

Imag(in)ing the War in Japan

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Imag(in)ing the War in Japan

Representing and Responding to
Trauma in Postwar Literature and Film

Edited by

David Stahl and Mark Williams



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On the cover: Girl with skull (Nagasaki, August 10, 1945), Yamahata Yōsuke, courtesy of Yamahata Shōgo/IDG Films.

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INTRODUCTION

David C. Stahl and Mark B. Williams

“To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event”
(Caruth 1995: 4–5).

“Representation is cognition” (Davis 2001: 5).

“This response, this *response-ability*, is what I wish to call...conscience
in its social form” (Des Pres 1976: 46).

Introduction

It is surely a truism that the contribution of art to the constitution, integration and comprehension of traumatic historical events has yet to be sufficiently acknowledged, articulated or realized. In *Legacies and Ambiguities: Postwar Fiction and Culture in West Germany and Japan*, for example, Ernestine Schlant observes that

[p]oliticians and political scientists, economists, journalists, opinion makers, and poll takers all form their conclusions according to some ‘objective’ criteria, but rarely, if ever, is literature consulted. Yet literature is the seismograph of a people’s dreams and nightmares, hopes and apprehensions...literary truth often goes deeper than political or economic analysis, and it reflects the conditions and values of the society under which it was created (Schlant 1991: 1).

Historians could arguably be added to Schlant’s list of those who, all too often, fail to “consult” literature—or film for that matter—in producing their narratives of traumatic events and experiences. In fact, the undervaluation and neglect of artistic works by historians, political scientists, economists, journalists etc. help explain why so many constitutive elements of the Asia Pacific War (e.g., the Nanjing atrocities, ‘comfort women’, Hiroshima) remain controversial and insufficiently fathomed to this day.

According to Walter Davis, traumatic events and experiences must be constituted before they can be assimilated, integrated and understood (Davis 2003: 142). In which case, what constituent elements of trauma are ‘missing’ or under-represented in conventional historical

accounts? This question cuts to the heart of the matter, because what is excluded from public memory and consciousness—primary affects, embodied, individualized experience, psychodynamics, contingency, ideological critique—can be as significant, if not more so, than what is included. Over-reliance on ‘objective’ investigation, logic and rational analysis of carefully vetted ‘historical facts’ often results in the traumatic stories of the past being only partially told.

Contemporary scholars such as Dominick LaCapra, John Dower and Walter Davis insist that emotion is integral to the traumatic historical experience and its understanding. Dower, for instance, writes that

vengeance and racial hatred were powerful sentiments that shaped the conduct of the war on both sides, and to pretend otherwise is dishonest.... Sheer visceral hatred drives people at war every bit as much as valor, every bit as much as rationality, every bit as much as patriotism, loyalty, or sense of duty (Dower 1996: 86).

Drawing upon their formidable powers of intuition and imagination to create potent, affect-charged forms and images of extreme historical violence, psychological damage and ideological contradiction, artists enable their audiences to virtually engage, internalize, ‘know’ and respond to trauma in concrete, human terms.

Much of importance about the War has been systematically suppressed, ignored, denied, distorted, avoided, naturalized, neutralized, silenced and rendered ‘taboo’ in public, national and international discourse. Serious artists—both survivor-narrators and those with no direct experience of the deadly conflict at home or abroad—use not only language, but also image to help constitute dissociated and marginalized historical realities and, in so doing, make it possible for them to be recognized, worked over, worked through, comprehended and responded to. Such artistic representations of the brutal, disavowed actualities of the belligerent past, moreover, have profound ramifications for contemporary conceptualizations of past, current and future identity, politics and action. In this sense, art serves as the “conscience of its community” (Davis 2007: 7). With the aforementioned issues, dynamics and interrelationships in mind, we have entitled this volume *Imag(in)ing the War in Japan: Representing and Responding to Trauma in Postwar Literature and Film*.

The Trauma of War

One of our central operating premises in this volume is the assumption that the events, experiences and aftermath of the Asia Pacific War were not only traumatic for the majority of Japanese people and the nation as a whole at the time, but have continued to be so to the present day.¹ This, of course, is not to suggest or imply that all Japanese individuals and groups registered war-related trauma in the same way or with the same intensity or temporality. In fact, as will be discussed below, two of the most striking characteristics of trauma are its “dislocation” and “belatedness” (Caruth 1995: 7–9, 153). What is especially true in this latter regard for people who have been traumatized directly during and after the War, moreover, seems to hold true for those of subsequent generations who have been—and continue to be—‘infected’ by the ‘contagious’ traumatic events and experiences of the wartime and immediate postwar past. Thus, in Japan and elsewhere, there appear to be significant yet under-appreciated transgenerational dimensions to personal and collective war-related trauma and its representation. With regard to the present study, we suggest that Japanese artists affected by such trauma, whether directly or indirectly, can be understood to be engaging in ongoing, collaborative projects aimed at more fully constituting particular traumatic experiences and events in cognitive, affective and ethical terms.

Before turning to the theoretical groundwork that will provide the overarching critical contexts and interpretive frameworks for the essays collected in this volume, some preliminary commentary on the complexities of trauma, its artistic representation and reception are here in order so that the specific focal points—and limitations—of the present study can be clearly identified and contextualized. We begin with a series of relevant distinctions related to discrete identities, roles,

¹ Kai Erikson’s discussion of individual and collective trauma is useful in this regard: “By *individual trauma* I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one’s defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively.... By *collective trauma*... I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with ‘trauma’. But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared...” (Caruth 1995: 187).

temporalities and spatialities. First, there are people who have been directly involved in traumatic war-related events and those who have not. The identity of the former, moreover, can be that of victim or victimizer (and in some cases both simultaneously), and their personal experience of trauma and its after effects will be shaped by such variables as age (adult or child), gender, role (combatant or non-combatant), nationality, culture, class, political orientation, etc.

As for the people who create artistic representations of traumatic events and experiences, some are directly involved as perpetrator or victim/survivor, others as witnesses, and still others are not present at the time or place of traumatic occurrence. In terms of the specific timeframes of production and consumption, distinctions should also be maintained between artists who created representations of trauma in the chaotic social and political context of defeat and occupation, those who did so in later decades and differing socio-political circumstances, and the people who read/watch such works—in the original or in translation—in the shifting social, cultural, historical and political context of their home countries. In all such cases, nationality, subject position and social, political and cultural context will affect both production and reception.

With these diverse, multiple and shifting identities, roles, spaces and times in mind, we note up front that in this study we are dealing exclusively with Japanese artists imag(in)ing the Japanese battlefield, home front and postwar experience in novels, short stories, poetry, photography, live action and animated film.² In so doing, we are well aware that we run the risk of ‘nationalizing’ the Asia Pacific War experience. We hasten to add, however, that no country has a monopoly on the human suffering and loss brought about by modern, total war, and that many of the traumas imag(in)ed in this volume, while particular and individualized, have global resonance and significance. As with conventional narrative histories, nationalized victim/victimizer binaries can conceal as much as they reveal. Indeed, in many cases, the role

² There are of course, Japanese artistic representations of the war experience of ‘the Other’ as well as scholarly studies on them. See for example: Ishikawa Tatsuzō’s *Ikiteiru heitai* (Soldiers Alive, 1945 [2003]), Kobayashi Masaki’s *Ningen no jōken* (The Human Condition, 1958–61), David C. Stahl, *The Burdens of Survival: Ōoka Shōhei’s Writings on the Pacific War*. But, for the purposes of this volume, we are limiting our inquiry to the Japanese response to their own traumatic experiences of the War.

played by historical actors and groups in this regard is ambiguous in the extreme (Dower 1996: 70, 95).

It is our hope that this volume will mark the beginning of a more expansive and inclusive undertaking, and we encourage other scholars to take up and pursue similar lines of inquiry with an eye to filling in the ‘gaps’ in our historical knowledge and understanding of the traumas of the Asia Pacific War by examining not only the artistic works produced by Japanese survivor- and perpetrator-narrators and their concerned compatriots, but those created by, amongst others, their Korean, Taiwanese, Chinese, Southeast Asian, Pacific Islander, British and American counterparts as well. Our efforts are admittedly far from complete even in this former regard.³ We do, however, offer detailed, in-depth ‘readings’ of representative Japanese artistic works from diverse genres produced by artists who fall into three basic groupings: 1) those who were adults during the war and its aftermath (i.e., Shiina Rinzō, Kurihara Sadako, Tōge Sankichi, Yamahata Yōsuke); 2) those who were children during the war (i.e., Nosaka Akiyuki, Ōe Kenzaburō, Mishima Yukio, Fukasaku Kinji, Matsumoto Akira, Tomino Yoshiyuki); and 3) those born postwar (i.e., Murakami Haruki, Medoruma Shun, Okuizumi Hikaru).⁴ In our organization of the material, however, we have, for the most part, decided to sequence the essays chronologically in terms of the traumatic historical events/experiences at the heart of the work(s) examined (e.g., 2–26 Incident, Nomonhan, Battle of Leyte Island, Kobe firebombing, Battle of Okinawa, atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki).

By way of further introduction to this volume, let us turn now to a consideration of the core theoretical perspectives that provide the interpretive frameworks and critical contexts for the essays that follow. We begin by considering the experience and aftereffects of trauma and the convoluted processes by which survivor-narrators struggle to represent and (re)constitute their experiences—and reintegrate

³ We do not, for instance, incorporate studies of major Japanese works such as Yoshida Mitsuru’s *Senkan Yamato no saigo* (Requiem for Battleship Yamato, 1952 [1985]), Ooka Shōhei’s *Nobi* (Fires on the Plain, 1952 [1957]), Ibuse Masuji’s *Kuroi ame* (Black Rain, 1966 [1978]), Kawabata Yasunari’s *Nemureru bijo* (Sleeping Beauties, 1961 [1969]), Ōe Kenzaburō’s *Kojinteki na taiken* (A Personal Matter, 1964 [1969]), or Imamura Shōhei’s *Fukushū suru wa ware ni ari* (Vengeance is Mine, 1979), to name but a representative sample.

⁴ For details concerning the diverse—and problematic—categorical divisions of postwar Japanese writers, see Angela Yiu’s essay in this volume.

themselves—through artistic expression. Next, we seek to substantiate our claim that great works of traumatic art in general, and the dialectical images created in them in particular, comprise distinct, independent modes of representing, constituting, cognizing and responding to unprecedented historical events and experiences. Finally, we turn to critical matters regarding the relationships between concerned observers, the traumatized observed and their artistic representations of overwhelming experience.

Representing the Self: Acting Out, Working Over and Working Through Trauma

As the critic Cathy Caruth has been at pains to point out in her writings on the subject, the experience of trauma is distinguished from other responses to pain and suffering in that it elicits, not simply a frequent and unwitting repetition of the traumatic event, but also the voice that cries out reminding the agent what has happened in his/her life and bearing witness to the past in the form of some forgotten wound (Caruth 1996: 2ff). Integral to this definition is the acknowledgement that the traumatic event is not—cannot be—fully assimilated as it occurs. Instead, there is, by definition, a period of latency during which the effects of the experience are not readily apparent—and during which the survivor of the trauma seeks to come to terms with the existence of a radically altered sense of self, one that may even be viewed as a second self. To be sure, the self thus created is not totally new. It nevertheless holds that recovery from trauma cannot be effected without reintegration of the traumatized self.

The implications for the trauma survivor—and particularly for the survivor seeking to bear artistic witness to this process—are significant. On the one hand, regardless of the length of the period of latency, and of whether or not the events of the past are reconstituted literally, the survivor does, as LaCapra articulates, periodically feel as if s/he “were back there reliving the event, and the distance between here and there, then and now, collapses” (LaCapra 2001: 89); in short, the survivor experiences a sense of “traumatic *dasein*”, of experientially being there anxiously reliving in its immediacy something that was a shattering experience for which s/he was not prepared. At the same time, however, the period of latency allows for greater critical mediation—for a

degree of perspective that allows him/her to begin “the arduous process of working over and through the trauma” (*ibid*: 90).

Seen in this light, the image is of the trauma survivor as living, not with memories, but with an ongoing, as yet unassimilated event. In these circumstances, Shoshana Felman suggests that all the survivor can do is to “construct a narrative, reconstruct a history and re-externalize the event” (Felman & Laub 1992: 69).⁵ And such narratives, far from representing faithful histories of the event—‘simple recollections’—would appear destined to address the question posed by Caruth: “What does it mean to transmit and to theorize around a crisis that is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness?” (Caruth 1996: 5).

The image of the act of memory referring, not simply to a recounting of the past, but to making sense of it—as “an interpretive act the end of which is an enlarged understanding of the self” (Freeman 1993: 29)—is one with which all artists engaged in the process of representing the self find themselves confronted. The past is not—and cannot be seen as—‘simply there’, ready for faithful elucidation, as such a view ignores the role exercised by the imagination in the act of binding ‘facts’ together through narration, and in creating the “hypothetical synthesis geared toward ‘unraveling’ the truth of the past” (*ibid*: 118). Or, as the novelist, Philip Roth claimed following his much publicized attempt at autobiographical writing, “Memories of the past are not memories of facts, but memories of your imaginings of facts” (Roth 1988: 8).

In the case of traumatic recollection, moreover, the situation is exacerbated by the fact that, “while the images...remain absolutely accurate and precise, they are largely inaccessible to conscious recall and control” (Caruth 1995: 151). Thus, the survivor struggles not so much with an overwhelming experience that has been obstructed, but an event that is constituted by its very lack of conscious imagination; as such, it cannot become either a narrative memory or a completed story of the past—but remains as “a history that literally *has no place*, neither (*sic*) in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in

⁵ It should be noted that, *contra* Felman, others would argue that the primary challenge/task of survivors and their empathetic others in this regard is that of internalizing the trauma and sustaining tragic consciousness. We shall return to this issue in the next section of this introduction.

the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood" (*ibid*: 153).

As time progresses, there may be an increasing tendency for the traumatized individual to come to terms with the seemingly irreconcilable nature of this situation. At the same time, however, as critical distance is achieved, so this resignation tends to be fused with another, more immediate issue: the question of whether the trauma is the encounter with death—or rather the ongoing experience of having survived. This concern lies at the core of so many traumatic narratives, many of which oscillate between the story of the unbearable nature of the event one survived and the story of the equally unbearable nature of its survival. To be sure, such narratives are marked by a sense of the survivor needing to survive in order to tell. There is, at the same time, a concomitant realization of the need to tell in order to survive. In this scenario, the survival and the bearing witness become reciprocal acts, events in which the writing represents, not merely a means of vision, but the very key to survival.

In her consideration of the specific role of literary testimony, Felman suggests that, at its core lies an attempt to “open up in that belated witness...the reader...the imaginative capability of perceiving history—what is happening to others—in *one’s own body*, with the power of sight (of insight) usually afforded only by one’s own immediate physical involvement” (Felman & Laub 1992: 108). We are talking then of a performative engagement between consciousness and history, one in which the artist is tasked with transforming words and images into events, and in making an act of every text. Such representation, then, is not a (re)living of a past event; it is rather an act, the consequences of which—the attempt to record faithfully what is going on—cannot but transform the experience itself. For, as Freeman reminds us,

language cannot help but deform and distort one’s memories of the past; it replaces them, by putting something else in their stead [because] experience is always fuller and richer than the articulate formula by which we try to be aware of it or recover it... The gap between experience itself and the words we employ to describe it can never be bridged (Freeman 1993: 87–8).

To be sure, there will be those who ask how one can know that this “gap” is unbridgeable. For his part, however, Freeman emphasizes the need not to underestimate the extent to which the “narrative imagination, engaged in the project of rewriting the self, seeks to disclose,

articulate, and reveal that very world which, literally, *would not have existed* had the act of writing not taken place” (*ibid*: 223).

The consequences for the author of traumatic testimony are profound: the moment s/he calls up a former experience, an element of fictionalization intrudes as early mental formations are superseded and new ones created. Already, there is an element of going beyond what was an attempt to situate the experiences of the past in a comprehensive, interpretive context. We are, nevertheless, a long way from a simple ‘falsification’ of the ‘truth’. Instead, argues Freeman, such narratives, “rather than being the mere fictions they are sometimes assumed to be, might instead be in the service of attaining exactly those forms of truth that are unavailable in the flux of the immediate” (*ibid*: 224). On the one hand, this process of recollection may be essential if the original facts and origins are to take on new meaning and significance in the light of the present; this cannot, however, mask the fact that what unites the two elements is the process of representation itself, that which Freeman describes as “a fundamentally poetic act in which the twists and turns of what had formerly been present become figured into a story of the past” (*ibid*: 117).

Once more, though, in the case of artistic testimony of trauma, the situation is exacerbated by the author’s ongoing status as survivor still working through the experience. In LaCapra’s portrayal, such recollections “may involve distortion, disguise, and other permutations relating to processes of imaginative transformation and narrative shaping, as well as perhaps repression, denial, dissociation, and foreclosure”. LaCapra continues by acknowledging that “these issues have a bearing only on certain aspects of [a given] account, and could not invalidate it in its entirety” (LaCapra 2001: 88–9). They do, nevertheless, lead to a distinct narrative style, one that, in the estimation of the critic, Berel Lang, in his consideration of literary portrayals of trauma in Nazi Germany, “is intended to be ‘read through’,...designed to enable readers to see what they would otherwise see differently or perhaps not at all...by denying the distance between the writer, text, what is written about and, finally, the reader”. In this mode, suggests Lang, “the author does not write to provide access to something independent of both author and reader, but ‘writes himself’” (Lang 1990: xii).

The process of representing and reintegrating the self under such circumstances is inevitably complex. There are nevertheless two clearly identifiable stages to this process, both of which are crucial for

distancing the writer from the original trauma, for laying certain ghosts to rest—and for renewing interest in life and the future. LaCapra describes this multi-faceted approach in the following terms:

Writing trauma... involves processes of acting out, working over, and to some extent working through in analyzing and 'giving voice' to the past—processes of coming to terms with traumatic 'experiences', limit events, and their symptomatic effects that achieve articulation in different combinations and hybridized forms.... [It] is often seen in terms of enacting it, which may at times be equated with acting (or playing) it out in performative discourse or artistic practice (LaCapra 2001: 186–7).

The distinction between these stages of the process is crucial. But how do they find expression and what is the relationship between them? In his consideration of these issues, LaCapra offers the following definition of the process of acting out trauma:

Acting out is related to repetition, and even the repetition compulsion.... This is very clear in the case of people who undergo a trauma. They have a tendency to relive the past, to be haunted by ghosts or even to exist in the present as if one were still fully in the past, with no distance from it.... For people who have been severely traumatized, it may be impossible to fully transcend acting out the past (*ibid*: 142–3).

At this stage in the process, the past tends to be relived as if fully present and, rather than finding representation in memory and inscription, it frequently returns as the haunting voice of the repressed. The result, in the narrative created during this stage of the process, is for the past to be performatively regenerated as if it were the present, this often being reflected in a confusion of narrative tenses leading to a sense of the writer back in the past, reliving it.

The shift from this stage to the situation wherein the author embarks on the process of working through the trauma may be subtle, even imperceptible; we are talking here, not of a linear teleological, development process, but of a gradual evolution, one that may involve a series of combined or hybridized phases during which time possession by the past may never be totally transcended. The shift is nevertheless often readily identifiable, marked off in the narrative portrayal by a heightened ability to distinguish between past and present—to “recall in memory that something happened to one.... back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future” (*ibid*: 22)—and to articulate this process with greater critical perspective. To LaCapra, this represents an important “countervailing force” to the

process of acting out—since for the victim this means the ability to say to him/herself, “Yes, that happened to me back then. It was distressing, overwhelming, perhaps I can’t entirely disengage myself from it, but I’m existing here and now, and this is different from back then” (*ibid*: 144).

Seen thus, the process is clearly distinguished from a simple avoidance or forgetting of the past and submerging oneself in the present. It requires going back to the issues, working them over, at least until the endless repetition compulsion is transcended, and recognizing why this whole process is desirable, even necessary. On occasions, too, it will require an overcoming of a deep-seated resistance to any sense of working through the issues in a manner that enables survival or re-engagement in life—as this could represent a betrayal of all those who were overwhelmed and consumed by the traumatic past; in such circumstances, a bond with other victims may create an unconscious desire to remain within the trauma, thereby invalidating any form of imaginative or narrative transformation.

Artistic Form, “Vital Images” and “Hermeneutic Engagement”

Having considered the nature of trauma and the challenges confronting the artist seeking artistic representation of the traumatic process, attention must now turn to examination of the important role artistic representation plays in constituting and cognizing the traumatic experience. According to Walter Davis, art is a primary, independent means of comprehending history and trauma that “transcends the order of the concept and what can be known within the conceptual medium” by imagining and generating new forms that adequately represent unprecedented historical events, and by concretely visualizing the psychological and emotional conflicts that are integral to violent, shattering experiences (Davis 2001: 13). In so doing, great works of traumatic art ultimately confront their audiences with the chilling psychological and existential possibility that “Thanatos not Reason directs History” (*ibid* 2006: 62). To the extent that this is true, the creative works of artists who represent historical trauma can be appreciated as significant acts of political resistance on multiple fronts, because “the way artists know is not only different; it liberates a knowledge of the Real that official historical methods are designed to conceal” (*ibid* 2001: 6). If, following Marx, the central role of ideology is “the

creation within subjects of the conditions that make it impossible for them to understand their historical situation” (*ibid* 2007: 3; *ibid* 2006: 12), then the critical role of art is “to provide a forum dedicated to the public airing of secrets, the public representation of the conflicts and contradictions central to our culture” (*ibid* 2003: 148–9).

Davis’ central insight regarding the unique revelatory power of art is expressed in his maxim, “Representation is cognition” (*ibid* 2001: 5). Form, in this sense, literally determines content because “a narrative paradigm functions from the beginning of any historical inquiry”, and “the limits of a person’s narrative framework—of the kinds of stories one can tell—establish the limits of what that person can know and experience” (*ibid*: 4). What distinguishes art in this regard is not only its capacity to access, ‘embody’ and communicate the affective dimensions of personal, lived experience, but also to progressively evolve the novel forms necessary for the apprehension of new historical developments (*ibid*: 217). Davis credits certain twentieth-century writers with perceiving and responding to the fact that the “extant modes of narration . . . are not adequate to the ‘facts’ of contemporary history or to the relationships authors must form to readers if those facts are to be comprehended” (*ibid*: 5). He elaborates on the implications of this for constituting and comprehending historical trauma as follows:

The artist knows that the primary source of artistic creation derives from art’s *immanent critique* of its own forms in terms of their inadequacy to the apprehension of new historical experiences. . . . The historical imperative that defines art as cognition is especially clear when an artist confronts a traumatic historical event. . . . The duty of poets as true, dialectical historians is to create the new artistic forms that will constitute words, affects and representations ‘adequate’ to . . . ‘unspeakable’ reality. . . . Art is that way of knowing which evolves forms fit to its historical occasion (*ibid* 2007: 80–1).

The ramifications of this position to the traumas of the Asia Pacific War and its aftermath are both profound and far-reaching: until the artistic forms “adequate” to unprecedented historical realities such as Hiroshima, Nanjing, ‘comfort stations’ etc. are intuited, imag(in)ed and circulated, the full historical, political, psychological, emotional and ethical significance of these events and experiences will remain unknown (*ibid*: 82–3; *ibid* 2001: 217).

One of the definitive characteristics of artistic expression is its ability to represent historical trauma in terms of the situated immediacies of affective experience (*ibid*). Observing that “reason is a wonderful

thing but...as moral beings we are finally what we are able to feel” (*ibid* 2006: 165), Davis identifies “creating new affects” as the “primary business of great [artistic] works” (*ibid* 2001: 228). He provides the following example of what he means by this—one that also facilitates our transition to a consideration of the centrality of images to historical knowledge and understanding:

Brought before the bar of historical investigation and forced to speak, Itzhak Zuckerman, soldier in the Warsaw ghetto and survivor of Auschwitz, responded to the insistent demand of Claude Lanzmann to contribute to the historical record with a deathless poem: “If you could lick my heart it would poison you” (*ibid*: 14).

In the following passage, Davis explicates the signifying power of Zuckerman’s arresting expression:

The image is Zuckerman’s thrust toward an awareness that can be known only insofar as it is suffered—by Lanzmann and by us—in an awareness that obliterates the documentary form of historical inquiry and with it any distinction between knowing and suffering. The violence of the image, and its truth, is that it contains a cognition that refuses to relinquish itself to the concept (*ibid*: 212).

Images are the basic components of a primitive language and mode of awareness and cognition. They are capable of concretely picturing dramatic, affect-charged experience in such a way as to defy linguistic or rational containment (*ibid*: 198). Traumatic events are affectively registered and ‘crystallized’ in indelible, iconic imagery that political forces subsequently labor to transform into abstract conceptions in order to (re)impose ideological control over history. The political dimensions of historical trauma and “traumatic memory” as opposed to “narrative memory”⁶ help us appreciate what Rilke had in mind when he declared that the artist’s task is “to wait for that which has become concept to become again image” (*ibid*: 6).

“Vital images” (*ibid*: 204) are the enduring products of overpowering experiences that vividly and accurately ‘freeze’, embody and visualize the conflicted terms of traumatic experience so that they

⁶ “Narrative memory” “consists of mental constructs, which people use to make sense out of experience”. “Traumatic memory”, in contrast, resists incorporation into a sensible narrative story because the overwhelming event, due to its suddenness or horror, cannot be fully assimilated and integrated into the schema of prior knowledge at the time of occurrence (Caruth 1995: 153, 160).

can subsequently be accessed, ‘thawed’, worked over and through, (re)constituted, known and acted upon:

Contra [Silvano] Arieti, the image is not the record of loss, but the fight against loss. In image we make a permanent record of those experiences we can never be done with, and can never fathom until we unlock the drama frozen in them.... Image stores with utter, primitive precision a primary context of human relations apprehended in the inherent violence of the real as it imposes itself on us.... The image is thus that cognition of the truth of what every other discourse rushes to deny. For image says “No” on two fronts simultaneously. It rescues an event from silence and forgetting. It then sustains the event over against its domestication through rationalizing explanations (*ibid*: 208–9).

‘Reading’ such a radically revelatory and inherently subversive “expression or expressive text” of trauma (*ibid*: 196) calls for a “hermeneutic of engagement” (*ibid* 2006: 4), the primary aim of which is to “unlock the condition arrested in the image in order to activate the agon implicit in it” (*ibid* 2001: 223). And because traumatic images assault us with the suppressed and repressed realities of our seemingly limitless capacity for cruelty, violence and destruction, articulating their significance requires the courage to “[descend] into the heart of our collective disorders” (*ibid* 2003: 166).⁷ Returning to a point touched upon at the beginning of this section, “vital images” confront us with the grave existential prospect that “the relationship between Eros and Thanatos is not eternal but historical to the core with the end of that dialectic entailing the possible extinction of one of the terms” (*ibid* 2001: 38). In light of such ominous psychological, emotional, political and historical circumstances, Davis concludes that, “art’s task [must be] that of Orpheus: to descend and unearth those images that combat and actively reverse [Death]” (*ibid*: 231).

Subject Position, Identity Politics and “Response-ability”

Outside observers working with highly contested, “[emotionally] charged, value-related events and those involved in them” (LaCapra 2001: 103) should endeavor to become as fully conscious of the nature of their subjects and their personal relationship to/with them as possi-

⁷ For representative examples of such “vital images”, see Sakaguchi Ango’s “Haku-chi” (The Idiot 1946 [1962]), p. 414 and Ōe Kenzaburo’s “Shiiku” (Prize Stock 1958 [1977]), pp. 160–1.

ble. LaCapra's recent work on trauma, its enduring psychological after-effects and signification is useful in this regard. LaCapra approaches the relationship between observer and observed in terms of subject position, identity politics and "empathetic unsettlement".

Interrogating one's subject position thoroughly at the outset is essential to engaging and interpreting—and, in the case of indirectly affected artists, producing—artistic representations of trauma. Concerned students of traumatic representation, be they Japanese or non-Japanese scholars, artists, readers or viewers, should be aware of their self positioning vis-à-vis their chosen subjects in light of their own psychological and ideological orientations (Tyson 1999: 286). The specific subject position one occupies—or consciously or unconsciously adopts—can substantially affect how one approaches, understands and responds to recreations of historical trauma. Here, one enters the vexed realm of identity politics, and it behooves all of us to be cognizant of the dangers involved lest we end up inadvertently adopting an inappropriate or illegitimate position. As LaCapra explains,

one has to be able to study certain problems, even if one is a member of the population (either oppressed or oppressing) that isn't totally within identity politics but that tries to achieve some perspective on identity politics. One way in which you can define identity politics is in terms of a form of thinking wherein research or thought simply validates your beginning subject position. Through identity politics, your initial subject position remains firm and, if anything, through research or inquiry is further strengthened time and again. Yet the challenge of research and thought is somehow to try to test critically, perhaps in certain ways validate, or perhaps transform one's subject position, so that one doesn't end up where one began (LaCapra 2001: 174–5).

LaCapra goes on to outline two basic approaches that outside observers can take toward their internal or external traumatized/victimized others: identification (of two kinds) and "empathetic unsettlement". He defines identification as

the unmediated fusion of self and other in which the otherness or alterity of the other is not recognized and respected. It may involve what Melanie Klein treats as projective identification in which aspects not acknowledged in the self are attributed to the other. It may also involve incorporation in which aspects of the other are taken into or encrypted in the self (*ibid*: 27).

In the case of the former, one is apt to stereotype or demonize the other and deny any connection between 'it' and the self. In the latter case, one is prone to identifying so intimately with the other that any

meaningful distinctions between self and other become blurred or lost entirely. And while projective identification is closely associated with the victimization process itself, incorporative identification can eventuate in a conflation of untraumatized self and traumatized other that may in turn result in an illegitimate appropriation by the former of the latter's identity, victimhood, voice, attitudes and even post-traumatic patterns of behavior.⁸

LaCapra suggests that outside observers deliberately strive to engage and respond to traumatic events, experiences and their representations by means of "empathetic unsettlement":

the position I defend puts forth a conception of history as tensely involving both an objective (not objectivist) reconstruction of the past and a dialogic exchange with it and other inquirers into it wherein knowledge involves not only the processing of information but also affect, empathy, and questions of value. This third position is not a straightforward dialectical synthesis of the other two, for it involves a critical and self-critical component that resists closure (*ibid*: 35).

In practical and ethical terms, this means that one consciously seeks, on the one hand, to eschew emotionally detached objectification and, on the other, to resist the form of indiscriminate identification that produces an unwarranted conflation of self and other.

In addition to offering a viable alternative to aloof objectivism and surrogate victimhood, "empathetic unsettlement" also allows for "attending to, even trying, in limited ways, to recapture the possibly split-off, affective dimension of the experience of others" (*ibid*: 40). Because "[t]rauma brings about a dissociation of affect and representation", and the trauma victim "disorientingly feels what [he/she] cannot represent" and "numbingly represents what [he/she] cannot feel" (*ibid*: 42), affect is of central concern to survivors and concerned observers alike. That said, however, the following distinction should be kept firmly in mind:

Empathy... is a form of virtual, not vicarious, experience related to what Kaja Silverman has termed *heteropathic identification*, in which emotional response comes with respect for the other and the realization that the experience of the other is not one's own (*ibid*: 40).

⁸ For a discussion of such issues with regard to the relationship between Hiroshima 'insiders' (*hibakusha*, or A-bomb survivors) and Hiroshima 'outsiders' (non-*hibakusha*), see Stahl 2007.

To the extent that Japanese and non-Japanese outside observers are willing to enter into a “dialogic relation to the other recognized as having a voice or perspective that may question the observer or even place him or her in question by generating problems about his or her assumptions, affective investments, and values” (*ibid*: 5), “empathetic engagement” with representations of historical trauma opens up valuable opportunities for self-reflection, self-critique and responsible action. Regarding this last point, Terrence Des Pres is most helpful in illuminating the ethical relationship between survivor-narrators and their concerned others and clearly identifying the ultimate goals of their ongoing, collaborative project of representing, constituting, integrating and responding to trauma:

We tend to forget, or perhaps never knew, how vigorous and strong-minded the reaction to horror can be. This response, this *response-ability*, is what I wish to call ‘conscience’...in its social form.... Horrible events take place, that is the (objective) beginning. The survivor feels compelled to bear witness, that is the (subjective) middle. His testimony enters public consciousness, thereby modifying the moral order in which it appears, and that is the (objective) end. Conscience, in other words, is a social achievement. At least on its historical level, it is the collective effort to come to terms with evil, to distill a moral knowledge equal to the problems at hand. Only after the ethical content of an experience has been made available to all members of the community does conscience become the individual ‘voice’ we usually take it for (Des Pres 1976: 46–7).

In the essays collected in this volume, the reader will encounter images of soul murder, merciless torture, senseless violence, the consequences in human terms of indiscriminate firebombing and atomic bombing, the eroticization of death, heartless betrayal, and unsettling as yet only partially constituted—and thus only partially fathomed and responded to—historical, cultural, political, psychological and ethical legacies of the Asia Pacific War. Our collective challenge as concerned outside observers is to engage, unlock and (re)constitute the affect-charged, value-laden human dramas imag(in)ed in specific Japanese artistic representations of the traumatic past—the “human seal” of Hiroshima; the young female survivor and skull amidst the ruins of Nagasaki; the Okinawan man who awakens one morning to find his leg swollen grotesquely, his big toe emitting water from which phantom soldiers come to drink nightly; the dying soldier in a remote cave in the Philippines with maggots squirming in his unseeing eyes as he quietly lectures about how the entire history of the universe is

contained in a single stone—and grasp their relevance to the present and future. Left unengaged, unconstituted, unrecognized and unacted upon, such images—and the historical traumas they reference, visualize and embody—will, whether we realize it or not, continue to disturb us both personally and collectively like recurrent but unregistered nightmares, haunt the present and threaten the future. It is our sincere hope that the following essays will contribute to the various processes by which the largely invisible political, ideological and psychodynamic forces informing these traumatic imag(in)ings, too, are clearly apprehended and vigorously countered.

Chapter Synopses

In an essay that serves well to capture the practical implications of the objectives for this volume as outlined above, Alan Tansman compares his students' responses to representations of two global catastrophes, the Nazi genocide and the A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Analyzing his attempts, on three separate US campuses, to teach a course entitled "Jewish and Japanese Responses to Atrocity", he outlines the difficulties he encountered in ensuring that these two events are not simply conflated as seminal examples of 'man's inhumanity to man'. Focusing on the extent to which individuals mourn losses in culturally specific ways, he examines different approaches to representing, reading and responding to traumatic texts—from the imaginative survivor-narrator transmuting his/her sense of anguish into artistic form to the empathetic reader trying to make sense of atrocity and its enduring aftereffects. Tansman is here interested in the mechanics whereby our affects can be unwittingly manipulated by survivor accounts—and concerned that attention to historical specificity can all too readily dissolve into a muddle of emotional responses. Concluding that empathy—while necessary—brings with it the danger of us avoiding intellectual comprehension, he spells out, in stark terms, the real challenge inherent in internalizing, articulating and responding to representations of trauma/catastrophe. In so doing, he lays down a cautionary marker for the rest of the volume.

In Chapter 2, Jay Rubin demonstrates through his contextualization and analysis of Murakami Haruki's *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* that the constitution and comprehension of, and ethical response to the traumas of the War represent an ongoing, transgenerational, imagi-

native and political endeavor. He sees the production of this lengthy novel as a major turning point for Murakami and his work in that it clearly signals his abandonment of passive, coolly detached character-narrators and his embrace of an active, engaged and committed character-narrator (Tōru), shows sustained, serious concern with the dark realities and legacies of the War, and represents them in a markedly different way to conventional, fact-based war novels written by Japanese survivor-narrators. Rubin goes on to explain that, in the course of Tōru's convoluted inward quest to know himself and understand the relationship between the personal/national traumas of the past and the individual/collective crises of the present, he discovers, confronts and works through the theretofore unconstituted/unknown motivations and brutalities of the 'Nomonhan War' (1939), the violence inherent in himself, and his deepest fears regarding the authoritarian tradition of Japanese government that not only eventuated in transnational catastrophes, but also remained/remains insidiously operative in postwar and contemporary Japan. Rubin draws particular attention to the significance of imagination in the novel. Rather than approach the War in terms of historical facticity, Murakami treats it fictionally as part of the psychological baggage carried half-consciously by Japanese of his own and subsequent generations. Rubin concludes his examination by suggesting that the style and aims of the young, mute narrator (Cinnamon) introduced toward the end of the novel well reflect those of his creator: beginning from the premise that "fact may not be truth, and truth may not be factual", he seeks through story making to clarify the condition and meaning of his present existence—and that of his society and country—by delving into and imaginatively constituting the violent war-related events that preceded him. Murakami suggests that filling in the 'gaps' of the traumatic past in this way—and learning and acting on the lessons this makes possible—are the critical historical, ethical and political responsibilities of contemporary and future generations of Japanese citizens.

Dennis Washburn examines in Chapter 3 the paradox of how the trauma of wartime violence is enjoyed as an aesthetic of the sublime. He analyzes this paradox through a reading of two short stories by Mishima, "Death in Midsummer" and "Patriotism", situating them within a larger postwar discourse marked 'on the one hand' by a sense of exhaustion and despair and, on the other, by ennui in the face of a return to normalcy and nostalgia for the heightened emotional states stimulated by the disaster of total war. The conception and writing of

these stories represent a response to trauma, even though the events they describe are not wholly related to or dependent upon wartime experience, and as such they force the reader to confront the uncomfortable possibility that death and violence possess a terrible beauty. Mishima's stories bring into play the complex relationship between the imperatives of art, which seeks to create pleasure out of the symptoms of trauma, and those of ethical responsibility, which demands that we confront and work through trauma as a way of learning from and coming to terms with it.

In an examination in Chapter 4 of the surprisingly neglected legacy of Shiina Rinzō, one of the most prominent authors of the *Sengoha* (*après guerre*) literary grouping traditionally credited with the creation of some of the most poignant evocations of the ruins of the Japanese landscape in the immediate aftermath of defeat in 1945, Mark Williams compares the author's literary treatment of his experience of *tenkō* (political apostasy) in representative early and more 'mature' Shiina texts. In this reading, it is suggested, the earlier works, most notably "The Diary of Fukao Shōji" (1947), suggest an author still engaged in acting out his experience of arrest, imprisonment and procurement of release by affixing his signature to a *tenkōsho* (a document whereby the individual agrees to renounce all left-wing political activity), leaving the impression of an experience still relatively raw. In contrast, by the time of composition of several of Shiina's later novels, in particular *On the Far Side of Freedom* (1954) and *The Canal* (1955), the same traumatic incident may underlie the narrative; but, by this stage, there is evidence of a determination to move on—to focus rather on working through some of the detail of the events in question. Conventional studies of Shiina tend to cite 1950, the year of Shiina's other *tenkō* moment—his decision to seek baptism into the Protestant church—as a key turning point in the author's career; in this essay, Williams cites this rather as a 'trigger' for an ongoing process that conforms closely to the process of responding to trauma as delineated by LaCapra.

In Chapter 5, Angela Yiu discusses Okuizumi Hikaru's *The Stones Cry Out*, a work that changes the landscape of postwar Japanese literature by virtue of its 'belatedness' and, in so doing, challenges the historical boundary of what was known as the postwar period. In analyzing its style and methods, Yiu discusses the way Okuizumi transforms a collective historical memory into art, and how that artistic creation forms a dialectical resonance with the past, urging readers who have not experienced war firsthand to perceive that the pres-

ent and future are built upon lessons from the past embodied in an artistic imagination that transcends the limitation of historicism and empiricism. The narrative strategies by which Okuizumi reconstitutes memory and re-enacts traumatic experience in multiple versions and dimensions resonate with LaCapra's theory of "traumatic *dasein*" and Freeman's idea of the articulation and revelation of a world that would otherwise not have existed "had the act of writing not taken place".

Following LaCapra, David Stahl argues in Chapter 6 that the constitution, understanding and ethical response to historical trauma and victimization is an ongoing, collaborative, transgenerational and transnational imaginative, empathetic and sociopolitical process. Opening with an examination of how Nosaka Akiyuki, as an adult, 'belatedly' began to remember and act out his traumatic childhood experience of surviving the firebombing of Kobe some twenty years earlier, Stahl contends that the author made significant progress toward working over and through his burdened past by means of fictional representation. In the short story, "Grave of the Fireflies", Nosaka creates an alter ego (Seita) who re-enacts his home front and immediate postwar traumas in alternative ways that not only allow him to care more for, and take better care of his little sister (Setsuko) during their final months, weeks and days together, but also to virtually die of starvation, just as his real-life sister did. While Nosaka also endeavors to symbolically console and memorialize his dead sibling in the work, his efforts are ultimately inhibited by impaired mourning. Stahl then argues that childhood firebombing survivor Takahata Isao's animated adaptation of Nosaka's story, *Grave of the Fireflies*, contributed substantially to Nosaka's twenty-five-year-long artistic project of working over, working through and coming to terms with his haunting home front experience by enabling his alter ego to relate his traumatic experience directly and personally as a sustained act of memory and more fully feel and openly express his profound grief over the series of devastating losses he suffered. Takahata also succeeds in constructing an enduring aesthetic memorial to Setsuko, Seita and their mother—and by extension innumerable other civilian casualties of total war—and subtly but effectively raising multi-faceted questions of "response-ability" that both interrogate past historical actors, groups and collectivities and concern contemporary and future audiences.

In Chapter 7, Davinder Bhowmik argues that, although Medoruma Shun did not experience the Battle of Okinawa that decimated the island in the spring of 1945, his thematically linked trilogy of the Battle

captures the conflict so imaginatively that it has been hailed as a fresh departure from conventional battle narratives in which Okinawans are portrayed solely as victims. In “Droplets”, the protagonist, both victim and aggressor, relives repressed traumatic memories that lighten somewhat the burden of survivor guilt. In “Spirit Recalling”, private and public memory clash fiercely, highlighting clear tensions between local and national forces that vie to narrate the past. Finally, in “Tree of Butterflies”, an ostracized ‘comfort woman’ recalls her wartime lover in a series of ever-intensifying flashbacks. The trilogy shows the hold war trauma has on the lives of its characters and their struggles to combat not only this trauma and the passage of time but also the exclusion of private, contestatory memories from officially sanctioned history.

Mark Silver’s analysis in Chapter 8 of the photographs taken in Nagasaki by Yamahata Yōsuke the day after the atomic bombing refutes the common assumption that photographs of such scenes of catastrophe do no more than provide transparent documentary evidence about them. These photographs seem to insist heavily on their own fundamentally documentary status, and it is primarily as historical documents that the photographs have been republished and discussed in the years since the bombing. But Silver focuses attention on the aesthetic surplus in Yamahata’s images, showing that if we stop to consider the way these images treat their subject, we can usefully place them in the context of pre-existing traditions of representation such as Christian iconography and Japanese pictorialist and landscape photography. Read against these contexts, Silver demonstrates, Yamahata’s photographs ultimately represent the bomb as a force that threatens to shatter the communal and ideological codes of meaning that form the very basis of culture. Silver’s reading of Yamahata’s images thus confirms our observation that the traumatic past is not ‘simply there’, not even in a form so seemingly removed from the processes of artistic cognition and transformation as the documentary photograph. These images may store Walter Davis’ “frozen dramas” with “primitive precision”, but Silver points out that the dramas arrested and exposed are actually twofold: they are not only confrontations with the violence of the real itself, but also with the failure of conventional modes to adequately represent such traumatic violence.

In Chapter 9, Karen Thornber examines the responsibilities imposed by Japanese literature of the atomic bomb written by both *hibakusha* (survivor; lit. explosion-affected person) and non-*hibakusha*, from the

late 1940s to the present day: on the one hand, its assigning of *culpability* (i.e. identifying enablers of the bombings, agents of other atrocities, and propagators of nuclear proliferation), and, on the other, its appeals to *obligation* (primarily regarding preventing future suffering). Japanese atomic-bomb literature has always negotiated multiple culpabilities. At the same time that it emphasizes Japanese suffering, it refuses to allow Japan to see itself solely as victim. Instead, it denounces Japan's wartime leaders and even at times the passivity of Japan's wartime civilian population. Many creative texts also look to the future and speak of responsibility not in terms of culpability but of obligation. Not surprisingly, literature written by *hibakusha* frequently addresses the duty of survivors, writers, and especially writers who are survivors to educate people the world over about the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But a key feature of Japanese literature of the atomic bomb—particularly that written in the decades following the immediate atomic aftermath—is its equally insistent call for international participation in the antinuclear movement, and, more generally, for eradicating violence worldwide. Analyzing Japanese literature of the atomic bomb not only allows for the probing of questions of responsibility, but also enables new understandings of the dilemmas confronting a world seemingly so unconcerned about its future that, as Japan's recent Niigata-Chūetsu Oki Earthquake (July 16, 2007) reminded us, the nation most profoundly affected by nuclear fallout not only houses the world's largest nuclear generating station but also operates it on an active earthquake fault.

In her discussion of two contrasting texts, Ōe Kenzaburō's novel, *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* and Fukasaku Kinji's film, *Battle Royale*, Christine Wiley argues in Chapter 10 that both can be read as allegories of Japanese nationalistic indoctrination during the War—and as testimonies of the sheer brutality and inhumanity of the wartime and postwar periods. Though separated by more than forty years in terms of time of composition, both texts offer similarly harsh critiques of the master narratives that were developed in the aftermath of defeat. Both Ōe and Fukasaku experienced the War as children, and both of their works focus on the traumatic, debilitating effects of war on their adolescent protagonists who are abandoned by the very adults responsible for their protection and welfare. Both authors focus on the themes of broken trust, brutality and abandonment, and Wiley argues that, for all the temporal remove and the different historical moments treated, each work succeeds in connecting the experiences represented in their

narratives with the larger experience of the Asia Pacific War, whilst at the same time drawing out their contemporary relevance. In Wiley's reading, adult betrayal signifies the betrayal of the Japanese people by its own government; the suffering of the children reflects that of the Japanese people as they desperately endeavored to support a lost cause—with both texts ultimately presenting harsh critiques of the egoism and degeneracy of those in power. In this way, Wiley interprets both texts as evocations of a future in which the traumatic realities of the War are not forgotten or repressed, but acknowledged as potent reminders of a brutal episode in Japanese history.

In the concluding essay to this volume, William Ashbaugh examines two immensely popular Japanese science fiction anime films—Matsumoto Akira's *Space Battleship Yamato* and Tomino Yoshiyuki's *Mobile Suit Gundam I*—as conflicting allegorical representations of the War. He suggests that, through their contrasting treatments of pivotal postwar Japanese master narratives, both works contribute to the constitution of collective war memory, albeit in distinctly different ways. *Yamato* symbolically depicts Japan as the unique victim of indiscriminate American firebombing and nuclear bombing, propagates the age old ideology of the “nobility of failure”, glorifies the military and the men who fought and died for Japan, and advocates the restoration of a full-fledged military in terms consonant with contemporary right-wing nationalism. In stark contrast, *Gundam*—which is seen as Tomino's response to Matsumoto's animated representations of conservative ideology and propaganda—advocates pacifism, castigates Japanese imperialism and militarism, and exposes and critiques the master narratives so central to *Yamato*. Ashbaugh concludes by arguing that, on the ‘battlefield’ of popular culture on which ideologies and interpretations of the Asia Pacific War are constantly being contended, *Gundam* appears to be coming out on top both in Japan and abroad. Thus, it can be said that the ‘pacifism’ of *Gundam* is ultimately winning the ongoing animated science fiction battle over the reconfiguration of collective memory of the War.

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CHAPTER ONE

CATASTROPHE, MEMORY, AND NARRATIVE:
TEACHING JAPANESE AND JEWISH RESPONSES TO
TWENTIETH-CENTURY ATROCITY*

Alan Tansman

But it is the knowledge of how contingent my unease is, how dependent on a baby that wails beneath my window one day and does not wail the next, that brings the worst shame to me, the greatest indifference to annihilation (J. M. Coetzee).

Comparing Catastrophes

This essay explores my experience in the American university classroom teaching responses by twentieth-century Japanese and Jews to catastrophe. It raises concerns about the ethics of such a comparison even as it finally deems the comparison necessary for understanding the tangle of art, emotion, psychology, and history in which the response to catastrophe is enmeshed. The Nazi murder of the Jews and the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima have occupied the modern historical and literary imaginations of these two peoples, molding their cultural and political identities and generating profuse expressions of their responses. To many, the experience of Hiroshima marks the beginning of an epoch in which world destruction has become more than a science-fiction fantasy. And to as many, the Holocaust signifies humanity's greatest evil, functioning like a "ubiquitous cipher for our memories of the twentieth century" (Huyssen 2003: 18), a "moral and ideological Rorschach test" (Novick 2000: 12). The imprint of these events, after more than half a century, is deep and indelible.

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Nevertheless, the comparison of the two events will strike some as distasteful. In teaching a course called “Jewish and Japanese Responses to Atrocity”, I have insisted that the students always keep in mind historical differences: the European Jews were the victims of a rationally planned and organized attempt to annihilate them, their deaths preceded by protracted torture of the mind and body; the Japanese citizens living in Hiroshima in the summer of 1945 were the victims of an instantaneous blast, victims whose emotional scars, like those of Holocaust survivors, took many years to begin to heal, but whose physical deformations were to scar future generations. This temporal difference in the experience of violence was one of many factors that went into shaping the experience and expression of these events. There were numerous others, not the least of which was historical: European Jews were not at war with their victimizers, and only the lunatic fringe would argue that they caused a threat or that their suffering was an unavoidable consequence of war. Japanese citizens, though individually innocent (in the language of human rights they were civilians but not responsible citizens) belonged to a nation at war with its attackers, and scholars continue to debate the necessity and the morality of the dropping of the atomic bomb.

Dare we ask whether the Japanese were victims the way the Jews were? The very question seems to suggest that degrees of suffering can be measured and that styles of mourning can be judged. It risks robbing victims of their claim that their suffering was uniquely their own and that the specific history that caused their pain was unprecedented and unparalleled. Comparing suffering leads us to the judging of suffering—a distasteful, even obscene, thing to do.

Who are we, we might well wonder, blessed by distance in time and place, to coolly and analytically interfere with the victims’ right (and need) to choose for themselves how to express their memories? Why should we point out suspected mistakes in a victim’s testimony or brazenly diagnose his claim to unique pain as merely symptomatic of the healing process? Everywhere we turn in the maze of suffering and memory we are discomfited by misgivings. Some of us feel we know that a victim’s silence is one symptom, or strategy, of mourning. We make the effort to empathize (though that seems impossible enough) and to analyze what is being remembered, however uneasy that task makes us feel. And when it seems right to respect the need for silence, we still fear one inevitable result of doing so: the silencing of history. For history does become obfuscated when, out of respect for

the victims' conviction that their experiences simply defy description, we silently listen, knowing that we are needed as witnesses.

Making the comparison risks an intellectually sloppy and morally repugnant suggestion: that when it comes to suffering, what happened is less important than how people responded to it. In this kind of thinking, history, seen through the prism of emotions we respect enough not to judge, can lose its specificity, reducing the attempted genocide of the Jews and the policide of Hiroshima to an opaque and banal vista of undistinguished horror. While respect for different tragedies seems to forbid comparison, once we ask ourselves why we suffer and how we recover, we seem inevitably to wonder if we have suffered more than others and whether we deserve to do so. Certainly many survivors of Hiroshima and the Holocaust wondered.

