないということ。従つてそこから生れ出る作品に社会性がない。社会は僕達の作品を必要とするだろうか？ よし必要とするにしても、どういう意味に於てであろうか。僕は考える。先ず、第一に「癩」ということの特異さが彼らの興味を惹くだろう。

If your poems are good, then your physical illness should jolt our souls; and your healthy spirits should hit us hard, for it exposes our pretended health. Perhaps you live in a more serious world than we do, where people deceive each other less. That is where you should train your critical spirits. (1955, p. 31)<sup>12</sup>

Note the constant use of “you” and the exclusive “we.” To Maruyama, the poets of the colonies are denizens of a different world; the fact that they are poets, just like Maruyama himself, does not convince him that they are on the same side. Similarly on the same issue, the poet Nakano Kikuo (中野菊夫 1911–2001), who served as the editor of the *tanka* section, writes thus: “Winter is just around the corner. You should all take good care of yourselves” (1955, p. 35).<sup>13</sup> While there is no reason to doubt his warm consideration for the patients, his words remind the poets that it is almost their duty to stay frail. They are the weaker half of society, and have to be protected by authority, even in the supposedly free realm of self-representation. The circles gave the patients hope, but the walls were never torn apart.

### Conclusion

In this paper I have analyzed several *tanka* composed by the residents of different leprosariums in Japan during the years 1919–1959. Many poets, within their circles, strived to express themselves through the traditional form of *tanka*, and shared their views toward the world. However, there has been limited scholarship concerned with the works of patients, especially those who never attained a certain amount of fame amongst the writers and critics of the mainstream literary establishment.

Although many poets recount their struggles and illness rather straightforwardly, poems that would question the authority of the colony staff or the police appear only after the Second World War. This was inevitable given that the magazines were constantly under the supervision of the officials, and here we can see the limit of freedom of expression the poets enjoyed.

It must also be noted that for patients with a serious commitment to the art of literature, such as Mitsuoka and Hōjō, *tanka* seemed to be insufficient as a means to express one’s true self, because young and enthusiastic writers tended to believe that stories and novels were now the central forms of fiction, while short, fixed verse like *tanka* could not fully convey the

<sup>12</sup> 詩がすぐれて居れば、あなた方の病患はわれわれの魂の疾病をゆりうごかし、あなた方の精神上的健康は、われわれの見せかけの健康を痛打するはずです。たぶん、われわれよりはごまかしの少い、真剣勝負の世界で、きびしい批評精神をきたいあげて下さい。

<sup>13</sup> すぐ冬です。一層、からだを大切にして下さい。

agony of the serious situation they were forced to endure. However, we must not underestimate the therapeutic value of creation the patients enjoyed, regardless of the degree of social impact their works have had. There is no doubt that the poets of leprosariums have glimpsed a sense of salvation when they were given a voice, even though they were aware that their voice would seldom reach outside the walls.

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## Asia Poems

### A. Robert Lee

#### “Tokyo Quartet”

*karasu*

Hard to tell whether Tokyo crows  
are smarter than other city crows  
but you have to suspect.

Aren't they raised on  
*kanji* and the two *kanas*?

Haven't they been around long enough to decipher  
*honne* and *tatema*?

Don't they perch in theatres performing  
*kabuki*, *bunraku* and *noh*?

Does anyone get an earlier shot at blossom-viewing  
*hanami*?

Can't they always hear the rattle of Tokyo eat and drink  
*sushi*, *ramen*, *soba*, *nama bīru* and *sake*?

Have they not heard a thousand  
Bashō *haiku* and Man'yōshū *tanka*?

Do they not linger after each Shibuya showing of  
*Rashōmon*?

Do they not monitor by cable and pole  
*NHK*, *Wow-Wow* and *Tokyo MX*?

Have they not listened from window ledge or street to  
*karaoke*, *enka*, *pachinko*?

Is theirs not a fly-past of Roppongi or Ginza  
*bijouterie*?

Are they not witnesses to Tokyo going round in train circles on the

*Yamanote-sen?*

Do they not understand the nuances of the  
Japanese bow?

Look at those swoops over the just-bigger-than-Eiffel  
Tokyo Tower.

Look at those glides along the  
Imperial Palace Moat.

Look at the hop and peck conference gatherings at  
Ueno Park, Hibiya Park, Yoyogi Park.

Look at the dive-flights round  
Tokyo station, *Tokyo-eki*.