In the classroom, my students and I did, too. At two private colleges and one public university I asked them to consider the possibility that individuals mourn tragedy in culturally specific ways. Through the calm of hindsight, we could check our unfiltered emotional comparisons (or our resistances to them) against the hardness of the historical and cultural record. Thinking about victims' and survivors' responses to catastrophe across cultures means bumping up against history and giving up the freedom to think about them solely through the prism of our own personal reactions. It also helps us understand what is universal and what is distinctive in responses to catastrophic events, even if those events belong to different orders of magnitude.

My own understanding of those historical responses has deepened over the last few years as I presented them to students and asked them (and myself) to become secondary witnesses of a sort, to open themselves to a range of emotional and intellectual responses. They closely read the words and absorbed the images created by individuals from both the Japanese and Jewish traditions who chose to express their suffering—some as hurt people simply trying to make sense of their experiences, others as creative thinkers transmuting their anguish into artistic form.

Now, when I compare these two cases, I find that I lean on what I have learned from these students. It would not be too grandiose to say that they stand for all of us who have struggled to understand a past we have not lived and to empathize with horrors we have not experienced. In the classroom, we experienced the difficulty of responding (one we all face), and, in doing so, became better acquainted with that same difficulty faced by the people we studied together.

Personal History and the Course

I say 'we' with some hesitation. The various threads that stitch together the pattern of our responses and draw the limits of our empathy and understanding are too numerous and too idiosyncratic to disentangle. We are the sum of influences that are historical, social, cultural, economic, physical and psychological—or more occult, like instinct and temperament. And our individual responses are cast and limited as much by our own personal pasts as by the time into which we are born. I am the grandson of survivors of European *pogroms* with relatives who died in concentration camps. As a child I glimpsed numbers on tattooed arms, and overheard hushed Yiddish conversations about horrors two decades old. (That I somehow understood their sadness through intuited rhythms and not through words I could not understand speaks volumes about how memories travel.) When I watched footage of Nazi concentration camps (a strangely secret pleasure), I believed that I might be seeing the bones of a relative. Yet, as much as I would like to claim a share in such grand suffering, Europe is distant. My more temporally immediate loss was of the idyllic—or so it was remembered to me—Caribbean life in Havana to which my grandparents had fled. My grandmother fled with her father to Havana from Kovel, near Kiev in Russia, escaping economic hardship and anti-Semitic violence; my grandfather fled alone from a town only 70 miles away, Rubeichev, in Poland, escaping the Polish army. I have heard these facts many times, but each time I have wanted to recall them I have needed to rely on my mother's memory. From Cuba, where I was born, we fled in turn in the early 1960s, when I was still a baby, to New York City.

When I first became aware of my surroundings in the Bronx of the mid 1960s, that dislocation from Cuba was only a few years old, and the gloom of the European tragedy lingering behind it felt both immediate and distant—as if all that remained of the charring of our skin was the weight of historic ashes. Against those ashes stood the image of a beautiful place (my earliest memories are of warm water and bright light, which I have always associated with babyhood in Cuba, though the memory must be a myth of my own making), representing time I had lost in the embarrassing daydream of another history that might have happened: a sojourn in Cuba that might never have been disrupted, leading to membership in the bilingual and bicultural elite of a Cuban émigré community, wearing sharp white linen trousers

and *guayaberas*, smoking the occasional cigar, feeling masterfully in control of my own destiny, always empathizing with the downtrodden, feeling the kind of confidence for the future that is built upon an unfractured past.

None of that was to be, and what I was left with in New York City, in addition to an abiding feeling of things lost and soon to be lost again, was a sense of standing apart from a number of communities: Cuban but not Latino; passionately anti-Batista but not subject to the same dangers as native Cubans who had remained on the island; European but only temporarily so; Jewish but only through bonds of suffering. In some way unknown to me at the time but clearer in retrospect, my own history subsequently led me to the study of Japan. When I was 17, Japan was an intellectual and emotional relief: I was drawn to a place in which Jews and their dark, sad history were not part of the story, a place where people seemed to have mastered their own history, as the Jews had not. To me, Japan represented the sole instance of a non-European country that had found its own way into modernity without being colonized and had created a modern cultural life on its own terms. The simplicity of these ideas served my need for a mythic alternative to the history into which I was brought, a myth of wholeness not unlike my fantasy of Cuba, as I realized many years later.

The myth-making power of memory, it seems, has us by the tail. My very experience in Japan eventually led me back—passively, almost unaware—to the European experience of the Jews, and to the disruptions that followed my family even after that, through the suffering of a people with whom I had no historical or emotional connection whatsoever.

What about the students? They belonged, like me, to a generation with no direct experience of the events I asked them to understand, and their link to these events was even more tenuous than mine. Members of a generation saturated with images of the European and Japanese catastrophes, they found it difficult to reach beyond those images. To an extent this is true of everyone: the victim himself never has unfiltered access to the original scene of suffering, but comes to look back on it through the filter of images he absorbs and which the workings of his memory obscure. Though not themselves victims, the students' perspective was also filtered, and far more so. Even among them, there were those with more or less emotional access to experiences of violence. For some, this access was provided by personal family traumas; for others, by their own experience of historical events. Particularly in

the classes I taught in California, Asian students whose past included histories of violence came equipped with a more vulnerable armature of response—one composed of images that were, perhaps, less filtered than my own. Yet I have come to believe that student responses are too complex to parse by ethnic, cultural, gender, or class identification. If anything prepared a student to sensitively and judiciously respond to responses to suffering—and to think those responses through with a combination of emotional intelligence, intellectual clarity, and ethical rigor—it was some moment in their own past that had touched them with the mark of trauma.

The suffering of my own people had supplied me with the empathy needed to understand Hiroshima, while Hiroshima provided the filter I needed to study the suffering of my own people. Memory has us by the tail because of the emotional resonances it stirs in us, which we sense, at a less-than-conscious and certainly at a pre-verbal level, resonances that provide us with the limits and expanses of our empathies. “The gathering and mental organization of experiences is usually determined by the emotional states associated with them”, writes W. G. Sebald, in his *On the Natural History of Destruction* (Sebald 2003: 150).

The course syllabus—outlining the story I wanted to tell the students—was born in part from my own autobiography. Just as the students’ responses were contingent on personal emotional history, so was my own. And, I realized after the fact, my own response was most evident in the course syllabus itself. In creating it I mapped my own desires: would the course end darkly or with humor? In creating it I was also guided by another kind of contingency. The syllabus was a narrative restricted by the contingencies of time and limiting the possibility of properly remembering the past. I know that every time I taught the course I blamed the impossibility of getting the job done on the contingency of limited time, and on the limits of the powers of representation. But I learned that, in fact, such limits forge the very tools artists (and students) use as they struggle to remember the past and to understand the responses of others (and themselves) to it.

For instance, it is difficult to dissociate from my history the decision to show the extraordinary 1983 Hungarian movie by Barna Kabay, *The Revolt of Job*. This movie, about a Jewish couple that adopts a gentile child to whom they will leave something of their past—knowing that their rounding-up by the Nazis is imminent—ends before the nightmare begins, but evokes that nightmare more powerfully than almost

any attempt to directly depict it. The voice of my grandparents' generation also led me to end the course with the German-Jewish Holocaust survivor and essayist Jean Amery's stirring plea, in his essay "Resentments", to allow the survivors themselves to decide when to cease their lament. Students sometimes came to this conclusion on their own: concerning the trial of Adolf Eichmann, one wrote, "It does not matter whether I—someone on the outside looking in—believe justice was served, for justice can only be truly measured and quantified by those on the inside, who are directly connected".¹ In one version of the course, I ended with images of Japanese citizens partaking in the yearly commemoration of the dropping of the A-bomb at Hiroshima's Peace Park. This is a commemoration whose goal is always in part to universalize suffering while also claiming Japan's special status as the first victim of the nuclear age. It is a commemoration that seems to guarantee that it will always continue to repeat its process and expression of mourning. The students wanted to know: when is enough enough, and is enough ever enough? One student asked, "Does one have to acknowledge one's own mourning process? I guess the obvious answer has to be yes. There are so many other terrible ideas brought up by memories, and I am tired. I find it easier to talk about ideas rather than write them (the perfect child of psychoanalysis). My mind goes too quickly for my hand".

But 'enough' was never enough to satisfy my urgent desire for students to leave the course impressed by the mark that events make on individuals and peoples, sensitive to the complexity of understanding and comparing responses to catastrophe, and touched by the creative works into which individuals transmuted their suffering. My students and I often found ourselves worrying about feeling manipulated by things we read or saw, and then second-guessing ourselves for resenting victims for presenting their experience in a powerful way.

Manipulating Emotional Responses

There came one section of the course where the students should indeed have second-guessed themselves; it was a section that was to leave them feeling sorely manipulated by a 'survivor' account. Through

¹ I have made minor corrections in the grammar of student responses.

the borrowed language of the Holocaust, and the literary fodder it provided, Binjamin Wilkomirski masterfully convinced the students (and thousands of readers, including the granters of literary awards) of the authenticity of his own Holocaust experience, one which, in fact, was not his to own. His account, *Fragments*, is a personal history, for sure, but a personal history of a man grappling with his own demons through literary machinations nurtured by the language of the Holocaust. It is, in that sense, authentic to himself and also fraudulent to history.

Our reading of Wilkomirski's massively popular and celebrated memoir of a traumatized Jewish boyhood proved to be the emotional climax of the course. The response was more emotional than I had imagined possible in a reading experience: to a person, the students said they had cried, and that reading the work was the most powerful account of suffering they had ever read. "It tore me apart emotionally", wrote one student:

There were times when I could handle the images, read, think, then let go and move on. And there were times when I needed to hold on to it, lose myself in it and mourn. One particular incident seized me ferociously and refused to let me go....Even now, remembering how the passage was written—very simply, just telling what happened—yet able to convey the horror and humiliation and anger, I still need to remind myself to breathe.

Wilkomirski hit a personal chord. Another student wrote,

I don't know why this disturbed me so much. Perhaps it's because I thought of my brother. I don't know why I did that—it makes no sense, really. I'm not Jewish, neither is my brother, yet after reading this I couldn't help but imagine my own brother standing outside a barrack urinating blood. Perhaps the connection was my brother being twelve years old (the same age as Jankl). Somehow all of my brother's vulnerabilities came through; how young he is, how helpless and in what pain he would be if that were him. I think a part of this has to do with being a bit homesick.

The students were moved because they were convinced of the honesty of the account, an honesty that came through in a fragmented style that seemed to students to convincingly replicate a trauma precisely because it did not allow Wilkomirski to smooth over the disturbing ruptures of his experience and memory by making them aesthetic. "Things are out of order", one student noted about her reading experience.

Some things I can't remember or they are blurry. Some things remind me of other things.... This pattern of narratives, of fragments, made me feel like I was seeing inside Benjamin's memory. Then I couldn't help but wonder if it was made that way on purpose in order to create that feeling or if the author just wrote it that way because that's how it came out.

This was insightful indeed. I revealed to the students, with misgivings about the entire ploy, that the book was not autobiographical but had been a false account made up by a disturbed man, a victim, perhaps, of his own traumas, but not of the ones he claimed—and for which he had become a public spokesman and hero. What are the ethics and aesthetics of representation of catastrophe in this case? W. G. Sebald, in a discussion of German writers' depictions of the war, argues that "the construction of aesthetic or pseudo-aesthetic effects from the ruins of the annihilated world is a process depriving literature of its right to exist" (*ibid.*: 53). But the aesthetic effect Wilkomirski is after is the absence of aesthetic effect. If his story works, and if it *could* have happened, what is the harm? One student wrote,

I think I sat in a state of shock trying hard to register and process the fact that what Wilkomirski, little Benjamin, had written was untrue.... when asked if I could forgive him, forgiveness is the easy part, because I can just reason more and more excuses for him. But forgetting my feelings of betrayal, deception, foolishness, will not happen. I felt foolish not because of what I felt but because I revealed my emotions, which were based on seemingly nothing, on paper (a sense of permanence) no less, and turned in....

Of course the satisfaction of this desire emotionally to affect the students is partly fantasy. The closest I seemed to get to sensing that an emotion had been implanted deep inside a student's heart was when I asked them to close their eyes while I played for them recordings of music written in response to the catastrophe by two Polish composers: Henryk Gorecki's 1976 *Symphony #3*, and Krzysztof Penderecki's 1959/61 *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* and his 1967 *Dies Irae: Oratorio in Memory of the Victims of Auschwitz*. Responding to the last two pieces, one student wrote:

The first piece we heard was horrific. Yet, it is amazing how a person desired to create music and felt an inspiration after the atomic bomb was dropped. He felt the need to write a piece so disturbing that it transported me to a dark place. However dark and chaotic the music was, I still believe there was beauty in its creation. I can't really explain why, but the fact that humans make music, no matter how horrible or incomprehensible, is a beautiful thing. What a sap I am.

The second piece that we listened to was breathtaking. I believe that each person's life circumstance will cause them to interpret the song differently. I found it very soothing and comforting. I felt the comforting embrace of a mother, best friend, maybe even God. This omniscient being held my hand, stroked my hair, and showed me the beauty of the world. When the piece became darker the person showed me all the suffering that I have endured in my life as well. I felt like this person was showing me this to let me know that someone recognized my sufferings and all the sufferings of the world. But this person also told me that this is what humans do, this is what we are supposed to endure. Maybe it was even me comforting myself. I see it clearly in my head, but it's just too much to write down. That was *my crazy vision*.

I am not sure one can ask for more, except for the student to emerge from within herself back into the history to which she was listening.

The Dangers of the Comparison

In teaching the class I became increasingly aware of the many dangers of presenting such material to college students (but certainly not only to them): reading or viewing sometimes horrifying but always emotionally heart-rending materials threatens to derail intellectual analysis (the goal of the classroom) into declarations of moral outrage and into opportunities for testifying to one's own suffering. The most dispiriting result of teaching such material is an historical amnesia that allows one to argue that because all sufferers are equal in their suffering, all *events* are equal in their magnitude.

Despite my consistent efforts to ground the experience of people in the particular details of their historical moments, and to beat like a drum the need for care in vigilantly discerning differences, history is always at risk, especially in a class in which the evidence presented is mostly cultural and is displayed to the students in the form of responses to history. The dissolving of rigorous attention to historical specificity into a muddle of emotional responses results from the very nature of the intellectual pursuit of such a class. For my premise in teaching it is that emotional response must precede intellectual analysis, but must then be mastered as one tries to think through the aesthetic and ethical dilemmas that records of suffering offer. I had students keep weekly journals recording reactions not formed by argumentation or the necessities of evidence, and also asked them to write essays that excluded emotion. In the study of any art, paying attention to one's

visceral reaction before clarifying it analytically helps to sensitize us to the complexity of the aesthetic effects. I wanted them to register that response. My intent was not to supplant the important task of constructing lucid arguments with the conventions of academic writing; to the contrary, I hoped that emotional reactions to what were sometimes brutal images would be siphoned off into journals, leaving minds free to work intellectually in formal expository papers. I learned that I was making a forced and artificial separation: essays sometimes became free-form emotional responses while journal entries often looked more like tendentious arguments. In class discussions, we had to find the same delicate balance between emotion and intellect, self-discovery and analysis.

I was not worried about being able to free up the students' emotional reactions; the material, I was sure, would move them, sometimes overwhelmingly. Rather, I courted the danger that emotion might overtake thought, hoping that the students would then be able to use their reactions as a springboard to understanding. There were moments in the classroom when a student would begin to cry, or feel compelled to describe a childhood trauma of her own whose memory was triggered by what we had read or seen. One half-Jewish, half-native American student returned us at almost every occasion to her resentment at the effacement of the genocide of her people in an America that, she was sure, taught that only one genocide—the Jewish—really counted. (This was to become a substantial topic of discussion.) Students' dreams, which transformed class readings and viewings into personal stories, became points of entry into the material. I myself dreamed that I had become a Bodhisattva—a Buddha saving the yet-to-be enlightened—lifting my students away from the syllabus with which I had traumatized them. "I really can't go on writing about this stuff", wrote one student. At such personal classroom moments, intellectual analysis seemed irrelevant, even disrespectful.

There were many more prosaic moments, too, colored by simple boredom with the material, by distractions from life—a wisdom tooth pulled, a boyfriend abandoned, a bad meal in the dining room, the beautiful sun outside. But could these moments be called upon to understand the material we were reading? Were students protecting themselves from exposure to pain? Did their feelings of boredom protect them and allow them to resist what was being imposed on them? In the classroom, I was more wholly present than the students (though I sometimes became distracted too: Is he bored? Why did she say

that?), and I wanted to see everything that happened in it as relevant. It was pedagogically important to understand personal reactions as mirroring discussions taking place among the writers of catastrophe we were reading, and to use those reactions as ways into the material. The students, like some of the witnesses to the testimonies we read, seemed traumatized by what they heard. But an uneasy question never left the room: was it not sacrilegious to turn other people's suffering into an opportunity for academic chitchat? More than once I sat with the students and felt sullied as I began a discussion about the narrative techniques in a survivor's testimony. This discomfort with treating others' suffering in artistic terms was not only ours, but was felt by many of the thinkers we were reading. The troubling ethical and aesthetic problems posed by the materials never left us, and the students attested that this made class exhausting—they felt they had become witnesses themselves. They were often impressively careful about the ethics of making judgments. "It's too hard", wrote one student, "to write about one's reaction to this Atomic Bomb account because I certainly don't want to offend anyone". "I realize", wrote another, that

the further I read the more I realize I've made assumptions that aren't based on anything. I have no idea what I'm talking about. I haven't once experienced trauma of this magnitude and I never had to listen to an account, either. I don't know what to think. *IT IS NOT MY STORY*.

Yet our feelings of unease, and of sadness and rage (which the students spoke about and shared with me in their weekly journals) allowed us to better understand the reactions of the victims.

Our experience in the classroom verified what I understood intellectually: that too much empathy can be a dangerous thing. The problems caused by thus comparing disparate cases seemed not worth the risks. Show a sensitive student footage of concentration camps or of skin melting off a young Japanese girl; have him read the testimony of a Nazi torture victim or of a Japanese stumbling through the charred ruins of Hiroshima; read with him the words of survivors who suffer only because they survived; expose him to documents of mental and physical horror that are heart-wrenchingly expressed—and do this in a culture in which self-expression in the humanities classroom has become as valued as rigorous analytical explication, and you will wind up, as I did, with a dismaying final paper arguing that what happened at Auschwitz was not fundamentally worse than what happened when

the United States government tested nuclear bombs in the Arizona desert. Out of sincere respect for the sanctity of individual suffering, this particular student—I will refer to him as B—concluded that the victims of Auschwitz could be likened to the citizens of Utah living downwind from nuclear test sites because in each case any particular individual could claim to have suffered immeasurably, and because it was obscene to compare experiences of suffering. In teaching the student to listen carefully to the language of emotion and to withhold easy judgments about experiences he had not had—to recognize what Primo Levi called ‘the grey zone’—he was led to efface the dramatic historical differences that should, indeed, have allowed him to make ethical distinctions.

I do not mean to blame B. And yet I cannot help but blame him for my ambivalence. By doing so, my own ethical discomfort is allayed: I can tell myself that I did my best and it backfired, that it was really no fault of my own, nothing that cannot be fixed (I fantasize) the next time I teach the class. Next year’s students will get it. His paper testifies to the dangers of teaching comparative suffering through a pedagogy that allows, and even invites emotional response. It was no doubt this that the curriculum committee at Dartmouth College perceived in 1996 when it resisted granting approval of the class, and then did so only on free-speech grounds. I believe that the course the institution would have had us teach would not have allowed the two events to be put in the same scale and would not have invited any comparison that might have led to seeing the experience of the Nazi murder of the Jews on a relative scale. I almost wish the voices of control had won, because the twinge of conscience I myself feel about the comparison has never fully subsided, even as I continue to believe in the ethical and aesthetic importance of thinking through the events alongside one another.

I am happy to say that B’s paper was an extreme and rare case, and that most students I have taught do indeed struggle to find the required balance between emotion and intellect, between careful understanding of historical distinctions and empathetic response to individual expressions of pain. (It is worth noting that they also reacted with sensitivity to overly stylized and intellectualized expressions: every showing of Alain Resnais’ *Hiroshima mon Amour*, a film whose treatment of suffering, memory, and the possibilities of communication I had thought perfect for the class, elicited much cynical chuckling.)

But raising the comparison between the Jewish and Japanese experiences in the first place perhaps led to B's willingness—now backed by some information and rhetorical skill—to bring disparate things too closely together. It seems right to feel the comparison of Japanese and Jewish suffering to be ethically disturbing, not only because it potentially obscures historical differences, but because coolly evaluating others' suffering and doing so from the cocoon of the classroom is disrespectful to the victims. Such an ethical discomfort never left the classroom: it appeared in much of the material we worked with, and the students did not need my cue to feel it for themselves. Our own continuous feeling of ethical discomfort also reflects another theme raised by the writers we read, which was the tendency to sanctify events of terrible suffering and the people victimized by them, taking them out of history, demanding that we suspend our critical faculties and adopt an attitude of silent respect and care. Perhaps it was my own sanctification of the Nazi murder of the Jews and of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima—and of the reactions to both—that led me to create the class in the first place. In my unanalyzed gut I believed that these cataclysmic events should remain impervious to analytical discussion because they could only be properly remembered by the true victims. I feared that to compare them threatened to reduce their distinctiveness, making each merely two examples of a larger history of horrors. But these feelings came from my own post-Holocaust past, and I now wanted to confront that past intellectually. Ironically, the language and culture to which I had devoted my professional life when I left behind any concentrated pursuit of my own tradition as a Jew provided the filter I needed. Was I merely using the Japanese to finally see the Jews?

But as much as this course reflects my own needs, I believe it speaks to larger questions as well. Both the Japanese and the Jews often represented themselves as unique in their suffering—as the victims of the greatest and most vicious (or only) twentieth-century genocide, or as the only victims of Atomic warfare, scarred innocents who uniquely marked the possibility of world obliteration. Each community was so seared by their experiences that their identities as victims molded them. Each event provoked a flood of creative work that grappled with the experience of trauma by reshaping it into art.

It is touchingly obvious and endlessly puzzling that human beings from vastly different religious and cultural traditions, suffering in disparate historical circumstances, find ways to confront their suffering in

languages that are surprisingly similar and also radically different. This sameness and this difference force us to see the complexity and variety of the work of the imagination under what Wallace Stevens called “the pressure of reality”. Exposing ourselves to the pressure of reality in another time and place and to the need to be self-conscious about our own rhetoric of sanctified suffering, we might be better able to gain a perspective on our own reactions to the present moment.

Leon Sperling and Takahashi Ichirō

To give a concrete sense of how students compared Jewish and Japanese responses, I would like to briefly discuss the second week of class. I had them watch a video testimony of a concentration camp survivor, Leon Sperling, and a 1995 filmed tour of the Hiroshima Peace Museum given by its curator, the A-bomb survivor Takahashi Ichirō, which includes his personal testimony, physical remains of the A-bomb explosion held in the museum, and film footage of the immediate aftermath of the bombing. At this point in the class the students have (should have) a general sense both of the historical context of the catastrophes of the war and of issues surrounding trauma, memory, and the retelling of events. The stories these two men tell help lay out the themes for the class: the way suffering gets described and represented in different cultures, in response to different catastrophic events; the artistic means by which experience is described (and the ethical problem inherent in thinking about suffering in artistic terms); the political uses to which testimony can be put; the religious and philosophical assumptions underlying one’s understanding and portrayal of suffering.

I show them the videos and try to elicit their raw, unfiltered responses—as if such things exist. Before the following class, I hope to have had these responses filtered through readings I include under the title, “Styles of Mourning, Psychoanalytic and Buddhist”, readings that suggest the possibility of two culturally distinct modes of mourning, one born from a Buddhist world view, the other from a psychoanalytic. To present the (admittedly sweeping) case for a psychoanalytic mode of mourning in the European case, I have them read Sigmund Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” and essays by Dori Laub, the psychoanalyst who in fact interviewed Leon S. on the tape we viewed as part of his work with the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust

Testimonies. To present the (also admittedly sweeping) case for a Japanese, Buddhist mode of mourning, I have them read one of the central and best-known classics of the Japanese cultural tradition, the Buddhist poet-priest Kamo no Chōmei's 1212 prose poem, "An Account of My Hut". (Later, I try to complicate this simple paradigm by noting the influence of the Jewish religious tradition on the Jewish mode of mourning, and of psychoanalytic ideas on the Japanese.)

How do the ideas presented in these works allow us to understand and analyze the taped testimonies of Leon Sperling and Takahashi Ichirō? Can we compare the responses of these two men in ways that account for more than their idiosyncrasies as individual human beings with complex personal histories? I ask the students these brief questions, and I suggest to them that they allow themselves to respond with as few inhibitions as possible. But I also request that they think not only about what these men say, but how they say it; and, having introduced this question, I feel the discomfort that comes from not respecting the sanctity of personal suffering, for I have begun to turn the two men into objects of aesthetic interest.

First, Takahashi Ichirō. The film begins with a view of the outside of the Peace Museum, built in modernist, International Style, lacking any markings of local design. It is a building that could be anywhere in the modern, industrialized world. We are taken inside as the camera pans through a hallway, showing us a bomb like the one that destroyed the city. We meet the curator, who stands beside a glass case enclosing a tattered schoolboy uniform reconstructed on a dummy. Mr. Takahashi tells us that the tatters belonged to three of his junior-high school friends killed in the blast. He details which tatters belonged to which boy. It is when he stands beside the shreds of clothing of his classmates that, he says, "It hurts the most".

The thirty-minute tour of the museum provides us with every possible form of evidence for establishing the event of the bomb and its effects, objective and subjective, documentary and testimonial (this is a distinction I later discuss with the students): scientific studies, statistical reports, medical records, personal testimonies. The evidence is given us in a variety of media: photographs, films, taped interviews, audio recordings, graphs, objects. But to my mind—and this is what I focus on with the students—the central piece of evidence, and the most searing, is Mr. Takahashi himself. He, himself, presents himself as an object to be lingered over. One particular sequence best shows this.

A woman who lost her daughter in the bombing is showing the camera evidence of her daughter's death and of her continuing presence fifty years later. The evidence is a rock upon which she believes the shadow of her daughter's body was burned by the flash of the bomb. We know such shadows exist; it is less clear that this mother possesses her daughter's shadow. We are then shown stone steps with other human shadows burned into them for eternity. Next, a map with a moving graphic detailing the location of the bomb and the circumference of its effects. A stern voice tells us, in English, that "strong heat waves incinerated everyone and everything in the city center". This is followed by close-up footage of the burned bodies of children, their keloid scars (said to have grown most rapidly because they themselves were growing most rapidly) looking like fields of molten lead and ash. We see a face grotesquely puffed up. Its mouth opens and closes. I feel my stomach tightening; I notice some students averting their eyes.

The next shot is of a bottle of liquid nutrients and as we follow the camera down along the tube descending from it we arrive at the arm, then the body and face, of Mr. Takahashi. A young woman's voice is telling us that he was a child like the one we just saw. He is now being treated for his bomb-related illness. Sitting up, he shows the camera his scarred and mangled arm, and describes the injury. He cannot bend or straighten the elbow. He strokes his scars for us, and points to spots where glass was blown into him by the force of the bomb blast. He points to "the root of the nail on my right forefinger and behind my right elbow" to show us his scars. He shows us his finger again, telling us that the cells that make the nail grow were destroyed by the cut the glass made. "Since that time I've had no normal nail growing here, only a strange black one like this". And strange it is. He slides off and on the tip of the black hard stub on his finger a long, black, bent, wood-like tuber that is the nail his body now produces. My stomach tightens again; students avert their eyes.

The female narrator now guides us to an exhibit room that houses other such black fingernails. Next to Mr. Takahashi's is one belonging to 64 year-old Hamada Yoshio, who stood only 900 meters from the hypocenter of the blast. In 1978, we are told, strange black nails began to grow from his fingers. We see a photograph of a hand with what looks like large black snakes, each one the length of a hand, growing out from his fingers. Music in the background has been darkly swelling. I notice students gasping a bit. I feel badly for exposing them to these images. I have seen them many times before and each time I do

they are as fresh as the first time. They cannot be gotten used to. (This is what I think as I watch the video. I note the perception and remind myself to share it with them. My queasiness now comes from thinking about pedagogy as I view human horror.)

The final testimony in the film is by a woman who lost her entire head of hair when it fell off her head in one full piece after the bomb fell. She donated the hair, which we now see, to the museum. (I think, remind the students of the hair in the Holocaust museum.) We are told that she has recently developed cancer, and we return to our guide, Mr. Takahashi. He stands by the school uniform once again. It is hard to look at it, but, he says, we “must look squarely at the facts it represents”. “I am”, he continues, “here in an appeal on behalf of each one of the silent friends of mine so cruelly killed by the atomic bomb”.

Suddenly we are gazing upon a photograph of President Truman, responsible and wise statesman (this irony is mine, not the film’s). A resounding voice begins,

As President of the United States I had the fateful responsibility of deciding whether or not to use the atom bomb for the first time. It was the hardest decision I ever had to make. [He sounds gently pleading yet firm.] I made the decision after discussion with the ablest men in the government, after long and prayerful consideration. I decided that the bomb should be used [here we see another photograph of the thoughtful Truman; his tone is that of a teacher] to end the war quickly to save countless lives, Japanese as well as American. But I resolved then and there to do everything I could to see that this awesome discovery was turned into a force for peace for the advancement of mankind. Since then, it has been my constant aim to prevent its use for war and to hasten its use for peace.

We gaze now upon a stately portrait of the President, and then quickly return to the head of the boy’s uniform in the museum. A dark, ominous voice almost chants: “If nuclear war should break out there will be no question of winners or losers, there won’t even be shadows on steps such as the ones we saw earlier”. The head of the dummy-boy now fades into the face of Mr. Takahashi. (Suffering knows no passage of time, I remind myself to tell the students.) He says:

I want you all to look hard at these things that are left in the museum. Listen to the actual voices of those who went through the bombing, and having made direct contact with the facts of nuclear warfare, join together to work to see that these weapons are banished from the face

of the earth. No day is too soon for that. There must never be another museum of this kind in any part of the world.

The music sadly swells; the camera backs out of the museum and leaves us with a fade to the eternal flame memorial in front of the building.

The immediate response of many of the students to the Hiroshima film is disgust from seeing scars and blackened fingernails; confusion and bemusement in reaction to Truman's speech; a sense of their emotional response being blunted by the 'schmaltzy' (I had to teach them this word) heart-string-pulling music. Already they seemed to sense that artistry was a dangerous game to play in the representation of suffering.

I know that the film raises too many points to face immediately. Why is America never mentioned as the will behind the bombing? Why is the bomb described almost as an act of nature? Why is Truman portrayed as almost sage-like, and why is he given place of prominence at the end? Do the Japanese of Hiroshima not want to blame the victimizer? Do they want to believe in themselves as sacrificial victims to a new age of world peace? Why is Mr. Takahashi laconic, stoic, almost disengaged as he speaks? Is this because he has mourned, or because he has repressed his anguish? Or is his expression of pain merely different from what we might expect. Is it a Japanese style? Mr. Takahashi—and the others who testify in the film—barely speak their inner feelings. They seem, rather, to focus on the material embodiments of their traumas—a shadow-cast stone, a scarred body, a head of hair. Is this, too, cultural style, a mode of mourning different from the one we expect—different, that is, from the one displayed by the Holocaust survivor Leon Sperling? (I worried that stereotypes of machine-like Japanese would be confirmed, but I knew that, by the end of the course, this would be dispelled by the array of Japanese they would read and see.) For Leon Sperling seems to confront his past in ways more familiar to us who have been raised in a psychoanalytically informed culture, who believe that repression of trauma is damaging and who place much store in confronting the past and verbalizing it as a means to free ourselves, to mourn and move on rather than be stuck in melancholia. When I used this material at Dartmouth College, in a class made up mostly of American born and raised Christians and Jews, my assumption of a 'we' who belong to a psychoanalytic culture was confirmed. At Berkeley, in a class where almost every student was some combination of Asian backgrounds, and, even if Christian, felt

themselves to be ‘culturally’ Buddhist or Confucian, my ‘we’ was off the mark. My assumption about mourning through analysis and exposure was just that—an assumption, which many in the room did not necessarily accept.

I knew that they would be devastated watching Leon Sperling’s testimony, and I (guiltily) anticipated seeing why. Leon is filmed close up. Except in extreme close-ups, we look at him from the chest up. When describing particularly painful moments he stares down and to his right. He sometimes addressed Dori Laub, the psychiatrist interviewing him, behind our right shoulder. In extreme close-ups the sound of his voice or his crying seems particularly loud. Once in a while we hear the sound of a car passing by outside. The presentation is sparse, bare bones. Yet I give the students the aesthetic imperative: listen to how he tells his story.

Each time I show the video to a class I feel as if I have to drag myself in front of them to begin the discussion. I feel emotionally drained and object to the necessity of speaking about him at all. I have learned that the students, for the most part, feel the same. In my case, I am flooded with images and stories from my own family; I imagine that in my students, too, painful associations are being triggered. I realize that the intensity of our response to Leon’s testimony makes me treat our discussion more delicately than I normally would. Perhaps this is why I try to focus on the aesthetics of his narrative.

I choose one ten-minute segment, which I replay for them: a shot of Leon’s head and shoulders. He is silent, and we have time to linger on his eyes that stare into space as if at the past made present. They seem tired but focused. His mouth is, uncomfortably, too open; his teeth are a bit yellowed, and saliva collects around them. He has a normal array of marks on his face. His ears are big and soft—cute ears. I have seen this face dozens of times; I have gotten to the point that when I see it I find myself saying to myself, “Leon, fix those teeth!” (I tell the students this, and some laugh, nervously.) I realize that I call him Leon because I feel that I know him well. I am also aware that I don’t know him at all, and that I have invaded his space, have been a voyeur, have seen him too close up, physically and emotionally. I know from our discussion that many of the students feel the same way.

Slowly, methodically, he begins to speak, as if picking each word like a precious stone from a bucket of mud. He often pauses for many seconds between words. He looks down and to his right. “But in the

camp, camps”, he says, “I became religious and I believe that were it not for my belief in god”—and now a very long pause—“then I would not have survived”...—he looks up, blinking—“...the camps”. The camera moves closer to his face. We notice the saliva in his mouth. “I have the hope”, Leon tells us, “that in the afterlife I am going to see my family again”. Now he looks defiantly ahead, at his interviewer, his lips pursed. The camera closes in still more. A long pause. He looks again down and to his right, his face occupying the entire screen, as he tells of “one friend in particular”—many seconds pass—“who came”—again many seconds pass, as he adjusts his seat, and we avert our eyes from his, because we see them too closely, and they are moist. As he tells us that his friend was “serving in the dead-body disposal squad” he seems to lean ever so slightly back away from the vision even as he intensely bores in on it. “He was older than I was and it’s probably thanks to him I survived the war”. Moisture glistens in his eyes and mouth. The pace is terribly, terribly slow.

Leon tells us that this friend had terrible experiences at another camp and was always crying out at night. He arrived in the United States before Leon and quickly became a successful businessman. Leon now looks straight ahead, and spits out, with a flatness that only reveals the turmoil beneath, “But then one day he committed suicide by jumping off the Manhattan Bridge”. He seems surprised, but also blasé. Looking down once again, he continues. “But I owe a great deal to my friend”—an interminable pause—“Pinhas Rosenzweig”. Leon now bites his lip and his body begins to shake in sobs. He covers his face with his hands. The camera moves closer. He uncovers his face, and we stare at his eyes, aware that we are far away from what he is seeing but too close to him seeing it. Dori Laub interrupts the moment: “He was like a father or a brother?” Surprised, almost irritated, Leon replies, “Pardon me?” And Laub: He was like a father or a brother? “Brother”, Leon answers. “A good brother”, Laub responds. Leon again shifts in his seat: “I can say that the camps taught me a lot. I matured quite a bit. [Tears glisten on his face.] And I’m glad I didn’t lose humanity in the camps”. And after a brief blackout on the screen, “I felt that there is god, despite the terrible things that happened to us”.

I am torn between, on the one hand, admiring the mastery Leon displays in his ability to believe in goodness and god and in being able to narrate his own story past the blanks that threatened to undo it, and, on the other, dismissing his ‘recovery’ as the rationalizations of a

permanently damaged man. I also consider that a good rationalization goes a long way. Without letting the students know how I feel, I try to suggest these possibilities. How did they respond?

Most were stunned into silence. Some cried. Some refused to talk. Some claimed to resent the camera's manipulation of our emotions. Others felt voyeuristic. If a discussion was to begin, we would require the comforting distance of intellectual analysis. I had them describe the ways he narrated his story, bringing together fragments from the past that he conjured into the present, allowing silences to speak as he stared into them, conquering those silences and mastering his experience through narrative, aesthetic form. The brief segment we focused on was, I suggested, like a short story, with an arc beginning with a statement of religious belief, descending into despair, and emerging back up into belief. Through this 'reading' of Leon we became able to speak about him, and as the sense emerged that perhaps we should not be speaking about him this way, as if he were indeed the narrator of a short story, we folded that ethical discomfort into the discussion.

But what about Leon's friend Pinhas Rosenzweig? He never talked to Leon about his troubles. He had nightmares. He became successful, and then he committed suicide. Was Leon addressing, perhaps even only semi-consciously, the very Freudian warning about the dangers of repressing trauma and of not telling one's story? Was Leon in the midst of a battle against the silence of his friend into which he feared falling? As we arrived at this point in our discussion, the feeling of fullness that comes with a complex interpretation almost made us forget about the suffering of poor Leon—and this was uncomfortable indeed.

Finally, I returned the students to the very beginning of Leon's testimony. "My name is Leon Sperling", he says, strong and almost matter-of-fact. "I'm a survivor of the Holocaust. I [long pause] was born in Krakow Poland and during the war I was incarcerated for..." Here Leon is interrupted by Dori Laub. "What year? What year?" Leon looks surprised, concerned. He raises his hand, carefully explaining, "I was born in the Krakow Poland in, uh, and I was incarcerated during the war for, uh, since 1942 or '43..." Again, Laub: "What year were you born in?" And Leon, his eyes drifting off: "I was born in 19...uh...and uh, I spent three years in various camps, first in Poland and then in Germany, and I was liberated on the last day of the war in Threisenstadt on May the eighth, 1945".

Like Mr. Takahashi, Leon seems to have become his experience. His birth, the date he can remember, is the day of his liberation. The beginning of his story is not—despite his doctor's best efforts—his birth, but his time in the camps. Here much comes together: story and experience, aesthetics and psychology, narration and recovery.

How much sense does it make to compare Leon and Mr. Takahashi? In addition to all of the differences in religion, culture, and history, there are the very different contexts of their testimonies. Do all these differences fade away beneath the complex idiosyncrasies of two human beings with personal histories that cannot be sorted out? Do the terms of psychoanalysis and those of Buddhism, the terms of being Japanese and of being Jewish, apply exclusively to each side of the divide, or can they cross the divide and speak to both sides? If they can cross the divide, then have we arrived at a universality of suffering and response?

Is culture too large a category of analysis? To suggest the possibility of understanding differences not in cultural, but in more personal, idiosyncratic terms—to see the processes of recovery and expression as based in physiology and therefore as universal—I presented the students with essays on aphasia and narrative by the neurologist and writer Oliver Sacks (“The Lost Mariner”). After all the comparisons, the general response was to assume that suffering is universal, and to suspend judgment about how to conquer and express it. Regarding Hiroshima, one student wrote,

The number of people dead and burning in the river, the descriptions of the dead, all make my heart turn on its side as if it wanted to stop beating for a while to take a rest or rewind the past to stop all that happened. To twist and yearn. But Hiroshima, now, is on the surface as normal looking as any other city in Japan. The grass—where people said that one blade of grass would never grow again—is green and rich, the stream flows by the bank. And the people are remarkably resilient. They go on. Have they forgotten? Are they in denial? Or are they strong and have they overcome? Does it make a difference? I don't know. Are we stronger because we go on or stronger because we forget?—Carry on, carry on. Which is more human?

Which indeed. The student struggles to empathize with individuals and to account for their different ways of adjusting to suffering. Empathy leads her to history. Empathy also makes her swerve from a fully rational comprehension of the past. The successes and failures of

teaching Jewish and Japanese responses to atrocity reflect the limits of our ability to join empathy to understanding. Only with skin charred like theirs, some survivors of Hiroshima have said, can we understand the pain they felt, but armed with that pain, we may shirk from looking history in the face.

Once they found themselves empathizing, students often resisted the reasons of history. Their not wanting to know why was, I think, an ethical stance: they sensed that knowing the answer can diminish the horrors, and that true empathy requires persistent discomfort with the assurance that we can feel for others.

Perhaps in the course we too often allowed ourselves to feel such comfort. Somewhere in the course of teaching it I came to realize that the students and I had formed a community through shared responses to other people's memories, to what philosopher Avishai Margalit calls "a memory of memory" (Margalit 2002: 59). I can see now that whatever comfort this community provided depended upon my belief that it had been formed by a force outside myself. A reader of this essay has suggested to me that the feeling of having "come to realize" this community seems a bit too "wrapped up". Indeed, looking back, I can see that, consciously or not, I was wrapping things up for the comfort that simplifying complicated feelings brings and for the relief that casting them in the mold of an inevitable story elicits. Wrapping things up in the form of a community that I passively came to realize allowed me to feel aesthetically: to sense that fragments had been fused into a whole and that they had been given a purpose all their own. In other words, I was sensing, on the most minor of scales, the aesthetic response to catastrophe.

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CHAPTER TWO

MURAKAMI HARUKI AND THE WAR INSIDE

Jay Rubin

Early in his career, Murakami Haruki was dismissed as a lightweight purveyor of pop fiction. But once his novels began to include harrowing reflections on Japan's tragic wartime history, it became easier to observe the presence of a concern for the country's dark legacy even in some of his breeziest early fiction. And when such themes did emerge full-blown in *Nejimakidori kuronikuru* (The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, 1994–95 [1997]), Murakami's handling of them differed markedly from more conventional, fact-based war novels written by people who had experienced the Asia Pacific War first-hand. This essay¹ will touch briefly on an early story and examine the meaning and perception of the war in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*.

“A Slow Boat to China”

Even as a high-school student, Murakami had a deep interest in history. One multi-volume set he claims to have read and re-read at least 20 times was an unabridged world history published by the Chūō kōron company (Murakami 1994a: 244). Both from his reading and from stories he heard at home, Murakami grew up with ambivalent feelings regarding China and the Chinese. These emerged in the very first short story he ever wrote, “Chūgoku-yuki no surō bōto” (A Slow Boat to China, 1980 [1993]), a delicate, strangely touching account of how the narrator came to harbor feelings of guilt toward the few Chinese people he had met.

Searching in the deepest, most undefined areas of memory after an injury to the head, the story's first-person narrator, Boku, comes up with the totally inexplicable words, “*That's OK, brush off the dirt*

¹ Adapted from Jay Rubin, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words* (London: Vintage, 2005), Chapter 11.

and you can still eat it". In themselves, the words mean nothing, but their very lack of logical connection to anything signals that they have emerged from his unconscious.

"With these words, I find myself thinking about...Death...And death, for some reason, reminds me of the Chinese" (13; 220).²

Following three brief episodes illustrating his ill-defined awkwardness toward the Chinese, the narrator of "A Slow Boat to China" declares, "I wanted to say something...I wanted to say something...about the Chinese, but what?... Even now, I still can't think of anything to say". He continues in an epilogue,

I've read dozens of books on China...I've wanted to find out as much about China as I could. But that China is only my China. Not any China I can read about. It's the China that sends messages just to me. It's not the big yellow expanse on the globe, it's another China. Another hypothesis, another supposition. In a sense, it's a part of myself that's been cut off by the word *China* (38-9; 238-9).

In this way, the story stops short of explaining what it is that causes the narrator to have such odd feelings toward China and the Chinese, just as Murakami's first novel, *Kaze no uta o kike* (Hear the Wind Sing, 1979 [1987]) offers only a one-liner on the stupidity of an uncle who blew himself up by stepping on a land mine that he himself had planted in the soil of Shanghai. One of the last images in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, however, is that of "a young moon, with a sharp curve like a Chinese sword", by which point in the book China has come to stand for the horrific slaughter perpetrated by Japanese soldiers in the war.

Commitment

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle is a sprawling work that begins as a domestic drama involving the disappearance of a couple's cat, ranges to the Mongolian desert, and depicts the protagonist's encounter with political and supernatural evil on a grand scale. Far longer than anything Murakami had written before, it is clearly a turning point for the

² The first set of numbers refers to the location of the story in *Murakami Haruki zensakuhin*, volume 3. The second set refers to Alfred Birnbaum's translation. See Murakami 1993.

author, perhaps *the* great turning point of his career. As Murakami himself has said, it is where he abandons his stance of cool detachment to embrace commitment (Murakami and Kawai 1996: 12–3, 69–70, 74, 75), and though much of the action still takes place inside the brain of a first-person narrator, this central character is mostly concerned with human relationships.

This was a bold move for a writer who had built his reputation on coolness, but Murakami had come to feel strongly that mere storytelling was not enough. He wanted to care deeply about something and to have his hero's quest lead to something.

In many ways *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* can be read as a re-telling of *Hitsuji o meguru bōken* (*A Wild Sheep Chase*, 1982 [1989]), the novel that first attracted attention to Murakami in the West. It is as if the author had asked himself: “What if the first-person narrator of that early novel, Boku, had *not* been so cool about the break-up of his marriage?”³ And where the tragic history of Japan's continental incursions was only hinted at in *A Wild Sheep Chase*'s fanciful story of Jūnitaki Village and the government's exploitation of its farmers (turning them into shepherders to aid the war effort against the Russians in China), here the scene shifts for many pages at a time to wartime action on the Manchurian-Mongolian border in order to explore the violent heritage of modern-day Japan.

Much of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* borders on the exotic, including never-explained elements of the occult, and scenes set far from modern urban Japan in terms of both time and space. If we strip away the mystery and color, however, the novel turns out to be the story of a somewhat sexually repressed husband whose even more repressed wife leaves him when she discovers her own sexual desire in the arms of another man.

Neither partner in the marriage is a prude, although the wife's perfectionism and neatness border on the extreme (as with the wife in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, to comic effect). She and her possessions—and her handwriting—are constantly described as '*kichin-to*', which is translated with various terms for neatness and precision (215; 167–8).⁴

³ Murakami has said that the marriage depicted in Natsume Sōseki's *Mon* (*The Gate*, 1910 [1972]) was in the back of his mind when he was writing *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. See Kawai and Murakami 1996: 84.

⁴ The first set of numbers refers to the location of the novel in *Murakami Haruki zensakuhin*, volume 2. The second set refers to Alfred Birnbaum's translation. See Murakami 1989.

Never a grand passion, even at the outset (“not one of those strong, impulsive feelings that can hit two people like an electric shock when they first meet, but something quieter and gentler”) (2:6.99; 225),⁵ their marriage *has* given them six years of gentle sensual intimacy, to be sure, in addition to what seems like genuine mutual love (marred only by some unexplained secret on the wife’s part surrounding an unexpected pregnancy and abortion three years earlier). But they have never given themselves over so fully to sexual pleasure that they lose control.

When his wife strays into the dark room of animalistic sexuality, however, and begins sending him ambiguous cries for help from that unknown world, the husband is confused. Afraid to rescue her from the darkness, he waits for a sign to tell him what to do. He receives a letter from her asking for a divorce and containing a graphic description of her affair. This would have been more than enough evidence for most men to end the relationship, but still he hesitates to act. He considers running off to Europe with another woman and simply leaving all his troubles behind, but concludes that he is going to have to fight, not run away.

He works through his anger by directing it at someone else: he beats up the folk singer he saw perform on the night of the abortion (which, he finally realizes, was the event that initiated the deterioration of his marriage). He concludes that the love they shared for six years was too important simply to abandon. If it was meaningless, then that portion of his life was meaningless, and perhaps his whole life has been meaningless. This he is not willing to accept. Where the narrator of *A Wild Sheep Chase* viewed the failure of the relationship with a mixture of irony and boredom, here the husband-narrator cares deeply about the loss and vows to fight for his wife’s return.

It is as much for the sake of the integrity of his own personality, however, as for the continuity of his marriage that the husband, Tōru, decides to pursue his wife, Kumiko. “I had to get Kumiko back. With my own hands, I had to pull her back into *this world*. Because if I didn’t, that would be the end of me. This person, this self that I think of as ‘me’ would be lost” (2:18.331; 340).

⁵ The first set of numbers refers to the location in *Nejimakidori kuronikuru* (3 vols.). See Murakami 1994–95. The second set of numbers refers to Jay Rubin’s translation. See Murakami 1997. To match page numbers in the paperback editions of the translation, subtract 2 for Book 2 and 4 for Book 3.

But instead of doing anything so practical as hiring a private detective or searching on his own for likely hiding places, Tōru launches his quest inward. He goes down into the earth, into a well, to brood on his past. What he finds there has implications that go far beyond his own inner world. As his young friend Kasahara May tells us (almost too directly), in choosing to fight for his wife, Tōru will become a kind of cultural hero, fighting battles not only for himself as an individual but “fighting for a lot of other people” as well (2:18.345; 327). In trying to find out who he is, Tōru discovers elements of his identity that have wide-ranging cultural and historical significance.

The psychologist Kawai Hayao reads Kumiko’s disappearance as an allegory for the kind of emotional barrenness that can overtake a modern marriage when one partner psychologically withdraws from the relationship; this in turn can be seen as emblematic of human relations in general, which call out for the often painful process of ‘well digging’ on both sides of the gap (Kawai and Murakami 1996: 196, 197, 81).

The well thus holds out the promise of healing, which is why Tōru goes to inordinate lengths to assure himself of an opportunity to spend time inside it, but the process of ‘well digging’ is by no means pleasant. Indeed, it suggests the threat of a slow, painful, and lonely death, as Kasahara May reminds Tōru after she has pulled up his rope ladder:

If I just walked away from here, you’d end up dead. You could yell, but no one would hear you. No one would think you were at the bottom of a well...they’d never find your body (2:9.153–4; 254).

Tōru spends so much time in the well in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* that many readers want to know if Murakami himself has been down one. The answer, quite simply, is no. He would be “too scared” to do such a thing he told Laura Miller in an interview for the web magazine *Salon*, adding that he associates the well with the story of Orpheus descending to the land of death. He also became visibly excited when he told an audience at a benefit reading he did after the Kobe earthquake that he had recently read about a hunter who had survived several days trapped down a well, and that many of the details of sound and light in the story matched what he had written entirely from his imagination (Miller 1997).⁶

⁶ Kobe reading observed by the author on 9 September 1995. See also “‘Murakami Haruki ga suki’ genshō no nazo” 1995: 22. Here, rather than saying he would be “too scared”, Murakami said he would like to try it someday. I have added “visibly excited” from direct observation of the event.

The name ‘Tōru’ (literally, ‘to pass through’) was used in *Noruwei no mori* (Norwegian Wood, 1987 [2000]) where it may have signified that the protagonist was making his passage into adulthood. In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, however, Tōru learns to ‘pass through’ the wall separating the ordinary world from the world of the unknown. His name first appears in the *katakana* phonetic script, though it is later written with a Chinese character meaning ‘to receive’, which suggests passivity.⁷ It therefore seems to imply both activity and passivity. Most of the time, Tōru is a typical Murakami ‘Boku’, a first-person narrator of interest to us less for himself than for the stories he hears—the stories he ‘receives’ through his ears—from the more colorful, even bizarre characters who surround him. Tōru/Boku listens to one ‘long story’ after another, and one of the major attractions of the novel is the sheer fascination of the stories themselves.

The name of Tōru’s wife is also significant. The ‘kumi’ of ‘Kumiko’ could have overtones of neatly bundling things together, arranging things, or, from a homophone, meaning to draw water from a well. The connection with water and wells would seem most relevant in this novel, which brings to a kind of culmination the well symbolism prominent throughout Murakami’s works.

If the well is a passageway to the unconscious, the water at the bottom represents the contents of the psyche. When Tōru goes down into the dry well, he takes on the role of its water, becoming almost pure psyche. In the darkness, he all but loses track of his physical existence and becomes pure memory and imagination, floating in and out of consciousness, unsure of where he ends and the darkness begins. Only the wall against his back seems to provide a barrier between the physical world and that deeper darkness he seeks. But then Tōru passes through the wall, and he discovers his fears concentrated in a place known only as Room 208, which is reminiscent of Room 101, the repository of each person’s greatest fear, in George Orwell’s *1984*. (The Orwell connection may not be accidental.)

Devoted Murakami readers may find the number 208 strangely familiar, though it is reminiscent of something so cute and frivolous from an earlier book that one’s natural response is to half-consciously repress the association: you know you know it, but you don’t want to think about it. The last thing we want to associate with something

⁷ The character is used in *Nejimakidori kuronikuru* 1:3.63.

as important as Orwellian fears is something as silly-seeming as the twin girls, 208 and 209, in *1973-nen no pinbōru* (Pinball, 1973, 1980 [1985]), but Murakami's decision to make the association is a bold one. Even in the earlier book, the cute twins were used to evoke the mystery of the processes of memory. Without any explanation, they showed up in Boku's bed suddenly one day and went back just as suddenly to their 'original place' in the depths of his mind.

Room 208 exists in Tōru's (or perhaps even Kumiko's) mind and is accessible only through a dream-like state. For Tōru, Room 208 is a place of irresistible sexual allure, where a faceless telephone-sex woman lies in bed, seemingly naked, waiting for him amid the suffocating fragrance of flowers; a place where his half-conscious attraction for a mysterious woman named Creta Kanō blossoms into a sexual fantasy so intense it causes him to ejaculate in 'reality', an adolescent throw-back perhaps related to Creta's Sixties-style hair and clothes. (Though, born in April 1954, Tōru would have been only nine in 1963 when Kennedy was assassinated.) Finally, Room 208 is a place of danger, where there is a threat of death involving sharp knives and somehow related to his brother-in-law, the evil Wataya Noboru.

Tōru hesitates to confront his fears, but he is determined to wrench some kind of 'meaning' out of his existence. Where earlier characters might have been content or even amused to leave things pleasantly enigmatic, he wants answers. He wants to understand. He wants to understand another person—and most of all, he wants to understand the woman to whom he is married:

Is it possible, finally, for one human being to achieve perfect understanding of another?...

That night, in our darkened bedroom, I lay beside Kumiko, staring at the ceiling and asking myself just how much I really knew about this woman....

I might be standing in the entrance of something big, and inside lay a world that belonged to Kumiko alone, a vast world that I had never known. I saw it as a big, dark room. I was standing there holding a cigarette lighter, its tiny flame showing me only the smallest part of the room.

Would I ever see the rest? Or would I grow old and die without ever really knowing her? If that was all that lay in store for me, then what was the point of this married life I was leading? What was the point of my life at all if I was spending it in bed with an unknown companion? (1:2.43, 56, 57; 24, 30, 30–1).

The problem is set out implicitly in Chapter 1 and overtly, as quoted here, in Chapter 2, but not until Book Three, some 600 pages later, is Tōru ready to take action. Then his quest takes on the overtones of legend—both Japanese and Western. He becomes a modern-day Theseus, advancing into the dark, convoluted labyrinth of linked computers, which is guarded by the half-human, half-bull Minotaur named Ushikawa (Bull River). Or he is Orpheus, or Japan's earth-creating god Izanagi, pursuing his dead wife into the depths of the underworld, where she forbids him to gaze on her physical decay.⁸ "I want you to think about me this way if you can", Kumiko writes to Tōru from her end of the computer hook-up: "that I am slowly dying of an incurable disease—one that causes my face and body gradually to disintegrate" (3:23.259; 492–3). And when, after wandering blindly through the maze of corridors of his inner world, he pursues her into Room 208 with a flashlight, she commands him, "Don't shine that light on me" (3:35.16; 573).

Going down into the well—into himself—is the ordeal Tōru must face to qualify himself for marital commitment. Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, another story of an ordeal faced for love, provides a motif for Book Three, "The Birdcatcher" (Murakami and Kawai 1996: 86). Murakami has said of marriage:

For a long time after I got married, I used to have this vague idea that the purpose of marriage was for each partner to fill in what the other lacked. Lately, though, after 25 years of marriage, I've come to see it differently, that marriage is perhaps rather an ongoing process of each partner's *exposing* of what the other lacks. . . . Finally, only the person himself can fill in what he is missing. It's not something another person can do for you. And in order to do the filling in, you yourself have to discover the size and location of the hole (*ibid*: 82–4).

Before Tōru can bring Kumiko back with him from the darkness into the real world, he must face his greatest fear: the evil embodied by Wataya Noboru. Noboru, his political success made possible by his smooth manipulation of the media, is heir to the continental depreda-

⁸ Once they have finished creating the land through sexual union, the male and female deities Izanagi and Izanami set to work bearing the deities that will live there. Giving birth to fire proves fatal for Izanami, however. Heartsick, Izanagi pursues his dead mate to the dark underworld, where she forbids him to look upon her. When he does look, however, he finds her infested with maggots. He flees in horror and disgust, and as soon as he returns to the world he washes the corruption of death from his body. See Philippi 1968 for an English translation of this founding myth of Japan.

tions of his uncle's generation. It is the same evil that appeared in the form of the right-wing boss in *A Wild Sheep-Chase*. Murakami associates it with the authoritarian tradition of the Japanese government responsible for the murder of untold numbers of Chinese, the sacrifice of millions of Japanese in the war, and the suppression of the student idealism of the late 1960s, leading to the boredom and overwork of the consumer culture that dominates modern Japan. This element expands the scope of the novel far beyond the story of a failed marriage. In search of his wife and his self, Tōru finds more than he bargained for. He finds ugly aspects of his country's recent history, much of it violent and horrible and lying just beneath the surface of everyday life. He also finds the violence inside himself as he nearly kills the folk singer, beating him bloody with a baseball bat.

"Violence", Murakami has said, is "the key to Japan" (Buruma 1996: 70). For Westerners who live in fear of the random violence of their own society and who see the safety of a megalopolis like Tokyo as something of a miracle, this statement comes as a surprise. But Murakami was speaking—and always writes—as a historian. *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is, indeed, a chronicle, a book of history in which chronology matters, a story set precisely in the mid-1980s, but probing deeply into the violence of the wartime years for the root causes of Japan's modern malaise. Each Book is labelled with the dates of its action: June and July, 1984; July to October, 1984; October 1984–December 1985—the very heart of the 1980s, the decade when the consumer culture seemed to obliterate everything but the pursuit of wealth.⁹ Tōru has chosen to withdraw from the pointless dead-end job this culture has offered him and to think about his life and where it is heading.

The central symbol of this era is the alley behind Tōru's house. Sealed at both ends, it leads nowhere. At the far end is a vacant house, where Tōru has been ordered by Kumiko to search for their missing cat. Images of emptiness abound in the book, echoing the description of the empty house. In the garden of the house stands a stone statue of a bird, "its wings open as if it wanted to escape from this unpleasant place as soon as possible" (1:1.23; 14). The scene is as dead as the center of the town of Jūnitaki in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, where there is

⁹ While much attention was paid to designating the day of the week on which the volumes of the novel were published, by an incredible oversight, the dating of the action on the back of the title page was omitted from Book Three.

“a bird-shaped fountain with no water in it. The bird looked vacantly up at the sky with an open mouth” (2:269; 213).¹⁰ If Murakami’s birds represent a lively communication between the conscious and unconscious worlds (see, especially *Sekai no owari to hādoboirudo wandārando* (Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World, 1985 [1991]), these frozen birds suggest a kind of amnesia.

Jūnitaki had once flourished under the government-subsidized program to raise sheep in order to produce wool for coats that would enable Japan’s military to wage war in China. The yard of the vacant house in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, we learn later, has a well that has gone as dry as the bird-fountain in Jūnitaki. This old well beneath an ancient tree becomes the site of Tōru’s inner quest.

The 1980s, then, are presented as a vacant, stagnant, dissatisfying decade, just beneath the surface of which lurks a violent history. They are much like the ‘boring’ 1970s of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the emptiness a legacy of pre-war authoritarianism. There are other symbolic parallels between *A Wild Sheep Chase* and *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*: the star-shaped mark that distinguishes the malevolent sheep and the stain-like mark, the size of a baby’s palm, that appears on Tōru’s cheek when he passes through the well wall separating this world from the other, a mark that links him with the fate of the veterinarian who witnessed the war in Manchuria. The one violent act in Tōru’s marriage is an abortion that Kumiko chose to have. He had wanted the child (whose palm print comes to grace his cheek), but she felt there was something evil in her family’s blood that should not be allowed to reproduce itself. Her decision to kill the life inside her is reminiscent of the Rat’s suicide in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, an attempt to kill the malevolent spirit of continental plunder lodged within him.

The War Inside

What does all this talk of war and imperialism have to do with an unemployed paralegal whose marriage is on the rocks? Well, nothing—except that he is Japanese. And he is looking inside himself. Murakami has always written about the half-remembered fragments that lurk in the mind until they pounce out to grab us unexpectedly, and in this,

¹⁰ Modified from Birnbaum’s translation.

his most ambitious novel, he finds in the shadows of memory not only the idiosyncrasies of his hero but his entire country's dismal recent past. "It's all there, inside me: Pearl Harbor, Nomonhan, whatever", Murakami has said of himself (Murakami and Kawai 1996: 59).

While writing Book Three of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, Murakami was asked in an interview: "Why should your generation take responsibility for a war which ended before it was born?" He replied:

Because we're Japanese. When I read about the atrocities in China in some books, I can't believe it. It's so stupid and absurd and meaningless. That was the generation of my father and grandfather. I want to know what drove them to do those kinds of things, to kill or maim thousands and thousands of people. I want to understand, but I don't (Parry 1994: 20).

Beneath the curved Chinese moon, Tōru finds in the water of his heart's well the sins committed by the generation of his 'uncle'—or rather, the dangerous, media-exploiting Wataya Noboru's uncle. An elite army officer, Noboru's uncle can be seen as the heir to *Norwegian Wood's* "Storm Trooper", the roommate who stuttered every time he tried to pronounce the word 'map'. Noboru's uncle believes wholly in the science of logistics, for which maps are an indispensable tool. He comes under the influence of the actual historical figure Ishiwara Kanji (1889–1949), a believer in Japan's mission in Asia and notorious leader of the Manchurian Incident, the Japanese Army-manufactured 'attack' on Japanese troops that started the War. By inheriting this uncle's seat in the National Diet, Noboru somehow inherits his legacy of imperialism. Thus it is China that lurks behind his appearance as a modern intellectual on TV, an image that gives Noboru such power over a superficial society. In the story "TV piipuru" (TV People, 1989 [1993]) the television screen was blank, filling people's lives with a numbing nothingness; here, the threat of the invasive medium is tied to the darkest aspects of Japan's recent history.

Boku of "A Slow Boat to China" may not know what to say about that country, but in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* Murakami knows exactly what he wants to say. Japan's recent history is alive inside Tōru, even though he is one of the most apolitical beings imaginable. This is hinted at in a scene in Book One, Chapter 5, when Tōru's 16-year-old neighbor, Kasahara May, asks him his name:

"Tōru Okada", I said.

She repeated my name to herself several times. "Not much of a name, is it?" she said.

“Maybe not”, I said. “I’ve always thought it sounded kind of like some pre-war foreign minister: Tōru Okada. See?”

“That doesn’t mean anything to me. I hate history. It’s my worst subject” (1:5.113; 62).

In fact, Okada Keisuke (1868–1952), Prime Minister from July 1934 to March 1936, was a key player in events leading to the ideological extremism that led to Japan’s disastrous decision to go to war. A retired admiral, Okada headed a government that promoted the worship of the mystical ‘national essence’ (*kokutai*) and of the Emperor, and quashed the more rational, widely-accepted ‘organ theory’ of the Japanese state; nevertheless, he was still not considered right-wing enough for the renegade young officers who staged a coup on 26 February 1936. They tried to assassinate him, but killed his brother-in-law instead. Okada resigned after this incident. He never served as Foreign Minister, but Tōru’s vague reference to pre-war politics hints at dramatic events such as these.

The 30-year-old Tōru Okada recognizes a certain indefinable bond with Japan’s pre-war government and displays some interest in the history of the war, but the shadow of history has yet to fall on the young May. She remains a virgin to the end, uninitiated into the ways of either sex or history. The young readers that Murakami has cultivated, however, may lose their historical ‘virginity’ with regard to the war as they follow him into Tōru’s dark room.

Some commentators have criticized Murakami for making up fictional wartime episodes rather than drawing on the facts, but this quite misses the point. The ‘war’ as depicted in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is not presented as facts experienced by Boku but as part of the psychological baggage carried around half-consciously by Japanese of Murakami’s generation and beyond. For most Japanese, the war exists in the same realm of the half-known as the Rossini opera *The Thieving Magpie* (*La Gazza Ladra*), the title of which occurs on the first page of the novel and is used as the title of Book One. As Tōru remarks near the end, all he knew of the opera was the overture and the title: it was a thing half-known from childhood, something he had taken for granted, had never questioned or pursued.

What kind of opera was “The Thieving Magpie”, I wondered. All I knew about it was the monotonous melody of its overture and its mysterious title. We had had a recording of the overture in the house when I was a boy. It had been conducted by Toscanini. Compared with Claudio Abbado’s youthful, fluid, contemporary performance, Toscanini’s had had

a blood-stirring intensity to it, like the slow strangulation of a powerful foe who has been downed after a violent battle. But was “The Thieving Magpie” really the story of a magpie that engaged in thieving? If things ever settled down, I would have to go to the library and look it up in a dictionary of music. I might even buy a complete recording of the opera if it was available. Or maybe not. I might not care to know the answers to these questions by then (3:33.397–8; 558).¹¹

The opera is featured prominently in the book not because its plot provides a key to the novel but precisely because it is just out of reach, on the periphery of most people’s consciousness. Parts of the overture can be heard in TV commercials, and some readers may associate it with the violent Stanley Kubrick film *A Clockwork Orange*, but for Tōru *The Thieving Magpie* will always be something he hasn’t quite understood. It is familiar, and yet its meaning eludes him.

Storytelling

Rather than writing about historical facts, then, Murakami examines the War as a psychological phenomenon shared by generations too young (like Tōru) to have experienced it firsthand—as history: as story. He does this by exploiting the power of storytelling—by taking his readers to the edge of the cliff and making them hang there while he switches to another narrative line.

This happens most effectively in Book Three, when war episodes alternate with those in which Tōru does battle in the darkness against the violence and evil in his own psyche. Chapter 30, for example, tantalizes the reader by cutting short Lt Mamiya’s story of “Boris the Manskiner” (the Russian officer who skins people alive) before it has even begun. Chapter 31 drops that story completely and switches to Tōru climbing down into the well. This chapter also ends by tantalizing the reader, for after Tōru has trailed the whistling hotel waiter to Room 208, we learn only that “the door began to open inward”

¹¹ This is one instance when Murakami and his Boku are almost indistinguishable. I was with Murakami when he bought a video of *La Gazza Ladra* at the San Francisco Opera gift shop on 21 November 1992. He wanted to find out once and for all what the opera was about—long after he had given the title *The Thieving Magpie* to Book One of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, and longer still after the overture had begun the story “The Wind-Up Bird and Tuesday’s Women” in 1986.

(*ibid*). At this suspense-filled moment, Chapter 31 ends, and the story of Boris the Manskiner continues.

This new chapter even bears the subtitle, “The Story of Boris the Manskiner, Continued”, as surely as the old movie serials or serialized newspaper novels labelled their contents.¹² With his colorful chapter titles, Murakami throws out any pretence at reportage and steps forth as a performative novelist in the tradition of Richardson or Fielding. He is unabashedly pulling the strings, switching his reader back and forth between parallel narratives. Lt Mamiya’s story of Boris, told in a letter to Tōru, has no direct connection to Tōru’s adventures in the dark corridors of his mind.

But how is Lt Mamiya’s letter interrupted by Chapter 31 on Tōru’s final confrontation in Room 208? Has Tōru suddenly leapt back to his desk and resumed reading? Of course not. He is still down inside the well. The only answer is that Murakami has put the new chapter there so that we will absorb alternating episodes of the two narratives in what he deems to be the most effective way. As the apparently unrelated stories appear in alternating chapters, a relationship spontaneously takes shape in the mind of the reader: the war becomes part of what Tōru finds inside himself.

In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, then, Murakami relies heavily on storytelling. At several points he leaves Tōru behind in favor of a third-person narrator. We see this in Book Three, particularly Chapters 9 and 26 of the translation, “The Zoo Attack (or, A Clumsy Massacre)” and “The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle No. 8 (or, A Second Clumsy Massacre)”. These two stories are narrated by the mother and son known as Nutmeg and Cinnamon.

Nutmeg tells her story to Tōru as they dine in a posh restaurant. Later, Tōru *reads* the sequel on a computer—into which it has supposedly been entered by Cinnamon. In fact, Tōru only reads it once and is unable to access it again, which means that we get it either because we are somehow looking through his eyes as he reads—which in turn means that *we* have access to the text again anytime we like because it is in our book, though *he* can never see it again—or because he has a superb memory and has somehow recalled it all for us later. Where the Tōru of *Norwegian Wood* simply tells us he is writing the story

¹² These are the chapter numbers in the published translation. Add two in each case for the numbers in the original.

down from memory, things are never so simple in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*.

Nutmeg, whose alias is suggested to her by salt and pepper shakers on the table where she dines with Tōru (3:8.94; 389), is a kind of shaman or medium, telling her story in a semi-conscious trance-like state. She represents the function of storytelling in its most primitive form, drawing on the depths of something like the collective unconscious. When Tōru interrupts her to ask about something she has said, she has no memory of having said it (3:10.117–8; 408). Her son Cinnamon, whose alias is chosen by Nutmeg through free association with her own, comes from a long line of mute Murakami story-spinners going back to the child Boku of *Hear the Wind Sing*—people whose lack of spoken eloquence is compensated for by literary skill. Cinnamon is the next evolutionary step in human storytelling, replacing oral recitation with a computer keyboard. When Tōru is frustrated in his attempt to access any files on the computer other than the sequel to Nutmeg's story, titled "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle No. 8", he begins to wonder about Cinnamon's role as a storyteller in ways that must reflect the questions in Murakami's own mind:

But why had Cinnamon written such stories? And why *stories*? Why not some other form? And why had he found it necessary to use the word 'chronicle' in the title? ... I would have had to read all 16 stories to find the answers to my questions, but even after a single reading of No. 8, I had some idea, however vague, of what Cinnamon was pursuing in his writing. He was engaged in a search for the meaning of his own existence. And he was hoping to find it by looking into the events that had preceded his birth.

To do that, Cinnamon had to fill in those blank spots in the past that he could not reach with his own hands. By using those hands to make a story, he was trying to supply the missing links. ... He inherited from his mother's stories the fundamental style he used, unaltered, in his own stories: namely, the assumption that *fact may not be truth, and truth may not be factual*. The question of which parts of a story were factual and which parts were not was probably not a very important one for Cinnamon. The important question for Cinnamon was not what [a person] *did* but what [that person] *might have done*. He learned the answer to this question as soon as he succeeded in telling the story (3:29.329–33; 528–9).

Of all the characters in this long novel, Cinnamon appears to be the closest thing to an alter-ego for the author. He "was engaged in a search for the meaning of his own existence... by looking into the events that had preceded his birth". It is as if the cool, detached Murakami had

begun to write as a way to explore his own detachment, and rather than be satisfied with amusing himself, had used the process to feed his deep curiosity. He began to probe into his life and times and the history of his country to try to figure out what was missing in them that might explain why he himself didn't feel more. Nowhere has he come closer to confessing his own emotional void than in *Norwegian Wood*, through the voice of the cold-hearted seducer of women, Nagasawa:

We're a lot alike, though, Watanabe and me. . . . Neither of us is interested, essentially, in anything but ourselves. O.K., so I'm arrogant and he's not, but neither of us is able to feel any interest in anything other than what we ourselves think or feel or do. That's why we can think about things in a way that's totally divorced from anybody else. That's what I like about him. The only difference is that he hasn't realized this about himself, and so he hesitates and feels hurt. . . . Watanabe's practically the same as me. He may be a nice guy, but deep down in his heart he's incapable of loving anybody. There's always some part of him somewhere that's wide awake and detached. He just has that hunger that won't go away. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about (301, 304; 208, 210).¹³

Cinnamon is the storyteller who probes most deeply into the historical past to explain the emptiness of the present. Visitors to Murakami's Tokyo office find the name 'Cinnamon' on the mailbox, and a variation on the name used to be part of the office e-mail address. Like Cinnamon, Murakami was engaged in a creative act of self-examination in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, as he brought stories out of the depth of his being that had been suggested to him by his country's history, with particular emphasis on Japan's military activities in China.

Nomonhan

Murakami traced his own inward search in a series of articles written after a two-week trip in June 1994 to the site of the Nomonhan Incident on the border between Manchuria and Mongolia. The timing is significant. Books One and Two of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* had just appeared, while Book Three was still growing in his computer.

¹³ The first set of numbers refers to the location of the novel in *Murakami Haruki zensakuhin*, volume 6. The second set refers to Jay Rubin's translation. See Murakami 2000.

Which is to say that Murakami had never set foot on the Asian continent or seen the Khalkha River or Nomonhan before he conceived of Mr Honda, the mystic who survived the Nomonhan slaughter, or before he wrote the scenes of cross-border espionage that bring Book One to its horrifying close with the flaying of the still-living Yamamoto. Only Book Three can be said to have benefited from Murakami's first-hand observation of a battlefield that had haunted him ever since he was a schoolboy.

From a history book he read as a child Murakami remembered certain photographs of weirdly stubby, old fashioned tanks and planes from what he calls the Nomonhan War (generally referred to in Japan as the Nomonhan Incident and in Mongolia as the Khalkha River War), a fierce border clash that took place in the spring and summer of 1939. It involved Japanese soldiers stationed in Manchuria and a combined force of Soviet and Outer-Mongolian troops. The images of the event remained vivid in his memory for reasons he could never explain to himself, and he read the few books he could find on the subject.

Then, almost by chance, he came across a number of old Japanese books on Nomonhan in the Princeton library and realized he was as strangely mesmerized by the event as ever. He went from those to Alvin Coox's massive two-volume study and was particularly pleased to discover that Coox, too, had been fascinated by the subject since childhood but found it hard to explain why. Continued rumination, however, led Murakami to a tentative explanation for his own unflagging interest: perhaps, he thought, "the fascination for me is that the origin of this war was all too Japanese, all too representative of the Japanese people" (Murakami 1994b, September: 48).¹⁴

The same could be said of the Second World War, he admits, but that war is just too big, too much of a towering monument to grasp in its entirety. It *was* possible to get a handle on Nomonhan, however: a four-month undeclared war staged in a limited area that may have been Japan's first experience of having its un-modern worldview and 'warview' trounced by a country that knew how to establish supply lines before going to war rather than simply hoping for the best. Fewer than 20,000 Japanese troops lost their lives in Nomonhan, but the number soared to over 2,000,000 in the Second World War. In

¹⁴ See also Murakami 1998: 135–90, and Coox 1985.

both cases, these soldiers died meaninglessly as victims of a system that will make any sacrifice to preserve ‘face’ and that blindly trusts to luck rather than efficient modern planning. “They were murdered”, says Murakami, “used up like so many nameless articles of consumption—with terrible inefficiency within the hermetically sealed system we call Japan” (*ibid*, October: 63). It happened first in Nomonhan, but the Japanese learned nothing from that harsh experience, and so they went on to fight the Second World War. “But what have we Japanese learned from *that* dizzying tragedy?” (*ibid*).

This clearly echoes the message (or a message) of *A Wild Sheep Chase*: “The basic stupidity of modern Japan is that we’ve learned absolutely nothing from our contact with other Asian peoples” (MHZ 2: 242; mod. tr., p. 188). True, Murakami observes, the Japanese people now ‘love’ peace (or rather, they love *being* at peace), but the ‘sealed system’ was left virtually untouched by the bitter experience of the war.

We did away with the pre-war emperor system and put the Peace Constitution in its place. And as a result we have, to be sure, come to live in an efficient, rational world based on the ideology of a modern civil society, and that efficiency has brought about an almost overwhelming prosperity in our society. Yet, I (and perhaps many others) can’t seem to escape the suspicion that even now, in many areas of society, we are being peacefully and quietly obliterated as nameless articles of consumption. We go on believing that we live in the so-called free ‘civil state’ we call ‘Japan’ with our fundamental human rights guaranteed, but is this truly the case? Peel back a layer of skin, and what do we find breathing and pulsating there but the same old sealed national system or ideology (Murakami 1994b, October: 63).

Nothing has changed in all the decades since Nomonhan, says Murakami. Perhaps the peeling of the skin of the spy and nationalist zealot Yamamoto is symbolic of the need to look beneath the outer layer to discover why Japan, even in peacetime, continues to regard its own people as expendable commodities.

The border dispute in which the Japanese military became embroiled in 1939 was still very much alive when Murakami made his visit in June 1994. In order to get to the village of Nomonhan, he and photographer/friend Matsumura Eizō had to take a plane, then two trains, and eventually a Land Cruiser, to see the Chinese side of the Khalkha River. They then had to go all the way back to Beijing, take another two planes and a long journey by jeep across the steppe to see the Mongolian side. Direct border crossings were impossible between

China's Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and the independent nation of Mongolia.

But it was worth it. Having overcome these difficulties, Murakami found himself standing in one of the best-preserved battlefields in the world—preserved not by government mandate for historical purposes, but by nature. The place was so fly-ridden, remote, arid and useless to anyone that tanks and mortars and other detritus of war had been left where they had been abandoned under the vast sky, rusting but still intact, more than half a century later. Seeing this vast graveyard of steel, where so many men had suffered and lost their lives for no good reason, Murakami wrote:

I suddenly realized that in historical terms we probably belong to the later iron age. The side that managed to throw the greater amount of iron more effectively at the enemy and thereby destroy the greater amount of human flesh would achieve victory and justice. And they would be able to take victorious command of one section of this drab plain of grass (*ibid*, November: 73).

There were more steel scraps of war on display at a large war museum in a nearby town, but a power failure hid most of them from view. On the way back to the military guest quarters where they were to spend the night, Murakami and Matsumura clung on amid the reek of gasoline fumes from the extra tanks on board the bouncing jeep as their chain-smoking Mongolian Army guides took a detour to hunt down and kill a she-wolf. They arrived at one o'clock in the morning, and Murakami flopped into bed exhausted, but unable to sleep. He felt the presence of some 'thing', and began to regret bringing back a rusty mortar and other war souvenirs that now lay on top of the table in his room.

When I awoke in the middle of the night, *it* was causing the whole world to pitch wildly up and down, as if the room were in a shaker. The darkness was total. I couldn't see my own hand, but I could hear everything around me rattling. I had no idea what was going on, but I jumped out of bed to turn on the light. The quaking was so violent, though, I couldn't stay upright. I fell, and then managed to pull myself to my feet by holding onto the bed frame... I made it to the door and felt for the light switch. The instant I turned it on, the shaking stopped. Now everything was silent. The clock showed 2:30 a.m.

Then I realized: it was not the room or the world that was shaking: it was me. At that moment, a chill froze me to the core. I was terrified. I wanted to cry out, but my voice wouldn't come. This was the first time

in my life I had ever experienced such deep, violent fear, and the first time I had ever seen such utter darkness (*ibid*: 79).

Too frightened to stay where he was, Murakami went to Matsumura's room next door, and sat on the floor by his sleeping friend, waiting for the sun to come up. As the sky began to lighten after 4 a.m., the chill inside him began to abate, "as if a possessing spirit had fallen away". He went back to his room and fell asleep, no longer afraid.

I have thought about this incident a great deal, but could never find a satisfactory explanation for it. Nor is it possible for me to convey in words how frightened I was at the time. It was as if I had accidentally peered into the abyss of the world.

In the [month or so] since it happened, I have come to think of it more or less this way: It—that is, the shaking and the darkness and the terror and that strange presence—was not something that came to me from the outside, but rather may have been something that had always been inside me, that was part of who I am. Something had seized a kind of opportunity to rip open this thing inside me, whatever it was, just as the old photos of the Nomonhan War that I had seen in a book as a grammar school boy had fascinated me for no clear reason and brought me 30-some-odd years later to the depths of the Mongolian steppe. I don't know how to put it, but it seems to me that no matter how far we go—or rather, the farther we go—the things we discover are more likely to be nothing more than ourselves. The wolf, the mortar, the war museum darkened by a power cut, all of these were parts of me that had always been there, I suspect: they had been waiting all this time for me to find them.

I do know this much, though: that I will never forget those things that are there—that *were* there. Because that is probably all I can do: to keep from forgetting (*ibid*).

Reading this description in a supposedly factual essay, it is hard not to share Ian Buruma's reaction when he heard the story from Murakami: "I was skeptical. The scene sounded too much like one from his novels. It was as if he had started to take his metaphors literally" (Buruma 1996: 70). However, Murakami insists that he described the event exactly as it happened to him, and he even repeated it to the psychologist Kawai Hayao, stipulating at the outset that he did not believe it was a paranormal phenomenon, but instead resulted from his 'utter commitment' to (or perhaps we could say 'obsession with') Nomonhan. Kawai could reply only that he believed such experiences did happen, but that one had to resist interpreting them with 'phony science'—for example, claiming that there was some 'energy' in Murakami's battle-field souvenir (Murakami and Kawai 1996: 155–65).

Matsumura Eizō had no idea that Haruki had come into his room that night, and he found out about Haruki's strange experience only upon reading about it in the magazine article quoted here. When he did read the piece, however, he felt no difficulty in believing it to be true. He too had felt very strange about the Nomonhan battlefield. Although he knew nothing about its history, it had given him goose flesh (something he says almost never happens to him), and for weeks after going there he dreamed about the place. That night, although Murakami found him fast asleep, Matsumura had had difficulty sleeping, despite the fact he was absolutely exhausted, and had drunk a beer to knock himself out (Matsumura 1997).

Once, asked if he believed in the sort of paranormal phenomena depicted in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, Murakami laughed. "No", he said, "I don't believe in that stuff". He enjoyed writing about such things, he said, but in his own life he was strictly a realist. Having said that, he added without irony that if he 'concentrated' on people he could tell a lot about them—for example, how many siblings they had, or what kind of relationship they had with their father. This was the technique that palmists used, he said. 'Reading' the lines on the palm was just a bit of fakery. But this kind of 'concentration' takes enormous energy and is extremely draining, so he reserves it for his writing. As for Malta Kanō's practice of divination using the water in a person's house, this was not, as far as he knew, a venerable (if suspect) practice like palmistry. He had simply made it up for the book (Interview 1994).

Murakami also has evocative things to say about the relationship between the world of the living and the world of the dead. After telling a British interviewer about Japan's version of Orpheus descending to Hades to find Eurydice (the story of Izanagi and Izanami), he claimed it was his 'favorite myth', before adding, with regard to certain deceased friends: "I feel the dead people around me sometimes. It's not a ghost story. Just a kind of feeling, or, a kind of responsibility. I have to live for them" (Thompson 2001). Asked by a reader if he believes in reincarnation, Murakami replied: "My stock answer for that is: 'I'll think about it when I'm dead'" (Murakami and Anzai 2000: 60).

In other words, Murakami sits on the fence where the supernatural is concerned. He is quick to deny belief in it, and yet he suspects the mind is capable of things science cannot explain. And so his visit to Nomonhan is of some value in illuminating what he went on to write: the third book of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Here Tōru encounters

the war and violence inside himself, as if they had been waiting for him all that time.

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CHAPTER THREE

TO MAKE GODS AND DEMONS WEEP: WITNESSING THE SUBLIME IN “DEATH IN MIDSUMMER” AND “PATRIOTISM”

Dennis Washburn

The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though. Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; and the miser-merman, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps; and among the joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities, Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man's insanity is heaven's sense; and wandering from all mortal reason, man comes at last to that celestial thought, which, to reason, is absurd and frantic; and weal or woe, feels then uncompromised, indifferent as his God.

—from *Moby Dick*, Chapter 93, “The Castaway” (Melville 1998: 71–2)

It is always callous to regard suffering and find beauty in it. Such a discovery requires a willingness not only to step back and contemplate the details of lurid spectacle—some horrifying act of violence, some moment of profound physical or emotional loss—but also to create out of the observation of terror and grief an artistic form that renders traumatic experience accessible and pleasurable. Works of art that meet those requirements, that make it possible to relive trauma and enjoy its symptoms, produce a special frisson, the shudder that arises at the chill touch of exquisite suffering.

Mishima Yukio (1925–70) assiduously cultivated callousness as an aesthetic attitude. He was obsessed with the possibilities of violence, with the beauty produced by destruction, and he created a number of memorable characters who revel, often sadistically, in the pleasures of pain. Given this predilection, it seems rather strange, then, to realize that he never wrote a major work of fiction or drama dealing exclusively, or even directly, with the seminal influence on his generation of artists, the cruel, almost apocalyptic violence of the Asia Pacific War.

Aspects of the War are of course present in many of Mishima's writings, but the War itself remains a ghostly presence acting almost exclusively as an aesthetic stimulus. In *Kamen no Kokuhaku* (Confessions of a Mask 1948 [1958]), there are brief scenes in which the narrator witnesses the haunting aftermath of war in Tokyo following the terrible air raids of the early months of 1945. The fire bombings have obliterated everything that served as evidence of human existence. Property has gone up in flames, and the primary relationships that hold civilization together have unraveled. Desperate to survive, women have killed their lovers, and children have murdered their mothers (MYS 45: 71–2, 84, 96). Yet the novel never directly depicts these events. Their significance is filtered through the aestheticized perspective of the narrator and achieves meaning only as they relate to and confirm the sense he has of himself as different and abnormal, the condition that in turn enables him to apprehend the strange and disturbing beauty of destruction. Similarly, in *Kinkakuji* (The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, 1956 [1959]) the War is almost a distant rumor. The protagonist, Mizoguchi, witnesses the power of American bombers, and even hopes that they will strike and destroy his own temple (*ibid.*: 343–4). But the bombers never attack, they never become the desired instruments of destruction that would allow him to take complete and sole possession of the beauty of the Kinkakuji, which he has pathologically idealized.

In these works, and in others, Mishima aestheticizes the War, reducing its presence in postwar Japan to a rhetorical effect by subordinating it to the desires or obsessions of his characters. Yet even within the context of Mishima's eccentric political and aesthetic beliefs, such a calculated artistic choice raises some puzzling questions. Since Mishima was a disciplined and ambitious writer who openly and consciously strove to be the dominant voice of his time, why did he render the War so remote and tangential in his major works? Why did he treat the War in narrowly aesthetic terms rather than use the event as a springboard to the kinds of moral and philosophical speculations found in much of his fiction?

This reluctance to grapple with the actual events of war may be attributed to several factors. It is well known that Mishima did not serve in the military, even though he was subject to the draft in 1944 and 1945. He was granted an exemption because of a lung ailment that may or may not have been misdiagnosed. The circumstances surrounding his exemption are not completely clear, but it seems that in

later years, especially as his political views grew increasingly reactionary, Mishima was troubled by his actions as a youth, and his self-doubt may have made it difficult for him to take up the War directly.

Apart from this personal consideration, Mishima's conservative brand of aesthetics has to be factored into his indirect response to the subject of the War. The main influences during his school years in the late 1930s and early 1940s were two poets, Tachihara Michizō, a classicist, and Itō Shizuo, a member of the *Roman-ha*, the Japanese Romanticists. The *Roman-ha* championed the idea, borrowed from German Romanticism, that the 'true' artist possesses a privileged aesthetic sensibility, which acts as a spiritual power divorced from the mundane. It fused this conception of the artist, in what now seems an audacious move, with a nationalist vision of the unique value and authority of Japan's cultural traditions. The aesthetics of the *Roman-ha* left a lasting impression on the young Mishima, and over the next few years as the war intensified, his circle of literary and intellectual acquaintances expanded to include, among others, Yasuda Yojūrō, a well-known polemicist with strong nationalist leanings. His contacts during this time also led him to a deeper and lasting interest in classical literary forms. When the *Roman-ha*'s ideology fell into disrepute after the defeat and American occupation, it is not surprising that Mishima, a very young man trying to establish himself in the fluid, highly charged political atmosphere of the postwar literary world, did not take up the War as a major subject, but instead continued to experiment with the classicism and aestheticism at the heart of his early literary training.

In spite of the particular circumstances out of which Mishima's artistic response to the War developed, we see in that response a tension that mirrors a broadly shared ambivalence in Japanese society over the meaning of the conflict and the consequences of defeat.¹ Many Japanese found themselves torn between the desire to forget (as much as that was possible)—that is, to repress not only feelings of loss and suffering that seemed overwhelming and beyond comprehension, but also feelings of guilt and shame that arose as a result of both personal and national associations with the war effort—and the powerful urge to memorialize stimulated either by the moral imperative to

¹ John Dower provides a vivid account of this shared ambivalence by cataloguing the wide range of emotions the Japanese people experienced in the face war and defeat. See Dower 1999, in particular chapters 1, 3, 4, and 5.

remember the War and its causes, or by lingering emotional or ideological attachments.

Complicating this ambivalence was a widely shared feeling of attraction for the War itself. Most Japanese were focused so much on the present moment of living that they achieved both a heightened alertness and a sense of detachment. Witnessing the overwhelmingly violent spectacle of total mechanized warfare stirred a sense of awe and wonder and an appreciation of a peculiar beauty that resisted reduction to the medium of mere words. Despite the instinctive human urge to flee before such terrible beauty, the horror of mass destruction brought with it an intensity of experience that produced an apprehension of the sublime; and the ambivalence of postwar responses to the War was due in part to the paradoxical desire to return to that moment of heightened aesthetic awareness, a longing for a return to the scene of death, a nostalgia for the sublime.

Mishima's obsession with the beauty of violent destruction and his apparent reluctance to treat the War as a primary subject of art thus should not be read solely as the contradictory reactions of a unique and eccentric artist, but as representative of the wider, emotionally vexing effort among Japanese writers to confer meaning on the destruction through the imposition of literary form. The rupture between sensibility and subject matter created by the ambivalence of postwar responses to loss is an especially important rhetorical element in two of Mishima's short stories, "Manatsu no shi" (Death in Midsummer, 1953 [1966]) and "Yūkoku" (Patriotism, 1961 [1966]), and it indicates the effect the postwar environment had on the development of Mishima's aesthetics more generally.

Witnessing the Sublime

The aesthetic sentiment denoted by the word 'sublime'² is the feeling that something is noble, exalted, or majestic. However, the sublime is

² A number of Japanese words—*sōgon*, *sūkō*, *kōsō*, *ogosoka*, *kedakai*, *sōzetsu*—may be used to denote the concept of the 'sublime' or the condition of 'sublimity'. Each of these words suggests qualities of grandeur, magnificence, solemnity, loftiness, or nobility, and makes an implied reference to spatial extremes of height or of depth. However, as the list of Japanese words above makes clear, there is no single, direct equivalent to the concept of the 'sublime'. Indeed, the word 'sublime' is sometimes transliterated as *saburaimu* in modern Japanese. My usage of 'sublime' in this essay

not a simple synonym for these adjectives, for during the eighteenth century the sense of the word shifted, in large part because of the work of Kant, to stress not so much a particular quality (i.e. the greatness) of an object, a scene, or a work of art, but its affect. The sublime is a word used to describe the feeling attained when you cannot describe your feelings—to signify a powerful reaction stimulated by the encounter with something that cannot be taken in, that appears limitless, eternal, and fearfully awe-inspiring.

Edmund Burke most famously noted the connection of the sublime to the emotions of fear and terror. Terror, he asserts, “is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime” (Burke 1990: 54). Burke’s reason for this claim is that fear, or terror, robs the mind of the power to act or reason, and thus exposes it to unmediated, grand or outsized sensations that stir intimations of both mortality and immortality. The causes of fear and terror do not necessarily require ‘greatness of dimensions’ since “it is impossible to look on anything as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous”. Nonetheless, it is clear that, for Burke, the experience of the sublime is intensified in the presence of objects of great dimensions.

A level plain of a vast extent on land is certainly no mean idea; the prospect of such a plain may be as extensive as a prospect of the ocean: but can it ever fill the mind with anything so great as the ocean itself? This is owing to several causes; but it is owing to none more than this, that the ocean is an object of no small terror (*ibid.*: 53–4).

Burke’s conception moves beyond the classical conception of the sublime as the quality of grandeur and profundity in an object, especially an object of art, and, following Kant, focuses instead on the reaction of the observer as the operative factor in the experience of the sublime. The sublime is a beauty that dares not speak its name. It induces an intuitive response that overwhelms the ratiocinative powers of the intellect and the descriptive ability of language or image to contain it.

Herman Melville captured Burke’s conception of the awesome and terrifying nature of the experience of the sublime in his description of the character Pip, which is cited above in the epigraph to this essay. Pip, a young black boy who has signed on to the *Pequod*, is given the

draws generally on both Japanese and English senses of the concept, but I am applying the term to denote the particular version of the ‘sublime’ as an aesthetic value that emerged within the historical context of postwar Japanese society.

opportunity to go out in the harpoon boats, and at his first encounter with a whale he panics and falls overboard. He is rescued, but when the same thing happens again, the boat master abandons him in pursuit of his prey. Left alone for hours until rescued by the *Pequod*, Pip is driven mad by the ocean's enormity; and with no means to communicate the inhuman beauty of his experience, at once wondrous and fearful, he is reduced to a kind of divine babble, a madness in which he can only speak "heaven's sense" to communicate his "celestial thought".

Melville's extraordinary description of Pip's madness represents the sublime as a spiritual fever brought on by an overwhelming encounter with enormity; and this representation is useful for grasping attitudes toward trauma in wartime and postwar Japan. A sense of enormity, and with it the overwhelming realization of the ultimate nullity of human values, institutions, and life, arose out of the massive scale of death and destruction a highly rationalized military made possible. The violence of total war perpetrated on civilian populations seemed random and thus beyond comprehension. War was no longer a merely human scourge, but had achieved a degree of intensity, indifference, and capriciousness normally associated with natural catastrophes or with an act of the gods.

Out of the terror produced by such enormity came the strange phenomenon of an indifferent, almost cool appreciation of mass destruction. This phenomenon is described vividly in the influential postwar essay, "Darakuron" (On Decadence, 1946), by Sakaguchi Ango³ (1906–55). Ango's essay simultaneously rejects and embraces postwar nostalgia for the sublime (Sakaguchi 1967: 383–7);⁴ and though "On Decadence" is widely regarded as an iconoclastic work, its depiction of wartime destruction and its satirical attitude toward the ideologi-

³ Sakaguchi Ango was a novelist and essayist who, after many years struggling to make a living as a writer, gained widespread recognition in the years immediately following the War. He was a member of the *Burai-ha* (the Decadence School), a group of young writers who, by celebrating their dissolute lifestyles in their literary works, became emblematic of the aimlessness, abjection, and moral confusion of postwar Japanese society. After a brief period of notoriety, Ango found it difficult to replicate the success of his postwar works such as "On Decadence" and the short story "Hakuchi" (1946, translated in 1962 by George Saitō as *The Idiot*), and his own hard living, which left him with an addiction to drugs, pushed him back into obscurity and led to his relatively early death.

⁴ In citing Ango's essay I have relied on a very fine unpublished translation by my colleague, James Dorsey. I am grateful for his permission to use this translation.

cal delusions that led Japan to such a ruinous pass are surprisingly warm-hearted, insofar as they are positioned in the essay as commonly shared experiences. Ango's criticisms are barbed, but they are free of bitter recrimination.

Ango achieves his personable voice in "On Decadence" largely through a self-deprecating tone. He manipulates the reader to his side by creating an invitingly conspiratorial voice and by establishing the pretense that he is opening up, revealing personal sentiments for which his readers will likely feel some sympathy on the basis of shared experiences. For example, Ango confesses that he is a coward who cannot stand the sight of blood, and yet the terror of war, it turns out, has a very different effect on him. Indeed, he goes so far as to claim that he actually loves colossal destruction. "The ferocious destruction wrought by the bombs and incendiaries really shook me up but, at the same time, the love I feel for my fellow man and the intensity of my connection with them was never stronger than it was in those moments" (*ibid*: 385).

The intensity of war stirs feelings of belonging and of universal attachment and love in Ango that expand to oceanic proportions as these shared emotions are infused with a sense of resignation in the face of indiscriminate destruction. Ango notes that he held the conviction that he would somehow survive the War—a belief held by most individuals as a kind of psychological defense mechanism against the real possibility that death may come at any moment. Even so, his conviction forced him to live in the present moment, and the experience of mere survival was further intensified by a curiosity about what the postwar world would be like, even though it was a future Ango found impossible to imagine. On the whole, for Ango, the experience of the War exerted a peculiar aesthetic, even spiritual charm that he could not resist. "What kept me in Tokyo was, quite simply, a magical spell which demanded that, in exchange for experiencing that mystical intensity, I risk my life by remaining in the city" (*ibid*).

In order to try to recapture that experience and give it form in language, Ango recounts several specific moments or scenes that illustrate what he means by "mystical intensity". Ango mentions his first two-hour air raid on April 4, 1945, and then describes the day the Americans bombed the Ginza:

I was on assignment to the Japan Motion Picture Company at the time, and I watched the bomber formations swoop down on Tokyo from the roof of the company's five-story Ginza headquarters. I stood with the

camera crew around the three cameras they had set up on a rooftop platform to record the event. The second the air raid siren sounded, every last human form disappeared from the streets, windows, rooftops, and every other corner of the Ginza. There was not a soul to be seen—even the rooftop anti-aircraft gunners had ducked out of sight behind their sandbags. The only human figures visible between heaven and earth were the ten of us on the roof of the JMPC building. First the incendiary bombs rained down on Ishikawajima, and when the next squadron of planes headed straight for us, I felt my knees buckle. The cameramen, though, remained disgustingly cool, cigarettes dangling from their lips as they turned their cameras toward the approaching planes. Simply amazing (*ibid.*: 385–6).

Ango's description of his buckling knees is a refreshingly human reaction, especially in light of the cool response of his companions. And yet here we have a description of an almost idealized reaction of the artist as witness, in this case the cameramen who, in doing their job in the face of the awesome power of the American bombers, possess a calm suggesting that they are caught up in the sublime beauty of the moment, in that "mystical intensity" for which Ango has confessed his fondness.

Although Ango is widely considered an iconoclast, the scene above, which fully displays his ambivalent reaction—a mix of fear, admiration, and courage—became an iconic representation of postwar nostalgia for the sublime that was recirculated in various media.⁵ Perhaps the most famous example of how this iconic moment became fixed in the popular imagination comes in the film *Gojira* (Godzilla, 1954) one of the great box-office successes of the 1950s. The central scene when the leviathan emerges from Tokyo Bay and begins its terrible rampage through the city—destroying the armed forces confronting it, toppling buildings and crushing vehicles, burning power lines, causing the agonizing deaths of a mother and child—is represented directly to us in lavish detail. However, this daring re-creation of the wartime destruction of Tokyo is framed for the viewer by the presence of intermediary witnesses, a team of cameramen and a reporter on top of a television tower who continue to broadcast what we are seeing until they too are silenced by the destruction. This mediation is, strictly speaking, not really necessary to help the viewer see what is happening, but by draw-

⁵ For a more complete discussion of Ango's influence on postwar literature and popular culture, see Rubin 1985.

ing our attention back away from the sheer terror of the rampage, represented by a series of rapidly edited scenes of various specific acts of destruction, the act of witnessing, which is made universally available by the new technology of television, confers significance to the apparently random violence through the conscious imposition of descriptive language and imagery. The presence of mediating witnesses highlights the impossibility of taking in the enormity of the event; and once the reporter's words are silenced and the rampage is finished, the scene ends with a long-distant shot of Tokyo in flames. Although the special effects in the film have an undeserved reputation for cheesiness in the U.S., the shots of the aftermath achieve a striking, weird beauty, and the presence (or imposition) of the reporters and crew foregrounds the attraction of the spectacle, a visceral cue that stimulated ambivalent responses for Japanese viewers of 1954—both memories of the terror and a wistful appreciation of its sublimity.

Godzilla, with its oddly beautiful juxtaposition of images of violence, stirs the conflicting emotions created by the War's destructiveness, and thereby exemplifies Ango's aesthetic:

There is something eerily beautiful about humans surrendering themselves to fate. While in Kōjimachi the mansions vanished, turned to smoldering ruins in a heartbeat, on the grassy banks of the palace moat an elegant father sat with his daughter, a single red leather suitcase between them. If not for the vast expanse of smoking rubble at one corner of the landscape, it would have looked like a pleasant picnic (Sakaguchi 1967: 386).⁶

The beauty of this scene arises out of the irreconcilable contradictions produced by the War. Feelings of universal love and brotherhood grow out of the constant presence of death. The fate of Japan and the collapse of its grand ambitions, symbolized by the disappearance of the mansions of the rich and powerful, are presented alongside a vivid picture of domestic tenderness. Compared to the beauty and love that

⁶ The image of destroyed mansions echoes a medieval work, *Hōjōki* (An Account of My Hut, 1212 [1955]), by Kamo no Chōmei. Though it may seem odd that Ango would make reference to a brief memoir about a failed courtier who renounces the world, becomes a hermit, and constructs his own tiny dwelling, *An Account of My Hut* dwells on the paradoxes that arise out of the illusory nature of all things, material, spiritual, and ideological that humans value. The work even expresses ambivalence about itself when Chōmei comes to the realization that his project of building a hermitage and writing about it is also illusory. The ironic tone of *An Account of My Hut* provides a model for Ango's essay.

emerged out of the horrifying destruction, the return to a state of normalcy in postwar Japan, which Ango describes as a descent into decadence, seems like a letdown.

In spite of his admitted nostalgia for the sublime, Ango makes the case for decadence by arguing that the love and beauty created by the terror of the War were “empty illusions, just so much froth on the surface of a river” (*ibid.*).⁷ For him the overriding truth of human existence is that no matter what rules, political principles, or moral ideals people create, it is ultimately impossible to stop the whole of humanity from plunging into decadence. Ango admits he was “enthralled by the beauty of the war raging around me. There was no need for me to think because I was surrounded by beauty, with everything human removed from the landscape” (*ibid.*: 387). But decadence will eventually win out, because it is impossible to sustain an idyllic utopia like wartime Japan, where beauty was empty, false, and inhuman.