Look at their observer-status in  
Electric City Akihabara and Goth and Lolita Harajuku

But is not their true qualification  
their Emperor's Cup  
and their University of Tokyo/*Tōdai* Ph.D  
the disrespect for the command and control  
of Tokyo trash

Tokyo trash collection  
And Tokyo trash truck?

*Gomi*

*gomi-shūshū*

*gomi-shū-shū-sha?*

“Ordinary Waste”, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday

“Cans, bottles, batteries,” Monday

“Metal,” First and Third Thursdays

“Oversized waste” – please apply “Oversized Waste Center.”

The best

collection-regulated

city in the world  
under  
scavenger surveillance.

Regimes of eye and beak  
tear and snatch  
strewn plastic and old food.  
eco-centrics.

Not even the green netting  
or each lid and cover  
stills their inspector-general scavenge.

Tenors and basso profundos  
of repeated guttural caw  
even as they perch and loop.

Trash saboteurs.  
Quilled wiseacres.  
On patrol foragers.  
Custom officers.  
Park and fly commuters.  
Orchestra and chorus.  
Lexicographers of the city.

Feathered companion Tokyoites.  
Tokyo's guardian Tokyoites.

***oto***

Every Tokyo neighborhood street  
if less name than block and post code  
a sound system from

good morning *konnichiwa* and *Ohayō gozaimasu*  
 to take-care-of-yourself evening *ki o tsukete*  
 and thank-you-for-your-work *otsukaresamadeshita*  
 from meticulous thank you *arigatō*  
 to politeness's excuse me *sumimasen* and *gomennasai*.

Overheard spoken Japanese  
 of dark suited dressed-for-work salarymen  
 of Bismarck-uniformed schoolboys  
 of maritime-kitted schoolgirls  
 of shopper women, mothers and children  
 of bike-bell riders  
 with gloved handlebars in winter  
 and boy-on-pedal girl-on-pinion  
 of *keitai* wafts of conversation across the wires.

First the ghost footsteps  
 the someone's following me feel  
 turn around, look up, listen again  
 and it's futon-beats, balcony bed-spans and mattress-thumps  
 paddled corporal punishment to dust or tick.

*Gomi* collection with warning ping  
*Gyōza* delivery man with recording chant  
*Tōfu* seller with hunting horn call  
*Sodaigomi kaishūsha desu* recycle truck

Ward Office canned tunes  
 Vivaldi to Beatle  
*Enka* to J-Pop  
 music while you walk  
 from discreet speakers

on street corner and wall.

Round the corner

*Pachinko* parlor clang and rush.

Top of the street

staccato whack of

practice golf-swing

into third story wall

of draped and hanging net.

Japan Post motorbike roar and swerve delivery.

Recorded stop announcements from passing bus.

Drink machine delivery for Boss, Calpis, Tea and Water.

Dovecot chorus atop the corner apartment block *manshon*.

Typhoon blasts numbered in-season.

Engine-purr of Black Cats storage and furniture removal vans.

Braking of night cars with square-green firefly license plates.

Rail sounds of *Odakyū* Line Locals and Expresses.

And ever your own chorus

of caw-speaking crow battalions.

### **sakura**

sakura Tokyo

of white heron

flutter striding

along the Mukōgaoka-yūen

river-canal by the small

dry rice-field under spring

sun cherry-blooms

and white-pink cloud

swirl of petals

sakura Tokyo  
of Shinjuku Gyoen  
National Garden  
weeping *shidare*  
city *somei*  
March-April  
open to view *hanami*

sakura Tokyo  
of tree and branch  
as 17-syllable  
precise as haiku  
lovely as an Edo  
flower kimono  
picturesque as a Kanto  
shrine festival

sakura Tokyo  
of rain with petals  
necklaced  
around the cruising  
duck and above the restless  
brown river carp

sakura Tokyo  
of color and odor  
jasmine azalea  
lemon iris

sakura Tokyo

of also pollen murder  
for your sinuses  
a hay fever storm  
a histamine ambush  
an allergy rampage

sakura Tokyo  
of reach for your kleenex  
and your best Japanese decongestant  
amid whirling  
small angel  
petalled blossom glories

sakura Tokyo  
of gaze and admire  
yet also sneeze  
as rivulets of salt  
eye-drops well  
and flow over a  
drip drop nose for beauty