Ango realizes that the frailty of humans will always lead them to create impossible ideals and codes for living, and so he also knows that his call for a turn to decadence will never be fully realized. Consequently, he ends his essay with what seems to be a contradictory argument against his own position. As he looks at the future prospects for Japan, he wants to dispose of the old, false ideologies while at the same time clinging to the hope that a new identity that is distinctly and authentically Japanese can be created. Still, this is not enough to get where Ango wants the Japanese people to go, and so he adds a qualifying condition to reach that future:

But if they're to sacrifice virgins of their own making, piece together warrior codes and emperor systems that are truly their own, then they first must follow the path of decadence, falling properly and to the very bottom. Japan, too, must fall. Only by falling to the very depths can it discover itself and thereby attain salvation (*ibid.*).⁸

Ango apparently does not regard the fall into decadence as a simple return to normal human desires that reject inhuman ideals, but as something much more profound. To become truly decadent is to move to the opposite extreme to find ‘salvation’ in the rejection of all illusions. Ango wants normalcy, but at the same time he wants to

⁷ Again, a clear echo of *An Account of My Hut*.

⁸ The word translated as ‘salvation’, *sukui*, has religious overtones arising from its fundamental sense of ‘rescue’.

somehow return to a state in which, as when he was surrounded by the sublime beauty of destruction, he no longer has to think. His nostalgia for the sublime is a yearning for a condition without thought, without ideology.⁹ In this regard, he echoes prewar ideologies that seek to overcome the self-conscious rationalism of modernity, and his deliberately paradoxical exhortation of ‘*daraku*’ transforms it into another word for the sublime.

“On Decadence” reveals a complex mix of genuine moral outrage, soul-searching, and attraction to the beauty of destruction. For all the outrageous posturing of the essay, it gave expression to the deep ambivalence that arose for many Japanese out of their personal experiences of the War. To write honestly and without illusions about death and destruction required an acknowledgment that the imposition of form is an aestheticization of loss and suffering. Such an acknowledgment, however, implicitly valorized the aesthetics of loss, and consequently it contributed to the ongoing controversy about how the War is treated that has been engaged in a multitude of ways and venues—not just in school textbooks, but in the critical reception of works such as Ōoka Shōhei’s *Nobi* (Fires on the Plain, 1951 [1957]) or Ibuse Masuji’s *Kuroi ame* (Black Rain, 1965 [1969]), in the struggles over the meaning of ritual at Yasukuni Shrine, or in the radical re-imagining of the significance of the War from the post-apocalyptic, dystopian view of a future Japan that is a prominent convention in certain genres of anime. In all these cases the tortured legacy left by immediate postwar responses to the Asia Pacific War continues unresolved.

Nostalgia for the Sublime

As an aesthete, Mishima lived out Ango’s call to adopt decadence as the moral ideal and artistic attitude most appropriate for postwar Japanese society. Mishima took to heart the idea that through the path of decadence he could create his own system of values,¹⁰ and in that

⁹ In this regard, Ango’s essay is firmly situated within the jargon of authenticity that has dominated aesthetic discourse in modern Japan. For a more complete discussion of this topic, see Washburn 2006, especially 17–26 of the Introduction.

¹⁰ Isoda Kōichi has made a compelling, though controversial, claim that Mishima’s politics and aesthetics are best seen as the outcome of an extreme individualism (what Isoda calls “radical modernism”) that champions personal autonomy over adherence to ideology. In this view, Mishima was not purely a reactionary, but in many ways was

sense his art emerged out of a generalized discourse on the war that looked upon death as a mystical beauty. “Death in Midsummer” and “Patriotism” illustrate the ways in which the ambivalence toward the war that informed Ango’s essay also inflected the style and subject of Mishima’s writings. At first glance these stories may strike the reader as very different. “Death in Midsummer”, which is set in the postwar period at the moment when Japan is beginning to recover economically, is an account of how a married couple, Tomoko and Masaru, comes to terms with the simultaneous deaths of two of their children and Masaru’s sister. Because the story focuses on the aftermath of this shocking event, it presents a portrait of the psychological states of the main characters, especially the young mother Tomoko. The story is highly internalized, focused through the perspectives of characters who are sympathetic, but diminished and unheroic.

In contrast, “Patriotism” focuses more on actions than mental states. Set before the War, it recounts in excruciating detail the lovemaking and double suicide of Lieutenant Takeyama Shinji and his young, beautiful bride Reiko. The narrative style of both stories may be described as fundamentally realistic, but if “Death in Midsummer” recounts the suffering of mind and the process of coming to terms with grief, “Patriotism” is all about the suffering and idealization of the body. Beyond these obvious differences in conception and execution, both stories nonetheless depict acts of witnessing the sublime and chronicle the emotions that arise from the experience—sentiments that, to repeat a point made above, connect Mishima’s art to the broader ambivalence that characterized postwar discourse on the War.

“Death in Midsummer” follows the process by which Tomoko and Masaru move from an ecstasy of suffering to a return to the decadence of everyday emotions and natural human desires—the narrative arc that Ango presents not only as the social reality of Japan, but also as a moral and artistic imperative. Read within the historical context of postwar Japanese society’s coming to terms with loss and suffering, the story is a compelling catalogue of responses to grief. At the same time, we should take care not to read Mishima’s psychologically credible

more open to individual freedom than even his contemporaries on the left. Although I do not entirely agree with this assessment, I do agree with Isoda’s analysis to the extent that it suggests the permeability of Mishima’s politics and aesthetics—a characteristic apparent, I believe, in Mishima’s representations of the postwar conception of the sublime. See Isoda 1973: 50–1.

portrait of the couple as a mere confirmation of clinical observations about the process of grieving, for to do so would unduly diminish the aesthetic ideology that informs the story.

Masaru is a young businessman who is doing well selling American automobiles. His success represents the kind of normalcy that is the aim of the postwar reconstruction of the Japanese economy. The nature of Masaru's job, however, is a not-so-subtle reminder of American power, which suggests that the realities of postwar Japan are anything but normal. Thus, when the deaths occur, the feeling of normalcy is shattered twice: once by the immediate loss, and a second time by the reminder that the very idea of normalcy itself is an illusion.

As a sign of his new status in an Americanized consumer society, Masaru sends his wife, three children and his unmarried sister, Yasue, on a vacation to 'A-beach' in a resort area of the Izu peninsula. One day, while Tomoko is taking a nap, Yasue baby-sits the children at the beach. When the two older children are pulled under the water by a rip tide, the shock of the accident causes Yasue to suffer a heart attack. Mishima foreshadows this scene by describing the natural setting of the beach in terms that are at once ominous and sublime:

Yasue placed her hands behind her for support, stretched her legs, and gazed out at the offing. Great masses of clouds rose up to towering heights. Their solemn silence was limitless, and it seemed to her that the bustle around her and the roar of the waves were being soaked up by that glittering, magnificent silence.

The summer was at its peak. There was an indignant anger in the intense rays of the sun (Mishima 1970: 146; Seidensticker 1966: 3).¹¹

In contrast to this charged atmosphere, there is something slightly excessive, even vaguely ludicrous about the manner of Yasue's death and the failure of everyone at the scene, including Tomoko, to realize immediately that the two older children are missing. Once the reality

¹¹ In citing this work I have relied on the translation by Edward G. Seidensticker, which was published as "Death in Midsummer" (see Seidensticker 1966). Seidensticker's translation is a sensitive work of literature, but it is also problematic in some respects. He shortened Mishima's original, editing out descriptive passages and several long sections that he probably believed were repetitious. In my opinion, some of these cuts are capricious and damage the conception of the story. Moreover, in tightening up some passages he has obscured the meaning of the text. For that reason, although I rely on the translation for citations, in some places I have amended the wording. Subsequent citations will be given in the body of the text as two page numbers separated by a semicolon. The first refers to the Japanese text, the second to Seidensticker's translation.

of the deaths is confirmed, however, the story quickly shifts away from the event to the reactions of Tomoko and Masaru.

Their initial expressions of grief and shock combine anxiety over how society will judge them with irritation at the indifference the world exhibits toward their suffering. Tomoko, for example, is afraid to meet her husband, because she imagines it “would be like meeting a trial judge”, and the need to try to explain to him what happened made it seem to her that “yet another disaster was approaching” (153; 7). Knowing that she must contact him at once, she finds the courage to leave the beach to send a telegram. At that moment she becomes aware of her own isolation as she realizes that the deaths have meaning for her alone:

She looked back as she walked off. The sea was quiet. A silvery light flashed in near the shore. Fish were jumping. They seemed quite intoxicated with delight. It was unfair that Tomoko should be so unhappy (153; 7–8).

Confronting the indifference of nature and the enormity of death, Tomoko’s projection of emotions onto the fish is a response that suggests her first intimations of the sublime.

When Masaru receives the telegram he undergoes similar emotions. He initially comprehends the deaths as a kind of social judgment of himself, feeling that the loss of his children is comparable to being dismissed from his job. Soon after, while he is riding in the taxi taking him to Tokyo Station, that feeling is replaced with a realization that he is cut off from an essentially indifferent world:

He looked out the window as they came near the heart of the city. The sun of the midsummer morning was even more blinding because of the white-shirted crowds. The trees along the road cast deep shadows directly downward, and at the entrance to a hotel the gaudy red-and-white awning was taut, as if the sunlight were a heavy metal pressing down on it. The newly dug earth where the street was being repaired was already dry and dusty.

The world around him was quite as it had always been. Nothing had happened, and if he tried he could believe that nothing had happened even to him. A childish annoyance came over him. In an unknown place, an incident with which he had had nothing to do had cut him off from the world.

Among all these passengers none was so unfortunate as he. The thought seemed to put him on a level above or below the ordinary Masaru, he did not know which. He was someone special. Someone apart (155–6; 9).¹²

Feeling isolated from the material world around them—a feeling suggested by Mishima’s crisp, objective description of quotidian details—the initial instinct of both Tomoko and Masaru is to assert their own egos, their sense of occupying a privileged position.

What soon becomes clear to both of them is that the desire to assert the special importance of their own egos as compensation for their enormous loss exposes the inadequacy of human emotions and the language used to express them. This occurs the moment Masaru arrives at the hotel at ‘A-beach’, for he is unsure how he should approach Tomoko. There was no natural way for him to face her in these circumstances, which leads him to wonder if “perhaps the unnatural was in fact natural” (158; 10). For her part Tomoko feels like a convicted criminal, and her actions look mechanical and rehearsed, even when she collapses in tears. With no way to fully express their feelings of loss, of shame and guilt, of isolation and difference, they must fall back on the familiar, everyday gestures that define their roles and identities as husband and wife, and as parents. Yet even these familiar gestures are constrained. Masaru

did not want the manager to see him lay a comforting hand on her shoulder. That would be worse than having the most intimate bedroom secrets spied on. Masaru took off his coat and looked for a place to hang it (159; 11).

Because these gestures are insufficient to express the quality of their grief, the illusory nature of their so-called normal life is laid bare. Tomoko realizes that a void has opened up, and so she performs the customary wifely act of retrieving a hanger for his jacket. He responds by picking up their surviving son, Katsuo. “Obeying the rules, he stood up with the child in his arms, and, going over to his wife, laid his hand gently on her shoulder. The gesture came easily” (160; 11).

¹² Seidensticker’s version here has the virtue of brevity, but he shortens the passage by leaving out a description of how Masaru is dressed and how he is sweating on the train. While this may have seemed like a tedious detail, its omission disrupts the continuity of Mishima’s narrative. Moreover, the omitted passages not only give us insight into Masaru’s character, but also set up the crucial scene that follows.

In order to cope with the shock and control their grief, both Masaru and Tomoko revert to practiced, easy social forms, gestures, and niceties. As the narrator dryly explains, “a death is always a problem in administration. They were frantically busy administering” (160; 12). The tasks that come with administering death, however, prove useless to assuage the inner turmoil of the couple. Tomoko complains to her parents that she feels that she has to take the blame, even though no one blames her—in fact, Masaru’s mother thinks Tomoko is the most pitiable one of all. When Masaru points this out to her, it brings no comfort, but makes her feel “like one demoted and condemned to obscurity, one whose real merit went unnoticed. It seemed to her that such intense sorrows should bring special privileges with them, extraordinary privileges”. She is driven to despair at the “poverty of human emotions” as she comes to realize that it doesn’t matter if one person has died or ten, because people can express grief in one way only, by weeping (162; 12).

At first both Tomoko and Masaru share similar responses to grief, but their experiences diverge, and the portrait of Tomoko begins to dominate the narrative when she obsesses over the irrationality of their emotional response and the improbability of their loss. She finds the situation, the loss of three members of her family under such circumstances, not tragic, but ludicrous, or even ‘comical’ (*kokkei*) (174; 19). The death of a single person, or of ten thousand, had an air of solemnity, while the death of three people seemed somehow ridiculous to her because it was slightly excessive and thus strained credulity:

It was too large a number for one family and too small for society. Moreover, they were isolated deaths that, unlike people who died in war or who died in the line of duty, had no connection to society. Tomoko’s shrewd womanly heart had been constantly puzzled by this riddle-like number. For the rather more social man, Masaru, he had realized at some point that it was more convenient to look at the deaths from the point of view of society. That is, he saw it as fortunate that they had not been killed by society by dying in war or in the line of duty (174; 19).¹³

If Masaru, who is just relieved that the deaths remain unencumbered with social obligations or public significance, is inclined to accept society’s judgment and move on, then Tomoko is driven by a desire to

¹³ I have reworded this passage, especially the final sentence, because Seidensticker’s translation misses the point.

plumb the depths of her grief. And in this starkly gendered world, it is the more interior-looking Tomoko who discovers that “in the very cruelty of life was a deep peace, as of falling into a faint” (176; 20).

Tomoko blames herself for lacking the courage and passion to commit suicide, and as she moves past the immediate crisis, she is torn by feelings of guilt and resentment toward the world. Little things remind her of the incident—a swimsuit in a store window, the word ‘summer’, mothers playing with their children. At one point, after doing some shopping at a department store, she takes Katsuo to a rooftop playground where she sees a toddler walking precariously around a fountain. She hopes he falls in and drowns, but the child makes it around safely, and in her mind his smiling face seems to mock her. Her feelings of resentment lead her to the realization that her special status as a grieving mother may not be so natural after all. It is a constructed role that will fade with time.

One morning, soon after this realization, she wakes up feeling happy because she had not dreamed of her dead children the night before. Her mood quickly changes, however, because she now knows she is capable of forgetting about them, even if for just a moment, so soon after their deaths. Shocked by her own heartlessness and decadence, she begins crying in apology to their spirits. Masaru wakes up and watches her, but sees more peace than anguish in her tears:

“You thought of them again?”

“Yes”. It seemed too much trouble to tell the truth.

But now that she had told a lie, she was dissatisfied that her husband did not weep with her. If she had seen tears in his eyes, she might have been able to believe her lie (168; 16).

Tomoko understands that she is now just play-acting the role of grieving mother; and while that suggests that she is finally ‘getting over’ her grief, it also makes it difficult to cling to the beauty of her suffering, to her illusion that she is special.

Masaru begins to find his wife’s behavior too dramatic, as if she is over-acting her role. For example, right after a visit to the children’s grave, an incident occurs at a suburban station where Tomoko has the illusion that she has left her dead children behind on the train, and struggles to get back on to retrieve them. Forced to restrain her, Masaru is embarrassed by this public display, and finds it difficult to relate to her emotions. Tomoko’s behavior, however, is a reaction to what she sees as the inevitable fall into decadence:

While neither of them especially thought about the matter, it seemed that the period of mourning, an unrelieved parade of the dark and the sinister, had brought them a sort of security, something stable, easy, pleasant even. They had become conditioned to death, and, as when people are conditioned to decadence [*daraku*], they had come to feel that life held nothing they need fear (172; 18).

Tomoko, having discovered the poverty of human emotions and the illusory nature of idealized roles and socially conditioned responses, now realizes that her feelings of grief have been so much a part of her consciousness that they have become normal and devalued. She longs for the lost pleasure of her grief, but because she is unable to sustain the stimulus of exquisite suffering, her descent into decadence leaves Tomoko bored.

In reaction to her boredom, Tomoko begins to re-engage society. She takes care of her appearance and becomes beautiful and sexual again. She becomes fully decadent in Ango's sense of the word. No longer able to play only the role of grieving mother, no longer able to sustain a connection with bottomless grief, she moves toward the depths of decadence to see if she can still feel deeply by stirring up either pangs of conscience, or the longing ache for a return of death. The narrator tells us that Tomoko "went slightly insane in her pursuit of pleasure" (180; 22). She also plunges into her housework, and hopes that some trivial accident, such as the prick of a sewing needle, might bring death to her. Unfortunately for her, none of this completely relieves her boredom, and she is left with a vague dissatisfaction, wordlessly "waiting for something" (185; 23). Since Masaru cannot comprehend her silence, they often spend whole days saying nothing to each other.

Tomoko eventually becomes pregnant again and finds the courage to admit that her pain is gone. She is dissatisfied with her inadequate emotions, and knows that her dissatisfaction will outlast her sorrow; but because she is pregnant again, she convinces herself that she has a moral obligation to resist the pleasure of being lost in grief. Masaru lacks that sense of moral obligation, and though he forgets the most profound moments of grief more quickly than his wife, he is more sentimental about his loss. Since his grief was not persistent, he felt alone, and to console himself over his wife's sorrow he has a brief affair, which ends when he learns that Tomoko is pregnant.

By the end of the story, the incident that resulted in the three deaths is transformed from an injury to a moral lesson, "from a concrete fact to a metaphor" (191; 25-6). This emptying out of the personal signifi-

cance of their loss lessens the individual experience of grief, but it also enlarges their awareness of the enormous indifference of death:

It was no longer the property of the Ikuta family, it was public. As the lighthouse shines on beach wastes, and on waves baring their white fangs at lonely rocks all through the night, and on the groves around it, so the incident shone on the complex everyday life around them. People should read the lesson. An old, simple lesson that parents may be expected to have engraved on their minds: you have to watch children constantly when you take them to the beach. People drown where you would never think it possible.

Not that Masaru and his wife had sacrificed two children and a sister to teach a lesson. The loss of the three had served no other purpose, however; and many a heroic death produces as little (191; 26).

Here the echo of Ango's aesthetics is quite strong, for the attempt to idealize or confer some significance on death always comes to naught because of humanity's inevitable descent into decadence. Sublime suffering is impossible to sustain, and will always give way to simple platitudes.

Two years after the deaths, following the birth of their fourth child, Tomoko convinces Masaru to take her back to 'A-beach'. Masaru is reluctant to indulge what he sees as a whim, since he believes it will simply dredge up painful memories. After several months, however, Tomoko finally convinces Masaru to go with her. Because she is the only one who has clear memories of the place, when they arrive she has the illusion that nothing has really changed. They go down to the beach and stand at the ocean's edge:

The clouds below seemed to be enduring something, holding out against something. Excesses of light and shade cloaked in form, a dark, inchoate passion shaped by a will radiant and architectural, as in music.

From beneath the clouds, the sea came toward them, far wider and more changeless than the land. The land never seems to take the sea, even its inlets. Particularly along a wide bow of coast, the sea sweeps in from everywhere.

The waves came up, broke, fell back. Their thunder was like the intense quiet of the summer sun, hardly a noise at all. Rather an earsplitting silence. A lyrical transformation of the waves, not waves, but rather ripples one might call the light, derisive laughter of the waves at themselves—ripples came up to their feet, and retreated again (195–6; 29).¹⁴

¹⁴ This is an exceptionally lovely rendering of the Japanese, and passages like this one justify my decision to rely on Seidensticker's work for purposes of citation, even though I have some misgivings about the omissions in his translation.

The magical lyricism of Mishima's description of the sea, which suspends time and returns us to the scene two years earlier, recalls Burke's observation of the terrifying power of the ocean and the fevered, hallucinatory language Melville employed to try to capture a sense of what it meant to experience the sublime. Masaru observes Tomoko's face as she gazes out at the sea, and has the feeling that he has seen that expression before, "as if she had forgotten herself, and were waiting for something" (196; 29). He wants to ask her what she is waiting for, but the words won't come. In any case, he thinks he already knows, and the story ends in a tableau of the newly restored family standing on the shore, leaving the unanswered question as a mystery for the reader.

At the very end, Mishima's story brings the reader to an epiphany, an experience of the sublime that resists the exigencies of language. As the couple gazes out at the overwhelming ocean, which is now conflated in their minds with the terrifying expanse of their loss and suffering, Masaru's question is not only unanswered, it cannot even be asked because of the enormity of the experience that motivates it. For Tomoko in particular, to speak of her experience, to utter "heaven's sense", might give a voice to her celestial thought, but it would be a voice of insanity or of perfect silence. "Death in Midsummer" partially confirms Ango's assertions about the inevitable process of decadence, which makes it impossible to preserve the state of heightened awareness accompanying devastating loss and grief. Yet the ending of the story, with its ambivalent resolution, leaves the reader suspended. The family has recovered and is moving on, but there remains not just an inexpressible sorrow, but a longing to recover the sublime beauty engendered by that sorrow.

Embodying the Sublime

In contrast to the heavily interiorized perspectives and vocabulary of uncertainty and doubt that characterize the rhetoric of "Death in Midsummer", "Patriotism" depicts a couple who resists the fall to decadence and embodies the possibility that an ideal may be preserved in a pristine and lasting form. The difference in outlook between these stories, which were written almost a decade apart, may be attributed to nothing more than Mishima's willingness to explore other ways to express postwar nostalgia for the sublime. Yet it is difficult to ignore the changes in Mishima's personal circumstances and in his status as

an artist as an explanation for why he could treat the subject of sublime beauty in such divergent ways.

In the years immediately following the publication of "Death in Midsummer", Mishima not only solidified his critical reputation in Japan, but also attracted an international readership. During this period he began to exploit his new-found celebrity by appearing in films and plays, posing as a model for photographs, and satisfying his interest in the worlds of boxing and body-building. Perhaps spurred on by his own notoriety, he also began to be more outspoken in his conservative political views, which had been inculcated in him since childhood. His activities were often met with a good deal of skepticism about the sincerity of his motives, especially in connection with his rightist views and his gradually evolving support for a return to imperial rule. It may well be that his peculiar ideological bent was a way to establish some moral grounding for his life and art, which, however expedient or inauthentic it may have looked from the outside, provided a necessary core to his being to support the poses he struck.

The effects of these personal and ideological transformations are apparent in "Patriotism". The story, which is set in prewar Japan, describes the sublime incandescence achieved by the suicides of a young, beautiful, heroic couple, Lt Takeyama Shinji and his bride Reiko. The historical backdrop to the story is the 2-26 Incident, the coup d'état attempted by radical officers of the Imperial Army on February 26, 1936. After the officers and their men managed to take over parts of central Tokyo, they demanded a complete end to civilian government. They claimed their actions were undertaken in the name of the Emperor, but Hirohito denied his support and insisted that the Army put down the revolt. In Mishima's fictional take on this incident, Takeyama is presented as a fervent loyalist in sympathy with the conspirators who was left out of their plot because he was recently married. When he is ordered to lead the attack against the revolt, he is caught in a moral bind between his duty as an officer, his loyalty to his friends, and his devotion to his ideal of the Emperor. Unable to resolve his dilemma, the lieutenant chooses suicide, and his wife decides that she must follow him in death. The major portion of the narrative is comprised of two scenes: one of the couple engaging in passionate (though morally sanctioned) sex, and the other of the lieutenant's *seppuku* (ritual disembowelment) and his bride's death, both of which are related in disturbing detail.

The historical background may lend a degree of credibility to the actions of the couple, but in a sense it is a pretext that allows Mishima to set before the reader two embodiments of the sublime. Compared to the style he adopted for “Death in Midsummer”, Mishima tries to strip away all sense of irony in “Patriotism” and return the reader to a prewar literary sensibility, to a language of unwavering belief and moral intuition that establishes the appropriately solemn tone needed to glorify the young couple. The short opening section of the story sets out the basic facts of their suicide and their reasons for choosing death, but it also stresses the extraordinary quality of their sincerity and piety. Even the *kanji* used for their names, Shinji (*shin*, ‘sincerity or faith’) and Reiko (*rei*, ‘clear or pure beauty’) suggest these virtues, which are put on full display by their actions:

The lieutenant’s final testament was a single line, *Long live the Imperial Army!* His wife’s testament apologized for her unfilial act of preceding her parents in death, then concluded, *The day that must inevitably come for a soldier’s wife has come.* The final moments of this righteous husband and wife were of such beauty as to make gods and demons weep (Mishima 1968: 208; Sargent 1966: 93).¹⁵

With no doubts, no regrets, and, most important, with no wasted words that might sully or complicate their beliefs and motives, the couple do exactly what is expected of them, perfectly exemplifying the ideals that define their very identities.

The second section of the story expands on the idealization of the couple by presenting the reader with a description of their wedding photograph. The description is so generalized that the physical individuality of both husband and wife are obscured. His severe expression and martial dress convey the purity of youth, while her demure beauty is “beyond the power of words to describe” (208; 94). Their looks, which are almost too perfect to be credible, are a manifestation of their extraordinary virtue. There is something almost super-human about them, and when people look at the photograph following their

¹⁵ In citing this work I have relied on the excellent translation by Geoffrey W. Sargent, which was published as “Patriotism” (see Sargent 1966). Subsequent citations will be given in the body of the text as two page numbers separated by a semicolon. The first refers to the Japanese text, the second to Sargent’s translation. Please note that although the story first appeared in print in 1961, the Japanese version I consulted was published in a collection of stories in 1968. In some cases I have slightly amended the wording of Sargent’s translation.

suicide, they can only lament that such perfect beauty is always ill-omened (209; 94). The narrative confirms this lament by an anecdote of their wedding night. Before they consummate their marriage, the lieutenant lectures his bride on the duties of a soldier's wife, and warns her that she must be prepared for his death, which could come at any time. He then asks her if she is ready to accept that fact of life:

Reiko rose to her feet, pulled open a drawer of the cabinet, and took out what was the most prized of her new possessions, the dagger her mother had given her. Returning to her place, she laid the dagger without a word on the mat before her, just as the husband had laid his sword. A silent understanding was achieved at once, and the lieutenant never again sought to test his wife's resolve (209; 95).

Because their virtue is completely internalized and constitutes their spiritual being, there is no need to exchange words, no need for thought to express their perfect harmony.

This purity of spirit extends to their physical relationship as well, for their hearts remain awesomely and solemnly sincere even when they engage in passionate sex. By providing such details Mishima risks turning the young couple from idealized characters into caricatures, making their sexual relationship the object of prurient curiosity or the butt of crude humor. In order to avoid undercutting the solemn portrait he sets out at the beginning, Mishima maintains a serious tone throughout the narrative, which insists that their behavior is thoroughly grounded on moral principles and exemplifies the ideal set forth in the Imperial Rescript on Education that husband and wife should be harmonious:

Not once did Reiko contradict her husband, nor did the lieutenant ever find reason to scold his wife. On the god shelf below the stairway, alongside the tablet from the Great Ise Shrine, were set photographs of their Imperial Majesties, and regularly, every morning, before leaving for duty, the lieutenant would stand with his wife at this hallowed place and together they would bow their heads low. The offering water was renewed each morning, and the sacred sprig of *sakaki* was always green and fresh. Their lives were lived beneath the solemn protection of the gods and were filled with an intense joy that set every fiber in their bodies trembling (210; 95–6).

The narrative goes out of its way to stress the complete connection between their bodies and souls, and so once the lieutenant and his wife have decided they have no other recourse but to die, the account of the lovemaking that precedes their ritual suicide is presented as

completely natural and right. Considered from the perspective of the ethics that guide the couple's every action, the sex scene is not voyeuristic, not pornographic, but an expression of perfected virtue. They believe that their pleasure is condoned by righteousness and divine power, and that its morality is unassailable:

On looking into each other's eyes and discovering there an honorable death, they had felt themselves safe once more behind steel walls which none could destroy, encased in an impenetrable armor of Beauty and Truth (216–7; 102).

The lieutenant sees no paradox in combining his fleshly desires and his love of nation. As the love scene unfolds, the two share all parts of their body, they are witnesses to each other in the most intimate of ways. With no doubts to trouble them, armed with pious belief, the sex is good because they are good. The reader, however, can only see them witnessing each other, and cannot partake of their gaze. As a result, the description of each part of their bodies is idealized to the point that their individuality is obscured, just as it is in the description of their wedding photograph. This lack of individuality pushes the scene close to the anonymity of pornography, but here again if we read the scene within the moral mindset of the couple, their passionate gazes confirm them as moral exemplars. For as they visually dismember each other, the word-images of their body parts remind us that they themselves are parts of the Emperor's *kokutai* (the 'national polity'), that is, literally, the body of the nation.

Being moral exemplars, they know when they have indulged in sufficient pleasure, and do not go beyond the bounds of decency. The sexual intoxication still continues, however, even after they begin making preparations for the elaborate ritual of death. Looking at Reiko, the lieutenant is excited because he is going to perform as a soldier, a role his wife had never seen previously:

It called for a resolution equal to the courage to enter battle; it was a death of no less degree and quality than death in the front line. It was his conduct on the battlefield that he was now to display to his wife (226; 111).

For anyone not sharing the lieutenant's worldview, his attitude seems to reveal a cruel egotism. But since desire and duty are unified in him, he is not troubled about the possibility that others may see him as perverse. Indeed, at that moment he fantasizes about his wife witnessing his lonely death on the battlefield, and he realizes that he is about to

die bringing the two parts of his life together. He finds in this impossible union a sublime beauty he describes as a “sweetness beyond words”, and he is convinced that he has received it as a special favor. His startling egotism is revealed again in his conviction, for the special dispensation he is to receive is to be witnessed as an embodiment of the sublime:

In the bride-like figure of her pure-white robe the lieutenant seemed to see a vision of all those things he had loved and for which he was to lay down his body—the Imperial Household, the Nation, the Army Flag. All these, no less than the wife who sat before him, were presences observing him closely with clear and unflinching eyes (226; 111).

In this state of mind, the lieutenant’s *seppuku* may seem like an act of autoerotic exhibitionism, but such appearances do not matter in the moral realm he inhabits. As an exemplar, his deed is sanctioned and thus beautiful. Once the actual ritual begins, however, the remaining humanity of the lieutenant returns to the surface as he struggles to rid himself of his mortal body and ascend to godhead. The excruciating pain and horror of *seppuku* is described in such detail that, like the sex scene, it borders on the pornographic, reveling in the exposure of the soldier’s inner body. It is a moment that is both scatological and eschatological, a spilling of blood and feces and spirit. At the same time, Reiko exposes her humanity as she has to fight to suppress her natural inclination to go to his side. Yet she maintains her super-human façade and, in what seems like an inversion of uxorial piety, continues to watch:

Whatever happened, she must watch. She must be a witness. That was the duty her husband had laid upon her. Opposite her, a mat’s space away, she could clearly see her husband biting his lip to stifle the pain. The pain was there, with absolute certainty, before her eyes. And Reiko had no means of rescuing him from it (228; 113).

She becomes a witness to his apotheosis, and, as such, is given the extraordinary privilege of watching as her husband is transformed into the very embodiment of the sublime. In her assigned role, she seems as inhuman and perversely cruel as he. But at that moment she remains only a witness to the sublime. She may grieve for her husband as he grieves for his nation,¹⁶ but she cannot share the enormity of his

¹⁶ ‘Patriotism’ is not a precise translation for the word *yūkoku*, which means something closer to ‘grieving for one’s country’.

pain, which raises a “heartless wall of glass” (229; 114) between the two of them.

Once his death is achieved, she makes final preparations that reveal her ego and vanity to be as expansive as those of her husband:

For a long time she lingered over her toilet preparations. She applied the rouge generously to her cheeks, and painted her lips heavily as well. This was no longer make-up to please her husband. It was make-up for the world which she would leave behind, and there was a touch of the magnificent and the spectacular in her brushwork. When she rose, the mat before the mirror was wet with blood. Reiko was not concerned about this (231; 116).

She is leaving behind the world and so, to echo Melville, “weal or woe, feels then uncompromised, indifferent” as her ideals. She has already taken care of all the mundane details—turning off the gas, turning on the lights, and extinguishing the charcoal in the brazier. Her final task is to leave the front entrance unlocked so that their beautiful bodies might be discovered quickly, before they are corrupted. This last expression of ego suggests just how isolated she now is from everything:

She released the bolt and drew open the frosted-glass door a fraction. . . . At once a chill wind blew in. There was no sign of anyone in the midnight streets, and stars glittered ice-cold through the trees in the large house opposite (232; 117).

Taking her place across from her husband’s bloody corpse, she is seated before the alcove in which hangs a scroll, a gift from the lieutenant’s commanding officer, that bears a two-character inscription meaning ‘the achievement of sincerity’. This moral injunction is the silent backdrop to all that has taken place, but it adds no more significance to the couple’s deaths than the common-sense lesson imparted by the deaths of Masaru and Tomoko’s children. Instead, it keeps before the reader both the peculiar spirituality that has allowed Lt Takeyama and Reiko to achieve apotheosis and the depth of their sublime virtue, which we cannot fathom. By the time Reiko licks the sweet-tasting steel of her dagger, she has gone far beyond our decadent sensibilities:

When she thought of how the pain which had previously opened such a gulf between herself and her dying husband was now to become a part of her own experience, she saw before her only the joy of herself entering a realm her husband had already made his own. In her husband’s agonized face there had been something inexplicable which she was see-

ing for the first time. Now she would solve that riddle. Reiko sensed that at last she too would be able to taste the true bitterness and sweetness of that great moral principle in which her husband believed. What had until now been tasted only faintly through her husband's example she was about to savor directly with her own tongue (232–3; 117–8).

Up to this point she had only gone as far as the place Masaru had stood in “Death in Midsummer”—a witness to grief, a witness to the sublime depth of his wife's grief. But neither Masaru nor Tomoko had succeeded in peering all the way to the bottom; they had been unable to reach beyond the sublime, and so had had to wait for that something that is the mystery of death. Reiko transcends the waiting. She possesses the certainty of belief and the will to act on her certainty, and so is able to transform herself, through death, into something infinite, something impossible to take in.

Conclusion

In 1965 Mishima would direct and star in a film version of “Patriotism”. He was motivated by a desire to fuse the image of himself as an artist with the idealized figure of the lieutenant in order, he hoped, to lend credibility to his bizarro-world call for a return to prewar emperorism.¹⁷ In spite of this attempt at absolute identification with his art, Mishima's story makes sense only if we keep in mind the extreme prewar mindset it references. The narrative is written in a direct, realistic style, but the register of its language and its ethical consciousness recall an earlier discourse of the sublime.¹⁸ “Patriotism” is not about

¹⁷ The remaking of Mishima's public persona in the 1960s is reminiscent of the transformation of Frank Sinatra's image that occurred when the character he played in the film *From Here to Eternity*, Pvt. Angelo Maggio, was beaten to death by the sadistic sergeant ‘Fatso’ Judson (played by Ernest Borgnine). The onscreen death of a self-centered musician not only helped Sinatra garner an Academy Award, but also served as a kind of public expiation for the sin of Sinatra's medical exemption from military service in the Second World War. Similarly, Mishima's decision to direct and act in the film version of “Patriotism” began the process of legitimizing his public image as a spokesman for the right. And even though his efforts were met with widespread skepticism, his death by *seppuku* for no reason other than the nihilistic beauty of the act indicates an obsession with the aesthetics of death and the sublime that are a direct result of his personal experiences during the War.

¹⁸ Alan Tansman has provided a brilliant analysis of the language of the sublime in Japanese fascism in his reading of the influential government-sponsored

the aftermath of death, but about apprehending the sublime beauty of the moment of death itself. For this reason the gory details, which can seem voyeuristic or morbid, are vital to the rhetorical design of the story. What we witness may be repellent, but since we cannot know the mystery of death, we can only witness the change of state from the quick to the dead through a metaphorical glass wall. Details *in language* of pain and suffering are all we have to grasp the greatness of the deed, the heroism that chooses to die for a sacred ideal. Since we cannot pass through that glass wall, these details in language act as a shadowy memento of the experience of death, stirring in us a vague comprehension—like a primal, atavistic remembrance—of the sublime.

Unable to take in the totality of death, the reader is made witness to a terrible beauty. It does not matter if the actions of the lieutenant and his wife may be dismissed as insane, sadistically cruel, or narcissistic. Such categories of judgment do not pertain to them. Their story is not predicated on suspension of disbelief, but on immersing the reader in a realm without ironic self-awareness where belief and ideals exist without thought. In such a realm there are no moral dilemmas, for everything is resolved to a pure, crystalline certainty, to a piety and sincerity that extends infinitely beyond mere human will and comprehension. All the reader is left is the enjoyment of trauma, the pleasure of the mad babble of language that tries and fails to convey the experience of the sublime. Lt Takeyama and Reiko are the uncanny doppelgängers of Masaru and Tomoko; they are the embodiments of prewar ideals whose inhuman beauty erupts out of the past—despite all efforts to repress, forget, or appease that beauty—and returns to haunt and taunt and seduce the unheroic, bourgeois lives of postwar Japanese. Totally free because totally without individuality, they exist in ‘wondrous depths’ in a sublime realm beyond language.

book, *Kokutai no hongī* (Essentials of the National Polity, 1937 [1949]). Because of Mishima's connection with the *Roman-ha*, whose ideology and rhetoric were in line with *Essentials of the National Polity*, there can be little doubt that this work and the literary atmosphere it created in the late 1930s influenced Mishima's sense of the sublime and provided him with a poetic vocabulary to describe that sense. See Tansman 2007: 57–79.

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CHAPTER FOUR

WRITING THE TRAUMATIZED SELF: *TENKŌ* IN THE LITERATURE OF SHIINA RINZŌ

Mark Williams

“The artist carries death with him like a good priest his breviary”
(Heinrich Böll).

In *Dawn to the West*, his survey of the literary scene in Japan between the Meiji Restoration and approximately 1960, Donald Keene devotes a lengthy chapter to a group of writers initially linked to each other in the critic Honda Shūgo’s seminal study, *Tenkō bungaku-ron* (A Study of *Tenkō* Literature, 1957), under the rubric of ‘*tenkō* authors’. For Honda, the membership of this group was relatively clear-cut and uncontroversial: he included any author who, against the backdrop of burgeoning militarization in the 1930s and often in the face of considerable mental and/or physical duress, had secured their release from detention by affixing their signature to a *tenkōsho* (a document in which they agreed to renounce their earlier left-wing sympathies in an overt display of political apostasy) and *whose subsequent literary lifeblood can be seen as directly drawn from this act*. It was not long before the critic Itagaki Naoko was seeking to broaden this category to include all works written by authors who had committed *tenkō* regardless of the nature of the materials they used for their narratives (thereby incorporating much wartime and immediate postwar literature). But Donald Keene’s chapter reverts to the definition offered by Honda. Shimaki Kensaku (1903–45), Takeda Rintarō (1904–46), Takami Jun (1907–65), Hayashi Fusao (1903–75), Kamei Katsuichirō (1907–66): the writers considered by Keene constitute a ‘Who’s Who’ of those authors for whom personal experience of *tenkō* clearly remained a defining moment of their art.

However, for all the interest in the choice of authors to be included in this grouping—and the critical attention that has been devoted to their literary reformulations of this core experience—of equal significance is a consideration of those authors who, despite their experience of *tenkō*, have been excluded from Keene’s *tenkō* chapter and are

treated, rather, elsewhere in his study. The list is surprisingly lengthy, and it includes several authors, such as Shiina Rinzō (1911–73) and Haniya Yūtake (1910–97), who would subsequently emerge as significant players in the *Sengoha* (*après guerre*) literary coterie and who would dominate the immediate postwar literary scene. What distinguishes these authors from those traditionally associated with *tenkō* literature is that, despite their experience of imprisonment, and often torture, in the early 1930s for left-wing sympathies and their subsequent procurement of release by means of their willingness to sign a *tenkōsho*, these writers have, by and large, not been seen as dependent for their literary stimulus and material on this one traumatic experience in their past to the same extent as many of their peers. Indeed, even though many of these writers are conventionally seen as inheritors of the *shishōsetsu* tradition of autobiographical/ confessional writing in which, typically, no incident from the author's past is deemed too trivial for inclusion as literary material, discussion of this group is marked by a surprising dearth of consideration of *tenkō* as integral to their art.

So how are we to account for these apparent silences? And, more significantly, are we justified in interpreting this paucity of critical discussion as evidence that we are dealing with a corpus of texts that does deliberately seek to eschew any overt reference to an event that, if nothing else, cannot simply have been dismissed as an irrelevance to some of the intensely personal narratives these authors were creating? Were these authors, in short, engaged in a form of self-censorship *vis à vis* an experience too painful and traumatic—or too shameful—to dwell on?

In an attempt to address such questions, the discussion that follows will focus on the writings of arguably the representative *Sengoha* author, Shiina Rinzō, looking specifically at the series of autobiographical novels he penned in the late 1940s/early 1950s. In so doing, I hope to show that, far from remaining silent on the subject of his own experience of *tenkō*, the issue is actually a persistent, if largely unstated, presence pervading his entire oeuvre. To be sure, in sharp contradistinction to the works of Shimaki and Takeda for example, the incident rarely occupies centre stage in the Shiina text. And, as if to further downplay the significance of this episode, the official time chart of Shiina's life, penned by his friend and biographer, Saitō Suehiro, remains equally reticent about events on the day, in April 1933,

when Shiina found himself agreeing to sign the *tenkōsho*: it states simply that

at the encouragement of his court appointed lawyer and in response to the shock he experienced on being presented with the *tenkōsho* submitted by Mitamura Shirō and Nabeyama Sadachika, he fell back on Nietzsche's philosophy on the desire for power and authority (*kenryoku ishi*) and completed his *tenkōsho* in which he admitted that his actions to date had been inspired by this same desire for power and authority (Saitō 1980: 250).

There is nevertheless evidence, throughout Shiina's oeuvre, of an author traumatized by events earlier in his life. As such, in contrast to those critics who dismiss the issue as of little moment to Shiina, I shall be suggesting, not only that the indirect and subdued references to *tenkō* in his literature are testimony to an author determined to work through an event that clearly registered as a traumatic moment in his life, but also that treatment of this issue is crucial to an appreciation of these texts—that it stands, in many ways, as a defining moment of Shiina's art.¹

In the discussion that follows, the primary focus will be on a consideration of the Shiina texts themselves in an attempt thereby to highlight the extent to which a recognition of the trauma induced by this experience of *tenkō* is indeed integral to our appreciation of his oeuvre—and, in so doing, to cite, as lying at the heart of his work, the question, “What does it mean to survive as a *tenkōsha*?” At the same time, I shall be assessing the extent to which Shiina's narratives conform to the template for a “literature of trauma” as analyzed in the Introduction to this volume. At the heart of this task will be focus on a series of narratives written by the author in the aftermath of defeat in the Asia Pacific War, “Fukao Shōji no shuki” (The Diary of Fukao Shōji, 1947), *Jiyū no kanata de* (On the Far Side of Freedom, 1954) and *Unga* (The Canal, 1955), works in which Shiina draws heavily on his own life experience of the early 1930s. Before moving on to consideration of the texts themselves, however, we need to consider the events, between 1931 and 1933 when Shiina was arrested and imprisoned for violation of the 1925 Peace Preservation Law on account of

¹ Two critics who, for all the general silence, *have* chosen to address this element of Shiina's art, albeit peripherally, are Kobayashi (1992) and Onishi (2002).

his left-wing sympathies. How are we to interpret his decision to sign a *tenkōsho* and his subsequent sense of himself “spewed back into society” (*ibid*) following months of torture at the hands of the military police?

Shiina and the Traumatized Self

It goes without saying that, in any attempt to examine the Shiina text for evidence of an author seeking to act out and to work through his own experience of trauma, due caution is required to ensure that the experiences of the protagonists of these narratives are not simply conflated with those of the author himself; there is need for a clear distinction between the lived and the telling experience. In this, the reading conventions of the *shishōsetsu* will offer us some useful guidance—even if ultimately we shall be locating Shiina at some distance from the model of confessional narrative established by his precursors on the prewar literary scene. Let us begin, then, with an attempt to ascertain the flow of events in Shiina’s life in the early 1930s—and his response to these—on the basis of the diary entries and other writings that the author himself chose to depict as autobiographical essays (in contrast to his prose narrative portrayals of the same events).

The brief entry for Shiina in *Kyōdō kenkyū: tenkō* (Collaborative Research: *Tenkō*), the authoritative survey of those who committed *tenkō* in the early 1930s, suggests simply that Shiina “committed *tenkō* in jail... After the Manchurian Incident, he converted from Communism to nihilism” (Shisō no kagaku kenkyūkai 1959–62, 1: 319). Attributing Shiina’s arrest on 3 September 1931 to his position as “head of a local Party cell”, the record makes no mention of the fact that Shiina had only joined the Japan Communist Youth Alliance in June of that year and had been a Party member for less than two months at the time of his arrest—nor that the cell in question comprised just Shiina and two other fellow workers at Ujikawa Dentetsu, the railway company he had joined in 1929. Having evaded the mass round-up of left-wing suspects implemented on August 26 of that year by escaping to Tokyo, Shiina was unable to slip the net for long—and soon found himself back in the Kansai region of central Japan, being transferred from one jail to another as the authorities sought to entice him to follow the precedent famously established by Sano Manabu and Nabeyama Sadachika earlier that year, with their decision to make

a pledge of renunciation of all Party activity by signing a *tenkōsho*. By the time Shiina found himself confronted with the same choice of acceding to the authorities' demands (and in so doing ensuring he would live with the sense of having betrayed his erstwhile colleagues) or resisting the pressure in the full knowledge of the consequences of such an act, the trend toward *tenkō* had gathered momentum. The bandwagon may have been hard to resist. Even more influential in inducing Shiina to cooperate with the authorities, however, was his burgeoning sense of the futility of resistance. As he suggests in "Kumo no seishin" (The Spider's Mentality, 1948):

I was no different from a thief who has failed in his own selfish aims. The martyr's pride and feelings of exaltation that had been my support in the painful days to date evaporated at a stroke. The world had become meaningless, almost unendurable to me (SRZ 14: 67).

Wracked by self-doubt, and increasingly unable to justify his predicament on the basis of rigid adherence to an ideology he had never wholeheartedly embraced, Shiina came to realize in jail that he had not participated in left-wing activity out of any genuine love of the masses; instead, as he acknowledges in "Waga kokoro no jijoden" (Autobiography of my Heart, 1967), "All I discovered within myself was a yearning for power and authority (*kenryoku ishi*)" (SRZ 23: 473). As he openly admits, however, even more debilitating than his frustrated ambitions was the sense of loneliness—and the fear of the future—from which there was no escape. Even in 1966, more than thirty years after the events in question, Shiina was still acknowledging to his diary,

At the time, I believed in the Communist mantra that fear and solitariness are the obverse side of capitalism and that they should be denounced as "petit bourgeois" trappings. But I couldn't deny the existence of this reality within me.

For a while, Shiina strove to "ignore the existence" of such feelings and he "endeavor[ed] to place them out of [his] mind" (SRZ 20: 380). It was not long, however, before news of his dying friend, Kimura Yoshifusa, inspired in Shiina doubts that would bring matters to a head. Again, Shiina's subsequent recollection of the incident is entrusted to the article, "Autobiography of my Heart":

One day, [faced with the reality of my dying friend], I realized that I couldn't die in his stead. Not only did concepts like "love of the masses" and love of the proletariat—notions that I had hitherto taken as self-evident—become less clear-cut. But, confronted with death, they lost all

meaning. That led me to wonder why I had become embroiled in Party activity—and, in such circumstances, there was no way I could answer this simply with “for love of the proletariat” or “for love of mankind”. So it’s hardly surprising that I could only find a pathetic answer; all I could discern within me was a will for power and authority (*kenryoku ishi*). I had lost all meaning to life. To use the Marxist-Leninist jargon, I had fallen into bourgeois decadence (SRZ 23: 473).

From the above portrayal it is clear that, by the time the sessions of brutal torture at the hands of the military police commenced, Shiina’s resistance was already severely weakened. As the physical pressure to capitulate increased, moreover, Shiina describes the sense of his “life flashing before him”. But “that life had lost all meaning. It was a life that could not be given meaning, either by my pride as a Party member or the correctness of the ideology. . . . Rather it was what happened within my heart that knocked me out” (Shiina 1967: 20).

Shiina later described this development within himself as a “spiritual collapse” (SRZ 20: 380), and in the majority of his subsequent writings on the circumstances surrounding his decision to concede to the overtures of the authorities, he cites this as the overwhelming catalyst. In “Autobiography of my Heart”, for example, the author describes the event in the following, matter-of-fact manner:

For about a year, I was passed from one police station to the next. At trial, I was dismissed as “lacking any sense of remorse”, and sentenced to four years with hard labor. I was held on remand for almost a year. Then, thanks to my willingness to affix my signature to a *tenkō* document, I was given a three-year sentence of hard labor suspended for five years and thrown out from the back door of the prison. So, in total, I was in jail for just under two years. But during that period, I experienced a true spiritual crisis. One could say that that crisis influenced my entire subsequent life. . . . Whilst there, I witnessed the crumbling of my spiritual foundations (SRZ 23: 472).

Closer examination of this event suggests that the *tenkō* performed by Shiina conforms closely to the model of the “spiritual *tenkōsha*” as delineated by Patricia Steinhoff in her pioneering study of the concept, *Tenkō: Ideology and Societal Integration in Prewar Japan*. Indeed, it was this very absence of ideological change that led the author to eschew the portrayal of his act as conforming to the parameters of a *tenkō* at all. Shiina remained adamant on this point in all his subsequent deliberations, confiding in his diary toward the end of his life:

Even today, I am still treated as *tenkōsha*. But with *tenkō*, you have to turn “from” something “to” something else: the “to something else” is

important. But, in my case, there was no “to” anything. I had merely lost all meaning to my life—and simply fell (*datsuraku shita*) (SRZ 20: 382).

Significantly, Shiina felt himself “not worthy of the name of *tenkōsha*” (Kobayashi 1992: 13) and chose, rather, to portray himself as a “*datsurakusha*”, one who had “failed to live up to the high moral and spiritual requirements of Party membership” (Steinhoff 1991: 158). Equally, moreover, as a disaffected railway employee abandoned by his father at birth and obliged to fend for himself from the age of fifteen when his mother found herself unable to support him, Shiina’s subsequent writings suggest a man whose *tenkō* was inspired, less by concern for his family or as a result of wrestling with the problems of nationalism, or through confrontation with his own mortality and the realization that he was unwilling to make the ultimate sacrifice for the Party, more out of concern, shared by the other “spiritual *tenkōsha*”, for life itself. And it was this that led to the decision to break with the Party. Thereafter, as Steinhoff suggests, realizing that life alone was not enough, Shiina and his fellow “spiritual *tenkōsha*” sought new meaning. In the case of Shiina, this took the form of a search for “true freedom” (*hontō no jiyū*), a quest that, increasingly, he came to portray as his sole means of escape from the fear of death—and from his sense, shared by so many of his fellow *tenkōsha*, that, in committing *tenkō*, he had betrayed the Party and, more immediately, his colleagues in the movement who had resisted all overtures to apostatize.² As he conceded in an interview with Steinhoff,

I thought that, if life has no meaning, maybe it is better to die. But no, I am afraid of death. I want to live. The edge of thought is death. Out of death comes the idea of freedom. This is the real freedom (*ibid*: 155).

The search remains a constant refrain throughout Shiina’s literature, born of a conviction, explored in the author’s lengthy consideration of the issue, “*Bungaku to jiyū no mondai*” (The Issue of Literature and Freedom, 1952), that “literature is only literature if it speaks of human freedom. Without that, however skillfully it may be narrated, it cannot exist as literature” (SRZ 14: 365). For Shiina, the all-important

² We should also note that, in Shiina’s case, this sense of betrayal was compounded when, in 1938, he quit the job with which he had been provided by the military police at Niigata tekkōsho, on account of his opposition to the company’s links with the munitions trade. However, for all its principled motivation, Shiina continued to portray this act as “the sin of a Japanese national deserting the national cause” (Sasaki 1980/1: 30).

distinction here was that between “freedom *from* the world”, which he is quick to dismiss as “empty” and “illusory” (*kyogi, sakkaku*), and “freedom *in* the world... a freedom derived from the fact that we are of the world” (*ibid.*: 380). The parallels here with Camus—with his call for the artist to stand as “le témoin de la liberté” (witness to freedom) (see Felman & Laub 1992: 108) by bearing witness to the body as opposed to a more abstract “truth”—have been widely drawn by Japanese critics (e.g. Takadō). Of greater significance for this study, however, is the sense of Shiina’s *tenkō*, an event which the critic Kobayashi describes as “Shiina’s first encounter with the primal darkness of his own being” (Kobayashi 1992: 21), as representing, paradoxically, the starting point in the author’s search for true freedom.

The journey was not destined to be easy—and, inspired as it was by an event of such traumatic impact, it is hardly surprising that it would involve frequent and repeated flashbacks to this ‘trigger moment’. As such, Shiina’s diary and other autobiographical essays offer plenty of evidence of this as the defining moment of his career. To be sure, the author’s perspective on this event was significantly refined following the other episode traditionally cited as the turning-point in Shiina’s career, the author’s decision to seek Christian baptism in December 1950. Rather than engaging in the ultimately fruitless task of seeking to rank these two events in terms of significance, however, in this essay I shall be treating this second change of commitment—Shiina’s second *tenkō* experience—not so much as a core spiritual experience crucial for an understanding of the author’s art,³ but rather as a telling moment in the incremental process whereby the author effected the shift from acting out his early experiences of trauma to being in a position to work through them.

In all this, however, the important issue to note is that, as author, Shiina was less interested in a ‘faithful’ history of past events, even one recognized as distanced from the ‘truth’ behind the events by the constraints on memory and representation outlined in the Introduction to this volume. Instead, he was committed to an indirect telling of this process—to a process of fictionalization. The narrative goal in all the texts here under consideration, therefore, is that quality of literariness as defined by Roman Jakobson: the creation of texts in which

³ For examples of critics who cite his baptism into the Protestant church as the key conversion moment for Shiina, see, e.g. Takadō (1989) and Kobayashi (1992).

“language and expression are thrust into the foreground and granted independent value and importance”, this in sharp contrast to the work of the historian in which “language is largely subservient to the effort to convey in the fullest, clearest, and most sensitive way an understanding or knowledge of something in the past” (LaCapra 2001: 9).

The distinction between literariness and history may represent a useful directive in our approach to the Shiina literary text. It does not, however, invalidate the claim that fictional narratives, too, may involve truth claims on a structural or general level. As LaCapra suggests, such texts can provide insights into phenomena such as trauma “by offering a reading of a process or period, or by giving at least a plausible ‘feel’ for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods” (*ibid.*: 13). Striking this balance lies at the heart of Shiina’s literary art. In our readings of an author whose texts are rooted in—although they also build on—the discursive practices of the *shishōsetsu* authors who had occupied center stage during Shiina’s formative years, moreover, we do need to be mindful of the need, emphasized earlier, to avoid a direct conflation of the experiences of Shiina’s protagonist with those of the author himself. To be sure, in approaching these texts, we must acknowledge, as the critic Edward Fowler reminds us, the perception of “a degree of narrator-hero-reader identification unthinkable in English” (Fowler 1988: xi). But in approaching this “apparent blending of ‘intrinsic’ (literary) and ‘extrinsic’ (biographical) data” (*ibid.*: xviii), we need to be mindful of the *shishōsetsu* reading practices that had been established over the preceding decades, whereby the reader is frequently reminded that it is only the telling experience, as opposed to lived experience, to which s/he is being granted access (*ibid.*: 9). At the same time, moreover, to read the Shiina text according to the *shishōsetsu* template established by his pre war precursors is to ignore developments in the genre and its discursive formulations in the intervening years, years in which the constant focus on the self *in extremis* had led to a concerted challenge to the earlier authors’ unquestioning faith in themselves as authors and to an increasing awareness of the fictionality of their self-portrayals.

So how do Shiina’s narratives of the self move beyond the parameters of the *shishōsetsu*? And to what extent are these changes an inevitable result of the traumatic nature of the experiences to which he sought to give literary representation? In response to these questions, there is, *prima facie*, considerable similarity between much of Shiina’s

oeuvre, particularly the biographical series written in the early-mid 1950s,⁴ and several of the pre war exemplars of the genre. In particular, these texts clearly conform to one of the form's central tenets: the sense that

the Japanese writer...compiled this record [of his own thoughts and actions], less out of a sense of his own self-importance, than out of skepticism that any experience other than his own could be recorded with complete confidence (*ibid.*: xxiii).

There is, however, a sharp contrast between the typical *shishōsetsu* protagonist, all too ready to dismiss his daily existence—and particularly his contribution to society—as boring and insignificant, and the Shiina protagonist who, for all his lack of social ambition, seeks rather to attribute his desire to reject the world to his perception of the triviality of the world and to the sense of meaningless and despair in which he sees his fellow humans embroiled. The Shiina protagonist is, in short, more clearly rooted in—and engaged with—society, and more concerned with seeking to empathize with the masses (*taishū*), than the “unsocialized selves” that the critic Kobayashi Hideo famously saw as characterizing the pre war *shishōsetsu*. To be sure, the focus in the Shiina text on issues of immediate concern to the protagonist may predominate. This does not, however, exist at the expense of broader issues of social concern, and the ensuing texts thus represent, not so much subjective and sentimental recollections of a very personal past, but depictions of the self firmly rooted in society.

Seen thus, the Shiina narrative is better positioned than the traditional *shishōsetsu* to offer elements of social criticism. Such commentary is also facilitated by the fact that, in place of the “single consciousness narration” (whether first or third person) that Fowler sees as integral to the *shishōsetsu* (*ibid.*: 28), Shiina provides a greater complement of characters who, at different stages of the text, alternate as the “focus figure” of the narrative, allowing for a variety of narrative perspectives not limited to that of the single protagonist.⁵ These perspectives cer-

⁴ The series is generally considered to comprise the following eight narratives: “Koyori no himo” (A Twisted Paper String, 1953), “Fuyu no hi ni” (On a Winter’s Day, 1954), “Tsunagareta inu” (The Leashed Dog, 1954), “Haha no zō” (Statue of my Mother, 1955), “Kami no dōkeshi” (God’s Clown, 1955), *On the Far Side of Freedom, The Canal*, and *Utsukushii onna* (The Beautiful Woman, 1955).

⁵ The term “focus figure” is cited by Irmela Hijjiya-Kirschner as central to the discursive strategy of the *shishōsetsu*; cf. Hijjiya-Kirschner 1996: 170ff.

tainly serve as valuable counters to any tendency to over-identify the author with his/her creation. At the same time, moreover, they help to dispel the sense of the author as “would-be sage” who “offers the text of his life as an example to the reader”, occasionally to the extent of offering “moral guidance” to the reader (*ibid*: 193).

The idea of turning to the Shiina text either for an “example” to the reader or for “moral guidance” is hard to countenance. What we do find there, however, is an attempt at analysis—both of the motivation behind his actions and of their possible consequences—that one would not expect of the typical *shishōsetsu*. This may be attributable, in part at least, to an introduction of a level of mediation, often through the filter of the protagonist’s memory, that, in turn, is often deliberately foregrounded. All of Shiina’s literary treatments of his *tenkō*, for example, were penned after the cessation of hostilities, at some temporal remove from the event in question. In each case, moreover, rather than being presented with an “unmediated” narrative of events in the early 1930s (although clearly in this regard the traditional formula of the *shishōsetsu* as representing “unmediated” (*ari ga mama*) reality requires some reconsideration in the light of the discussions in the Introduction to this volume of narrative techniques of writing the past), these events are portrayed as triggered by some event in the present that reminds the Shiina protagonist of his traumatic past.

There remains, however, one further quality of the Shiina narratives that distinguish them markedly from the earlier *shishōsetsu*—and this concerns the very nature of the material treated. As Hijiya-Kirschneireit suggests,

the Japanese reader finds the *shishōsetsu* particularly convincing when he can, to a large extent, recognize his own world in them....[In the *shishōsetsu*] there are no profound reflections about the author’s artistic being or his writing which might disconcert the reader and make him realize that there is a difference between the narrator’s world and his own (Hijiya-Kirschneireit 1996: 280).

For a few years in the early 1930s, *tenkō* may indeed have been surprisingly commonplace.⁶ It still remained a subject matter so extraordinary—and so traumatic—that the average reader struggled to relate to

⁶ Steinhoff suggests that all but a tiny minority of the 57,000 arrested for leftwing activities between 1928–34 succumbed to the various pressures to commit *tenkō*; cf. Steinhoff 1988: 84.

it, particularly in the late 1940s–50s when it assumed such prominence in the Shiina narratives.

Acting out Tenkō

Having considered, in broad-brush detail, the nature and scope of Shiina's artistic project, let us turn now to consideration of a series of texts that epitomize the trends as outlined. In particular, in pursuit of an author dedicated to the project of writing the traumatized self, we can distinguish between the earlier Shiina texts, in which the emphasis would appear to remain very clearly on the process of acting out the traumatic experience of his *tenkō*, and his later works, where he can indeed be seen as working through this same experience. The distinction between the early and later Shiina texts is one to which several critics have drawn attention, the vast majority of them, as already noted, pointing to the author's decision to embrace the Christian faith as the significant turning-point. This division between his pre- and post-baptism works is certainly convenient, and one that the author himself, in classic *shishōsetsu* manner, fostered in the titles of many of his texts of the period.⁷ Rather than simply viewing the author's experiences at the turn of the decade as leading to a fundamental shift in narrative focus, however, I would suggest that we can also view this period as representing the time during which the author effected that slow and often imperceptible transition from acting out his experiences of trauma to working through them. Let us begin with a consideration of the early Shiina works.

Much has been made in the critical discussions of the early Shiina stories (e.g. *Shin'ya no shuen* (The Midnight Banquet, 1947 [1970]), *Omoki nagare no naka ni* (In the Sluggish Stream, 1947 [1970]), and *Eien naru joshō* (The Eternal Preface, 1948)) of the manner in which the Shiina protagonist in these works is portrayed, quite literally, as struggling to eke out an existence amongst the "ruins" of Occupation Japan.⁸ Unable to make any sense of his plight, he appears destined to

⁷ Eg. *Kaikō* (The Encounter, 1952), a term with specific Christian connotations of a life-changing experience; and *On the Far Side of Freedom*, a work in which, as we shall see, Shiina's protagonist is deliberately located on the "far side of freedom", still searching for the key to "freedom in the world".

⁸ Cf Takadō (1989) for a classic example of this approach.

succumb to the despair and darkness he had managed to overcome during his time in prison. On the one hand, such depictions quickly found favor with critics, such as Ara Masato, who argued forcefully, not only that all literature should portray “the voice of the masses”, but also that this could only be achieved by those, like Shiina, who “had known despair...fallen into the abyss...and descended into hell” (cited in Schlant & Rimer 1991: 176). For others, however, these were the musings of an author resigned to his fate, a fate directly attributable to his early confrontation with death. As the critic, Honda Shūgo suggests:

The reason he was so desperate in his search for a place where he could die was doubtless because he had an earlier experience of being unable to die—because he had been denied death even when he was convinced that he could die. In short, everything begins with his *tenkō* (cited in Kobayashi 1992: 8).

Significantly, the political comment is never overt in these texts. There is nevertheless evidence of an overly intrusive narrator, a narrative voice which on occasion appears to be echoing—acting out—the very questions with which Shiina had found himself confronted in jail and some of the responses he countenanced at the time. On one occasion, for example, the protagonist, Sumaki, is specifically asked by his neighbor, Toda: “What did you change to (*tenkō*) when you renounced Communism? Democracy? I love democracy”. Sumaki’s response is reminiscent of Shiina’s insistence on *tenkō* as involving, not merely a “from”, but a “to”:

I couldn’t stand this and replied, “I think all ideologies are for fools! Why do you insist on my belonging to some ~ism? Even your precious ‘democracy’ can’t escape the fate of these ~isms....As long as it is an ~ism, it is destined for dissension and struggle. No matter how great the ideology (even the ideology which has as its goal the peace and happiness of all mankind), by nature it will lead the very people who advocate it into the tragedy of war and destruction! We hold to our ideologies because it is convenient to have them; that’s all. Ideas ought to be fed to pigs! They are about as useful as toilet paper!” (SRZ 1: 27).

Another question which we have already noted as integral to Shiina’s *tenkō* experience and which we find clearly acted out in this debut work is that of whether he would ultimately be willing/able to die for a friend. The question is constantly on Sumaki’s mind, with Shiina’s own jail-time response to this question (“When two individuals love each other, there’s an element of hatred, isn’t there?”) reflected in his protagonist’s conclusion that,

“When it comes to Communism, the lazy will be hit with the heaviest sentences, won’t they?”

“No, I’ve given up on Communism...completely! Everything to do with any ~ism is for fools. So, I’ve given it all up. And if I do ever find myself thinking about it, it’s only to wonder how the hell I got so hooked on it in the first place”.

“But, what if the whole world were to turn to Communism? What would happen to the lazy ones then?”

“I guess they’d just die”, I replied, taking the words out of his mouth (*ibid*: 25).

The passage is heavily imbued with the shadow of *tenkō*. In jail, Shiina had eventually concluded that, even were the aims for which he and his fellow Party members had struggled to materialize, such a society was ultimately meaningless unless and until it brought with it a freedom of the individual from the shackles of death. In reflecting on the dark side of his ideology—and on the ultimate futility of his own existence—Shiina’s narrator can here be seen drawing conclusions reminiscent of those that led to the author’s *tenkō*.

For all the pervading hopelessness with which Shiina’s protagonist finds himself embroiled, however, there remains a paradoxical tone of optimism—embodied in Shiina’s ability to “endure” his wretched circumstances, and subsequently even to “laugh” at them—that rescues these works from the web of despair.⁹ The third and final element of the trilogy, *Fukao*, however, offers no such release, a judgment born out by Shiina’s own admission that, “when I wrote *Fukao*, I had this acute sense that everything was impossible, even dying” (Kobayashi 1992: 67). In *In the Sluggish Stream*, for example, for all that Sumaki admits that he can see no future for himself, he is intrigued by the thought of the next day’s weather:

I think it will clear up tomorrow. But the whole idea of tomorrow is alien to me. To me, tomorrow is always just that: tomorrow! I may be allowed a long life. But to me, that would just be an endless succession of yesterdays. To me, the idea of the future doesn’t exist. And yet, how I love to think about tomorrow! And how wonderful it is to think about tomorrow’s weather! Tomorrow: that’s the greatest word ever invented by man. And yet no other word is so empty.

⁹ The notion of *taeru* (endure) represents the constant refrain of *Midnight Banquet*; that of *warai* (laughter) is similarly ubiquitous in *In the Sluggish Stream*; for discussion of this aspect of Shiina’s art, see Williams (2003).

But still tomorrow is great! Particularly thinking about tomorrow's weather! (SRZ 1: 61).

But by the time of composition of *Fukao*, the reality is more stark, and the protagonist acknowledges: "I feel as if tomorrow is the darkest thing in the world. For me, all I have is a succession of todays" (SRZ 1: 196).¹⁰

From the outset, the novella assumes the guise of "part of the diary of a friend of [the narrator] who died in jail. The diary was kept by the military police at the police station where he was eventually held"—and is clearly identified as penned between June 19 and July 12 during the "Shōwa teens" (i.e. 1935–45; although there is enough circumstantial evidence to locate it towards the beginning of this period). And, in contrast to the earlier works, the reason for the protagonist's arrest—"for being a member of the Communist Party"—is clearly delineated (193).

Throughout the narrative, Fukao is portrayed as possessed of many of the same doubts and concerns that had troubled Sumaki in the two earlier texts. Drawn, in spite of himself, to visit the town where Sugimoto, his erstwhile Party comrade, is now seeking to build for himself a new life divorced from all political activity, for example, Fukao gives expression to many of the same doubts as Sumaki. Thus, on one occasion, he confesses:

Recently I have been troubled by thoughts that had never before occurred to me. Did I really love the masses? Could I really die for them? But I don't answer; I simply endure (*taeru*) those questions. On such occasions, a poignant hope comes to me. If I could only love the masses like some philosophical system—if I could only love them academically—how fantastic that would be! In that way, I could die like some philosophical system (194).

At the same time, Fukao, too, struggles with his sense of loneliness—of being totally alone in the world. He summarizes his reduced circumstances in the following stark terms:

My grandmother's dead, and of course I don't know my parents. My elder brother had to run off to Tokyo by night and is now missing and my younger sister has taken refuge in a spinning boarding house. And

¹⁰ All subsequent references to this novel are taken from this text and cited as page number only.

the family home has been sold on and is now apparently in the hands of relatives of the Buddhist priest at Gyoninji (202).

As with Sumaki, Fukao is distrustful of all those around him—and determined to keep himself to himself in his temporary lodgings, which he has come to see as “indisputably an eternal prison” (223).

And yet, for all the narrative focus on Fukao (through whose eyes the entire drama is filtered, in the form of his diary entries), this is no solitary drama. Having chosen, for whatever reason, to escape to the town inhabited by Sugimoto, Fukao is not, and cannot be, alone, and it is in the interaction between these two former colleagues—and the examination of the motives behind Sugimoto’s decision to commit *tenkō* and Fukao’s dogged resistance to all entreaties to follow suit—that this novella stands as the author’s most powerful consideration of—and acting out of—his own *tenkō* experience.

When Sugimoto first shows up, totally unexpectedly, at Fukao’s lodging house, he appears impressed by the latter’s dogged determination to “stick by his principles” (*setsu o magenai*) (232), comparing this favorably with his own fallibility that has led to his own self-identification, not as *tenkōsha*, but as *datsurakusha* (232). Almost immediately, however, he becomes defensive, explaining why he had made the decision to leave the Party:

I’ve had it with the Party (*aka*). I’m not just saying that because of the times we live in; I genuinely feel this. You are one of the chosen...and have been recommended as an ideal Party member. And if you just remain loyal to the Party—especially now that the worst of the storm is over—then you could become a member of the central committee....It must be thrilling. But what of the workers? And the proletariat? You don’t care how many hundreds or thousands need to be sacrificed, provided you can have your government. Then you will become one of those in power. And me? I’m just a miserable worker. Do you call that justice? I don’t understand....not at all (233).

On more than one occasion, Sugimoto storms off, only to return the following day with renewed attacks. As he warms to his subject, he accuses Fukao of “hypocrisy” (234), of seeking to use Party membership “for personal gain” (238). But his real attack is leveled at the ideology itself:

Love of the masses? That’s a grotesque ideal....Communism is rooted in love of the masses. But the Party is simply an organ for putting Communist ideology into practice. That’s why all Party members claim to love the masses, right? Haven’t you missed the most important point?

If Communism is born, not of love of the masses, but from a realization of historical necessity and a sense of justice, then...I tell you, it counts for nothing! It's no different from the Fascism that's all the rage right now...The important thing is love. Love distinguishes Communism from Fascism. But do you honestly believe you can love the masses (238–9)?

Sugimoto has clearly taken his *tenkō* to heart. His most scathing attack, however, is reserved for the manner in which Fukao has used the ideology “to gain superiority over [his] comrades” (243). Not only was he willing to “stand by as the proletariat fights” (243); he had also perfected the art of escaping just in time, leaving others to be arrested.

In response to this barrage, Fukao appears helpless, devoid of all passion for political discussion—and for life itself. Instead, in keeping with the earlier Sumaki, he simply “endures”. Following one of Sugimoto’s visits, for example, he acknowledges to his diary, “I was exhausted, totally devoid of energy and returned to my room. Reaching the top of the stairs, I collapsed onto my bed. My head was devoid of all thoughts. It was as though just being there, doing nothing, was the only way I could continue living, so I just lay there” (237).

Reading such passages, it is hard to resist the temptation to see them as rehearsals of the conflicting thoughts with which Shiina found himself assailed in prison. The sense of self as hypocrite—and more poignantly for Shiina, as betrayer of erstwhile comrades—is here graphically acted out. At the same time, in the portrayal of Fukao, alone and directionless, the narrative offers a powerful depiction of the trait that Steinhoff cites as integral to the *tenkō* experience: the extent to which separation from the group that was so crucial to the arrestee’s self-worth can deprive the individual of most of his *raison d’être* (Steinhoff 1991: 109ff). To Fukao, dying alone seems counter to all that the Party had inculcated in him. Alone and isolated, however, he can no longer be sustained by ideas, “which only have power through the group” (*ibid*), a point that is graphically borne out by his response, at the very end of the novella, to Sugimoto’s admission that he had just informed on Fukao to the military police. Sugimoto defends his action on the grounds that he had “no choice but to inform on [Fukao], to betray [his] own class” (258)—and urges Fukao: “Now’s the time to escape if you’re going to” (*ibid*). Caught between the desire for self-preservation and the realization of how the Party would expect him to respond, however, Fukao’s response is equivocal. Indeed, as the novella concludes, Sugimoto departs, and his parting

cry of “*Banzai to the Party!*” stokes the fires of Fukao’s interior dialogue. He still has time to escape—but sits there, wondering what he is waiting for. “Was it the police? Or death?” (260). The questions are left unanswered. But in the concluding suggestion that he might, rather, be waiting for “something that would change the color of the light of the world forever” (*ibid*), we have the clearest evidence to date of an author seeking to give literary configuration to the mental questioning that had accompanied his own personal process of *tenkō*.

Working Through Tenkō

As noted earlier, much has been made of the years 1950–51 as a turning point in Shiina’s literary as well as spiritual life. And it is clearly possible to view this later experience of *tenkō* (conversion), albeit this time of a spiritual dimension, as operating as an event that triggers reassessment of the earlier event (LaCapra 2001: 89). Certainly, Shiina himself was to stress the fundamental distinction he discerned between his current self and his earlier self “on the far side of freedom”—in the literary portrayals of his former self as, for example, “a corpse” (the constant refrain in *On the Far Side of Freedom*), as “a betrayer” (central to *The Canal*), and as “god’s clown” (*kami no dōkeshi*, the title of his 1955 story). Significantly, however, the past is not dismissed as an irrelevance; it is seen, rather, as essential preparation for the present, his attempts to date to come to terms with the past as prerequisites for the process of working through these events to which his attention now turns.

It is here, I would suggest, that one can find the essential difference between Shiina’s earlier and later *tenkō* narratives. The former, epitomized by *Fukao*, conform closely to Felman’s template for narratives that “inaugurate the Age of Testimony as the age of the imperative of bearing witness to the trauma and the implications of survival” (Felman & Laub 1992: 165). The latter, by contrast, written at considerably greater remove from the events in question, “rewrite the problematic of an Age of Testimony in a different manner, since its dilemma and drama do not so much *bear witness to survival* as they obscurely struggle through the question: *how does one survive the witnessing?*” (*ibid*). Seen thus, these later narratives become exercises in “critical rethinking of the stakes of witnessing in history and recapitulation[s]...of the relationship between testimony and contemporary history” (*ibid*:

168). Let us examine the applicability of these claims with reference to *On the Far Side of Freedom* and *The Canal*, Shiina's two most complete literary considerations of the *tenkō* experience in his later work.

In the first of these two novels, *On the Far Side of Freedom*, Shiina draws in greater detail than in any other work on autobiographical material. The novel is divided into three parts, with Part 1 derived from his life between 1926–29 (including his decision to leave home aged 15, his experience as an apprentice cook, and his eventual employment with the Ujikawa Dentetsu railway company); Part 2, spanning the period from 1929–31, covers the author's increasing commitment to leftwing activism and his decision to escape to Tokyo at the time of the August 31 round-up; and Part 3 details the aborted attempt to eke out an existence selling waterproof paper, his arrest, life in prison, decision to commit *tenkō* and consequent release and the grueling experience of “freedom” he experiences in the match factory to which he was assigned by the military police. The emphasis throughout, then, is on his former self, now viewed as “god’s clown”, struggling “on the far side of freedom”. But in all this, it is difficult to avoid the sense of the author, Shiina himself, as omnipresent, frequently casting judgment on his protagonist from his current perspective on “this side of freedom” and, to a large extent, it is these suggestions of overt authorial intrusion that provide the strongest evidence of an author continuing to work through his material. The material may now be carefully filtered—and certainly the sense of immediacy, inherent to the process of acting out that pervades the earlier *Fukao*, is no longer in evidence. There is, nevertheless, a subjective engagement with the material that conforms with LaCapra's template for the author intent on working through his material: Shiina's protagonist acknowledges the pain he had experienced earlier whilst at the same time appearing to revel in the realization that he is “existing here and now, and this is different from back then” (LaCapra 2001: 144).

The process of distancing himself from the events in question is initiated at the outset of the novel—in a scene where the protagonist, Seisaku, stares at a photograph of himself, aged seventeen. The more he looks, the more Seisaku tries to reassure himself that he bears no relationship to this “former self”:

This is a picture of myself, Yamada Seisaku, as a youth. But I can't help but vigorously deny that this photo is of me. I feel the same of all photos of my past; they seem to hold the shadow of crime or death.... Clearly,

this youth is not me. It is my corpse, my ridiculous corpse that has long since disappeared (SRZ 5: 65–6).¹¹

The narrative distance is carefully preserved throughout Part 1. As soon as Seisaku joins the railway company—and, in so doing, embarks on the process that will lead to his arrest, torture and *tenkō*, however, the narrative tension rises, the narrator appearing increasingly to empathize with the consequences of the events in question. Seisaku's motives for joining the Party, for example, may thus be presented as arbitrary and inconsequential:

He looked into the stationmaster's office through the window. The stationmaster, with his bald patch, was studying the rota like a robot and writing the train times onto it. Seeing that, Seisaku felt that his entire life—and that of all his colleagues—was meaningless, ridiculous and totally illogical. At that moment, Seisaku suddenly decided to join the Party. And so, without telling anyone, he joined up. But he had scarcely any idea as to the true nature of Communism (117–8).

Already, however, the narrative appears to be subverting its own pretence at bland depiction of events—by juxtaposing such depictions with passages that focus on Seisaku's heightened sense of tension. Shortly after joining the Party, for example, Seisaku learns that the death penalty for left wing activities was allowed for under the recently implemented Peace Preservation Law. Significantly, “although this was no more than a possibility in his case, Seisaku mistook it for an inevitability” (125) and, increasingly, his acts, including the decision to abandon his colleagues and escape to Tokyo, are portrayed as “manipulated by the fear of death” (155).

Already there are indications within the narrative of the resentment that Seisaku's actions inspire in his colleagues. Seisaku himself may remain totally oblivious to this; as we shall see, it is only in Shiina's next novel, *The Canal*, that the reader is offered extended consideration of the psychology of betrayal that remains central to the process of working through this trauma. Increasingly, however, Seisaku is being depicted as possessed of a concern and sentimentality toward his fellow human beings that is at odds with the protagonist's own self-evaluation. Arrested and cast into a lice-infested cell with a group

¹¹ All subsequent references to this novel are taken from this text and cited as page number only.

of other prisoners, for example, the hitherto callous Seisaku betrays a different facet to his being, seemingly in spite of himself:

Seisaku was kind to all the people thrown into his cell—and was convinced that he loved them. If we were to list all the crimes with which he found himself confronted, that would exhaust the whole of criminal law; but he was able to feel for them all. Why? Because, even when confronted with their fear and despair, he didn't have to do anything to try and save them. Even if he were to console one of them, he felt no responsibility for his words. The fear of death that had dogged him for so long disappeared from his being—except for when he was being tortured. Seisaku had turned into an inhuman abstraction (174).

It is at about this time that the suggestion is first put to Seisaku that he consider committing *tenkō*. His immediate response reveals his desperate attempt to maintain the Party line: “None of us can be sure what the future holds” (176). It is not long, however, before he hears news that his former colleague and closest friend, Arakura Kiyō, is desperately ill. The self-examination that ensues is reminiscent of that which Shiina had entrusted to his diary:

Death no longer seemed to him merely as the ultimate in loneliness—but also as a reality before his eyes. And he had no way to fight it—or even to oppose it in his thoughts. But then, one day, he removed his mask, asking himself, “If I could take his place in death, would I be able to do so?” He told himself in all earnestness that, if he truly loved him, there was no way he would be unable to do so (181).

Seisaku struggles in vain to convince himself that this very question is “ridiculous...premiered as it is on an impossibility” (*fukanō o zentei to shite iru*), and he seeks to dismiss it as a “mere figment of his imagination, entirely divorced from the real world” (182). The narrative, however, remains insistent, and the portrayal of Seisaku finally succumbing to the realization that, if he is unable to lay down his life for his friend, he is equally unable to die for the Party, represents the true *tenkō* moment of the novel:

This miserable clown continued faithfully to act out this meaningless, useless soliloquy, all within the cramped confines of his concrete cell. He thought of himself turning to his friends, and declaring, “I'll continue with the movement until I die”. A cold sweat ran down his cheeks and his head pounded as if it had been hit by a stone. Again, he remembered proudly exhorting his colleagues, “We have to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the masses”. He caught his breath and a painful groan escaped his mouth. Suddenly, feeling an excess of shame, he stood up restlessly. But there was nowhere to which he could escape (*ibid*).

The portrayal of the psychology of the *tenkōsha* is arresting—and the literary ground is now prepared for the protagonist’s immediate response to his decision to put pen to *tenkō* paper:

Seisaku had become an item of unrecyclable garbage. And he objectively realized that he had become a betrayer of his class—because he had filled out a *tenkō* document in accordance with the model with which he had been confronted. The only slight difference with the model he had been shown was that he threw in the word “Nietzsche” on several occasions. He had first encountered Nietzsche when he had been given a paperback version of *Ecce homo*. Lost in thoughts about his failure to love the masses, he had been amazed by Nietzsche’s contempt for love of the masses. He felt a definite sense of empathy. And even if this could do nothing to assuage his sense of emptiness, this did not prevent him from using Nietzsche’s name on his *tenkō* document (*ibid*: 185–6).

The subsequent portrayal of Seisaku following his release on parole is of a man determined to make the most of his new-found, and hard-earned freedom. Paradoxically, however, he is made to work so hard at the factory to which he is assigned that he finds himself longing for the freedom (to do nothing) he had enjoyed in prison. The freedom he now experiences is dismissed as an “empty freedom”—and he eventually sets off for Tokyo once more, determined to discover the “dazzling sense of freedom” (*kagayakashii jiyū*) (208) he remains convinced lies within his grasp. The novel, however, concludes at this point, the final paragraph offering both an affirmation and a rejection of Seisaku:

Strangely enough, this Seisaku was destined to die a few years later. Even stranger was the fact that this seemingly irredeemable man was destined for rebirth in heaven after his death, as if he were god’s clown (*ibid*).

The passage stands as a stark reminder of the divide that separates Seisaku “on [either] side of freedom”. At the same time, however, it can be seen as the clearest assertion to date of the protagonist’s freedom from the clutches of death, and from the emptiness and despair of his own past, a theme on which Shiina was to elaborate considerably in the sequel novel, *The Canal*.

The Canal

The Canal is deliberately located in the time frame immediately following the conclusion of *On the Far Side of Freedom*, with the protagonist, here known as Senkichi, recently arrived in Tokyo and seeking

to re-establish himself in society through hard work and attempts to establish some meaningful relationships with those around him. From the outset, the link with the previous narratives is consciously drawn, with the portrayal of Senkichi's days as a railway conductor, his arrest and eventual *tenkō*:

After two years [in prison], Senkichi had betrayed his colleagues and himself. In short, he had submitted a *tenkōsho*—and been rewarded with a suspended sentence. This traitor had then worked for a while in a Himeji match factory, been taken ill, become embroiled in a little incident—and traveled up to Tokyo where he was a total stranger. Of course, he was supposed to inform the police of these movements, but he failed to do even this. Ridiculously, he looked on Tokyo as his final resting place. Such things may have seemed trivial; or rather, he considered himself to be trivial.... But the Japanese police net was renowned throughout the world: nothing was too trivial for it and it had a controlling authority like a natural law (SRZ 6: 520).¹²

The methodology of looking back on his former self “on the far side of freedom” is here maintained. But in contradistinction to *On the Far Side of Freedom*, where the implicit comparison between the protagonist on either side of freedom had posited a seemingly unfathomable divide between past and present, the process in *The Canal* is portrayed more as that of seeking a reconciliation of these two selves, as differing facets of the same being. The focus in the earlier work on the protagonist seeking to distance himself from his former self by dismissing the latter as his “corpse”, as “god’s clown” is thus here replaced by portrayal of a protagonist in the present still very clearly identified as a sinner and a betrayer of his former colleagues. The distance between the two versions of the self is thereby reduced—with the current protagonist appearing as no more, nor less, than his former self in search of redemption.

The portrayal is offered by Senkichi himself, in his self-portrayal as a “man who has committed a miserable sin, a man no longer qualified as human.... an ugly traitor, who has been rejected by both former enemies and comrades” (568). Stripped of all sense of self-worth, Senkichi longs for nothing but a sense of freedom (“Even if it’s a lie, why can’t I shout out that I’m free?” (*ibid*)), and it is on the portrayal of this search for freedom—and on the ensuing examination of the relationship

¹² All subsequent references to this novel are taken from this text and cited as page number only.

between sin/ betrayal and freedom—that the narrative impact of the novel is concentrated.

To Senkichi, the only escape from his miserable circumstances is through searching—and, during the course of the narrative, this quest leads to the discovery, not merely of the world of former colleagues who had hitherto rejected him as having betrayed them, but of a greater affinity with the mundane and harsh reality of the masses (*taishū*) that had long been cited as Shiina's singular literary contribution, but which is nowhere better delineated than in the depiction, in *The Canal*, of life in the *roji* (alleyways) of suburban Tokyo. Inevitably, however, the search does not—and cannot—take place in a vacuum, and an integral part of the process relates to Senkichi's ability to acknowledge and come to terms with his own traumatic past and to work through these events as the only means of moving forwards. Senkichi is consequently dogged by frequent reminders of his past, with several early incidents acting as the 'trigger' for flashbacks to the trauma surrounding his *tenkō*. Most dramatic of these is the scene, at the very beginning, in which Senkichi, running an errand for his boss, crashes a company bicycle into a bus. He loses consciousness, but, as he recovers, "he felt as if he had been enveloped by a thick, soft, but firm wall. At the same time, he felt as though this had brought him face to face with his true self" (523). The portrayal is reminiscent of several of Shiina's accounts of his prison experience—and is juxtaposed very quickly in Senkichi's mind with his experience of being tortured by the military police:

Senkichi recalled the large *dōjō* on the second floor of the police station. There was a long, thin, plain wooden desk in the middle behind which sat a young prosecutor and clerk. Senkichi was made to sit in front of them, while an old, slow-moving military police officer (*tokkō*) stood behind him. He was ordered to tell them the names of the local Party members who had contacted him—and of those in his cell. When Senkichi said that he knew none, the *tokkō* passed a bamboo sword between Senkichi's hands, now tied behind him, and his back and then pulled it up towards his shoulders, with a shriek. He felt as though both arms were being ripped from their sockets. Every time the pole was forced up, he let out a pitiful scream and broke out into a sweat. He endured this; but the *tokkō* just carried on and on with the torture. Unable to resist the pain, Senkichi fell to the floor. But the *tokkō* made no attempt to pick him up—and just carried on forcing his arms up with the sword (531–2).

For all the distance, the memories are still raw—and they inspire Senkichi, once more, to relive the events. As in the earlier narratives, the

decision to succumb is clearly portrayed as lacking any intellectual substance:

At that moment, Senkichi became aware of a solitary fly buzzing around his nose. The fly was totally indifferent to Senkichi's suffering, and just carried on crawling over the reddish-brown *tatami* mat and then flying off elsewhere. At that moment, the anger directed at the judge and the *tokkō* that had been supporting him until then crumbled. He feared that he was on the verge of simply succumbing to death and began to feel that everything was ridiculous, that he didn't care about anything. All the ideology in which he had believed implicitly, his love of his comrades, his pride as a worker, and the white intellectual face of the local Party member who was his link to the leadership.... all of these seemed suddenly meaningless, and not worth dying for. And it was then that he reached the wretched conclusion that it would be better to confess than to die (532).

In sharp contrast to the absence of portrayal of any of the intense dialogue that led Fukao to resist all the authorities' entreaties in the early novella, and building on some of the less clearly formulated thought processes hinted at in *On the Far Side of Freedom*, *The Canal* represents the first concerted effort by Shiina's protagonist to analyze these events. As a condition of his parole, for example, Senkichi is obliged to report on a regular basis to his local police station, and these visits provide him with ideal opportunities for reflection. One such discussion is inspired by the question that, as we have seen, weighed heavily on Shiina's mind:

"What did you convert (*tenkō*) to?" the *tokkō* asked happily. "From Communism to what?"

Senkichi remained silent. In his case, there had been no "to anything" involved. The *tokkō* seemed to realize this and laughed. "There are lots of them like you. There's no substance to your *tenkō*. Haven't you seen the papers? Some of these *tenkō* have been greeted with loud applause from society. Some of them have been treated so well it almost makes me want to become a *tenkōsha* myself".

"That's the bigwigs in the Party", Senkichi found himself saying. "I'm just a lowly worker".

"That's not true", said the *tokkō*, suddenly assuming a serious air. "What's important is the substance. Even here in Shiba we've had some where the substance has been acknowledged and they've been taken on into fairly high positions in various companies. Others have been taken into government departments and gone off to Manchuria and Korea. But you lot? You just go around saying, 'I've committed *tenkō*!' But there's no real substance—nothing you've converted to.... I'm sure you know

this, but there are some who resisted all pressure to commit *tenkō* and who have been sentenced to hard labor. I have to say that I trust them more as human beings. But when it comes to you lot... how can you be trusted? It's not surprising nobody trusts you" (564).

The passage places explicit emphasis on the paradoxical consequences of Senkichi's *tenkō*. On the one hand, he did succeed thereby in securing his release; at the same time, he sees the act as a betrayal of himself. For all the attempts at reconciliation, however, Senkichi is left with but one abiding realization: as a result of his act of betrayal, he is now all alone in the world, as "even his past Party activity had been killed off by his act of betrayal" (555). It is at this point that the narrative introduces Masako, the young woman of humble means who overlooks all of Senkichi's awkwardness and self-pity and offers him lodging and, more importantly, friendship. Senkichi, however, remains true to character, his response to each of Masako's acts of charity seemingly designed to nurture his self-image as an "ugly traitor" (568). At the same time, the image is reinforced at the narrative level, where increasingly Senkichi's actions are clothed in the guise of *uragiri* (betrayal). Determined to confide his feelings of affection for Masako on one occasion, for example, he is prevented by "something that 'betrayed' me from telling Masako that I loved her" (573). Shortly thereafter, overwhelmed by the fifty-*sen* coin she has just given him, Senkichi remains transfixed by the coin glistening in his palm "as though proof of his pathetic act of *betrayal*" (599).

The depiction is of Senkichi confronted—and increasingly troubled—by his own "overwhelming wretchedness" (586). Significantly, however, the narrative then proceeds to an important admission: "Never before had Senkichi been confronted by the ugly contradiction inherent within his being to this extent. And strangely enough, this thought was linked to a sense that he was betraying the entire world" (587). Here, as if for the first time, we have the sense that Senkichi is finally making some headway with his attempts to reconstruct his *tenkō* experience. Having failed, to date, to integrate this as an integral element of his life history, he is now in a position to move from resistance and denial to a greater degree of acceptance; he is ready, in short, for an encounter with one of his former colleagues whom he had "betrayed".

Senkichi's initial response to bumping into his former colleague, Anami Reiko, is cloaked in nostalgia for the past. Her cool reply to

his greeting, however, immediately serves to rekindle his sense of self as traitor:

Reiko didn't smile. She simply stared at him with an expressionless look in her eyes, and replied in the Kansai dialect, "Yes".

The sweet sensation of nostalgia drained visibly from Senkichi's being; there was a distinct tone of powerful criticism in Reiko's voice. The past, which he had long since tried to bury, came flooding back; he was even aware of the weight on the palm of his hand of the ten fifty-*sen* coins he had received from Reiko when she had been working in the small café in Kobe to cover the "rent of an agitator". There had even been a time when he had experienced feelings of love toward her.

"When did you come to Tokyo?" he asked out of desperation.

"Only about a month ago", she replied (605).

The earlier narratives would doubtless have left things there, the Shiina protagonist unwilling—or unable—to delve deeper into the cause of Reiko's evident anguish. Senkichi, however, is ready for further probing, and the ensuing narrative raises several of the issues he had been mulling over for so long:

"You [were tortured] too?" He eventually asked hesitantly.

"Yes", she replied brusquely.

"I suffered terribly at the hands of the *tokkō*. I was moved from one police cell to another for about two years", Senkichi began to explain. "They eventually let me out on parole".

"Why did you run off without telling anyone?" she eventually asked.

"That's not true. I told my colleagues it was dangerous and ordered them to escape".

"I never heard that", she said in a monotonous voice. "Everyone on the trains was mad with you. Even those who weren't in the union got caught up in it. Everyone's convinced that you informed on them to the police before running away".

"That's a lie", he found himself shouting. "Are you crazy?"

"In which case, why didn't you come back to be with your former colleagues on leaving prison?" (606).

Senkichi's eventual response to the series of accusations that Reiko now proceeds to level at him represents a critical turning point, a dramatic shift in Shiina's literary representation of the *tenkō* mentality. Initial protestations that he is not to blame only serve to augment his feelings of guilt, until he is eventually driven to conclude, "I've just been trying to get on with my own life as best I can... If that makes me a traitor, then so be it!" (611). The conclusion, compounded shortly thereafter in his attribution of the decision to run off with Suzuko, Masako's

son's lover, to his conviction that "the only way forward for my life is through betrayal" (624), may defy all conventional morality and logic. However, in its portrayal of Senkichi determined to live for the future, not simply by expunging the traumatic past from his consciousness but by seeking consciously to move on, the incident is decisive. On the one hand, he may be left bemoaning the fact that "that horrible moment under torture had destroyed any bridge back to the past" (631); at the same time, however, he has now reclaimed at least some semblance of control over his life and its future direction.

This reclaimed control is epitomized by the two incidents that bring the novel to its conclusion. Firstly, as he loiters by the canal near Masako's house, unsure whether to go through with his ultimate act of treachery, he throws both his battered copy of Engels and the name card he has been given by the *tokkō* into the waters in an act clearly designed to rid himself of his wretched past. Significantly, however, he cannot bring himself to take that one final step that he had always perceived as the final freedom he retained: the ability to choose the moment and manner of his death. As he stands there, he acknowledges, "the most accurate judgment would be that I have no alternative but death. So what is it that is making me live?" (648). The question is rhetorical: Senkichi has already convinced himself that it is only the fact that he is a "cowardly traitor" (*ibid*) that prevents him from jumping. Instead, he walks off in search of Suzuko.

With the narrative to this point having deliberately portrayed Masako as the one and only saving grace in Senkichi's life, the depiction of the protagonist at the very end embarking on this deliberate act of treachery is clearly designed to place the issue of betrayal at center stage. At the level of interpersonal relationships, it is an act clearly destined to exert maximum pain and suffering on those nearest to him—and represents, as such, the clearest reprise of the *tenkō* psychology in Shiina's entire oeuvre. At the same time, however, the text appears intent on drawing attention to the fact that this represents far more than a simple reworking of what is, by now, a familiar trope. Instead, there is evidence, in Senkichi's desperate, and contorted, attempt to justify his action, of a protagonist fully aware of the nature and consequences of his actions and well on the way to extricating himself from the simple cycle of repetition evidenced in the earlier works:

If it were true that *the only way for him to live was to return to Masako's* and endure the ensuing humiliation, then he had no alternative but to

prevail on Suzuko. He felt he mustn't return to that house without first truly betraying Masako and her family—and the only means to this end was to prevail on Suzuko, by force if necessary (648; emphasis added).

The decision is explicitly portrayed as Senkichi's "pathetic revenge on the world" (649). In suggesting that Senkichi will thereby succeed, paradoxically, in "returning to Masako's" and "living on", however, the concluding paragraph appears intent on achieving a degree of closure to the issue that had pervaded Shiina's narratives to date. In a very real sense, the passage stands as a culmination of the project of working through the traumatic past. And, as emphasized by the fact that Shiina would write nothing of note for the next few years and would never again return to an autobiographical mode in which the past remained paramount, it is tempting to view this portrayal of Senkichi's decision to return to Masako, however circuitous the route, as the ultimate *tenkō* moment in his literature.

Conclusion

In the Introduction to her study of literary testimony, Shoshana Felman cites as her aim the desire to explore "the relationship between narrative and history, between art and memory, between speech and survival" (Felman & Laub, 1992: xiii). In like manner, in this paper, in exploring the evolution in Shiina's literary treatment of the experience of *tenkō* (and by selecting those texts from his oeuvre that rely most heavily on autobiographical detail), I have sought to show how "issues of biography and history are neither simply represented, nor simply reflected, but reinscribed, translated, radically rethought and fundamentally worked over by the text" (*ibid.*: xiv). To Felman, this process necessitates a focus on the symbiotic relationship that exists between "contextualization of the text" and "textualization of the context"—the benefit to the critic being potential "new avenues of insight, both into the texts at stake and into their context—the political, historical, and biographical realities with which the texts are dynamically involved and within which their particular creative possibilities are themselves inscribed" (*ibid.*: xv).

In the case of traumatic recall, however, the issue of distance—of physical remove from the events in question—cannot be disaggregated from the equation. Induced, by trauma, to experience "a dissociation

of affect and representation [whereby] one disorientingly feels what one cannot represent [and] numbingly represents what one cannot feel” (LaCapra 2001: 42), the challenge for the artist in such circumstances is to move on from the situation in which this dissociation is evident for all to see (and in which the author gives the impression of struggling not to be overwhelmed by its sheer immediacy), to one in which s/he works through the same traumatic past by “articulating or rearticulating affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a re-enactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation” (*ibid.*).

Such differentiation can usefully be applied to Shiina’s oeuvre, I would suggest. And, while eschewing any suggestion of an unbrokered contrast between the early works, epitomized by *Fukao*, as offering little more than an endless repetition of traumatic events, and that of the later works, *On the Far Side of Freedom* and *The Canal*, as embodying a total mastery of, or even closure to, the events in question, there is nevertheless evidence of an evolution to his art that conforms with the various templates with regard to the individual response to trauma discussed in the Introduction to this volume. To be sure, as LaCapra himself would have predicted, there are occasions within Shiina’s corpus in which his protagonist would appear to be simultaneously engaged in acting out and working through traumatic events (*ibid.*: 105ff). The processes are nevertheless distinguishable, with the discrete elements clearly attributable to different dimensions of the self. And it is only with the latter texts, written at a clear remove, not only from the events in question but also from the desperate personal circumstances in which Shiina, along with so many of his fellow citizens, found themselves in the immediate postwar period, that one finds evidence of the artistic detachment—of the determination to “counteract, or at least mitigate, [the repetition compulsion] in order to generate different possibilities—a different force field—in thought and life” (*ibid.*: 71).

As noted earlier, following completion of *The Canal* and *Utsukushii onna* (The Beautiful Woman) in 1955, Shiina would write little of note for the remainder of the decade. And, with the exception of “Baishakunin” (The Go-between, 1962 [1970]) and *Chōekinin no kokuhatsu* (Confessions of a Convict, 1969), his subsequent work has largely been ignored by the critics. Shiina himself was not surprised by this turn of events: by the time of completion of his series of works in the mid-1950s, the author was mentally exhausted and struggling

to discern a new direction for his writing.¹³ In light of the appreciation, by LaCapra, Caruth and others, that, when it comes to seeking ‘closure’ on earlier trauma, the processes of acting out and working through the events in question can take the individual only so far, but are ultimately powerless to transcend the ‘repetition impulse’, it is tempting to cite these 1955 works (and *The Canal* in particular) as watershed texts whereby the author acknowledged, however subconsciously, the cyclical, and thus endless, nature of the process in which he was embroiled. At the same time, it is hard to escape the conclusion that, by this point, he may have traveled as far as possible in working through those elements of the trauma and emotional guilt (over deserting his former comrades) that he had experienced at a very personal level in jail; none of this, however, could assuage the awareness of a broader political and moral culpability (in not having offered greater resistance to the state and the rising tide of Fascism) with which he found himself increasingly burdened in the years leading up to his death.¹⁴

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¹³ This point was made by Kobayashi Takayoshi in a speech delivered at Meiji Gakuin University on July 27, 2001—and clearly supported by Shiina’s diary entries of the time, as reported in Saitō (1980).

¹⁴ Takadō Kaname a close personal friend of Shiina, is clear in his conclusion that the author ultimately never came to terms with this sense of guilt (see Takadō (1989)).

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CHAPTER FIVE

OKUIZUMI HIKARU AND THE MYSTERY OF WAR MEMORY

Angela Yiu

*Introduction*¹

In 1994, Okuizumi Hikaru (b. 1956) won the Akutagawa Prize for his novel *Ishi no raireki* (The Stones Cry Out, 1993 [1999]), a story about the devastating and tragic consequences of a man's attempt to bury his wartime guilt and memory. Since then, Okuizumi has been consistently producing a body of fiction that addresses the theme of war memory, including the two-volume *Gurando Misuterii* (Grand Mystery, 1998), *Romanteki na kōgun no kiroku* (A Record of a Romantic March, 2002) and, most recently, *Mōdaru na jishō: Kuwagata Kōichi jokyōju no sutairishu na seikatsu* (A Jazzy Phenomenon: the Stylish Life of Assistant Professor Kuwagata Kōichi, 2005).² These stories combine realism and fantasy and straddle the genres of detective fiction, mystery, SF, and the orthodox novel, all of which are embedded in a strangely complex and deeply metaphorical language that marks Okuizumi's style as an embodiment of pure and popular literature as well as a cross between the highbrow and lowbrow. Using this hybridism of genre and style to constitute the memory of war and examine the legacy of individual and collective war crime and guilt, Okuizumi has constructed a violent, haunting, and shimmering world filled with suspense and improbabilities on the level of plot and replete with

¹ I would like to thank David Stahl and Mark Williams for inviting me to join this project mid-stream, and for their valuable suggestions for the revision of this paper.