***kakitsubata***

Step through fashion Tokyo  
Omotesando-Harajuku

Step through well-dressed, well-heeled  
Prada, Cartier, Gucci, Dior

Step through bamboo alley  
Nezu Museum, *Nezu bijutsukan*

Step through China, Korea gallery

Edo's Ogata Kōrin's iris screens

Step through 12-folds of linen paper

Purple flower on green stem cluster

Step through two-color stalk and bloom

Eyes on painted movement, stillness

Step through balance, composition, grace

Art's time and season flower poetry

Step through elegant glassware portal into

Gardens of lantern, pagoda, seated Buddha

Step through pergola, bamboo hoops along

Positioned terrace, terraced rock

Step through downward slope towards

Pond iris, upright against breeze and ripple

Step through citted Tokyo

Kōrin originals still alive in May

Step through gardened shade and green

Nature's originals still alive in May



**“Japan 8.9”**

Auden’s Icarus gives the right measure:  
Tragedy as we eat, open a window, walk dully along.

Tokyo—I feel the irritation of  
unheated train, unlit carriage, stilled elevator,  
the unsought request to deal with  
Rolling Power Outage, conserved electric power,  
the save energy on-offs at the ATM,  
the run on plastic-bottled water.  
Nobody asked for this.

Tokyo—we all have our March 11, 2011 story.  
Tsunami. Quake. Reactor.  
Mine was to see a city street surge and shudder,  
look upon macadam splitting,  
watch high-rises sway,  
join a bus lane full of shoppers and store people,  
hear the plated glass doors of an office block  
rattle like violent false teeth,  
and walk to Shinjuku Station for a 12 hour wait as  
rail lines received check, systems inspection.  
Nobody asked for this.

And then guilt, needed diminution, at the played-over TV  
of  
sea-raged Miyagi tsunami wave,  
jagged Tohoku earth split,  
floating matchbox coast of Sendai,  
rooftop tidal collisions with boat and bridge.  
Nobody asked for this.

Fukushima Dai-ichi.

Fukushima Number One.

Fukushima's heat and poison.

Fukushima black fire smoke, white hydrogen steam.

Reactor vesuviuses, Plutonium vulcans.

Pacific winds, and clouds, and particle-bearing rain.

Repair-worker heroism of nerve and duty.

Irradiated air and underfoot water.

Nobody asked for this.

A whole invader language of

iodine-131, caesium, zirconium, argon,

bone, liver, thyroid, lymphocyte,

microsievert and becquerel,

rods, fuel pool and coolant

helicoptered and fire-engined sea-water spray.

Nobody asked for this.

And

each

augmenting

number

of bodies dead, drowned, beached, coffined, missing,

and

each

augmenting

number

of bodies

evacuated, orphaned, un-housed, school-gymnasium futoned.

Nobody asked for this.

I try to stand my petty ground in the face of  
 every ongoing after shock,  
 every smaller saw-tooth grind of the plates below  
 five kilometers, ten kilometers, twenty kilometers down.  
 The *konbini* runs out of rice or pot noodles.  
 Bans on Ibaraki spinach and broccoli.  
 Should you eat the washed lettuce,  
 wear the washing-machined clothes,  
 drink *o-cha* watered from your own tap,  
 face-mask your breathing in everyday Tokyo?  
 And then see firefighter, soldiery, engineer, entering Fukushima  
 with radiation meters strapped to waist or chest like outside lungs.  
 Clockworks of risk, ticking cancer.  
 And listen to TEPCO, Kan and Edano.  
 And listen to each cliché, Japanese calm, good order.  
 And watch tears, disbelief, anger.  
 China checks Japanese produce.  
 Nobody asked for this.

Each timeline memory stirs—  
 1923 and Tokyo's Great Kanto Earthquake  
 1995 and Kobe's Great Hanshin Earthquake  
 1979 and Three Mile Island  
 1986 and Chernobyl.  
 And now, like some redivivus China Syndrome,  
 some nuclear string-arithmetic,  
 Reactor 1.2.3.4.5.6.  
 Nobody asked for this.

More death in the northeast.  
 More bodies.  
 More quakes.

More floating isotopes.

More shindo scale.

More richter scale.

More “missing.”

Less plastic bottled water  
(even for baby thyroids).

Less carriage journey heat.

Less light on the trains.

Less moving escalators.

Less vegetables.

Less *konbini* altogether.

Nobody asked for this.

Both more and both less.

8.9 or 9.0.

Japanese or western scale.

Nobody asked for this.

Nobody at all.

**“Badeling Wall Curve”**

Off from Beijing in December cold.

China Great Wall Badeling.

A mind-ply of other walls.

Berlin. Frost poem. Pink Floyd.

Qin, Han, Sui, Ming dynasties.

Juyongguan Pass.