² *Grand Mystery* is a work of detective fiction about the murder/suicide of an officer during the Asia Pacific War. *A Romantic March* is a satire about the unending march of Japanese soldiers in the War that continues into contemporary Japan. *A Jazzy Phenomenon*, spanning some 500 pages, alludes consistently to fifteen schoolboys supposedly lost at sea in an attempt to return to Tokyo from an outlying island where they were evacuated during the last stages of the conflict. When asked in an interview if the word 'mōdaru' in the title refers to the grammatical usage of the modal auxiliary, Okuizumi suggested the reference to 'modal' in jazz music, which he regularly performs, pertaining to mode, as distinguished from key.

deep, philosophical reflections about time, memory, individual choice and responsibility in times of war and postwar.

While numerous works of contemporary military fiction and film glorify the valor and lament the sacrifices of the Japanese military during the War in the rising tide of neo-nationalism of late 20th century and early 21st century Japan,³ soul-searching, dialectical engagements with the past in artistic creations have been few and far between. Among writers a generation before Okuizumi, Ōe Kenzaburō and Inoue Hisashi, who were both born in 1935 and experienced the war as children, continue to write conscientiously about the War.⁴ Similarly, Kaikō Takeshi (1930–1989) also wrote with a keen political and moral consciousness about the Vietnam War and the Japanese government and bureaucracy.⁵ Yet among writers who came of age in the 1960s and 70s, Okuizumi is unusual in having produced a body of literary work that consistently delves into war memory, though Murakami Haruki's (b. 1949) contributions—mainly episodes embedded in full length novels—should also be taken into account.⁶ This is not to say that there are no thought-provoking war-related works in recent literary history; there clearly are, but for the most part they are written by writers with personal remembrance of the Asia Pacific War, even if only as young children.⁷ For most writers born after 1945, the theme of war was put

³ These bestsellers include Henmi Jun's two-volume *Otokotachi no Yamato* (Men of the Battleship Yamato, 2004), a work of nonfiction about the last survivors and the bereft families of the battleship sunk by U.S. forces in Okinawa, resulting in 3000 dead, and Fukui Harutoshi's *Bōkoku no ijisu* (The Aegis of Annihilation, 2002), an imaginary attack on Japan by the U.S. Both were made into movies in 2005.

⁴ Ōe is best known for "Shiiku" (Prize Stock, 1957 [1977]) and the nonfiction *Hiroshima nōto* (Hiroshima Notes, 1965 [1995]) and *Okinawa nōto* (Okinawa Notes, 1970). Recent atomic bomb related nonfiction includes *Hiroshima no seimei no ki* (The tree of life in Hiroshima, 1991). Inoue's recent contribution to atomic bomb literature includes the play *Chichi to kuraseba* (Living with my Father, 1994), made into a film in 2004. Along with seven other prominent intellectuals, Ōe and Inoue established the *Kyūjō no kai* (The Article 9 Association [for the renunciation of war]) in 2004.

⁵ Kaikō Takeshi worked as a war correspondent in Vietnam in 1964, and his works include the trilogy about the war there: *Kagayakeru yami* (Into a Black Sun, 1968 [1980]), *Natsu no yami* (Darkness in Summer, 1972) and the unfinished *Hana owaru yami* (Darkness of the Fading Blossoms, 1990).

⁶ Murakami's war-related fiction includes two episodes in *Nejimakitori kuronikuru* (The Wind-up Bird Chronicle, 1994–95, [1998]), one on the zoo attack in Manchuria (Book 3, Chap. 9) and one on the Battle of Nomonhan in Outer Mongolia (Book 1, Chap. 12, 13). For a more detailed discussion, see chapter 2 of this study.

⁷ These include the works of fiction and nonfiction writer Handō Kazutoshi (b.1930) whose war-related fictions include *Nihon no ichiban nagai hi: unmei no hachigatsu jūgonichi* (The Longest Day in Japan: August 15 1945, 1965), *Nomonhan no*

far behind them as though war memory has nothing to do with those who have no personal and experiential memory of which to speak. That the ability or urge to write about war is limited to those who have lived through it is itself a misconception; note, for instance, the many ‘historical novels’ about wars preceding 1931—the *bakumatsu* (late Edo) period, the first Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War, etc.—re-imagined and re-told by the popular and prolific writer Shiba Ryōtarō (1923–96) as a sustained narrative of valorous nation-building. Unlike Shiba, who does not write about the wars after 1931, Okuizumi gazes into the darkness of a war of aggression fought before his birth and re-opens the possibility of collective and personal soul-searching that is particularly important for a population increasingly made up of people born after the War. In challenging the boundary of historical and personal memory in his conscious and consistent reflection on the war in his fiction, he generates a process that simultaneously destroys and preserves the past in an attempt to create a present and a future in which people have learnt not to repeat the arrogance, absurdity, and tragedy of war.

This paper will examine Okuizumi’s *The Stones Cry Out* in order to probe the following questions: What does it mean for Okuizumi, born over a decade after the end of the War, to create a body of work that focuses on the memory of the War? How does this change the landscape of postwar Japanese literature and challenge the historical

natsu (Summer in Nomonhan, 1998), *Reite oki kaisen* (The Sea Battle of Leyte, 1999), *Shinjūwan no hi* (The Day of Pearl Harbor, 2001). Also well-known is Yoshimura Akira’s (1927–2006) *Senkan Musashi* (The Battleship Musashi, 1966), and Gomikawa Junpei’s (1916–95) *Ningen no jōken* (The Human Condition, 1955), made into a 6-part, 9-hour film by the director Kobayashi Masaki (1916–96). Gotō Meisei’s (1932–1999) *Hasamiuchi* (Attack on Both Sides, 1973) was also highly acclaimed. In film, Imamura Shōhei’s *Kuroi ame* (Black Rain, 1989), based on Ibuse Masuji’s novel of the same title, won numerous awards at home and overseas. The historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki (b. 1946), known for the piercing historical evidence he uncovered in his nonfiction works *Jūgun ianfu* (Comfort Women, 1995) and *Dokugasu-sen to Nihongun* (Poisonous Gas Battle and the Japanese Military, 2004), pointed out in *Kusa no ne no Fashizumu* (Grassroots Fascism, 1987) that there are in fact many personal memories of the war recorded at the grassroots level. From the 1970s, amateur authors also formed ‘remembrance groups’ (*kioku-kai*) and ‘movements for personal history’ (*jibunshi undō*) to record their wartime experience (Saaler 2005: 157–8). A historical and often dystopian imagination is not lacking in young contemporary writers, as evident in Hirano Keiichi’s (b. 1975) *Nisshoku* (Solar Eclipse, 1998), a story set in medieval Europe, and Satō Aki’s (b. 1962) *Sensō no hō* (The Rule of War, 2003), a story about an imaginary takeover of a Japanese prefecture by the Soviets in 1975. But the urge to apply that imagination to reflecting on the War is apparently missing.

boundary of what has come to be known as the postwar period? In analyzing the style and methods of *The Stones Cry Out*, this paper will discuss the way Okuizumi transforms collective historical memory into art, and how that artistic creation establishes a dialectical resonance with the past, urging readers who have not experienced war firsthand to perceive that the present and future are built upon lessons from the past embodied, not falsified, in an artistic imagination that transcends the limitation of historicism and empiricism.

Categorization of Postwar Literature Re-visited

To place a latecomer, so to speak, at the tail end of a line-up of postwar writers necessitates a re-visitation of the conventional categorization of postwar literature and its writers, and by extension a re-evaluation of the boundaries of the postwar literary imagination. In examining the critical contexts of postwar literature in her book *Narrative as Counter-Memory: A Half-Century of Postwar Writing in Germany and Japan*, Reiko Tachibana conscientiously outlined the existing categories of postwar Japanese literature from major critical sources (Tachibana 1998: 14–6).⁸ These include (1) the generational taxonomies delineated by the authoritative *Kokubungaku* (“Nihon Kindai Bungakushi” 1976: 164–225) that divide writers into six categories, from those who were established before the war (Nagai Kafu, Shiga Naoya) to those who were young children at the end of the War (Ōe, Kaikō); (2) Hijiya-Kirschnerit’s more elaborate categorization which included a slightly reshuffled generational taxonomy consisting of five groups, to which she added four topical categories (the War, battlefield experience, civilian life, the A-bomb) and four genres (pure literature, mass literature, personal records, documentary accounts) (1991: 99–119); (3) Van Gessel’s discussion of the opposing trends of social activism and artistic purism in postwar literature as an extension of prewar literature; (4) John Treat’s analysis of the full range of Japanese A-bomb literature and his argument of three “postnuclear”

⁸ Borrowing from Michel Foucault’s “Language, Counter-Memory, Practice”, Tachibana examines “postwar German and Japanese narratives as ‘counter-memories’ to the officially sanctioned versions of World War II” (Tachibana 1998: 1). For Foucault’s essay, see Foucault, Michel (1977) *Selected Essays and Interviews/Michel Foucault*, Bouchard, Donald, ed., Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

generations, ranging from writers who experienced the bombing to those who transform Hiroshima and Nagasaki into a powerful metaphor. To this list of critical contexts, Tachibana added Ōba Minako's (1930–2007) *Urashimasō* (1977 [1995]) to the corpus of A-bomb literature. In *Zadankai Shōwa bungakushi* (Round-Table Shōwa Literary History) v. 4 (2003), Komori Yōichi outlined four broad political categories among immediate postwar writers: the established writers who broke the silence of wartime censorship, the proletarian writers and activists from the prewar era, the *Buraiha* or Decadent School,⁹ and the writers of popular fiction (Inoue and Komori 2003: 330–1). It is clear, however, that none of the existing categorization considers the possibility of the creation of meaningful and relevant postwar literature among writers born after the war.

In constructing the generational taxonomy of postwar literature in 1985, Hijiya-Kirshnerit wrote that

the generation born after the War does not figure at all in Japanese generational models dealing with writers' attitudes toward World War II. It is presupposed that, for this generation, the War is of no immediate concern and interest (Schlant and Rimer 1991: 110).

Her example of such abstract indifference was Murakami Ryū's *Umi no mukō de sensō ga hajimaru* (Across the Sea, a War Begins, 1977). Hijiya-Kirshnerit's comment summarizes the conventional generational categorization built upon the partially valid but nonetheless deeply flawed, assumption that war memory is strictly bound by visual perception, empiricism and experience. This kind of generational taxonomy underestimates the possibility of a powerful artistic re-imagining that challenges the boundary and limitation of personal experience. It would take another eight years for the publication of *The Stones Cry Out* to shatter the conventional assumption that those who had not experienced the war firsthand have no "immediate concern and interest" in writing about it in a serious and thought-provoking manner.¹⁰

⁹ The *Buraiha* writers are known for their subversive, satirical and humorous prose for which they are called *shingesaku-ha* (School of New *Gesaku*), after the Edo comic literary tradition. Representative works include Sakaguchi Ango's "Darakuron" (On Decadence, 1946), Dazai Osamu's *Shayō* (The Setting Sun, 1947 [1968]), Oda Sakunosuke's *Sesō* (The State of the Times, 1946 [1990]), and Ishikawa Jun's "Ōgon densetsu" (The Legend of Gold, 1946 [1998]). Perhaps more than any other writers, *Buraiha* authors defined the spirit of defiance and skepticism in the postwar period.

¹⁰ In reviewing Tachibana's book, Hijiya-Kirshnerit pointed out the need to include works by writers who have no personal memory of the war. While she mentioned *The*

Okuizumi is also among the growing number of critics who insist that war- and postwar literature has not come to an end but should be an ongoing project, given the number of unexplored issues of war memory and guilt¹¹ as well as Japan's indirect and increasingly direct involvement in numerous wars after World War II. During a round-table discussion (2000) on Ōoka Shōhei involving the writers and critics Higuchi Satoru, Okuizumi, Inoue Hisashi, and Komori Yōichi, Higuchi pointed out that postwar literature has not come to an end and the real questions about war and postwar are still relevant and immediate today. This opinion resonated among the discussants and resulted in the coining of the phrase “unfinished postwar literature” (*mikan no sengo bungaku*).¹² Okuizumi commented on the perpetual warring state that Japan and the world are in even after World War II:

War is not simply about the state of combat, nor is it only about the military. In the 20th century, countries are in a perpetual state of war even during supposed non-combative peacetime. In that sense, we can only say that postwar Japan is not in combat, but we have to admit that war goes on for ‘postwar’ Japan.... I agree with Mr. Higuchi that the conventional categorical confinement of ‘postwar literature’ is breaking down. In the so-called ‘postwar’ world, the Korean War and Vietnam War occurred, even though Japan was not a participating country in those wars. The war that Japan joined as a participating country was the Gulf War in 1991. Japan contributed financially to the Gulf War and sent some personnel. In that sense, Japan was part of that war (Inoue and Komori 2003: 334).

Okuizumi's comment predated 9.11 (2001) and the subsequent ‘war on terrorism’ waged on various fronts, which Japan continues to support by sending money and members of its Self-defense Force. Though there is no limit to the debate about what constitutes a ‘state of war’ in apparently non-combative regions, it is undeniable that the world is in a perpetual state of preparation for war, and Japan is not immune to that mode of thinking and operation. In 2007, the Self-Defense Agency was upgraded to the Self-Defense Ministry, and the main agenda of the conservative and nationalistic Abe cabinet (2006–07) was to reform

Reader (1995 [1997]) by the German writer Bernhard Schlink (b. 1944), she made no attempt to identify any Japanese counterparts (Hijiya-Kirshnereit 1999: 526).

¹¹ Inoue Hisashi pointed out that the Northern territories issue (between Japan and Russia) remains unexplored in literature (Inoue and Komori 2003: 341).

¹² The round-table discussion is recorded in Inoue and Komori 2003: 320–433, especially 327–41.

the constitution to disconnect contemporary Japan from its past as a defeated and occupied nation. This was accompanied by a slippage of memory and a willful manipulation of the Japanese language to erase or alter certain shameful historical facts. All of a sudden, women who were forced to serve in the sex slavery industry during the war, often identified by the euphemism of ‘comfort women’ (*ianfu*) as though they were in the same category as the care packages (*ianbukuro*) sent to soldiers by citizens, were considered not to have been ‘coerced’ by the military despite the fact that there were testimonies from sex slave survivors and official records documenting the official military order to set up the sex stations (“Abe Questions Sex Slave ‘Coercion’” 2007). Furthermore, given the ease with which a Japanese sentence operates without a definite subject or pronoun, the education ministry instructed some publishers “to remove passages from high school history textbooks that said Okinawan residents were forced to commit mass suicide by the Imperial army”, another attempt to spare the Japanese military from the responsibility of having coerced civilian suicides (“Editorial: Battle of Okinawa” 2007). No doubt such blatant alteration and erasure of collective memory accompanied by a perpetual state of gearing up for war beneath the beguiling state of so-called peace or postwar compel Okuizumi and his fellow critics to argue that war and postwar literature ought to remain under continued active consideration, and not dismissed as relics. Inoue Hisashi, a founding member of the *Kyūjō no kai* (The Article 9 Association), concluded by saying,

Itō Sei wrapped up neatly the state of postwar literature in his critical works *Shōsetsu no hōhō* (The Method of the Novel, 1948) and *Shōsetsu no ninshiki* (Understanding the Novel, 1955) and effectively cleared away ‘postwar’. We should go beyond that and deal with all the unending issues at length in the style and spirit of Ōoka Shōhei (Inoue and Komori 2003: 341).

Okuizumi, as I will argue in examining his story, in many ways inherits the legacy of Ōoka’s soul-searching spirit in the wake of defeat.

The Stones Cry Out

Manase Tsuyoshi returned to Japan from Leyte Island physically intact yet perpetually haunted by the images of dead and dying men in a cave before his capture by American troops. It was in this cave where he

encountered a dying lance corporal who gave him his first and indelible geology lesson: that even the smallest stone has the entire history of the universe inscribed upon it. After the war, Manase inherited his father's used book business, started a family in his old family home in Chichibu, and spent his spare time collecting stones. But his quiet life was shattered by a horrible and mysterious crime: his ten-year-old son, Hiroaki, died in a cave of multiple stab wounds. From then on, his family life unraveled: his inconsolable wife turned alcoholic and unstable, his younger son, Takaaki, left in the foster care of his sister, ruined a promising athletic career and became a violent revolutionary and a murderer, while Manase became increasingly secluded among his stone collection in his storehouse. Of all the vivid recollections of the people and events in the dark cave in Leyte, a gaping lacuna in Manase's memory continued to haunt him: he could not remember if he had indeed followed the order of the captain and stabbed the lance corporal to death. It was not until Takaaki's suicide that Manase ventured back to the cave where Hiroaki died and remade the memory that he had buried along with his guilt and fear.

One brilliant technique Okuizumi uses to capture the dwindling attention span of his contemporary readers and compete with other forms of media is to deliver this deeply philosophical and reflective story in the form of a mystery. Okuizumi believes that "what is required of novels today is to shed light on various social problems while entertaining the people who read them" (Okuizumi 2005b: 3). The plot in *The Stones Cry Out* is sustained by the whodunit mode: did Manase kill the lance corporal? Who killed Hiroaki and why? Was Manase in the Chichibu cave at the time of Hiroaki's murder, since it was Manase's voice that apparently had lured Hiroaki deep into the cave? Why were little Takaaki's hands covered with blood when he regained consciousness outside the cave after his brother's murder? Many of these questions remain unanswered and insoluble because of the gaps in memory and the deliberate leap in logical and sequential development in the plot through an intricate weaving of reality, memory, and dreams, but the questions are firmly planted to create suspense and speed up the pace of the story. As a result, despite the long hours in the lonely storehouse and the complex, extensive rumination on geology and history, there is no moment in which the reader is not drawn by curiosity to find out more about what had happened or will happen. Thrown back and forth between the present and the past in a flowing third person narrative with predominantly embedded dia-

logues instead of quoted speech, the reader's attention is maintained throughout, right up to the moment of revelation, which Okuizumi, in the manner of all good mystery writers, gingerly and teasingly saves for the precious last few pages.

Another reason that Okuizumi finds the genre of mystery particularly appropriate as an instrument for dissecting war guilt is that it poses a question that challenges the norm with regard to human lives: how does one confront and investigate the crime of an individual murder in the midst of mass killing? (Chino and Okuizumi 2005: 540). In an essay entitled "Sui-ri shōsetsu nōto" (Notes on Mystery Novels), Ōoka Shōhei commented that the detective Akechi Kogorō in Edogawa Ranpo's stories in the *Ero-guro-nansensu* tradition of the early Shōwa period was a fugitive and a rebel because, in an age of mass killing, individual crime and murder held no interest for people. "No one cared about the death of a single citizen in a corner of the city when hundreds and thousands of people were killed at the front everyday" (Ōoka 1986b: 58). Ara Masahito pointed out that detective fiction can be considered a product of civil society and is most fully developed in countries such as the United States and Great Britain where democracy is highly valued, in that the detective embodies the civic ideal of relying on investigation instead of violence or torture to find the culprit and extract the truth (Ara 1986: 60–1). Thus Okuizumi's choice of the whodunit mode to question war guilt is particularly significant in its attempt to stress the code of civility even in times of war, as well as to emphasize the meaning and value of an individual life in times of indiscriminate violence and mass killings.

At this point, there is a need to say a few words about the Japanese form of mystery in order to understand why it suits the purpose of examining individual war guilt and memory. Glossed as *misuterii* in katakana, Japanese mystery is a broad categorization that encompasses all kinds of *sui-ri shōsetsu* (literally, novels of inference or reasoning), also commonly and interchangeably identified as *hanzai shōsetsu* (crime fiction) or *tantei shōsetsu* (detective fiction). In "Notes on Mystery Novels", Ōoka traces the roots of the modern mystery story to two major sources. One is the gothic novel that flourished at the end of 18th century England, a form of European Romantic, pseudo-medieval fiction marked by its atmosphere of mystery and terror drawn from an alternative reality that departs from the ordinary world, such as the dark dungeons and subterranean passages in the medieval buildings and ruins that often serve as the

setting.¹³ Ōoka identifies the gang of villains in *Les Misérables* and Fagin's training nest of young thieves in *Oliver Twist* as the 19th century urban rendition of these terrifying dens of darkness that originated from the gothic novel (Ōoka 1986b: 53). Another source is the courtroom fiction (*saiban monogatari*) that ranges from the biblical episodes centered on the wisdom of King Solomon and the tales of burglary (*tōzoku monogatari*) in *Konjaku monogatari* and *kanazōshi* (*ibid.*: 58).¹⁴ Among modern Japanese fiction, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's "Yabu no naka" (In a Grove, 1922 [1952]) would be representative of a mystery based on courtroom fiction, and Ōoka's *Jiken* (The Incident, 1977), awarded the Japanese Mystery Association Prize in 1978, is also written in that vein.

That the author of *Nobi* (Fires on the Plain, 1952 [1957]) and *Furyoki* (Taken Captive: A Japanese POW's Story, 1948 [1996]) showed such consistent fascination with the form of the mystery sheds light on the interesting marriage between mystery and war memory hinted at in Ōoka's works and brought to maturation in Okuizumi's fiction. In Ōoka's case, the solitary wandering of starving Private Tamura in a sub-tropical island littered with putrefying corpses and severed body parts evokes the soul-wrenching terror and uncertainty of the dark labyrinth-like spaces of gothic novels. In *The Stones Cry Out*, the evil stench and the maggots squirming in the lance corporal's eyes in the dark cave of Leyte effectively capture the atmosphere of twilight terror when death, metaphorically and physically, eats into the living: "This was the first time [Manase] had seen maggots squirm in the eyes of a breathing, talking human" (Okuizumi 1999: 5). As for the appeal of courtroom fiction, it allows the mind to go through the process of prosecution, defense, arguments, etc. to sort out evidence of injustice suffered or crime perpetrated in moments of desperation and despair, and to arrive at some form of healing or atonement that might enable life to renew itself after wandering through hell. Although there is no

¹³ Representative works in this genre include Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1765) and Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), both of which are mentioned in Ōoka's essay. See also "Gothic Novel" 2007.

¹⁴ *Konjaku monogatari* (Tales from the Past) is an anthology of about 1,000 stories written in the late Heian period (794–1185). These include Buddhist tales, folklore, and didactic tales from China, India, and Japan, and often feature human beings and the supernatural. *Kanazōshi* refers to printed books in kana or a mixture of kana and kanji that flourished in Kyoto between 1600 and 1680 in the Edo period. Representative works include *Nise monogatari* (Tales of Falsehood, ca. 1639, author unknown), a parody of *Ise monogatari*, and Asai Ryōi's *Ukiyo monogatari* (Tales of the Floating World, 1661).

courtroom in *The Stones Cry Out*, a desperate search for truth and judgment permeates the entire story, and the judge of conscience is like the invisible magistrate in Akutagawa's "In a Grove" who presides wordlessly over denials, silence, and lapses in memory, until the mind finds a way to retrieve the key to remembrance.

Edogawa Ranpo, who popularized the detective mode in the 1930s, identified Akutagawa, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, and Satō Haruo as the three progenitors of the modern Japanese mystery (Kusaka 2002: 502). It is noteworthy that the works of these three writers are conventionally categorized as pure literature as opposed to mass literature, and this marks the inherent highbrow and lowbrow nature of the genre of mystery, an interesting mixture and flexibility that Okuizumi fully exploits in his works. Satō identifies one of the most outstanding features of the Japanese mystery as distinguished from its orthodox Western counterpart: mystery is about creating a dream-like state, not about solving the crime. Satō considers the genre of mystery as a branch of Romanticism, and describes the thrill and suspense of the mystery as "a form of poetry, a form of drunkenness in a romantic feeling" (Satō 2002a: 494). Instead of focusing on solving the crime, Satō values the dream-like nature of the mystery, which always features what he calls an extraordinary plot in an extraordinary world (*ibid* 2002b: 500). When one considers some of the most representative works of mystery by these three writers, such as Akutagawa's "In a Grove", Tanizaki's "Shunkinshō" (A Portrait of Shunkin, 1933 [1963]) and "Yume no ukihashi" (As I Cross a Bridge of Dreams, 1959 [1963]), and Satō's "Utsukushiki machi" (Beautiful Town, 1919 [1996]) and "Shimon" (Fingerprints, 1918 [1996]), one realizes that they all share the feature of creating a mystery instead of solutions, or at best providing hypothetical solutions based on fragmented remembering and evidence that deepen the mystery.

Similarly, in *The Stones Cry Out*, there is no means to find out for sure the answers to any of the fundamental questions in a mystery—who dunit, what is the *modus operandi*, and what is the motive?—because the answer is always obscured by a gap in memory and a nightmarish impulse on Manase's part to fill in that gap with multiple versions of re-imaginings, blending past and present deaths and murders into a haunting and terrifying continuum.¹⁵ Thus in a dream in which

¹⁵ It is noteworthy that the central question of war guilt in Ōoka's *Fires on the Plain* also hinges on a blank in Tamura's memory, about whether he has knowingly eaten the flesh of his comrades.

Manase relived the stabbing of the lance corporal which he might or might not have perpetrated, the cries of the dying man turn into Hiroaki's screams, a confusion reinforced many years and many pages later when Takaaki asks Manase, "When we heard that voice from the back of the cave, Hiro said it was yours. 'That's Daddy's voice', he said. But of course you weren't there that day. Were you?" (Okuizumi 1999: 126). Even though Manase was physically in Kyoto when the murder of Hiroaki took place, Takaaki's question still shakes the foundation of Manase's and the reader's rational interpretation of hard evidence and alibi. Okuizumi's use of the whodunit mode combined with an obstinate rejection of rational inference and evidence leads the reader to conclude that the writer has borrowed the form of the mystery to create tension and suspense while he asks a different set of questions concerning war guilt and memory and their indelible and lingering effects on life; in short, questions that continue to reverberate even when the story ends. In refusing to solve the crime, Okuizumi employs and destroys the whodunit mode in his story to convey the idea that the search for individual and collective responsibility for war crimes is an unending and complex process, and it will take much longer than a lifetime for individuals and a nation to atone for the brutality of war.

In an essay titled "Gendai no shinwa, suiri shōsetsu" (Modern Myth and Mystery Novels, 1986), Kurita Isamu attempted to delineate the major difference between modern fiction (i.e. so-called 'pure literature') and mystery. He argued that modern fiction focuses on the "essential concerns of human beings" (*ningen to iu mono no honshitsu*)—love, honor, wealth, freedom, etc.—qualities which are by nature abstract and which by necessity lead to the lack of closure in most stories (*kanketsu dekinai*). By contrast, mystery relies on an incident or a fact (such as a murder) as a point of departure and requires objective, concrete analysis of evidence (Kurita 1986: 85). Ōoka made a similar point when he said that there are essential differences in the depiction of human nature and psychology in mystery as compared to the love romance, in that mystery has to account for the mechanical accuracy of things and events from the beginning to the end, and thus the writer of an orthodox mystery (*honkaku suiri*, in the tradition of the Sherlock Holmes series) has to structure the devices of mystery based on a careful estimation of the reader's psychology (Ōoka 1986a: 2). In *The Stones Cry Out*, however, Okuizumi apparently wants to combine the dissection of human nature with a story full of suspense and, in so doing, break the barrier between the

conventional introspective, I-novel type of modern fiction and the orthodox mystery built upon the piecing together of clues and evidence to give shape and coherence to a fragmented universe. In that sense, Okuizumi deconstructs the form of the *misuterii* and transforms it into a profound mystery filled with the kind of gaps, hiatus, discontinuity, and selective forgetting that resembles fragments of personal memory. Thus the quest for the missing link of what happened in the cave(s) is simultaneously a detective's relentless pursuit of what happened and a whodunit as well as a personal search for a clue that may trigger remembrance and open the door to the inner chamber of the mind. In Okuizumi's story, there is no way to separate the two.

There are two kinds of time in *The Stones Cry Out*—existential time and geological time—the former corresponding to lived experience and the latter to the stones. Borrowing from Gustav E. Mueller's formulation in "Experiential and Existential Time" (1946), existential time is 'living-time' (*liebenszeit*), 'the time which we are in enacting it' and 'ontologically subjective' (Mueller 1946: 428). That is to say, the living and temporal reality of an individual is made up of existential time, which essentially forms the precondition of any kind of experience. Manase's war and postwar experience is personal, not collective or historical, and is made up of existential time subject to his individual acceptance and denial, remembering and forgetting. Given its constant change and movement, existential time in the story comes to be associated with what lies on the surface of a limited span of human life, impermanent and subject to forgetting and rearrangement. This image of a shallow flow of time, though mistaken, is powerfully suggested in the story and stands in stark contrast with what appears to be a deeper form of time embodied even in the smallest stone, "which has the entire history of the universe inscribed upon it" (Okuizumi 1999: 1).

Emerging from the dark cave as though it were a voice from the earth itself, the lance corporal introduces Manase to the deep, geological time that suggests a stable, objective, external reality and a possibility of eternity:

The tiny pebble that you might happen to pick up during a walk is a cross-section of a drama that began some five billion years ago, in a place that would later come to be called the solar system—a cloud of gas drifting idly through space, growing denser and denser until after countless eons it finally gave birth to this planet. That little pebble is a condensed

history of the universe that keeps the eternal cycle of matter locked in its ephemeral form (*ibid*: 3–4).

Furthermore, he juxtaposes existential time and deep, geological time in his delirious lecture by explaining the transformation of organic deaths into rocks over time, and he urges Manase to see the connection between his limited human life and the history of the world:

Limestone and chert consist of the compressed skeletons of tiny organisms that collected eons ago on the bottom of the sea. Even the calcium in our own bones will eventually change into stone and be made part of the mineral cycle. That is why the tiny pebble that you pick up from a riverbed, no matter how silent and alien, is in fact your distant relative. That pebble in your hand tells the history of the world, and you too are a part of that history, and what you discover is the way you yourself will look in the future (*ibid*: 38).

After the war, however, Manase disconnects the inextricable link between the two kinds of time and appears to cope with life by consciously seeking refuge in deep, geological time and rejecting existential time. Even though he goes through the motions of life with an apparent degree of normality—he earns a living, marries, and has two children—daily life seems perfunctory and filled with indifference. Stone-collecting becomes an obsession. The dark cave in northern Leyte is transformed into the benign storehouse in which he cloisters himself every night examining, polishing, and cataloguing each piece of stone he collects in his spare time, a means to restore order to a mysterious and chaotic world. The squirming (*ugomeku*) maggots in the lance corporal's eyes that terrified Manase are now transformed into squirming crystals under the microscope: “All at once the world under his eyes appeared to come to life, each mineral seemed a living creature, the crystals squirming” (*ibid*: 47). The birth of each son is marked by progress in his stone-collection, a fifty-stone collection on Hiroaki's birth and a hundred-stone collection on Takaaki's. That the word crystal (*shō, aki*) is embedded in both the boys' names shows that, for Manase, his offspring are symbolic crystallizations of his geological obsession, not extensions of his humanity.

However, in immersing himself in the marvel of geological time, Manase distances himself from existential time. Like Private Tamura in Ōoka's *Fires on the Plain*, Manase returns from his experience as a POW disconnected from humanity and a temporal reality that may restore living-time for him, that is, a state of experiencing fully every existential moment and allowing the present moment to be connected

with the past in the form of remembrance and the future in the form of hope and anticipation.¹⁶ Manase indulges in the fascination of eternal time and avoids contemplating how his own temporal reality—his past, present, and future—is part of a larger process of annihilation and preservation through which new substance and/or meaning are formed. He severs existential time from geological time for one simple reason—he does not want to remember (*ibid.*: 28). Manase could not remember whether he obeyed the order by the captain to kill the dying lance corporal, the only person who addressed Manase like a father and earned his respect. There was a gap in Manase's memory between staring into the gloom at the entrance of the dark cave and sitting outside as a captive in a village square. When he tried to recall what happened in between, he could only remember washing his hands, seemingly grimy with clotted blood, in the river. Existential time—in which Manase experienced and perceived events subjectively—is constantly shifting and terrifying, while geological time, which exists outside his ontological experience, seems objective, stable and sheltering. Manase opts for the latter.

For all the comforts it promises, Okuizumi does not allow Manase to hide in the sanctuary of geological time. What follows is a complex web of doubles and repetitions, like Deleuzian simulacra or phantasms—different from the original yet bearing uncanny resemblance—rising from the past to force Manase to return to the metaphorical and actual site of memory.¹⁷ Manase's postwar life is an eerie repetition of his experience in the cave of Leyte, dissimilar on the surface yet bearing a haunting likeness in its core. The duality of the Leyte cave is faithfully reproduced—one as an embodiment of geological time repeated in Manase's storehouse where he works on his stone-collection, the other as the gaping hollow of death and forgetting repeated in the dark space that swallowed his family whenever they descend the stairs from his storehouse. Furthermore, the cave in Leyte is most significantly duplicated in Chichibu as a site of murder of the only people—the lance corporal and Hiroaki—with whom Manase feels a

¹⁶ In *Fires on the Plain*, Tamura is unable to connect with his wife after the war because of traumatic memories that she cannot share (Ōoka 2007: 163).

¹⁷ In his critique of the three-tiered Platonic hierarchy of idea, copy and simulacra, Gilles Deleuze argues that the simulacrum exists in and of itself, without grounding in or reference to a model: its existence is “unmediated” (Deleuze 1994: 29). For a discussion of the Platonic repetition, compared to the minting of coins, and the Nietzschean repetition based on differences, see Miller 1982: 6.

strong bond via their shared fascination with stones. The father-and-son-like bond between the lance corporal and Manase is repeated in the actual father-and-son bond between Manase and Hiroaki, and Hiroaki's innate fascination with geology is an uncanny embodiment of everything that is philosophical, spiritual, innocent and positive about Manase and his experience in the cave, to the extent that Manase experiences anxiety about Hiroaki's reality. "Had [Hiroaki's] existence been an illusion, or perhaps the crystallization of a dream bestowed on Manase as a gift?" (*ibid*: 63). In the presence of Hiroaki, Manase can reiterate the lance corporal's lecture on geology in the same fatherly tone and live through the satisfaction of enacting the double roles of father and son, teacher and listener, the one who inherits the wisdom and knowledge of the earth and the one who passes it on. Yet it is also this intricate, double connection that makes Manase experience the terrifying uncertainty of having committed both virtual patricide and infanticide, crimes so heinous and unforgivable that the only thing he can do is to forget.

There is another layer of repetition, laden with loneliness, hatred and violence and connecting the captain, Manase and Takaaki, that Manase attempts to banish from his postwar life. The captain's presence is marked by an indomitable will and a powerful voice that issued orders so absolute and irresistible that men covered with flies and maggots would leap to their feet and Manase would "gladly throw himself into a curtain of machine-gun fire" (*ibid*: 18). In the dark forest of Leyte, the captain with his handsome face and conspicuous pallor became authority and direction incarnate, and despite the fact that he had become hobbled by gangrene from a shrapnel wound in his left leg, his words permitted no dissent. He ordered dying soldiers to kill themselves or be killed if they had no strength left to commit suicide. Though Manase seemed to find the massacre of sick soldiers understandable in war, he had difficulty coping with the order to kill the man that the lance corporal had become to him: "Kill him, Manase! See if you can do it, Manase! . . . Now cut! Nice and easy!" the captain goaded Manase with his strangely seductive voice" (*ibid*: 133). In the dark resonance of the captain's voice, loneliness and violence are transformed into a magical seduction, a distorted *raison d'être* in the absurdity and mass murder of war.

Takaaki shares many similarities with the captain, from the horror of one who has witnessed death and insanity and the bitterness and loneliness of one abandoned in a dark, unmapped territory, to

the physical injury in the left leg. “The moment [Manase] saw the lone player leave the field, dragging his injured left leg and refusing all offers of help from the bench, Manase knew his son had still not forgiven him” (*ibid.*: 95). After ruining his sports career through a violent outburst on the playing field, Takaaki sinks deeper and deeper into the whirlpool of senseless violence. Active in the student riots in 1968, Takaaki soon became engaged in indiscriminate assaults and murders and led his life with no concern for the future, as though he were born to kill and die. Takaaki is a reminder of the senseless deaths and murders of war that Manase would prefer to banish from his life. When taunted if he had ever killed anyone during the war, Manase defended himself lamely by saying, “We’re not at war now”, to which Takaaki sneered, “Oh, but we are! And not only in Japan but in the entire world. You just haven’t noticed” (*ibid.*: 110). Takaaki, then, is a phantasm of war that challenges any attempt by Manase to break away from the past.

But it would be too simplistic to see the captain and Takaaki as the evil party opposed to the good lance corporal, Manase, and Hiroaki. Takaaki *is* Manase, as much as Hiroaki is part of his father. As their names suggest, they are both crystallizations (*kesshō*) of Manase’s duality. Manase chooses and favors Hiroaki because the older son embodies the side of him that he wants to see. Yet unlike Hiroaki, Takaaki, we are told, is a split image of his father. When Takaaki visits Manase one last time in his storehouse, the father senses the smell of blood in his son, and “he saw the face of a man whose eyes were swarming with maggots” (*ibid.*: 109), a reminder of the lance corporal who was after all part of the carnage of war, despite the philosophical lesson on geological time and human history that he chose to bequeath to Manase. But above all, Takaaki shares with Manase the burden of survival,¹⁸ if not the uncertain guilt of a possible murder of a loved one. Hidden in the breast of an eight-year-old child who is to suffer simultaneously the death of a brother and the abandonment of both parents is the dark doubt and secret of having been responsible for his brother’s murder. In his last meeting with Manase, Takaaki confessed that he was with Hiroaki the day of his murder. Like Manase, Takaaki suffered a gap in his memory in not being able to remember what happened between losing sight of Hiroaki in the cave and regaining

¹⁸ This idea echoes David Stahl’s *The Burdens of Survival*, 2003.

consciousness outside the cave. Again, like Manase, he was disturbed to find what resembled dried-up blood on his hand that he could not wash away no matter how hard he tried. Unlike Manase, who took shelter in the sanctuary of stone-collection and immersed himself in a different time frame, Takaaki charged head-on with the anger, fear, and loneliness of a guilty survivor, and in the end paid with his own life.

What lies at the heart of the endless intersecting patterns of repetition are the stones, especially the green chert formed by the fossilized skeletons of eons of living organisms. But even the stones are not a solid Platonic archetypal model immune to the effects of repetition. Manase has learned from the start that no two stones are the same. The green chert that passes from the hand of the lance corporal literally and symbolically to Manase, Hiroaki, Takaaki, and finally back to the lance corporal and Manase contains a full range of meanings and signification. From the lance corporal to Manase and Hiroaki, it signifies life and time embedded in eternity, yet when Hiroaki attempts to pry his own sample of chert from the cave in Chichibu, he pays for it with his life. Thereafter, the association with death and violence dominates until the stone travels all the way back to Takaaki's hand. But the final mysterious return of the stone from the lance corporal to Manase's possession suggests the possibility of redemption and renewal, a point to which I will return after examining what can perhaps be considered the most intriguing aspect of the story, that of time travel.

An avid SF reader, Okuizumi incorporates elements of time travel in nearly all his war-related stories.¹⁹ In *The Stones Cry Out*, this is significantly captured in the last scene in which Manase walks deep into the Chichibu cave where Hiroaki died to find himself in the cave in Leyte and experiences anew the time when he was ordered to kill the lance corporal. This directly leads to another scene by the river where the lance corporal told Manase that the children Hiroaki and Takaaki gave him the green chert in the cave. Okuizumi's comments on time travel in *Grand Mystery*, which involves traveling back to the final years and sites of the Asia Pacific War, throw light on what he is doing in *The Stones Cry Out*:

¹⁹ SF writers Okuizumi lists among those he has read and liked include: Robert Anson Heinlein (1907–88), Sir Arthur C. Clarke (b.1917), Isaac Asimov (1920–92), Brian Aldiss (b. 1925), J. G. Ballard (b. 1930), Greg Egan (b. 1960), David Brin (b. 1950). See Chino and Okuizumi 2005: 529–31.

The most difficult thing about time travel has to do with its reality. Concerning the plausibility of time travel, orthodox SF uses fairly heavy-handed pseudo-science to construct its reality. Another way to go about it is to simply assert that time travel is possible (laugh). I don't belong to either camp. I can't use the first method, and I can't stand the lies in the second. Despite the fact that it's fiction, I still want to convey a certain reality. Thus it becomes problematic how to convince the reader of a certain reality without resorting to scientific explanation. In *Grand Mystery*, I use the image of a tunnel to transport the characters to an alternative reality...

My aim in any story is to maintain the ambivalence (*ryōgisei*) of imagination and reality found in an SF occurrence. I don't want to specify that something like SF has occurred in the story. I want to place the main character in that narrow opening—the space of ambivalence—in which an SF occurrence may or may not have taken place. To put it simply, what the main character experiences might have been a dream. That has always been a central theme in my work. The reality built upon the interaction with others, and the reality of an individual imagination—there is bound to be some slippage between the two. That the slippage is reality itself is perhaps what my stories emphasize. Thus despite everything I insist on placing my main characters in the space of ambivalence (quoted in Ōmori 2001: 457–8).

In this mysterious space of ambivalence, Manase carries the lance corporal to the riverbank to wait for sunrise instead of stabbing him to death in the dark cave, and the lance corporal places in Manase's hand the green chert that the boys Hiroaki and Takaaki gave him. This process involves not simply a matter of retrieving lost memory but an active will to remake what was lost and invest it with a full range of meanings and possibilities. In this space that allows an intersection of multiple temporal and spatial dimensions, Manase experiences both the past and the present in an imaginary conflation of time as well as Leyte and Chichibu in a new reality that is, in the famous Proustian formula in "Time Regained", "real without being actual, ideal without being abstract".²⁰ This is where he is able to find redemption and put to rest the souls of the lance corporal and his two sons who, in more ways than one, served as penance for Manase to gain an understanding of the relationality of the past, present and future, and the connectedness between objective geological time and subjective existential time.

²⁰ This is from the chapter "An afternoon party at the house of Princesse de Guermantes" (paragraph 13) in "Time Regained", vol. 7 of Proust's *In Remembrance of Things Past* (Proust 2003).

While Manase is clearly aware of the past as he goes through the motions of living his present life after the war, he commits the tragic error of unhinging the past from the present and refuses to see its connectedness. Moreover, in favoring geological time over existential time, he avoids what Mueller identifies as the “moral decisions and responsibilities” of the present moment (Mueller 1946: 430). Mueller explains that present time, which Augustine called *cura*, “embraces the past and the future”. Furthermore,

In repentance, the past is remade, in contradiction to the chronological record which reports the fact as a dead and gone derelict of time. Repentance turns a shame over a past action into a renewing source of good. The past, in *cura*, reaches the present as an authoritative and warning voice. And on our moral decision hinges the course of the future (*ibid*).

It is tempting to seek refuge in Mueller’s Christian humanism and to see repentance as a means to turn “past action into a renewing source of good”, and, despite the fact that *The Stones Cry Out* ends with an uplifting image of the stone turning into “a radiant crystal” (Okuizumi 1999: 138), it is important to remember that the past is remade, not reversed, in the space of ambivalence. Death and sacrifice are given their proper meaning and mourning through remembrance and understanding as they remain irreversible. The source of good—the “radiant crystal” formed at the end of tremendous loss and sacrifice, some of which remain gratuitous—lies in the ability to free the past, present, and future from their compartmentalized disconnectedness and revive the past as a lesson and warning for the present and the future, live the present as an ongoing process of repentance and anticipation, and create a future that simultaneously preserves and destroys the past because of what it learns. In emphasizing continuity instead of breaks in existential time, one establishes an affinity between existential and geological time, in that individual experience is a small but linked fraction of a much larger continuum, in the same way that a stone is a manifestation of the entire history of the universe. In the end, Manase realizes that to truly understand the ordinary stone picked up on the roadside is to confront the existential moment rather than to seek sanctuary in the protected abstraction of eternity, since it is in living-time that one can exercise the will and power to amend past mistakes and seek forgiveness. Thus the green chert is invested with the ability to travel through time and space instead of lying still

in the small compartment of stone specimens safe in the confinement of the storehouse.

It becomes clear, then, that Okuizumi's use of time travel is not a conventional SF device but a deliberate mechanism that elicits what the critic Pierre Nora called "the will to remember" (Nora 1989: 21) in order to set into motion a dialectical relation between the past and the present, between deep and expansive geological time and seemingly shallow and limited existential time. It is in that narrow space of ambivalence where multiple temporal and spatial dimensions squirm and jostle like so many living creatures that time is regained and awakened to illuminate existence and survival in a literal and figurative dark cave.

Literature as the Porta in Infinitatem

War memory does not have a time limit. But it does fade with age, especially in non-combative regions. In this age of neo-Nationalism in which the slogans of 'breaking away from the postwar regime' and 'patriotism in education' are ubiquitous, it is all the more important to open the shuttered door of war memory and re-examine the traumatic past in connection to the present and the future. In all his war-related stories, Okuizumi devises a gateway to memory in order to trigger remembrance: a cave in *The Stones Cry Out*, a tunnel in *Grand Mystery*, an old photograph in *A Romantic March*, a lost children's story in *A Jazzy Phenomenon*. These gateways lead to an unending dialectical process that breaks down the artificial barrier between war and postwar, as well as that between postwar and contemporary Japan. In *Grand Mystery*, it is called the *porta in infinitatem*—the gateway to infinity—a term that I will borrow to describe Okuizumi's war-related stories.

Literature serves as a vessel in which the legacies of the past and the uncertainties and hopes of the present and future are condensed and expressed in powerful and enduring imag(in)ings. *The Stones Cry Out* directly links Okuizumi to three of the most committed postwar writers and opens a dialogue with them—with Ōoka on memory loss, the burdens of survival, and the relationality between the past and the present, self and other; with Ibuse Masuji, who travels back in time and imagination in *Kuroi ame* (Black Rain, 1966 [1969]) to a site of

atrocities that he did not physically experience but was capable of summoning through art; and with Ōe Kenzaburō, whose tormented and volatile Takashi in *Man'en gannen no futtobōru* (A Silent Cry, 1967 [1974]) is Takaaki's contemporary and spiritual brother. In opening the gateway to such dialogues, Okuizumi proves that a postwar novel in 1993 can instantly awaken what seemed to be dead memories and force those who have not experienced war to examine moral questions in their full intensity. In *The Stones Cry Out*, he created the imaginative symbol of the green chert in which the dead and the living crowd together to challenge the linear order of time and liberate humans from that order, so that they can become fully aware of the far-reaching resonance of time in its multiple dimensions. The chert, we are told, looks dull and ordinary when dry but gleams with life when moistened. Likewise, the continuous literary and artistic output of war reflections will moisten and revive the parched and fragmented memory of a terrifying past that we stand to lose or perhaps even repeat if it is forgotten or erased. Powerful artistic and literary re-imaginings will make what was once fragile and banal into something durable and extraordinary—a moral imagination—to guide our present and future. In that sense, time gains the ability to be simultaneously past, present, and future through the *porta in infinitatem* of literature and, through that door, one can seek atonement, healing, and hope, even if one cannot undo the past.

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CHAPTER SIX

VICTIMIZATION AND “RESPONSE-ABILITY”: REMEMBERING, REPRESENTING, AND WORKING THROUGH TRAUMA IN *GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES*

David C. Stahl

“Historical losses call for mourning—and possibly for critique and transformative sociopolitical practice” (LaCapra 2001: 68).

Responses to Takahata Isao’s animated film *Hotaru no haka* (*Grave of the Fireflies*, 1988 [1992]) vary greatly. Based on Nosaka Akiyuki’s 1967 short story of the same title, this anime recounts the tragic experience of two young Japanese siblings who survive the incendiary air raid that destroys their home and kills their parents toward the end of the War, but subsequently die of starvation. Many people—Japanese and non-Japanese, old and young, male and female—are brought to tears. And while some empathize with fourteen-year-old Seita, others blame him for the death of Setsuko, the four-year-old sister left in his charge. Still others experience an ambivalent combination of grief and censure. Reactions outside Japan include anger (which can itself be a form of grief reaction), claims that the film perpetuates the postwar Japanese master narrative of national victimhood and rhetorical questions about whether anime deserves to be taken seriously.¹ Responses

¹ As for the first reaction—grief—I have experienced it myself, and I have also observed it in many of the college and university students I have screened the film for both in the United States and Japan. In a filmed interview, Takahata comments on both the second and third reactions: empathizing with and blaming Seita. He expresses surprise that so many people he talked to experienced the former. Takahata assumed that more people would have been critical of Seita’s attitude and actions (Takahata 1998b). The fifth reaction—anger—was exhibited by a senior colleague during a work-in-progress talk I presented on the film. The same colleague went on to voice the seventh response as well. For a detailed discussion of the question, *Why Anime?*, see Susan J. Napier’s introductory chapter of the same title in *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. The sixth response mentioned above—that the film is best seen as a work of popular culture that is “allied with victim’s history”, “show[s] little inclination to delve into issues of [Japanese] guilt or responsibility”, and “evoke[s] an unproblematic response of heartfelt sympathy on

in Japan would include—and perhaps intermix—a sense of personalized and/or collective suffering, victimization and loss, anger at the wartime Japanese government, the United States government or both,² discomfort concerning the adult acts of survival egoism depicted, a commitment to non-belligerence and a conviction that Japan must never again find itself in such an abject, defenseless position. Conspicuous in these varied and hybrid responses are affect (or a lack thereof), preoccupation with individual responsibility, the politics of public memory, ‘victim consciousness’, concerns with national and multinational accountability, localized ethical and moral failings, pacifism and muscular neonationalism. Such divergent and complex reactions to Takahata’s extraordinary anime raise critical questions about how concerned ‘outside observers’ approach, engage, understand and respond to artistic representations of specific experiences of historical trauma and victimization.³

Grave of the Fireflies is the creative product of two Japanese survivor-narrators who were subjected to indiscriminate firebombing attacks in their youth. Their distinctive traumatic experiences not only have significance to their respective literary and cinematic representations, but to the relationship of their audiences with them as well. In “Speaking the Language of Pain”, Kali Tal writes:

To posit a literature of trauma one must assume that the identity of the author as author is inseparable from the identity of author as trauma survivor. This means that the literature written about the trauma of others is qualitatively different from literature by trauma survivors (Tal 1991: 217).

the part of the viewers by focusing on innocent children devastated by war’s destruction”—is presented in the aforementioned book by Napier (162–3).

² A similar response has been expressed by some *hibakusha* (A-bomb survivors). In the “1995 Introduction” to *Hiroshima nōto* (Hiroshima Notes, 1965 [1981]), Ōe Kenzaburō writes: “In the A-bomb survivors’ view, Japan’s rapid modernization, with its many distortions, led to Japan’s wars in Asia, which in turn led to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; thus they hold the Japanese state responsible for their sufferings. While they also criticize the United States for dropping the bombs, they have long sought compensation for their suffering from the Japanese government” (Ōe 1981: 9).

³ I strongly recommend watching the film in Japanese with subtitles. Takahata took great pains to find a highly talented five-year-old voice actress who spoke Kansai dialect (Shiraishi Ayano) to play the role of Setsuko (Takahata 1998b).

To the extent that interested ‘observers’ have not been directly affected by the extreme events in question, they are endeavoring to fathom ‘the trauma of others’.

Tal’s comments on the literature produced by Vietnam War veterans, too, are applicable to artistic works produced by Japanese survivor-narrators of the Asia Pacific War:

The unfortunate truth is that the Vietnam War was the work of no one’s imagination; it was, rather, a devastating reality—a series of events taking place on a physical rather than symbolic level. . . . The symbols that narrators create to represent their wartime experiences are generated out of the war’s traumatic events. They are frequently symbols for which the untraumatized have no parallels and thus are in no position to interpret correctly if they have not paid careful attention to the events upon which these symbols are based (*ibid*: 224).

Tal concludes her essay by stressing the imperative for people dealing with the artistic representations of traumatized others to clearly acknowledge their position as outsiders (*ibid*: 247). And this holds as true for Japanese audiences as it does for their foreign counterparts.⁴ As outlined in the Introduction to this volume, Dominick LaCapra’s examination of the relationship between concerned observer and traumatized observed in terms of subject position, identity politics and empathetic unsettlement is useful in this regard. LaCapra also identifies mourning, restoration of victim dignity, critical practice and transformative sociopolitical action as primary modes of working through historical trauma and victimization (LaCapra 2001: 68, 178). As will be shown, *Grave of the Fireflies* facilitates constructive engagement with these important modalities of coming to terms with the burdened past.

Survivor-Narrators and Concerned Others

The first part of the argument I will put forth in the pages that follow boils down to this: following multiple ‘returns of the repressed’ during 1966–67, Nosaka Akiyuki, a survivor-narrator who was traumatized as a teenager in the American firebombing of Kobe and suffered the loss of his foster father, the crippling of his foster mother,

⁴ That said, the latter group clearly faces substantial additional challenges in that they must also work cross-linguistically, cross-culturally and cross-historically.

and the death from starvation of the one-and-a-half-year-old adopted sister left in his care, endeavored in (fictionalized) ‘factual accounts’ (*jitsuroku*) and autobiographical fiction (*jiden shōsetsu*) to work over and through his traumatic past by recalling, re-enacting, bearing witness to and critiquing his shattering experience of total war. Given the extreme nature of this home front and his immediate postwar experiences, his efforts were understandably fraught with difficulty, dogged by guilt and self-justification, and marked by conflicting motives of atonement, dissembling, testimony, evasion, repentance and prevention.⁵

Like Nosaka, Takahata Isao⁶ was a childhood survivor of a devastating American incendiary raid. He was nine years old when firebombs destroyed his home and neighborhood in Okayama. Amidst the chaos and confusion of the attack, he and his older sister became separated from their parents when they mistakenly fled toward, rather than away from, the burning city center. Takahata’s sister was badly burned—and scarred—during this incident, and the terrified siblings were not reunited with their parents for some forty-eight hours. In a filmed interview, Takahata recalls that this was his most horrifying experience, and he goes on to state that *Grave of the Fireflies* was one of the most important projects of his life (Takahata 1998b).

Nosaka reflects that although he had been approached (unsuccessfully) on several occasions about producing a live-action film adaptation of “Grave of the Fireflies”, he had never considered an animated adaptation until he spoke with Takahata, heard about his traumatic childhood experience and learned how closely and carefully Takahata had read his autobiographical writings on the war. Nosaka subse-

⁵ When we turn below to a consideration of the ‘basic facts’ of the traumatic experiences Nosaka went through between the pivotal Kobe air raid of June 5, 1945 and his release from a makeshift juvenile detention center in Tokyo in December, 1947, the central aim will be to contextualize the ensuing analysis and interpretation of “Grave of the Fireflies”.

⁶ Born in Ise, Mie Prefecture, on 29 October 1935, Takahata graduated in 1959 from Tokyo University, where he studied French Literature. He met Miyazaki Hayao after joining Tōei Dōga Studio in 1961. After decades of directing and producing films for three anime production companies and doing freelance work, Takahata teamed up with Miyazaki to make *Kaze no tani no Naushika* (*Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind*, 1984). The following year, the two founded Studio Ghibli, which has produced some of the most popular and important animated features of the past two decades. Takahata both wrote the script for and directed *Grave of the Fireflies* (Clements and McCarthy 2006: 638–9, 625).

quently led Takahata and his production team to the Manjidani resort area that served as the main ‘stage’ for the tragic events of the story. Nosaka was probably willing to entrust animated representation of his masterwork with Takahata because he knew that Takahata himself had directly experienced—and been traumatized by—the overwhelming realities of indiscriminate incendiary attack (Nosaka 1988: 127). In fact, many of the air raid scenes depicted in the film were based on Takahata’s personal experience (Takahata 1998b).

The second part of my argument is that Takahata’s animated adaptation of “Grave of the Fireflies” contributed significantly to Nosaka’s twenty-five-year-long literary endeavor of working over, working through and coming to terms with haunting home front and immediate postwar experience. As fellow survivor-narrator, concerned observer and empathetic collaborator, Takahata made a number of significant modifications and additions to Nosaka’s original story. The most important of these have to do with mourning, memorialization and responsibility.

Returns of the Repressed

In 1968, Nosaka Akiyuki was awarded the prestigious Naoki Prize for Literature for two short stories published the previous year: “Amerika hijiki” (American *Hijiki*, 1967 [1977]) and “Hotaru no haka” (Grave of the Fireflies, 1967 [1978]). Both works, while containing significant fictional elements, draw heavily on Nosaka’s home front and immediate postwar experience. In an essay published in the *Mainichi shinbun* (Mainichi Newspaper) shortly after receiving the award, Nosaka characterized himself as a writer of the “burned-out-ruins, run-for-your-life, black market school” (Nosaka 1969: 184). Nosaka lived in the context of a nation mobilizing and mobilized for war throughout his formative years: he was born the year before the 1931 ‘Manchurian Incident’ that led to the establishment of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo, he entered elementary school the same year full scale hostilities broke out between Japan and China at Marco Polo Bridge in 1937, he was a fifth grader when Japan dramatically expanded the war into the Pacific in December 1941, and he was in the third grade of middle school when the incendiary attack on Kobe and the series of traumatic events that followed in its wake permanently transformed his life:

The air raids, the burned-out-ruins and the black market made me what I am....

When I look at the high-rise buildings and super-highways that were once just futuristic dreams, I see them amidst the ruins, and I think of the sun shining down on it all.... When I see photographs of the bombardment of Hanoi or Haiphong, I feel terrified and defenseless, and the sounds of falling objects and explosions, and the sights of severed heads and carbonized corpses resembling so many withered tree trunks come back vividly to me.... Like the repetitive call of a bird, I return time and again to the burned-out-ruins and black market.... My home is the burned-out-ruins and the black market (*ibid*: 185).

Nosaka recalls that those who were born between 1929–31 were too old to be evacuated from the urban centers to the countryside and too young to be conscripted into active military service (*ibid*: 183–4). Instead, they were mobilized as civilian labor forces and ordered to decongest buildings, set up emergency relief centers, construct emplacements for anti-aircraft guns, and clear away rubble following enemy attack. Nosaka and his cohort consequently experienced first-hand the horrors that arise when war hits home. They lived through the final months, weeks and days of the war witnessing and suffering the mass death and destruction of modern, mechanized war, and the privation, destitution, desperation, starvation and illness, and ruthless acts of survival egoism that went hand-in-hand with defeat. In an essay published in August 1968, Nosaka writes: “The air raids had an enormous impact on my generation; they wounded us in ways we will never recover from” (*ibid*: 192).

Nosaka’s comment that like “the repetitive call of a bird” he “return[ed] time and again to the burned-out-ruins and black market” is significant. Japanese literary scholar Shimizu Setsuji draws special attention to such repetitive actions in his seminal study of Nosaka’s autobiographical writings. He begins by introducing Nosaka’s statement in *Sakka fōto jijoden* (*A Writer’s Photographic Autobiography*, 1969) that since childhood he has incessantly “rotated again and again around a central point as if caught in a vortex”. Shimizu then modifies this image of continuously revolving in “concentric circles” (*dōshinen*) so that Nosaka is likened to a bird that repeatedly circles—at times approaching and other times veering away—over what Shimizu terms his *genten*, or “psychological starting point(s)”. This dynamic visualization of obsessive patterned behavior not only suggests Nosaka’s fixation on his traumatic war and immediate postwar experiences, but also his ongoing efforts to both revisit and distance himself from them.

According to Shimizu, beginning with “Grave of the Fireflies”, the temporal and experiential focal point of Nosaka’s incessant literary circling was the eleven-week period between the Kobe air raid of June 5, 1945 and the death of his adopted sister Keiko⁷ on August 21, 1945 (Shimizu 1995: 58–9, 64, 70, 160–1).⁸

Nosaka initially began to write about his childhood war experience in 1966–67, some twenty years after the fact. This ‘belated’ psychological and expressive turn is understandable in terms of latency and the ‘return of the repressed’. The symbolic reactivation and traumatic reenactments that characterize Nosaka’s self-portraits at this time are traceable both to reinvigorated international conflict and changes in his family life. During this period, hostilities in the Vietnam War escalated markedly, and images of the aerial bombing and napalming of Vietnamese cities, towns, rural villages and jungles functioned to resurrect ‘forgotten’ memories of Nosaka’s home front traumas.⁹ In 1968, Nosaka wrote:

One can’t know the air raids without experiencing them. . . . I know it’s futile to think that others will understand, but I will say this: children suffer most in war. The expression on the faces of famished Nigerian children, Jewish children in Auschwitz and Vietnamese children was no different from that of my sister who died of malnutrition. Two thirds of the children who sought shelter in Sannomiya Station probably died there. What crime did those children who starved to death there amidst the smell of urine commit? Adults were responsible for the war, and if there is another war, it will be our fault. . . . Complacently living as we do in peace and prosperity, we naturally think that Vietnam has nothing to do with us. But one misstep, war breaks out and women and children suffer (Nosaka 1969: 195).

⁷ Nosaka is inconsistent with regard to his sister’s name: in his earlier autobiographical writings, he records her name as Keiko, but in a later work he does so as Reiko. To avoid confusion, I will use the former.

⁸ With regard to Nosaka’s “psychological starting point(s)”, I would also include the two-month period between the time of his arrest and incarceration early in November 1947 and his release from the Tokyo Branch of the Tama Juvenile Detention Center in late December.

⁹ As previously mentioned, Nosaka referred directly to such photographs in a 1968 essay (that was subsequently included in Nosaka 1969). Nosaka was not alone in having war traumas of the past symbolically reactivated by the outbreak and intensification of the Vietnam War. Well-established writers such as Ibuse Masuji and Ōoka Shōhei also completed major works of war literature during this period—*Kuroi ame* (Black Rain, 1966 [1978]) and *Reite senki* (The Battle for Leyte Island, 1967) respectively—and in 1965 Japanese historian Ienaga Saburō gave the series of public lectures that culminated in the publication of *Taiheiyō sensō* (The Pacific War, 1968 [1978]).

Photographic images of the aerial bombardments of Vietnamese civilians were not the only stimuli that helped open the floodgates of repressed memory; changes in Nosaka's family life, too, served to recall and reactivate traumatic childhood experience. Nosaka married in 1962, and his first daughter, Mao, was born in 1964. When Mao neared the age Keiko had been when she died, theretofore repressed memory and experience insistently came to intrude into—and even displace—contemporary reality. In “Pureiboi no komoriuta” (A Playboy's Nursery Songs, 1967), one of his earliest ‘factual accounts’ of his war experience, Nosaka writes that he raised his daughter with a sense of atonement, endeavoring to do for her what he had been unable to do for Keiko (*ibid*: 114). He also describes how he would become irrationally agitated when Mao acted spoiled and refused to finish her meals or eat all of her sweets. Nosaka goes on to relate that after evacuating to Fukui Prefecture at the beginning of August 1945, Keiko's condition steadily deteriorated until she reverted from walking to crawling, became too weak to eat or cry, and in the end slept on and on until death. After writing that his heart aches whenever he thinks about how much he would like to have been able to give Keiko even the smallest amount of Mao's leftover treats (*ibid*: 125–7), Nosaka closes as follows:

Mao is now about the same age my unfortunate sisters¹⁰ were when they died, and their images overlap. I feel unqualified to be Mao's father, and I wonder how long I'll be able to look after her and protect her (*ibid*: 131).

Some twenty-five years later, Nosaka picked up where he left off in “A Playboy's Nursery Songs”. Midway through his lengthy confessional work, *Waga shikkoku no ishibumi* (The Monument to My Shackles, 1992), Nosaka states that he forgot his home front and postwar traumas almost completely after moving to Niigata at the end of 1947 to live with his biological father and his family. Immediately afterward, however, he begins to write again about his marriage and his first daughter. While admitting that he is unable to clearly recall what Keiko looked like, he feels that there is a close resemblance (*omokage*)

¹⁰ Nosaka's foster parents adopted a baby girl named Kikuko in March of 1941, but she died of illness toward the end of the year. Keiko was adopted in the spring of 1944.

between her and Mao. Nosaka goes on to describe the profound anxiety that accompanied his irrational conviction that Mao would suddenly drop dead (*ibid.*: 92–3). Lois Tyson's psychoanalytic observations are particularly instructive here:

Anxiety can reveal our core issues... because we are anxious in situations in which those issues are in play... anxiety always involves the *return of the repressed*: I am anxious because something I repressed—some painful or frightening or guilty experience—is resurfacing, and I want to keep it repressed (Tyson 1999: 18–9).

Nosaka subsequently describes how his anxiety grew so acute that he could no longer even bear the sight of his daughter. In the end, he left home for three months, staying in a succession of business inns and drinking heavily. During this period of separation from his family, he was repeatedly assailed by paranoid fears that Mao would stop breathing or abruptly die in her sleep. Upon returning to his lodgings after work, he also suffered recurrent visions of his house and family going up in flames (Nosaka 1992: 93).

These accounts of Nosaka's psychological state and behavior suggest that past traumatic experience was not only returning, but also coming to replace current experience and perception; that the present was literally being experienced and responded to in terms of the traumatic past. Nosaka's 'running away' from home, too, can be interpreted as a compulsive repetition of prior abandonments of family members (his foster father, foster mother and Keiko at the time of the air raid, and his foster mother and grandmother on multiple occasions thereafter).¹¹ Before turning to analyze "Grave of the Fireflies", however, it will be useful to consider a number of additional matters: namely, the mixture of dissembling, confession and testimony brought forth by the 'return of the repressed', and the 'basic facts' of Nosaka's "psychological starting points".

¹¹ In this sense, it is significant that Keiko is said to have died while Nosaka was away at the public bath (Nosaka 1969: 125). Literal and figurative returns of the repressed and the compulsive acting out that they give rise to are also central to "American *Hijiki*", the award-winning short story Nosaka published one month before "Grave of the Fireflies".

Dissembling, Confession and Testimony

Nosaka's early autobiographical writings are not only marked by unstable combinations of truth (*jijitsu*) and untruth (*uso*), of defensive, self-serving fabrications and revealing, painful revelations, but also by a pressing need to bear witness to his traumatic war and postwar experience. According to Shimizu Setsuji, the most significant "myth" (*shinwa*) Nosaka labored to create and perpetuate in his 'factual accounts', autobiographies, autobiographical novels and biographical/literary chronologies (*nenpu*) was that he was a war orphan, the only member of his family to have survived the June 5 air raid on Kobe (Shimizu 1995: 22–4). In *Adoribu jijoden* (Ad-lib Autobiography, 1973), Nosaka confessed that what he had theretofore written about his past was neither the whole truth nor entirely true (*ibid*: 10–1, 30–2). To make a long and convoluted story short, Nosaka's foster father disappeared without a trace during the incendiary attack. His foster mother, Aiko, who was badly burned and crippled in the raid, not only survived, but also seems to have lived on into the 1970s. His grandmother, who was not in Kobe at the time of the raid, apparently lived on for at least two years after the War. Nosaka also had relatives in Tokyo.¹²

Why would Nosaka have taken such pains to create the image of himself as a war orphan? I submit that he did so primarily for defensive, preemptive purposes. Who, upon being informed that Nosaka had lost his entire family at the end of the war would think of questioning him regarding his actions at the time or the role he might have played in Keiko's death? By unambiguously adopting the identity of hapless war orphan, Nosaka was able to garner sympathy and deflect possible inquiries concerning his conduct during the attack and the chaotic days, weeks and months that followed.

While Nosaka may have succeeded in fending off unwelcome external probes in this way, the internal waves of self-recrimination that accompanied the returns of the repressed in 1966–67 seem to have prodded him to make confessions of himself. Such revelations appear in significant forms in "A Playboy's Nursery Songs" and "Gojū no ho no kyori" (The Distance of Fifty Steps, 1968). In these 'factual

¹² For this information, as well as many of the details that will subsequently be introduced in this essay under the subheading 'Basic Facts', I draw on the work done by Shimizu Setsuji.

accounts’, Nosaka writes about the persistent survivor guilt he feels in relation to three distinct events. The first concerns his conduct on the morning of June 5. In “The Distance of Fifty Steps”, Nosaka writes about the self-condemnation he experiences over fleeing from his collapsed, flame-engulfed home without attempting to look for or help his father, mother or little sister (Nosaka 1969: 197–8). In this case, his guilt simultaneously stems from what he couldn’t bring himself to do at the moment—risk his life to save his family—and what he couldn’t help but do—act to save himself.

The second set of experiences that continues to trouble Nosaka’s conscience has to do with his treatment of Keiko. He not only feels intense pangs of guilt over the fact that she died of malnutrition while under his care, but also over the active role he played in starving and mistreating her. As he confesses in “The Distance of Fifty Steps”:

When I think of how my sister wasted away to skin and bones by a process of reverse development that eventually left her too weak to raise her head or even cry, how she died alone, and how there was nothing left of her but ash after she was cremated, I feel that I was too preoccupied with self-preservation. When I found myself in the hell of starvation, I ate her share of food (*ibid*: 198).

Nosaka also states that no matter how many times he tries to tell himself that he was not to blame, as her older brother he still “feels the full burden of her death” on his shoulders (*ibid*).

In “A Playboy’s Nursery Songs”, Nosaka describes how he would eat the rice kernels in their rice gruel intending to give his sister the broth, but that, when he would bring the spoon of hot broth to his lips to cool it down for her, he could not resist putting it, too, into his own mouth. When he managed to acquire fruit, vegetables and other foodstuffs, he ate them without sharing. Nosaka characterizes himself at the time as a *gaki* or hungry ghost, a figure from one of the lower realms of Buddhist transmigration that is sometimes depicted as having a needle-sized throat and an enormous belly. He concludes by admitting: “I loved her, but my gluttony overrode my affection and concern for her” (*ibid*: 123–4).

Nosaka not only attests to taking Keiko’s share of food, but to being physically abusive as well. When she cried at night, he would take her outdoors—he specifically states that the fireflies were all gone by this time in mid to late June—so as not to disturb the people he was staying with in Manjidani. Walking about outside with her on his back, he became so unbearably tired and exasperated by her interminable

sobbing that he hit her to make her stop. At first, he spanked her, but in the end he resorted to striking her on the head with his knuckles so forcefully that she lost consciousness (*ibid.*: 124–5).

The third thing Nosaka feels guilty about is his escape from the juvenile detention center. After living in squalor with some fifteen to twenty boys—many of whom were bona fide war orphans—who were severely underfed and exposed to the cold, wind and snow of winter, and watching a number of his cellmates starve to death, Nosaka was rescued by his biological father and taken into his warm, loving, affluent family. After release, Nosaka apparently gave little thought to the boys he left behind. In “The Distance of Fifty Steps”, he recalls: “I did absolutely nothing for my former companions; I betrayed those waifs” (*ibid.*: 199). Here again, he expresses a deep sense of self-recrimination over ‘abandoning’ and ‘forgetting’ his cellmates, many of whom probably died in captivity.

In “Jigoku no ichirizuku: Naokishō o jushō shite” (Milepost of Hell: On Receiving the Naoki Prize, 1968), Nosaka states that if someone were to ask him why he writes, he would not know what to say. He goes on, however, to observe that he will never be able to rid himself of the traumatic experience of witnessing “familiar streets become unrecognizable of a morning, that pure, valiant emptiness, and encountering the tenacity of cornered human beings struggling for survival” (*ibid.*: 188). At the end of “The Distance of Fifty Steps”, too, Nosaka returns to his motivations for taking up the pen:

If you were to ask me why I write, I would say that I do so precisely out of my sense of guilt. . . . Fifty steps, a hundred steps. The fifty steps I fled too far, the guilt I feel over running fifty steps too far, binds me firmly to the burned-out ruins and the black market (*ibid.*: 200).

In “Senritsu no shōnen jidai” (Frightful Youth, 1968), Nosaka states that he also writes to bear witness to individualized experiences of historical trauma and victimization. Referring to his time in the juvenile detention center, he declares that he “feels a moral obligation to record his testimony regarding the two months he spent in what amounted to living hell”. What immediately follows is of particular significance: “If I don’t [bear witness], who will mourn the boy who died looking like a monkey?” (*ibid.*: 170). With this question, Nosaka broaches critical matters related to remembrance, mourning and memorialization. And while he writes specifically about an unnamed orphaned youth he watched starve to death in captivity, the same question could be asked with regard to his sister Keiko.

‘Basic Facts’

Nosaka Akiyuki was born in Kamakura on October 10, 1930. At the time, his father, Sukeyuki, was an official in the Tokyo Metropolitan Bureau of Construction. Nosaka’s mother, Nui, died shortly after giving birth to him, and Nosaka was adopted by the Harimaya family of Kobe in 1932. Although Nosaka’s foster mother, Aiko, was his maternal aunt, and his foster father, Zenzō, was his uncle by marriage, he was raised to think of them as his birth parents.

Based on a review of the various autobiographical writings Nosaka produced during the twenty-five year period between 1967 and 1994, the details of the foundational traumas Nosaka went through between June 5, 1945 and December 22, 1947 can be roughly reconstituted as follows.¹³ When Kobe came under incendiary attack by hundreds of American B-29 bombers, Nosaka, his foster parents and adopted sister were at home. Upon hearing the warning siren announcing the approach of enemy planes, Aiko presumably took Keiko down into the bomb shelter the family had dug under the floor boards of the kitchen. Nosaka and Zenzō were at the entryway of the house when the first wave of bombs reached them.

The firebombs did not explode on impact; they were designed so that a delay fuse was activated when they landed, and after a pause of between three to five seconds, an ejection-ignition charge was detonated. Bartlett Kerr describes what happened next:

At detonation, a TNT charge would explode, and magnesium particles would ignite the gasoline gel [napalm] contained in a cloth sock . . . [and] the explosion blew burning gel out of the tail of the casing and—like a miniature cannon—shot it as far as 100 feet. If the gel struck a combustible surface and was not extinguished it started an intense and persistent fire (quoted in Fukushima 1997: 3).

Upon hearing a neighbor shout that firebombs had been dropped, Nosaka picked up a bucket of water and dashed across the street into

¹³ For the biographical information collected in this section, I rely on the meticulous scholarship Shimizu Setsuji has carried out on Nosaka and his many autobiographical writings and my own readings of the many conflicting and conflicted ‘factual accounts’ and stories Nosaka wrote about his traumatic wartime and postwar experiences; namely, the *jitsuroku* collected in *Native Japanese Thought* (1969), *Writer Autobiography 19: Nosaka Akiyuki* (1994) and *The Monument to My Shackles* (1992). (Note: *Writer Autobiography 19: Nosaka Akiyuki* is a republication of *Ad-lib Autobiography*, which originally appeared in print in 1973.)

her house. He was part-way up the stairs leading to the second floor when he heard the approach of another shower of firebombs. Nosaka impulsively ran back out of the house, threw himself down on the ground, and covered his head with the bucket he was carrying. When he regained his senses, he stood up to see that the pine trees in his front yard were on fire, the front half of his house was destroyed, the back half was engulfed in smoke and flames, and his father was nowhere to be seen. After calling out to his foster parents, Nosaka fled toward Mt. Rokkō.

When Nosaka arrived at the hillside bomb shelter about a mile from his home, he came upon a four or five-year-old girl inside. She was sitting calmly on the ground, holding a doll and a basket, and they talked for about half an hour.¹⁴ From the entrance of the bomb shelter, they had an unimpeded view of the city. Gazing out, Nosaka saw that Kobe had been virtually destroyed and that a great curtain of orange flames from which golden embers rained down constantly hung over the smoldering ruins.

Several hours later, Nosaka made his way to the place along the Ishiya River where his family had agreed to meet in case of emergency, but he found no one there. Hearing that casualties were being taken to the National Elementary School—one of the only buildings left standing—he went there and was reunited with his foster mother and sister. Aiko, who had somehow managed to escape from their collapsed, burning house with Keiko in her arms, was covered in bandages. She sustained severe burns to her face, hands, feet, and the right side of her body including her right arm and right leg.¹⁵

A few days later, Aiko was transferred by rickshaw from the National Elementary School to a seaside hospital in Nishinomiya. When her mother, Koto, subsequently arrived to tend to her, Nosaka and Keiko moved in with relatives living in the Manjidani resort area some three miles inland. The siblings stayed in a house near the Niteko pond between the first week of June and the first week of July. From time to time, Nosaka visited the hospital to bring his foster mother and grandmother food and help with the laundry, but for the most part

¹⁴ Nosaka has written that the origins of his fictional character Setsuko can be traced back to this brief but memorable encounter (Nosaka 1992: 38).

¹⁵ According to reports in the official history of Kobe City, the casualty figures for the 5 June 1945 air raid are as follows: 3,184 killed, 1,926 seriously injured, and 3,898 lightly injured (quoted in Nosaka 1994: 185).

he stayed away due to the terrible hospital conditions and because he couldn't stand the constant bickering between his foster mother and grandmother.

In Manjidani, Nosaka and Keiko lived with a middle-aged widow and her lovely daughter, Kyoko, who was two years Nosaka's senior. Nosaka writes in several places that he immediately became so infatuated with Kyoko that he hardly gave his sister or his foster mother a second thought. Given his terrifying experience of the incendiary raid on Kobe, whenever the air raid warning sounded, Nosaka immediately strapped Keiko to his back and ran to the horseshoe-shaped bomb shelter dug into the hill next to Niteko Pond. Kyoko often joined them at such times.

When they first moved to Manjidani, they had enough food because Nosaka was able to locate the large container of provisions that his foster father had buried in the garden of their Kobe home. This cache, however, was quickly exhausted, and before long Nosaka had to get by on meager rations of rice, stolen vegetables, fresh water snails and other things he could forage. Because she was still too young to chew and swallow hard foods, and because Nosaka often ate her share himself, Keiko soon began to suffer from undernourishment.¹⁶

When Kyoko was mobilized to work at a nearby factory toward the beginning of July, Nosaka and Keiko moved into the pond-side bomb shelter, where they stayed until the end of the month. The circumstances surrounding this change are unclear, but Nosaka cites Kyoko's absence, the fact that he was shunned by neighbors who considered him a coward for running off to the bomb shelter at the first sign of danger instead of staying behind to help with the firefighting, and an incident involving Koto and the widow as his reasons for moving out. As an emergency precaution, Nosaka's foster father had stored spare clothes and other necessities at the Manjidani house. On two occasions after the young refugees moved in, Koto showed up and noisily accused the widow of stealing some of the family possessions left in her charge. The indignant widow subsequently moved all their belongings into the hallway and told Nosaka that if they were really so valuable, he should take them to the bomb shelter for better safekeeping. Be that as it may, Keiko's condition surely deteriorated further during the month they spent on their own in the bomb shelter.

¹⁶ This may explain why Keiko cried so frequently and intensely at night.

At the beginning of August, it was decided that Nosaka and Keiko would evacuate to an acquaintance's house in Fukui Prefecture. Here again, the circumstances surrounding this move to Harue and the details related to their life there are sketchy at best. What is known is that Keiko continued to waste away there until she died of starvation on August 21. Nosaka then obtained a death certificate, acquired coal and firewood, cremated Keiko himself, collected her meager remains in a small medicine tin, and rejoined his foster mother and grandmother in Moriguchi, Osaka where they had moved in with other relatives. Upon being asked about Keiko, Nosaka simply responded that she had died in an air raid.

During Nosaka's absence, Koto had fallen and become bedridden, but Aiko—while scarred and only able to use her right hand with difficulty—was gradually recovering. Nosaka returned to school in 1946. At first, he commuted to Kobe First Middle School, but he later transferred to Osaka Municipal Middle School. In March, 1947, he failed the high school entrance exam, quit school and got by for a time pimping for occupation soldiers in the Nakanoshima area of Osaka.¹⁷

While the specifics are once again hazy, Nosaka moved to his foster mother's natal home in Meguro, Tokyo in October, 1947. At the beginning of November, he was caught stealing clothes from the two elderly women with whom he was living. After arrest and processing, he was transferred to the Tokyo Branch of the Tama Juvenile Detention Center. This makeshift facility served primarily as a holding area for war orphans and underage petty criminals. All that was actually required for release was for a legal guardian to step forward and claim them. Thus, it is odd that Nosaka, whose legal guardian (Aiko) was alive in Osaka and whose relatives were living in Tokyo, remained in custody until the end of December.

The second floor room Nosaka was confined to for nearly a month was small, dark, cold, filthy and filled to capacity with other children, some of whom had been there for as long as two years. Most were war orphans, and a number of them suffered from sexually transmitted diseases. There was no furniture in the cell, and the inmates crouched, sat and slept on a bare, plank board floor. They used a common bucket to do their business, and they had to do so openly. Since there were no glass panes in the barred windows, the children were constantly

¹⁷ Nosaka writes fictionally about this difficult time in his life in "American Hijiki".

exposed to the cold air, wind, rain and snow of winter. To make a terrible situation even worse, the youths were restricted to a starvation diet of barley mixed with sorghum, and hot, salted water.

During detention, Nosaka witnessed a number of his fellow inmates waste away and die miserably before his eyes. He repeatedly recalls a particular boy who had lost so much weight that he no longer had any buttocks. Whenever he would use the communal bucket, his red, swollen, protruding anus so reminiscent of the raw, exposed backside of a monkey stood out conspicuously. The children were either constipated or they suffered from chronic diarrhea. Before long, Nosaka’s health, too, began to decline precipitously. By the end of his third week of confinement, he realized that he would die there if he didn’t find a way out. In the end, Nosaka informed the authorities about his biological father. As soon as Sukeyuki, now a wealthy, influential politician, was contacted regarding his son, he immediately traveled from Niigata to Tokyo and arranged to have Nosaka released into his care. After his miraculous rescue and acceptance into his father’s family, Nosaka seems to have done everything he could to forget the traumatic experiences of the last two and a half years and start a new life.

“Grave of the Fireflies”: Working Over and Working Through
Historical Trauma and Victimization

The psychological dynamics of “Grave of the Fireflies” are strikingly different from those of “American *Hijiki*”. While in the latter, Nosaka depicts an alter ego who is possessed by the past so overwhelmingly that he cannot help but re-experience and compulsively act it out in the present, in the former, he imagines an alter ego who returns to the traumas of the past of himself in order to re-enact his experience in alternative ways. By having him do so, Nosaka takes constructive symbolic steps toward working over and working through his burdened past. As Dominick LaCapra explains: “Acting out is compulsively repetitive. Working through involves repetition with significant difference—difference that may be desirable when compared with compulsive repetition” (LaCapra 2001: 148).¹⁸ LaCapra elaborates as follows: “one has begun the arduous process of working over and through

¹⁸ “Grave of the Fireflies” represents a psychological breakthrough in these terms, but as will be discussed below, the third-person narration, emotional detachment

[traumatic experience w]hen the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance, and perspective” (*ibid*: 90). Coming to terms with trauma thus entails working over and through it

in a different way related to what you judge to be desirable possibilities that may now be created, including possibilities that lost out in the past but may still be recaptured and reactivated, with significant differences, in the present and future (*ibid*: 148).

This is an accurate characterization of what Nosaka endeavored to do in “Grave of the Fireflies”. In “Watakushi no shōsetsu kara” (From My Novel, 1969), Nosaka comments as follows on his motivations for imag(in)ing this version of his story:

Now, I really regret how Keiko was so cruelly reduced to skin and bones. I thought how great it would be if I could have loved and cared for her as much as the brother in “Grave of the Fireflies” did [for his sister]. I put these thoughts into action through Seita (quoted in Shimizu 1995: 15).

For the purposes of the present study, the most significant symbolic ‘reversals’ of and divergences from the ‘basic facts’ of Nosaka’s traumatic experience are: Seita dying of malnutrition just as his sister, Setsuko, did; Seita caring more for and taking better care of his sibling; the portrayal of the Manjidani widow as an incarnation of egoism, gluttony and insensitivity; and the pervasive presence of fireflies.¹⁹ What apparently remained unchanged, however, was Nosaka’s “inability to mourn”.²⁰

and preoccupation with grotesque physical detail simultaneously inhibit the work of mourning and memorialization.

¹⁹ Other significant changes include: Setsuko being four years old and dying of starvation in the pond-side bomb shelter in Manjidani rather than at their acquaintance’s house in Harue, Fukui Prefecture; Seita’s mother dying from her wounds several days after the June 5 air raid; and Seita’s father being a deployed first lieutenant in the Navy.

²⁰ This concept is adopted from Mitscherlich. It has also been treated by Robert Lifton in terms of “impaired mourning” (Lifton 1991: 484; 1996: 170). Lifton writes about the survivor’s *life of grief* as follows: “We know that the essence of grief is loss. But what is it that the survivor has lost? For what does he mourn? He mourns, first of all, for family members and for others who had been close to him. And he mourns, as we have repeatedly seen, for the anonymous dead. But he mourns also for inanimate objects and lost symbols—for possessions, houses, streets he had known, beliefs that have been shattered, a way of life that has been ‘killed’. In sum, he mourns for his own former self, for what he was prior to the intrusion upon it of death and death conflicts. For what has been taken from him...is his innocence of death, and particularly of

“Grave of the Fireflies” starts in the present with a third-person description of Seita dying of starvation in Sannomiya station September 21, 1945. While the style of translation in this and subsequent passages will surely strike one as odd, translator James R. Abrams deliberately employs it to convey the breathless, breakneck pace of the original²¹ (the significance of which will be returned to below):

He leaned stoop-shouldered against a bare concrete pillar—its mosaic tile now peeled off—inside the Sannomiya station of the public intercity line shoreside exit, sitting on the floor, both legs stretched straight out; he was burnt to a crisp by the sun, had not washed himself for nearly a month, but the color of Seita’s emaciated cheeks was yet pale, sunken...the crowds, feet passing continuously by his side, no need to take notice of him, but suddenly dropping their eyes at the strange smell they hastily jumped aside to avoid Seita—Seita had already lost the power to crawl to the toilet right before his eyes and nose. Finding motherlike solace in the solid three-foot-square pillars, against each pillar a war orphan was planted.... (Nosaka 1978: 445).

Nosaka’s treatment of this opening scene is complex and multi-layered. In the passage quoted above, he combines and condenses three distinct sets of experiences, places and times. The first relates to something that must have come to his attention after the war. As we have seen, Nosaka notes that, “two thirds of the children who sought shelter in Sannomiya Station probably died there” (Nosaka 1969: 195). The second clearly stems from Nosaka’s personal experience in the juvenile detention center, and the third is linked with his sister’s deterioration, regression, immobility and death, a point the narrator draws special attention to: “no longer able to get to her feet succumbing as if into a deep sleep, just as her brother she had wasted away from malnutrition”

grotesquely demeaning death” (Lifton 1991: 483–4). For a discussion of the challenges another important Japanese survivor-narrator—Ooka Shōhei—faced with regard to “impaired mourning”, see Stahl 2003: 8–11.

²¹ Abrams writes as follows about Nosaka’s style and the relationship between author, narrator and alter ego in the work: “Nosaka’s characteristic rambling, narrative way of telling a story is at its most pronounced in ‘A Grave of Fireflies’. He places periods not so much to end a sentence but conclude a train of thought, and some of his ‘thoughts’ run on for pages. I have tried to imitate this style of writing as much as was physically feasible.... Although the story is written in the third person, as the story progresses the first person, often speaking in [Kansai] dialect, makes intrusions into the narrative. The storyteller and the hero of the story seem to merge into the same being, a phenomenon that... well depicts Nosaka’s relationship to the story” (Nosaka 1978: 463).

(Nosaka 1978: 447). Perhaps the survivor guilt that accompanied the reactivation of Nosaka's theretofore repressed experience made him feel that he, too, should have died as so many other traumatized, neglected and homeless children had toward the end of the war and in the days, weeks and months following defeat. Through Seita, Nosaka was able to symbolically re-enact the past in such a way as to put himself through the degrading, grotesque forms of death and dying that he had witnessed in others.

Nosaka also enables his alter ego to behave more positively, considerately and selflessly throughout his home front ordeal. Seita not only takes over the role of the father—who is said to be fighting overseas as a naval officer—but in important ways that of the mother as well. Thus, it is Seita who buries the large container of provisions in the garden; and when the air raid siren sounds on the morning of June 5, it is Seita who leads his mother to a concrete reinforced bomb shelter before carrying his sister off to safety on his own back. Most important, Seita is described as caring deeply for, and taking much better care of his sister throughout their final months together. The widow's attractive daughter is only mentioned in passing; and it is explicitly noted that an older lodger—not Seita—"had eyes for [her]" (*ibid*: 453–4). This projection of desire into another allows Nosaka's alter ego to devote himself whole-heartedly to Setsuko's well-being; she is his sole object of concern and affection. Seita tenderly and compassionately administers to his sister when she suffers from heat rash, scabies, lice and flea bites. And when she cries at night, he manages to calm her down gently and put her to sleep easily by walking around outside with her on his back:

taking Setsuko . . . into the night streets as always the fireflies, it would all be so much easier if only Setsuko weren't here he thought for a moment, but she fell asleep soon after he put her on his back and the weight of her body—perhaps it was his own fancy—seemed to become abruptly lighter. . . . (*ibid*: 456).

The children cope with their situation fairly well until Seita decides to move to the pond-side bomb shelter. For a time, they get by by selling or trading their mother's clothing for food. Once the kimono run out, however, they find it increasingly difficult to get anything to eat. Seita is repeatedly said to be too inexperienced and unfamiliar with the convoluted workings of the black market to make any effective use of it, and when local farmers stop selling him rice, Seita resorts to stealing

produce from the surrounding farms and gardens. This, too, he does primarily for his sister’s sake—whatever food he acquires is given to Setsuko. Despite his best efforts, however, Setsuko’s condition continues to worsen. In a final heroic effort to provide her with nourishment, Seita begins to put his own life at risk. Overcoming his terror of air raids, he waits until after the warning siren sounds to enter recently vacated houses to steal kimono and whatever else he can lay his hands on as firebombs rain down and buildings go up in flames all around him. In the end, however, even such heroic measures are not enough to stave off Setsuko’s decline. In desperation, Seita imagines sustaining his sister on his own flesh and blood:

Watching Setsuko laying there dozing clutching her doll, how ‘bout cutting my finger, letting her drink the blood, hell, wouldn’t make much difference if I cut just one off, I could give her the meat of it.... (*ibid*: 460).

In “Grave of the Fireflies”, many of the deplorable attitudes and actions Nosaka came to chastise himself for are projected into others. The widow is portrayed as an embodiment of callousness, survival egoism and irresponsibility. In addition to taking the lion’s share of the best food for herself and her own family, she is also depicted as being insensitive, uncaring and verbally abusive. This is most apparent in descriptions of her reactions to Setsuko’s crying at night and to Seita’s habit of running to the pond-side bomb shelter at the first indication of danger. When Setsuko wails after having a nightmare,

the widow as if she had been lying in wait came stalking in, “my daughter and my son are both working for the sake of the country, so at least can’t you do somethin’ to make her stop cryin’? it gets on our nerves an’ we can’t sleep”, with a bang she slammed the sliding door, taking Setsuko, sobbing even harder with the angry threats, he went out into the night street.... (*ibid*: 456).

The widow also fails to demonstrate any real compassion or understanding toward Seita—traumatized and orphaned so recently in the Kobe air raid—when he dashes off to the bomb shelter with his sister as soon as the air raid warning siren sounds. When she hears the children sing the “Carp Streamer Song” to the accompaniment of the organ one afternoon, she finally reaches the end of her tether:

“that’s enougha that, whadya think you’re doin’, in wartime like this, that could make your aunt mad ya know, lack of proper sense,” having at some time come back she screamed out, “my lord, it’s just like some

pestilence had come droppin' in, even in the air raids gives absolutely no help, if you're that worried about savin' your own skin you oughta just go live in that cave" (*ibid.*: 456–7).

This last outburst amounts to turning the children out into the streets. The widow's irresponsibility, indifference and selfishness are especially conspicuous when the children move out. After asking them where they plan to go, and being told that they don't know, she "works up a forced smile", says "is that so, well, take care of yourselves, by-by Setchan", and immediately disappears into the house (*ibid.*: 457).

Some three decades after the fact, Nosaka recalls the circumstances surrounding his writing of "Grave of the Fireflies":

Pressed to meet my publisher's deadline, I wrote as if I were on autopilot. It was a time when I had great confidence in my writing, and, to borrow a phrase, I wrote as if I were possessed. I let my hand do the thinking and I sent it off without revision (Nosaka 1992: 94).

It is significant that Nosaka describes himself writing in a 'stream of consciousness' manner "as if he were possessed" (*mono ni tsukareta gotoku*). What is particularly noteworthy about his style is the third-person narration, rapid pace, abrupt jumps in time, place and thought, emotional detachment and concern with Setsuko's victimization and loss. Because much of this is suggestive of melancholia, however, Nosaka's implicit objective of working over and through his traumatic past is only partially realized in "Grave of the Fireflies". Relating the story in the third person distances the narrator from the events at issue; the 'free association' style of the storytelling allows for instantaneous spatial, temporal and conceptual 'flight' from the most painful aspects of his experience; and the breathless pace ensures that excruciating moments will not be dwelt upon for long.

Nosaka's story is also replete with grotesque physical imagery linked with death and dying. Descriptions of the makeshift relief center set up at the National Elementary School, for instance, include a man blowing blood bubbles from his nostrils with each exhalation, a middle-aged woman with exposed genitals who is missing a leg below the knee, and flies swarming around, and maggots tumbling down from Seita's mother's corpse as she is transferred from hospital bed to cremation grounds. While it can be argued that vividly reproducing such grotesque bodily images is integral to Nosaka's bearing witness to the sensory realities of his traumatic personal experience, *fixation* on such literal details works to inhibit or forestall the work of mourning.

Seita's first significant expression of grief occurs during the eponymous "grave of the fireflies" scene. The morning after the children gather fireflies and release them into the mosquito net they set up inside the pond-side bomb shelter, Setsuko collects the remains of those that died in the night and buries them in front of the entrance. When Seita asks her what she is doing, Setsuko explains that she is making a grave for the fireflies, and then, unsolicited, she adds that she has been told that their mother, too, is dead and buried: "I heard it from auntie, she said mamma already died and was in her grave". At this moment, Seita "for the first time broke into tears" (Nosaka 1978: 458). It is unclear whether Seita's sudden outpouring of emotion at this moment stems from registering the reality of his mother's death or his realization that all of his efforts to protect his sister's innocence in this regard have been in vain. Perhaps his reaction is the product of both in that there is now no longer any need to try to maintain the (self-)deception that his mother is still alive.

When Seita subsequently goes into town and learns that Japan has not only lost the War and surrendered unconditionally, but that its 'unsinkable' Imperial Fleet has been destroyed as well, the reality that his father, too, is dead and gone sinks in, and the narrator informs the reader that "much more than in his mother's case he felt the realness of his father's death". Significantly, there is no real expression of grief at this major turning point; instead, Seita is simply said to have lost his will to live (*ibid*: 460). The description of Seita's reaction to Setsuko's death, too, is marked by psychic numbing:

At night a storm, Seita crouched in the darkness of the shelter with Setsuko's body rested on his knees, even when he dozed off he soon awoke, rubbing over and over her hair, pressing his own cheek against her already cold cheek, he did not cry (*ibid*: 461).

In "Grave of the Fireflies", it is repeatedly mentioned that none of the dead receive adequate rites of passage. Primarily out of sanitation concerns, the siblings' mother is rushed off to a mass cremation site and burned together with the corpses of other air raid victims. And from the time of his mother's death until after her cremation, there isn't "even a beggar monk in sight...no incense or flowers, no dumpling offering, no reading of the sutras, not even someone to cry". In the end, Seita is handed a wooden funerary box containing what is said to be his mother's ashes as if he were being given an allotment of rations (*ibid*: 452).

The only thing bearing any resemblance to a burial ritual is performed by Setsuko for dead fireflies. Once again, this is a far cry from a formal, dignified, public funeral service, and Setsuko herself insists that, if her mother's remains are not properly cared for, her mother's spirit cannot go to heaven. Seita personally sees to the cremation of his sister, but he does so alone atop a hill overlooking Manjidani. In the midst of this solitary 'ceremony', moreover, Seita experiences an irrepressible "urge to defecate" and he "[squats] down still gazing at the flames" (*ibid.*: 461). The next morning, Seita gathers Setsuko's scanty ashes and presumably places them in the candy tin that he still has with him at the time of his death in Sannomiya station. Setsuko's ashes are then thrown away by an unconcerned and unknowing custodian. Last, but not least, Seita himself, much like his mother, is said to be cremated at an unspecified temple along with the corpses of dozens of other homeless children whose collective ashes are consigned to a crypt set aside for *muenbotoke*, or those who died without any living relatives to carry out the prescribed Buddhist memorial services.

Despite abundant evidence of "impaired mourning", Nosaka does attempt to symbolically console (*chinkon*) and memorialize Keiko in "Grave of the Fireflies". He does so primarily through the manipulation of firefly imagery. It will be recalled that Nosaka explicitly states in "A Playboy's Nursery Songs" that by the time he was taking Keiko outdoors when she cried at night, the firefly season in the Manjidani area had passed (Nosaka 1969: 125). In the short story, however, fireflies are all but omnipresent. Aside from the title, the first mention of *hotaru* occurs as the widow is becoming increasingly inhospitable and hostile. Going outside in the evening, the siblings listen to the croaking of the bullfrogs from the nearby pond, and play with the fireflies: "on the end of each blade of the lush grass growing along both sides of the deep-flowing stream... a firefly twinkled". In this instance, fireflies are associated with the "deep velvety smooth darkness of June", vibrant, sensual nature and a world untouched by air raids (Nosaka 1978: 453).

The next significant reference to fireflies occurs when Seita takes Setsuko outside when she cries at night. While only mentioned in passing—"taking Setsuko... out into the night street, as always the fireflies"—they are associated with Setsuko settling down and falling sound asleep on her brother's back (*ibid.*: 456). The third important instance appears when the children catch and release fireflies in their mosquito net. Amidst the "more than one hundred" glowing insects floating about around them, Seita and Setsuko are said to "feel a sense

of relief, following that gentle motion soon they fell into dreaming” (*ibid*: 457). And the next morning, after Setsuko buries the remains of those that died in the night, the narrator comments that “peaceful days passed, at night they were watched over by the fireflies” (*ibid*: 458). After carefully creating these associations between fireflies and the vitality and beauty of nature, sensuous summer nights, a peaceful separate world, harmony, easy slumber, pleasant dreaming and a sense of security, relief and protection, the narrator goes on to link them with Setsuko’s spirit and express his hope that they will continue to accompany and console her beyond death:

In the middle of the night the fire burned out, in the dark he was unable to see to pick up the bones, leaving it there he lay down at the side of the hole, around him an enormous group of fireflies, but for Seita they were no longer to be caught, if it’s like this maybe Setsuko won’t be so lonely, fireflies will be at her side, flying up, flying down, now flying to the side, won’t be long the fireflies’ll be gone, but you go up to heaven with those fireflies (*ibid*: 461).

Thus does Nosaka take his first, tentative steps toward symbolically memorializing his dead sister in “Grave of the Fireflies”. Such commemorative efforts, however, are apparently difficult to carry through with in the absence of the psychic and emotional opening-up that are integral to the work of mourning.²² Following Setsuko’s reasoning, moreover, despite her brother’s expressed wishes, Setsuko’s spirit/ghost, too, will not be able to go to heaven unless her mortal remains are properly interred and attended to.

*Mourning, Memorialization and “Response-ability” in/and
Grave of the Fireflies*

The work on the battlefield and home front experiences, history and legacies of the Asia Pacific War done by Ōe Kenzaburō, Ienaga Saburō,

²² In his chapter entitled “The Survivor”, Robert Lifton writes: “It is no exaggeration to say that psychic numbing is one of the greatest problems of our age. Because it is so pervasive in all of our lives, experiences which help us break out of it are greatly valued.... those who open themselves up, even momentarily and from afar, to the actualities of death encounters, can undergo an intense personal experience which includes elements of catharsis and purification. . . Psychic opening-up is not only necessary to the resolution of the mourning process but becomes in itself a treasured experience” (Lifton 1991: 509).

Ibuse Masuji, Nosaka Akiyuki, Ōoka Shōhei and others was arguably influenced by contemporary domestic and international conflicts such as the mass protests against renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (1960), announcements of the resumption of nuclear bomb testing by the Soviet Union and United States (1961–62), the political splintering of the Japanese movement against atomic and hydrogen bombs (1962), China's development of nuclear weapons (1964), and the Vietnam War. The same holds true for Takahata Isao and Imamura Shōhei, who were probably inspired to produce and release their filmic adaptations of iconic literary works treating Japanese firebombing and atomic bombing experience²³ by the establishment of diplomatic relations with China in the early 1970s, national and international controversies surrounding Yasukuni Shrine for the War Dead (the spirits of fourteen Class A war criminals were enshrined in 1978; Nakasone Yasuhiro became the first Japanese Prime Minister to officially pay his respects at the Shrine on 15 August 1985), the textbook controversy (1982) and Emperor Hirohito's illness, surgery, collapse and death (1987–89).²⁴ Since critical issues regarding Japanese responsibility for the war in general, and the Shōwa Emperor's war responsibility in

²³ *Grave of the Fireflies* and *Black Rain* (1989), respectively. It should also be noted that in 1983 Masaki Mori directed an animated adaptation of Nakazawa Keiji's *Hadashi no Gen* (Barefoot Gen, 1973 [1987]), a semi-autobiographical manga that depicts the experiences of six-year-old Gen before, during and after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and that an animated sequel, directed by Hirata Toshio, was released in 1986 (Clements and McCarthy 2006: 45–6).

²⁴ Herbert Bix describes this series of monumental events as follows: "On September 18, 1987, the eighty-six-year-old emperor was reported to have an undisclosed intestinal disease. He was soon hospitalized for surgery, the first emperor to undergo such a procedure. The operation was successful but a year later, on September 19, 1988, he was gravely ill. Crown Prince Akihito was informed that his father had cancer; the press was left to speculate. The nation plunged into a mood of prolonged grieving. For one hundred and eleven days Japan raptly followed an old and dying emperor's temperature, blood pressure, and other vital signs.... Death came to Hirohito at 6:33 in the morning on January 7, 1989, with family members around him (Bix 2000: 684–5). In a filmed interview, Takahata recalls that the idea of animating "Grave of the Fireflies" came up suddenly and that he and his production team were working against the clock since the release date had been preset for March, 1988 (Takahata 1998b). Nosaka writes that he visited the studio in "the summer of 1987" upon being informed that rough sketches had been completed for most of the central scenes. He subsequently notes that the film was released seven months later, on 16 April 1988 (Nosaka 1988: 127). The abruptness of the conception of the project and the tight timeframe may well have been influenced by reports of the emperor's illness and unprecedented operation, and the prospect of his death in the near future.

particular, were never adequately resolved,²⁵ these last developments were arguably especially strong stimuli for conscientious creative artists such as Takahata and Imamura.