Read up on Manchu, nomadic Mongol.

Fortified, unfortified China.

Then funicular mountain-ride.

Then pathway, watchtower, embrickment.

The eye-line follows.

Rise and dip. Corner and straight.

Snow-strewn walk.

The very postcard of a 10,000 Li Wall.

One of the visitor throng.

Winter-clad, headgeared for climate.

What is for you alone?

What does the sighting eye claim for its own?

You follow wall curvature, swerve.

And, just, enter the imagined deeper bend.

Time-bend, history-bend.

The lean into epoch, dynasty.

Breath expels, legs seize.

But mind conjures gyre, China cycle.

It's a hard imagining in the frost.

A cold wall of emperor, soldier, change.

Then you revolve back to present.

Your next best leg forward wall corner.

### **“Taipei 101”**

It takes no time at all to learn that 101

means floor number, vertical level.

Stairway to Heaven. Almost. Via zoom elevator.

91<sup>st</sup> floor observatory. Taiwan in relief.

*Feng shui* notwithstanding, and four a taboo,

A four-side city panorama and you think equivalences.

Four points of the compass. Four elements.

Four seasons. The Amadeus String Quartet.

The eyes open, amaze, squint, roll.

A touch of vertigo, a check of the window's glass thickness.

You look down upon summits of each Xiani District high-rise.

Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, Hillary, on highest Everest ridge.

It's then that thoughts of quake, drift, tempest, enter.

New technology gives due comfort: *Tuned Mass Damper*.

Suspended pendulum, interior globe, circle-plates, cables.

So close to sky, to cloud, can all be safe?

First time view and it feels like one or another Space Capsule.

Shuttle cone. NASA Mars probe. Soyuz.

Not to mention Dustin Hoffman *Sphere*, George Lucas *Death Star*.

Are you still on earth or extra-planetary?

But the *Damper*, well, dampens, stills all sway.

Not, however, all of yourself.

Inner ear, stomach, ganglia, dry throat.

Cockpit nerves of Canaveral launch, Kazakhstan landing?

But then you grow bold, Skyscraper101 A+ student.

Restaurant, mall, business office, each a building text.

Even the Fitness Center. Even the Library.

You rise to the occasion.

### **“Angkor Wat Bowl”**

I know, I know ... you're right

World Heritage fare

Siem Reap Province

beehive turret-towers

galleried corridors

temple corners

palmed waterways

India to Cambodia friezes

Ganesh and Monkey

dancing shivas

Thai over Khmer war engravings

tree root-tentacles

Buddhist metropole

A look of deliquescence

peeled paint

steps crumbled

“Magnificent”

“Lost Civilization”

“Time Palace”

And amid your clamber

your viewfinder shots

the neophyte monk

young, shaven, red-robed

plus

bowl

comes at you.

In buddhist-business English

“A dollar for a photograph”

“Please place in bowl”

Is this world heritage

too?

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Afterword**

*The above poems were taken from a number of my recent verse collections. They each give tribute to the Asia, and Japan in particular, in which it was my good chance to spend well over a decade. They endeavour to pick up on the temper of place, the cultural energies of sight and sound. “Tokyo Quartet”, “Japan 8.9” and “Angkor Wat Bowl” appeared in *Ars Geographica* (2012), “Badeling Wall Curve” in *Imaginarium: Sightings, Galleries* (2013), and “Taipei 101” in *Portrait and Landscape: Further Geographies* (2013).*

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### **About the Journal**

The Editor welcomes unsolicited contributions to the Journal, but the vast majority of papers accepted for publication come from the related IAFOR conferences and are usually closely associated with the themes of the conferences. Papers are mostly selected for publication in April and May, to be published in the Northern autumn of the same year. Contributors are expected to submit the initial draft of their paper in The IAFOR Journal house style, which is APA (the academic style of the journal of the American Psychological Association: see the Purdue Owl for details at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>). If accepted for publication, the paper's style will likely be slightly modified to provide consistency across papers. British and U.S. English are both acceptable, but spelling and punctuation conventions should be consistent with the form of English used. In-text citations rather than footnotes should be used for references to secondary sources. General notes should be in the form of footnotes rather than endnotes, and should *not* be manually inserted (use Word's automatic formatting). Generally contributions should be between 4,000 and 7,000 words in length. Japanese names should follow the modified Hepburn system of transliteration, including the use of macrons for long vowels.

**Contributors for whom English is not a native language are responsible for having their manuscript corrected by a native-speaking academic prior to submitting their paper for publication.**





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