In his animated adaptation of “Grave of the Fireflies”, Takahata both adheres faithfully and makes significant contributions to Nosaka’s literary efforts to represent, work over, work through and come to terms with historical trauma and victimization²⁶ [Figure 1]. Following the latter’s lead, Takahata portrays Seita as an incarnation of love, concern and caring for his four-year-old sister, and he enables Seita to do what his surviving real-life counterpart could not: selflessly devote himself to and sacrifice himself for his younger sibling and die of starvation just as she did. Takahata also creates warm, intimate scenes of

²⁵ Regarding Emperor Hirohito’s war responsibility, John Dower writes: “The emperor’s active contribution to his country’s aggression had not been negligible, although serious investigation of this was thwarted by the occupiers. His moral responsibility, in any case, was transparent; and in choosing not merely to ignore this but to deny it, the Americans came close to turning the entire issue of ‘war responsibility’ into a joke. If the man in whose name imperial Japan had conducted foreign and military policy for twenty years was not held accountable for the initiation or conduct of the war, why should anyone expect ordinary people to dwell on such matters, or to think seriously about their own personal responsibility?” (Dower 1999: 27–8).

²⁶ As previously mentioned, in 1973 Nosaka stated in *Ad-lib Autobiography* that what he had theretofore written about himself and family during and after the June 5 firebombing attack was not only far from the whole truth, but also incorporated significant fabrications as well. He goes on to state, however, that he could not yet bring himself to correct the record; instead, he simply inserts relevant excerpts from his previously published ‘factual accounts’ that contain no ‘lies’ (*uso*). When his recently serialized work *Kakuekitaru gyakkō* (Brilliant Glare, 1987) was published as a book, Nosaka openly confessed that he was not a war orphan, that his mother and grandmother had survived the raid and that they had lived on for years afterward (Shimizu 1995: 10, 22, 31, 36–7). Shimizu Setsuji argues that Nosaka’s involvement with the *Grave of the Fireflies* project was decisive in his decision to expose the realities of his traumatic past more honestly. He points in particular to a piece Nosaka published in September 1987, when he was still revising *Brilliant Glare* for book publication. In “Anime osorubeshi” (Beware of Anime), Nosaka writes that since the end of the war he had always been afraid of approaching Manjidani. He reached a major psychological “turning point” (*fukkireta yō na kimochi*), however, when he personally led the animation team to what he called “the scene of the crime”: “Attached to myself as the author of ‘Grave of the Fireflies’, I had continued to avert my eyes from the ‘mirror’ that reflected my [true] image.... Now, I am confronting my past more honestly” (*ibid*: 37–8). Additional evidence that his collaboration in the making of *Grave of the Fireflies* enabled an important emotional breakthrough can be found in an article he wrote about his involvement with the project and his response to viewing a promotional copy of the film the summer before its public release: “I received a video copy of the trailer, and late at night after some fairly heavy drinking, I watched it alone. Although I knew it was animation, I was somehow brought back 43 years. Watching just a few opening scenes kept me crying until dawn” (Nosaka 1988: 127).

the children playing gleefully together and sharing joyous experiences rendered impossible by Keiko's untimely death. In Takahata's compassionate and masterful hands, Nosaka's story is idealized, aestheticized and purged of much of the grotesque physical imagery so conspicuous in the original story. Most important, perhaps, Takahata makes it possible for Seita to more fully experience and openly express the grief that Nosaka—and the alter ego Nosaka created—could not. At the same time, Takahata enables his audience to empathize with Seita and Setsuko, virtually go through their particular home front trauma and “[attend] to, even [try] in limited ways, to recapture the possibly split-off, affective dimension of the experience of [traumatized] others” (LaCapra 2001: 40).

One of the most significant alterations Takahata makes to Nosaka's story is presenting it as a first person act of memory. This change allows Seita to relate his traumatic experience to the audience more directly and personally. Description and analysis of the opening sequence of the film reveal Takahata's narrative design, mode of representation and the complex aesthetic associations that are so central to the work as a whole. The film opens with a black, empty screen. Against this dark background, Seita materializes in a medium close-up. Illuminated in glowing, reddish light, he is dressed as he was on the morning of the Kobe air raid. He turns to face the camera, and the audience hears him say in a voice-over: “I died at night on September 21st, 1945”. Seita then looks screen left, and a cut to an eye-line match shows the dim interior of a train station which is also infused with glowing, reddish light. As the image of his filthy, emaciated body slumped over against a large, tiled pillar becomes visible, the reddish light is gradually replaced by soft, white illumination. A reverse angle shot shows Seita from the chest-up in his pre-trauma form still bathed in reddish light looking down at, and then approaching his past self, collapsed and on the verge of death. A cut to a high angle medium shot shows the former at the right side of the frame while the latter can still be seen next to a tiled pillar to the left [Figure 2].

Seita moves closer, and a cut presents an extreme close-up, ground-level shot of his counterpart's bare feet. The camera pans along his legs from left to right and then tilts up to show his upper torso and the profile of his face and head. At first, all that can be heard is the sound of his labored breathing, but the sounds of footsteps, people talking and a train passing overhead become increasingly audible as the scene

momentarily shifts to the events several hours before Seita's 'death'. A cut, which marks an ellipsis, then presents a close-up profile of Seita later that evening sitting on the ground propped up against the pillar with his chin resting heavily on his chest. The audience is privy to the internal diegetic sound of Setsuko happily calling out "Mommy!" and of the echoing of her rapid footsteps as she hurries to join her mother. After murmuring, "What day could this be?", Seita collapses to one side and all is silent except for the sound of a buzzing fly which lands on his cheek. Without reacting, Seita murmurs "Setsuko", and 'dies' with his eyes open.

A cut to a medium long shot shows a uniformed custodian enter the dimly lit frame. In addition to Seita, three other war orphans can be seen sprawled out on the ground and leaning up against tiled pillars. The custodian prods Seita with a broom handle, mutters "Here's another one", searches through his clothes and discovers the fruit drops tin containing Setsuko's ashes. He asks a co-worker what to do with it, and he is told to get rid of it. After checking on another prostrate boy and vacantly observing that he, too, wouldn't last long, he walks over to the nearest exit, winds up like a baseball pitcher and throws the tin into the dark fields outside the station.

When the tin bounces on the ground, the lid pops off, white ash and bone fragments spill out, and fireflies begin to float up from the surrounding grasses. A cut back to a medium shot shows dozens of fireflies hovering about in the foreground as the grasses beneath them are infused with glowing, reddish light. Then Setsuko, wearing a protective air raid hood just as she had on the morning of the incendiary attack, slowly lifts her head and shoulders up out of a tight, low, forward crouching position and stands up facing the camera. A reverse, over-the-shoulder shot shows her peering into the dim interior of the station at her brother's prostrate body. A look of concern crosses her face, but just as she is about to go to his side, Seita, in his pre-trauma form, places his hand gently on her shoulder from behind, and the siblings are happily reunited. Since the central part of the screen is still suffused with reddish light, the grasses look like glowing coals, and the red and orange fireflies moving around above them resemble glowing sparks or embers. After the children smile at each other reassuringly, Seita straightens Setsuko's air raid hood. He then crouches down to pick up the fruit drops tin, and as he lifts it, it is transformed from its soiled, battered state back into its original pristine condition.

He hands it to Setsuko, she shakes it up and down to confirm that it contains candy, and they walk off hand-in-hand screen left.²⁷

Following the initial credits, there is a cut to a long shot of a train pulling away from a station at night with two fireflies floating about behind it, the central area of the scene still bathed in glowing, reddish light. After a low angle long shot of the train emerging from a tunnel and moving over an overpass, a cut to a medium shot shows the interior of the empty carriage with Seita and Setsuko sitting side by side sharing fruit drops as several fireflies flit about nearby. A cut to an extreme long shot shows the train crossing over a bridge spanning a river illuminated by soft, red light against a dark backdrop. As it crosses, a sudden flash of bright red light suffuses the scene. A cut to a shot from inside the train compartment shows the children looking out of the window at a nighttime firebombing raid in progress. The expansive scene is aglow with red flames, white and orange sparks and embers 'rain' down from the sky and receding B-29 bombers can barely be seen in the distance. The frame suddenly brightens, a blinding white flash of light washes out the entire screen, and a jump cut shows American bombers en route to attack Kobe on the morning of June 5.²⁸ Another cut to an overhead long shot exposes men, women and children running through the chaotic streets desperately in search of shelter. A final cut then shows Seita, Setsuko and their mother at home just minutes before the first wave of bombs is dropped.

²⁷ Takahata makes fruit drops and the fruit drops tin central elements of his animated adaptation of Nosaka's story. In a filmed interview, he recalled how intensely children longed for hard candies toward the end of the war when everything was rationed and in such short supply (Takahata 1998b). Given the fact that he was such a meticulous, empathetic reader of Nosaka's autobiographical writings, moreover, it is likely that this was also Takahata's response to Nosaka's expressed desire to have been able to give even the smallest portion of Mao's unwanted treats to Keiko. By the same token, Takahata enables Setsuko to voice her thanks to Seita just before she dies.

²⁸ This intense flash of light (*pika*) is the most overt indication of Takahata's subtle 'layering' of firebombing and atomic bombing experience (indeed, in Japanese, the term '*pika*' has now come to refer specifically to the 'nuclear flashes' over Hiroshima and Nagasaki). Other examples include a verbal reference to 'black rain', depictions of carbonized corpses and burned out streetcars reminiscent of those appearing in Hiroshima photographs and the resemblance of Setsuko in her air raid hood and the famous photo Yamahata Yōsuke took in Nagasaki of a *hibakusha* child wearing similar protective head gear while standing and eating a rice ball (cf. p. 238). The significant implications of the association of incendiary and nuclear bombing will be returned to at the end of this essay.

As previously mentioned, in this extraordinary opening sequence of the film Takahata has Seita relate his story in the first person, represents his account as a sustained act of memory and introduces some of the central imagery he subsequently uses to construct his artistic memorial to Seita and Setsuko (and by extension to other noncombatants sacrificed during the war). The glowing, reddish light—which recurs periodically during the film—signals that the audience is being presented with visualizations of Seita's personal remembrance of historical trauma and victimization.²⁹ His recollection of the traumas of the past—including his own 'death' and 'splitting'—initially results in psychological/spiritual reunion with Setsuko, theretofore physically separated from him by death and mentally separated from him by repression/dissociation. Memory then initiates and facilitates a journey—indicated by the depiction of the siblings traveling together in an otherwise empty train carriage—that takes them back to the beginning of their end. After they move back in time and space to the point just prior to the commencement of the fatal attack, Seita's story is unfolded chronologically and episodically in 'real time'.

Grave of the Fireflies is an aesthetic memorial. It opens with Seita's psychic death, details the losses and cremations of his mother and Setsuko, and closes by returning to Seita's symbolic death and psychological/spiritual reunion with Setsuko. During a memorial or wake,

²⁹ Another representative example of this recollective structuring begins with a medium shot of the inside of a crowded train carriage in 'normal' lighting showing Seita sitting with the box containing his mother's recently cremated ashes on his lap and a concerned older woman sitting next to him looking down at it uncomfortably. The camera slowly pulls back to show Seita and Setsuko in their pre-trauma forms on a bench to the right side of the frame. The former is sitting and looking to his right, and the latter is sleeping with her head on his lap. Seita is thus pictured to be literally and figuratively 'looking back on' this past experience. And since Setsuko stayed at their relatives' house when Seita went to pick up their mother's remains, her presence with him in the glowing red light suggests that, as with the opening sequence of the film, she is once again with him 'in spirit'. In another telling instance, the viewer is presented with a heart-wrenching scene of Setsuko crying out desperately and clinging to her aunt in a futile attempt to prevent her from taking their mother's kimono away to exchange for food. She continues to cry out in protest repeatedly as Seita restrains her physically and the aunt leaves the room. A cut shows the aunt walking across the adjoining room with the kimono in hand. The sliding door is partially open, and while the siblings are no longer visible, Setsuko's desperate cries can still be heard. Here again, the camera pulls back to reveal Seita screen left illuminated in glowing, reddish light. Another cut to a close-up then shows him turning away and covering his ears with his hands, a gesture suggesting that the *memory* of Setsuko's screams during the incident is unbearable.

the bereaved struggle to simultaneously register, absorb and mourn the loss of the deceased and celebrate her/his life. Thus, in the anime, Seita's recollection of the past brings about revival and recovery of experiences both painful and joyful.³⁰ As for the latter, many of the warm, loving scenes of the two siblings playing happily together are wholly the creative products of Takahata's rich imagination. The ultimate celebration of Setsuko's short life, which appears toward the end of the film, is inserted between scenes of her death and cremation. This moving montage begins just after a group of privileged school girls is shown returning from their evacuation sites to their Manjidani homes following surrender. Ironically, a record is shown turning on a phonograph, and the Japanese version of "Home Sweet Home" that is played continues in the background throughout the series of depictions of Setsuko's 'ghost' at play in and around the pond-side bomb shelter under bright, calm, clear blue skies.

The sequence begins with the camera panning the mundane objects the children used every day: a tattered paper parasol, a hibachi, pots and pans, jars etc. A cut to the inside of the shelter shows the funerary box containing their mother's ashes and ants crawling on old pieces of watermelon—the last thing Setsuko ate before she died. The sound of Setsuko's echoing laughter indicates that what follows, too, is the product of remembrance. The first shot is from inside the shelter looking out toward the entrance. Setsuko briefly materializes at the threshold chasing butterflies, only to fade away as quickly as she appeared. A cut to the outside of the shelter then shows her reappearing on a swing. After the audience hears her say "Come back soon" in a voice-over, she turns to look directly at the camera. Next, she jumps off the swing, runs toward the shelter and disappears again at the entrance.

This pattern of appearance and disappearance is repeated as she is subsequently shown sweeping the inside of the shelter with her doll strapped to her back, bringing flowers to the "grave of the fireflies", pretending to fan coals under a hibachi, chasing dragonflies, holding the tattered parasol, playing hide-and-seek with the camera/Seita/audience, saluting while wearing oversized boots, a flat metal wash pan on her head in place of a combat helmet, playing rock, paper, scissors

³⁰ Shifts back and forth between these two affects are signaled and accentuated by the moving theme music of the film, which alternates between melodies evocative of magical, nostalgic childhood 'nursery songs' and heavy, somber, ominous and elegiac compositions.

with her reflection in the pond and, in a final overhead long shot, playing hopscotch in front of her de facto ‘home’. This montage in which she disappears and appears like a daytime firefly immortalizes her youthful, joyous, spontaneous, playful and fun-loving spirit.

That said, there is a palpable bitter-sweet quality to this pictorial celebration of Setsuko’s fleeting existence. In many of her activities, she is ‘making believe’—playing house, acting as if she were a mother carrying a baby on her back, pretending to prepare a meal. In short, she dies before she is ever really able to engage in any of these activities for real.³¹ In his review of the film, Roger Ebert suggests that Takahata’s anime elicits not only tears but grief. He goes on to draw particular attention to the way that individual shots are held long enough for the viewer to dwell upon and absorb them (Ebert 2000: 1–2).³²

Juxtaposed with warm, loving scenes of togetherness and joy are scenes expressive of profound sadness and loss. One of the most significant is that of Setsuko burying the fireflies. As she says: “Mother’s in a grave too”, a close-up shot of Setsuko tossing the dead fireflies into the hole she dug is cross-cut with a low angle medium shot up at men throwing their mother’s bloody, bandage-wrapped corpse onto a pile of bodies in a huge cremation pit. When Setsuko goes on to explain that their aunt told her about their mother’s death and burial, a cut shows Seita’s reaction as he struggles unsuccessfully to control himself, and then breaks down in tears. As he is overcome by grief, another cut to a close-up profile shot shows his chin resting heavily on his chest as tears pour forth from his closed eyes. When Seita regains his composure, he attempts to console Setsuko by telling her that their mother is buried under a big camphor tree in a cemetery she knows that is located near Nunobiki Falls. Then, in a pivotal high angle reverse-shot close-up, Setsuko is shown looking directly up at the camera—which is positioned where Seita’s eyes would be—as she asks the following haunting question with tears welling up in her wide open eyes: “Why do fireflies have to die so soon?” [Figure 3].

By the time of Setsuko’s death, Seita is not only numb, but also bereft of the will to live. As he leaves Setsuko inside the bomb shelter on the threshold of death—stretched out on her back and clutching

³¹ If this is true for Setsuko, who is four years old, then it is certainly all the more so for Keiko, whose life was cut short before it could ever really begin.

³² Ebert concludes his review by asserting that *Grave of the Fireflies* “belongs on any list of the greatest war films ever made” (Ebert 2000: 2).

her favorite doll and fruit drops tin to her chest—and exits to cook some food he was finally able to purchase, the audience hears him dispassionately say via a voice-over: “She never woke up”. A cut, accompanied by an ellipsis, then shows him alone in the darkness of the bomb shelter lying on his side next to Setsuko and gazing at her inanimate body as a storm rages in the background. Another cut presents the audience with a dim freeze-frame tableau of Seita holding Setsuko diagonally across his chest. He is shown in profile facing the right side of the frame, and Setsuko’s face, which is turned toward the camera, is partially visible as he presses her cheek against his chest and neck. While Seita’s body language conveys his profound love, his face is a frozen mask of grief and hopelessness.

As Seita makes his final preparations to cremate Setsuko the following day, he shows no emotion as he mechanically goes about his grim task. At the last minute, he decides not to place the empty fruit drops tin into the basket containing her emaciated body and her doll. Seita is then shown lying on his side in the darkness gazing at the small cremation pit. He is subsequently presented in an overhead medium close up shot lying on his back gazing up at the smoke that rises up past the surrounding fireflies toward the star-studded heavens above. In the final voice-over of the film, Seita calmly informs the audience that he gathered up Setsuko’s ashes the following morning, put them into the fruit drops tin, descended the hill and never went back to the pond-side bomb shelter.

Takahata memorializes the siblings—and their trauma, victimization and loss—through the creation of a complex series of imagistic associations that builds on the iconography of Nosaka’s short story. Fireflies, the central unifying motif of the anime’s aesthetic work of remembrance, are most conspicuous during the summer, which is itself associated with the end of the war. There is, moreover, a traditional linkage between fireflies and the souls of the dead, and Obon, or the Festival of the Dead, which is also observed in August. In light of the intimate connections established between the fireflies of the title and Setsuko, her mother and Seita, it can be said that Takahata’s memorial consists of the symbolic coupling of spirited, but short-lived ‘fireflies’, the souls of those noncombatants sacrificed during and after the war, and the innumerable specks of starlight in the nighttime sky. The ‘firefly spirits’ that naturally appear and disappear every summer thus serve as ongoing seasonal reminders of individualized and collective civilian losses that were/are as valuable and worthy of respect,

remembrance and ‘response’ as the martial spirits that are officially enshrined, memorialized, honored and worshipped as national deities at Yasukuni Shrine for the War Dead.

There are, however, critical unresolved issues regarding the civilians who were indiscriminately sacrificed en masse during the war. These come into better focus when Takahata’s handling of graves is scrutinized. In short, there are simply no definitive physical sites around which survivors can organize formal rites of passage and rituals of remembrance. The only semblance of such practices is performed by a child for fireflies closely associated in her mind with her dead mother whose cremated remains ultimately go unburied.³³ And as we have seen, at the very outset of the film, Setsuko’s ashes are thrown away and scattered in the grassy field in front of Sannomiya station. And it is never said what becomes of Seita’s body after death. Thus, the mortal remains of Setsuko, her mother and her brother have not been properly interred, given final resting places or been adequately honored with dignified, public funeral rites, observances or ‘sites of memory’. Be that as it may, Shimizu Setsuji suggests that the ultimate locations of their ‘graves’—and by extension their memorials and monuments—are Nosaka’s story and Takahata’s anime (Shimizu 1995: 201). Taken together, it can be said that these artistic works contribute substantially to the ongoing, transgenerational endeavor of working over, working through and coming to terms with historical trauma and victimization.³⁴

Conclusion

Now that Takahata’s representation of the remembrance, mourning and memorialization of historical trauma and victimization have been considered, we can close by directing our attention to his subtle but

³³ Fireflies, moreover, are also expressly linked in the film with Kamikaze. The bodies of the young men who engaged in suicidal bombing missions were also irretrievable. Likewise, Seita’s father presumably disappears at sea when his battleship is sunk.

³⁴ In this regard, LaCapra observes that: “It is conceivable that for some, perhaps many, in secular society, a discursive analogue of mourning is all that’s available” (LaCapra 2001: 213).

multi-faceted treatment of the critical matter of “response-ability”.³⁵ The following comments by Terrence Des Pres serve as a helpful introduction to the implicit epistemology and ethics of Takahata’s animated adaptation of Nosaka’s story:

...like any witness, the survivor gives testimony in situations where moral judgment depends on knowledge of what took place. Through him the events in question are verified and their reality made binding in the eyes of others. The survivor-as-witness, therefore, embodies a socio-historical process founded not upon the desire for justice...but upon the involvement of all human beings in common care for life and the future.... The assumption is that good and evil are only clear in retrospect; that moral vision depends on assimilation of the past; that man as man cannot dispense with memory. Wisdom depends on knowledge and it comes at a terrible price. It comes from consciousness of, and then response to, the deeds and events through which men have already passed. Conscience, as Schopenhauer put it, is “man’s knowledge concerning what he has done” (Des Pres 1976: 47).

“Response-ability” in *Grave of the Fireflies* can be visualized as a series of expanding concentric circles.³⁶ The nucleus of this configuration is

³⁵ For a detailed discussion of Terrence Des Pres’ thoughts about horror, “response-ability” and conscience, please refer to the Introduction of the present volume. Ienaga Saburō’s more specific comments are also instructive here: “No one could live through those years without being directly involved in the war. Choices had to be made: To cooperate with the authorities? Opportunistically to make the best deal possible for oneself? To feign obedience and comply? To watch the war from the sidelines? To resist? Everyone confronted these choices in their daily thoughts and actions. Unless we look back at the decisions we made and consider whether we acted properly or not, we cannot lead a serious existence in the postwar world. In other words, I agree that the unexamined life is not worth living, and add that a life lived in wartime demands a special re-examination” (Ienaga 1978: xiv).

³⁶ I adapt this figure from John Dower, who employs it as follows: “People in all cultures and times have mythologized their own war dead while soon forgetting their victims—if, in fact, they ever even give much thought to them. Many Japanese were sensitive to the dangers of such a myopic fixation even as they eulogized their dead compatriots as tragic victims of forces beyond their control. When liberal and left-wing intellectuals began to organize a formal peace movement in 1948, they acknowledged this to be a problem but nonetheless concluded that victim consciousness was the only foundation on which a more universal peace consciousness could eventually be built. Psychologically and ideologically, the argument went, the surest way to mobilize antimilitary sentiment was to keep alive the recollection of intimate suffering and loss. The image was one of gradually expanding concentric circles of antiwar consciousness: from personal, to national to international. Transcending national and racial introversion, it was argued, would take time. In fact, victim consciousness never was transcended and the outer ring of these imagined circles never came to be sharply defined” (Dower 1999: 504).

comprised of traumatized individuals who live on from day to day haunted by loss, numbness, survivor guilt and self-condemnation. Moving outward from the personal core, the next ring includes the local community made up of people who allow their values and world views to be manipulated and corrupted by pernicious nationalistic ideology and propaganda, those adults who in the course of their own egoistic struggles for self-preservation lose their capacity for empathy, compassion and response, the close and distant relatives, neighbors, neighborhood association officials, farmers, physicians, military police, train station custodians etc. who coldly turn their backs on the most vulnerable members of society in their time of greater need and heartlessly leave them to fend hopelessly for themselves.

The third and more inclusive concentric ring extends to envelop the nation-state. It contains the military leaders, politicians, ideologues, bureaucrats, industrialists, educators, artists, mass media producers and disseminators, etc. who collude to bring about the decisive psychological shift from “sensory reality” to “mythic reality”,³⁷ those who construct, indoctrinate and perpetuate as ‘sacred’ and ‘inviolable’ symbolic abstractions such as Emperor, Nation and Cause, who recognize, value and praise only selfless service to and sacrifice for Country and War Effort, who refuse to face, acknowledge or admit mistakes, failure or defeat, and instead call for even greater sacrifices under deceptive euphemisms such as *ichioku gyokusai*, or the ‘glorious deaths of the 100 million’. Textually, this attitude is embodied early in the film by a local uniformed official shouting “Long live the Emperor!” in front of a crowd of refugees as an entire city is consumed by the flames of war immediately behind him. Contextually, it is implicitly problematized via the timing of the production and release of the work, which paralleled public reports of Emperor Hirohito’s undisclosed illness and unprecedented surgery. This association raises a crucial, and still insufficiently answered question: What is the precise nature of the relationship between largely ignored, unacknowledged, premature, grotesque, devalued and officially ‘forgotten’ civilian deaths and the prolonged, dignified, collectively recognized, nationally honored, mourned and memorialized passing in old age of the most powerful and influential

³⁷ See LeShan 2002: 33ff. LeShan uses the terms ‘sensory reality’ and ‘mythic reality’ to distinguish between the contrasting ways people conceptualize, perceive and respond to reality during peacetime and wartime respectively.

(at least in symbolic terms) wartime figure in Japan, and thus arguably the most culpable in political, legal, ethical and spiritual terms for the disastrous Asia Pacific War and its aftermath?

The next, even more expansive sphere of accountability extends to international affairs and relations, specifically how modern wars have come to be prosecuted in such a way that defenseless noncombatant men, women and children are routinely seen as 'legitimate' targets of unrestrained aggression and annihilation. Through dehumanization, dissociation, psychic numbing, projection, rationalization, self-deception, and moral and ethical atrophy the *discriminate* saturation bombing of civilian populations has come to be viewed as 'conventional' (Tanaka 2005: 4).³⁸

Finally, there is that outermost ring of "response-ability" that essentially incorporates and informs all of the others. This is the all-inclusive, global realm of humanity, of the species, but it is also one that is simultaneously inseparable from the individual. At the very beginning and end of the film—and when Setsuko asks her haunting, unanswered question about why 'fireflies' must die so soon—Seita stares directly into the camera with a grim expression on his face [Figure 4]. In so doing, he—and the artist who imag(in)ed him—confronts his audience, raises the critical question of their "response-ability", challenges them to not only marshal the courage to squarely face, work through and help come to terms with the deadly realities of our violent modern societies and times, but also to do something to intervene in the senseless sacrifice of civilians in war.

The souls of sacrificial victims such as Seita, Setsuko, their mother—and innumerable other noncombatants both inside and outside Japan—have no adequate graves. Until they have been properly acknowledged, memorialized and attended to, they—and we—will

³⁸ At the end of his article, Tanaka writes as follows: "From this brief history of indiscriminate bombing, we can understand that the phrase 'discriminate bombing (against civilians)' rather than 'indiscriminate bombing' is in fact more appropriate as the majority of victims of 'strategic bombing' are civilians, in particular women and children. In plain language, 'strategic bombing' of civilians is an act of terrorism" (Tanaka 2005: 4). John Dower elaborates on the usage and consequences of such 'terror bombing' as follows: "When all was said and done... no one seriously challenged on moral grounds this crossing of a great divide regarding the legitimate targets of war. By failing to do this, genuine heroes in the war on fascism denied themselves a firm and morally unambiguous place in history. They became heroes with the blood of women and children on their hands, and in this regard protagonists in a tragic rather than a triumphal narrative" (Dower 1996: 94–5).

have no lasting peace.³⁹ The restless ‘spirits of the past’ not only haunt, but also threaten to take possession of their living counterparts both personally and collectively. And whether we are aware of it or not, they will surely continue to trouble and disturb us until the day that we rouse ourselves to imagine and act upon our own viable means of symbolically consoling the dead and putting them to rest by remembering their terrible suffering and loss, carrying out proper rites of passage, restoring their dignity and giving meaning to their sacrifices by learning and passing on the lessons of the traumatic, war-torn past well enough to avoid repetition of mass historical victimization. To this end, it behooves us all to not only take to heart, but also act in accordance with the following political and ethical insight of Milan Kundera: “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of remembering versus forgetting” (quoted in Hedges 2003: 130).

In the closing frames of *Grave of the Fireflies*, Seita and Setsuko, reunited in spirit through the former’s recollection of the home front and immediate postwar traumas of the past, sit together bathed in glowing, reddish light on a bench atop a hill overlooking a beautiful night scene of contemporary Kobe city. As previously mentioned, Nosaka wrote that when he looked after the war at the high-rise buildings and super-highways that were once just futuristic dreams, he could not help but see them amidst sunlit ruins (Nosaka 1969: 185). In light of Nosaka’s statement and Takahata’s ‘layering’ of firebombing and atomic bombing experience, the dark, ominous implications of the final images of the anime become clear: if contemporary reality is dissociated from the traumas of the past—and knowledge of how they were produced—the historical catastrophes of the War might not only be repeated, but repeated with an even deadlier difference;

³⁹ In this connection, LaCapra notes that: “In... metaphoric terms, one might suggest that the ghosts of the past—symptomatic revenants who have not been laid to rest because of a disturbance in the symbolic order, a deficit in the ritual process, or a death so extreme in its unjustifiability or transgressiveness that in certain ways it exceeds existing modes (perhaps any possible mode) of mourning—roam the post-traumatic world and are not entirely ‘owned’ as ‘one’s own’ by an individual or group. If they haunt a house (a nation, a group), they come to disturb all who live—perhaps even pass through—that house. How to come to terms with them affects different people or groups in significantly different ways. But just as no group that was not there is entitled to simple identification with victims, so the problem of response and the difficulty of attempts to come to terms with unsettling aftereffects and haunting presences are not clearly circumscribed or ‘properly’ the preserve of anyone” (LaCapra 2001: 215).

this time conceivably both *beginning and ending* with “discriminate” nuclear attack.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

FRACTIOUS MEMORIES IN MEDORUMA SHUN'S TALES OF WAR

Davinder L. Bhowmik

Medoruma Shun, a prominent Okinawan intellectual, was not widely known until 1997 when he won the prestigious Akutagawa Prize, though he had been receiving regional literary prizes since the early 1980s. Medoruma was born in Nakijin, a northern Okinawan town steeped in history. Located on the Motobu peninsula, which juts north-easterly off the coast of the East China Sea, Nakijin abounds in various crops such as sugarcane, watermelon, leaf tobacco, greens, and, as Medoruma writes about in his debut story, “Gyogunki” (Chronicle of a School of Fish, 1984), pineapple. In the 11th–12th centuries, known as Okinawa’s three-mountain (*sanzan*) period, Nakijin was the residence of the Hokuzan king. Remains of the town’s castle, awash every January in Japan’s earliest-blooming cherry trees, demarcate what was once the center of the culture and economy of northern Okinawa. Geographically removed from Okinawa’s capital city Naha, Nakijin was a world apart from the life Medoruma would live in the south where he studied literature at the University of the Ryukyus, under the tutelage of Okamoto Keitoku and Nakahodo Masanori.

The language of Medoruma’s childhood and that of his entry into the adult world of the university are distinct and separable. Reminiscing on his grammar school days, Medoruma relates that in 1969 he was ordered by his teacher not to use the local dialect. Instead he was encouraged to replace a good part of his daily speech with standard equivalents. The memory of his teacher’s strictness, the otherworldliness of the replacement phrases—common enough in such media as television or manga, but not in Medoruma’s everyday speech—left him suffused with shame. The self-loathing Medoruma experienced as a result of adhering to his teacher’s commandment led him, perversely, to refrain from using standard language from the time of the incident to the point that he entered university (Medoruma 2001a: 324).

In an essay on Okinawa's peculiar linguistic quandary, published a year after he received the Akutagawa Prize, Medoruma notes that, from the mid-1980s onward, the boom in things Okinawan, striking to mainlanders and islanders alike, began with amateur theater productions. One in particular was a 1986 production by the troupe Gekidan Sōzō (Medoruma 1998: 192–3).¹ What stayed in Medoruma's mind long after the curtains went down on this particular performance was how playwright Chinen Seishin, noted author of the script *Jinruikan* (House of Peoples, 1976), made conscious use of three types of language: local dialect, standard Japanese, and a hybrid of the two. Medoruma speculates that the rapidly changing face of Okinawa, post-reversion, is the reason that dialect, suppressed in the prewar period by state authorities keen on bringing Okinawa into the national fold, and in the Occupation period by local schoolteachers who advocated reversion, re-emerged anachronistically in society.

In tandem with local theater productions, the issue of the Okinawan dialect emerged as more than a regional issue and came to capture the national imagination through a variety of initiatives, including publication of the bestselling *Okinawa Keyword Column Book*; comedy groups that appeared regularly on television as well as on stage; film director Takamine Go's dialect-rich movies *Paradise Views* (1985) and *Untamagiru* (1989);² the enduring success of older musicians such as Kina Shōkichi, who had emerged in the 1970s; and newer musical groups such as Rinken Band³ and the Nenes. In addition, on the literary front, from the mid-1980s, young writers from Okinawa began to publish their fiction in several mainland literary journals (e.g. *Kaien*, *Bungakukai*, *Subaru* and *Shinchō*), garnering literary prizes in rapid succession.⁴

¹ The name of the production Medoruma recalls so vividly is *Kozaban donzoko* (The Koza Version of the Depths).

² See Gerow 2003.

³ In his analysis of Kina's "Shimagwa Song", anthropologist James Roberson explains that in both of Kina's versions of this song he implores his audience to remember their island spirit and never to forget the language of Okinawa. The song's second verse follows: "Don't throw away/Never throw away/The spirit of the Islands/Don't throw away your heart/Don't forget our Okinawan language/We are the spirit of these Islands". See Roberson 2003.

⁴ The authors Medoruma cites as frequent prize-winners are Tabata Mitsuko, Eba Hideshi, Kohama Kiyoshi, Yamazato Teiko, and Nagadō Eikichi. He rounds out his list by including Sakiyama Tami and Nakawaka Naoko, distinguished, as is Medoruma himself, for receipt of the critically important Kyushu Art Festival Literary Prize.

As the proliferation of dialect in multiple forms of media in the 1980s shows, Medoruma's attentiveness to language, particularly the dying dialects of the Ryukyus, is far from anomalous. "Unchanging dialect, changing Okinawa", he writes wistfully, though surely his is a romanticized view of local language as pristine and ideal, a stark contrast to the injurious effects of twentieth-century modernization on cultural formations (Medoruma 1998: 192).⁵ Despite Medoruma's obvious penchant for dialect, which he has regularly used since "Chronicle of a School of Fish", his earlier works have a smaller percentage of words in dialect glossed than do his recent stories, a fact Michael Molasky attributes to the growth of Medoruma's readership beyond the reefs of Okinawa (Molasky 2003: 191).

After graduating with a degree in Japanese literature, Medoruma took a number of jobs, mostly as a high school teacher in various locales throughout the prefecture. Like his predecessors, Medoruma has worked full-time while pursuing his writing. Unlike most aspiring writers, however, for well over a decade, Medoruma has, to the best of his ability, consciously chosen to remove himself from local literary circles in a sincere effort to instill discipline into his life as a writer. Eschewing not only literary events, but even casual conversations about literature, Medoruma craves a "degree of severity" he believes will bolster his craft and keep it from getting soft (Medoruma and Ikezawa 1997: 179). The Henoko heliport controversy, in which residents in the northern city of Nago were made to choose between accepting an unwanted military installation within its jurisdiction or losing a huge incentive package, forced Medoruma out of hiding when he took a teaching position in Nago. However, his subsequent public appearances relate strictly to his concern for local politics and the rights of Okinawans rather than for literary matters. Indeed it is his disciplined nature that has kept Medoruma out of the limelight and from retracting his stated wish *not* to be categorized as a writer of Okinawan literature.⁶ Baffling as Medoruma's position may be, he elects to distance himself from other intellectuals in Okinawa and

⁵ Although Medoruma uses the phrase, "unchanging *uchinā*, changing Okinawa", (*kawaranai uchinā to kawatteiku Okinawa*) in which *uchinā* may best correspond to the ancient island kingdom, and Okinawa as the newly constituted modern prefecture, in the context of the essay it is clear that Medoruma is using the term *uchinā* broadly to include forms attached to the island, namely, its dialect.

⁶ In this rare interview, Medoruma bluntly tells Ikezawa Natsuki, "I don't want my fiction to be categorized as Okinawan literature" (Medoruma and Ikezawa 1997: 176).

separates his writing from the genre of Okinawan fiction, even as he continues to produce work that clearly demonstrates deep ties to the island and (unwanted) connections to fellow Okinawan writers. It is likely that Medoruma's discomfort with readers and critics regarding his works as Okinawan literature stems from an aversion to collectivities, in particular Okinawan nationalism.

Critics have cited a host of reasons for Medoruma's distinction among contemporary writers, from a literary style that "fuses earthiness with refinement, and brooding intensity with a gentle humor", to his continual experiments in narrative technique, and finally to what is surely the crux of Medoruma's success—the passion with which he assumes the twin role of writer and intellectual (Molasky 2003: 168). As with exemplars such as Ōe Kenzaburō and Nakagami Kenji who preceded Medoruma in their performance of similar dual roles in Japanese society, what best characterizes Medoruma is the doubling of his pen as a sword. This doubling explains why reading Medoruma's fiction can be such an exhausting endeavor.⁷ It is not only that unfamiliar words impede the (mainland) reader; the cumulative weight of Medoruma's thorough probing of the psychology of his characters, his knack for guileless storytelling leavened with issues of contemporary concern, and the linguistic discord reflected in his writing all contribute to making his fiction serious reading despite the pleasures it affords, and its contemporary appeal. What follows are analyses of Medoruma's three most important works that thematize war: "Sui-teki" (Droplets, 1997 [2000]), "Mabuigumi" (Spirit Recalling, 1999), and "Gunchō no ki" (Tree of Butterflies, 2000). In each work of this thematically linked trilogy Medoruma makes clear the long lasting effects wartime trauma has on the lives of his characters. The aim of my analyses is twofold: first, I will show how, in each story, survivors of the Battle of Okinawa or their descendents physically bear the burden of war memory. Second, while these characters unburden themselves of repressed memories in the course of the works, there is no resolution to the trauma of war; it bleeds into the lives of the postwar generation.

⁷ Takeuchi Mitsuhiro describes the labor required of Medoruma's readers as stemming from, but not limited to, his use of dialect: "First dialect derails a reader, forcing a complete halt. At the same time the text puts a stop to one's thought, it demands new ways of thinking. The reader is forced to read, thinking all the while. It's on this account that one is wiped out each time one finishes a mere short story" (Takeuchi 2000: 60).

Fractious Memories in "Droplets"

Publication of "Droplets" marked a turning point for both Medoruma and for Okinawan literature. Ironically, Medoruma, who had long since removed himself from literary circles, found himself in the glare of national attention following his receipt of the Akutagawa Prize. Moreover, the consecutive Prizes garnered by Okinawa in 1996 and 1997 led an ever-increasing number of scholars throughout Japan to reflect on the subject of Okinawan literature, a topic dealt with previously mainly only by scholars in Okinawa. The theme of war in Medoruma's stories was hardly new. Being the sole Japanese prefecture that experienced extensive land combat during the Asia Pacific War, Okinawa had long provided writers with gripping material for narratives of war. Among the corpus of such narratives, "Kame no kōbaka" (Turtleback Tombs, 1966 [2000]), written by Ōshiro Tatsuhiro, is perhaps the benchmark by which subsequent narratives of the Battle of Okinawa are most often compared. A grim tale of one family's survival in a cramped ancestral tomb, "Turtleback Tombs" conforms to conventions of war narratives in both its realist fiction form and its weighty content. "Droplets" and its sequel "Spirit Recalling", on the other hand, are fresh twists on the representation of war in Okinawan literature. Though by their very nature the content of these stories makes them a solemn tribute to Okinawa, which suffered devastating losses in the Battle, the innovative and occasionally irreverent methods Medoruma adopts to tell his tales of the walking wounded rightly place him at the cutting edge of fiction writing in Okinawa today.

For a writer born in 1960, well after the end of the war, the obsessive war motif in Medoruma's fiction, from "Fūon" (Sound of the Wind, 1985) to *Niji no tori*, (Rainbow Bird, 2006), would indeed be curious were it not for the fact that Okinawa is awash with war memorials, war widows, and military bases, instilling in its residents a greater degree of historical awareness than in the main islands of Japan. In contrast to the vast majority of Okinawan battle narratives, which as Nakahodo Masanori points out, were first penned by soldier participants, then ordinary citizens, and finally authors, and which dealt blow by blow with the events of the battle, Medoruma's war writing focuses on the residual effects the Battle has had on the individuals who survived it (Nakahodo 1982: 3–13). While one could argue that Ōshiro, too, depicts the war's intrusion on a particular family in "Turtleback Tombs", his narrative remains ensconced in the typhoon of steel that pummeled the island in April 1945. It is this past tragedy that gives

the work its punch, whereas the appeal of Medoruma's work lies in his ability to delineate the shadows the war casts upon contemporary Okinawa.

Beginning with a Kafkaesque opening, "Droplets" departs wholly from the previous tradition of war narratives in Okinawa. In this unlikely story of a man who awakens to find his leg swollen to the size of a gourd and whose big toe emits water that phantom soldiers come nightly to imbibe, Medoruma injects large doses of humor. Some of the sources of this humor are the author's use of local dialect in the speech of his country bumpkin protagonist Tokushō and other villagers, and his employment of a comedic sub-theme featuring a rascally character, Seiyū, who hits on the idea of marketing the toe water that contains Viagra-like properties. While some might object to Medoruma's use of humor and a magic realist mode to write about war, it is this wildly imaginative aspect of Medoruma's fiction that has made him one of Japan's most promising authors and which has kept him safe from the perils of treading directly on the dangerous ground of history and memory.⁸

In his discussion of public memory and modern experience, Geoffrey Hartman writes that books are the main bearers of public memory while nonverbal arts such as painting and memorials serve as cultural reference points. These arts, neither unified nor bounded, influence personal identity. Hartman argues that, at present, "information sickness" has left the individual wading through a sea of media representations which cleave rather than bridge public and personal experiences. Certainly technology alone is not to blame for this desensitizing trend. The passage of time also diminishes the reality of traumatic experiences such as war. How does one keep memories of the past in active recall when these memories are in constant jeopardy from both unnatural media reiterations (e.g. repeated clips of World Trade Center attacks) and natural weathering? In the reversion period, war discourse in Okinawa became systematized. In part this was to present to the mainland a unified face, that of loyal prewar subjects who are tragic victims of war.⁹ The quintessential icon of such suffering was the Himeyuri, or Maiden Lily Student Nurse Corps, a group of 219 female student

⁸ For a reading of "Droplets" through a magic realist frame, see Bhowmik 2003.

⁹ Suzuki Tomoyuki discusses this aspect of the reversion period in his lengthy but nuanced article. See Suzuki 2001.

recruits, nearly all of whom died in the crossfire between Japanese and American soldiers. The subject of several film and narrative depictions, the Himeyuri have instilled in the minds of Okinawans and mainland Japanese alike the idea of Okinawa as victim. As Linda Angst puts it, the symbol of the female student nurses has become the canonical narrative of postwar Okinawan identity (Angst 2003: 142).

So seductive is Medoruma's yarn of a farmer whose bizarre bodily transformation throws an unnamed yet vaguely familiar northern village into confusion that one is tempted throughout to read the work as a quaint folk tale. Chock full of symbols such as gourds, water, and flowers, the work seems to emerge organically out of Okinawan soil, to which critics, since the story's publication, have tried to attach their various readings.¹⁰ "Droplets", they would argue, like countless Japanese folk stories before it, is an Okinawan-inflected cautionary tale of the ruin that befalls individuals who lack moral compunction. That is, Tokushō's illness is, as his wife Ushi reminds him not once, but twice, his "comeuppance for tryin' to profit off people's sufferin' in the war" (Medoruma 2000: 272). As the narrative unfolds, Medoruma connects—through ghosts that serve as a bridge between past and present, and lime in water spouting from the big toe of Tokushō's leg that is suggestively shaped like a gourd—the protagonist's present ailment to his suppression of war memory and the embellished versions of battle experience with which he regales school children during yearly commemorations of the war's end.

The Battle of Okinawa, Medoruma refuses to forget, has left the island with many walking wounded at pains to put on a cheery front, all the while dying inside. Midway through the story, as Tokushō begins to have flashbacks of his experience in the caves, the story's theme of war becomes obvious. Telltale signs come earlier, in the first page: "Tokushō's right leg, which had already ballooned to the size of a medium-sized wax gourd, was moist whitish green, and his toes fanned out like the heads of a family of tiny snakes" (*ibid.*: 255). The relationship between gourds and war is a subtle one, lost on many readers unaware that in the immediate postwar period, enormous gourds proliferated, seemingly nurtured by soil enriched by the corpses of war dead. Another hint of an intermingling of past and present comes

¹⁰ For a sampling of such reviews, see the judges' comments upon the announcement of Medoruma's award in *Bungei shunjū* 1997.

in the scene in which Dr. Ōshiro, the local physician, reports that the liquid taken from Tokushō's leg for laboratory examination is simply water with a trace of lime. As in the story's fantastic beginning, the properties of the water contain an element linked to wartime, namely lime from the many natural limestone caves used for hiding during the Battle.

In a telling comment, Hino Keizō, one of the Akutagawa Prize committee judges, describes such passages as the story's final image of a dazzling hibiscus attached by a long vine to an enormous gourd as "Okinawan" (*Okinawateki*) (*Bungei shunjū* 1997: 427). Kuroi Senji, another judge, similarly cites the spontaneous appearance of a crowd of villagers driven by curiosity to gather around Tokushō's home in hopes of learning more about his illness as the work's most striking feature. Such masses, Kuroi explains, have long been absent in Japanese fiction (*ibid*). In Hino's comment, it is the oddity of "Droplets"—tropical flowers and vegetation redolent of the subtropics—that marks the work as "Okinawan". For Kuroi, presumably accustomed to stories of alienated city dwellers, the foreignness of crowd formation is what makes the work regional. Both judges' comments, patently orientalist in their dismissive categorization of difference, nevertheless elucidate Medoruma's knack for creating a vibrant place where, depending on one's point of view, strange things do happen. The burden of modernity, Hartman explains, is exacerbated by media artifice, provoking in individuals a strong desire for "local romance", stories that evoke particular places in the collective memory (e.g. *Winesburg, Ohio*) (Hartman 1993: 244). Were such stories to feature traumatic events of the past, surely they would stubbornly resist the steady effacement of history outside the world of the text. For critics such as Hino and Kuroi, "Droplets" is a balm for weary metropolitan readers, a text that beckons the afflicted with the tantalizing promise of a cure, much as the post-reversion marketing of Okinawa-as-resort welcomes tourists with open arms.

In one of many such essays, Medoruma rails against the portrayal of Okinawa—by mainlanders and Okinawans alike—as an island whose culture rejuvenates through its "gentleness" (*yasashisa*):

Thanks to mainland subsidies the economy has developed, and Okinawa's 'complex' is a story of the past... Performances by poets who put on 'Okinawan art' that caters to the expectations of mainland mass media by playing the samisen and doing the *kachāshī* in front of the elephant cage fill the television screen and newspaper pages. I think it's a

poet's duty to destroy the image of 'Okinawa' the mass media produces, and represent his own 'Okinawa'. Where's the 'mainland criticism' in circulating images of Okinawa produced by prejudice—samisen and *kachāshī*, karate and Ryukyuan dance? ... Words like *tēgē* and *chirudai* are praised to the skies, and catchy phrases such as "Okinawa's culture of gentleness" are thrown about....I'm completely fed up (Medoruma 1996: 28–9).

As Suzuki Tomoyuki explains, Medoruma abhors the idea of Okinawa as "cultural", and bemoans the fact that, in recalling its cultural memory, Okinawan society has become completely oblivious to what is politically important. For this reason, Medoruma administers his stories of Okinawa with a dose of what Suzuki terms "ill will" (*akui*), injecting a necessary corrective to the shopworn notion of "gentle Okinawa".¹¹

It is Medoruma's "ill will", or spirit of contrariness, that prevents one from readily consuming "Droplets" as one might the bulk of cultural products by and about Okinawans. While judges like Hino and Kuroi may explain away the strange occurrences that take place in "Droplets" as conforming to Okinawa's distinctly exotic culture in an effort to understand (before dispensing with) the story, Medoruma disallows such easy digestion of the work by embedding it with multiple traps. One pitfall occurs in the story within Tokushō's own story of the buried past, which features Seiyū, the protagonist's shiftless cousin who greedily capitalizes on the water from Tokushō's toe once he witnesses its magical power. Seiyū's 'miracle water' marketing scheme succeeds to the point that his suitcase and bank account burst with money he envisions squandering in massage parlors from Kyushu to Tokyo. When the water loses its effectiveness, leaving Seiyū's customers disfigured rather than 'healed', an angry mob forms to beat him senseless. Just as Tokushō dispenses lies to schoolchildren through his artfully constructed stories of war heroism, so too does Seiyū deceive his customers with sham water cleverly packaged in brown medicinal bottles affixed with gold seals and red lettering, surely a sly reference to the countless variety of similarly packaged vials ubiquitously sold in Japan to invigorate spent businessmen. Seiyū and Tokushō's moral lapses cause each much anguish; the former is beaten, while the latter suffers a debilitating illness that leaves him bedridden. Abiding by the

¹¹ Suzuki develops this idea in his essay "Gūwateki akui—Medoruma Shun to Okinawasen no kioku" (Allegorical Ill-Will: Medoruma Shun and Memories of the Battle of Okinawa). See Suzuki 2001: 1–52.

conventions of fables, then, Medoruma rewards good and punishes evil—or does he?

In the story's most dramatic scene, Medoruma pits Tokushō against Ishimine, a phantom soldier whom Tokushō instantly recognizes as the close friend he abandoned in a cave during the Battle. The story's very literal climactic scene, in which the physical sensation of Ishimine's tongue on Tokushō's foot causes him to ejaculate, not only showcases Medoruma's tongue-in-cheek wit, but it also underscores the work's complexity. The nightly phantom soldiers' visits stir up in Tokushō deeply repressed memories of his cowardice and force him to realize his own self-deception. When at last he understands this, Tokushō asks Ishimine for forgiveness. The narrator imbues the highly charged scene with an unmistakable trace of homoerotic desire:

“Ishimine, forgive me!”

The color had begun to return to Ishimine's pale face, and his lips regained their luster. Tokushō, despite his fear and self-hatred, grew aroused. Ishimine's tongue glided across the opening on his toe, and then Tokushō let out a small cry with his sexual release.

The lips pulled away. Lightly wiping his mouth with his index finger, Ishimine stood up. He was still seventeen. A smile took shape—around those eyes that stared out beneath the long lashes, on the spare cheeks, on the vermilion lips.

Tokushō burst into anger. “Don't you know how much I've suffered these past fifty years?”

Ishimine merely continued to smile, nodding slightly at Tokushō, who flailed his arms in an effort to sit up. “Thank you. At last the thirst is gone”. Speaking in well-accented, standard Japanese, Ishimine held back a smile, saluted, and bowed deeply. He never turned to look back at Tokushō as he slowly vanished into the wall. A newt scampered across the wall's stained surface and caught an insect.

At dawn, Tokushō's wail echoed throughout the village (Medoruma 2000: 281–2).

This critical passage raises several issues, none of which is easily resolved, or aids in reading the story as a generic tale of a village temporarily disturbed by immorality.

One question that comes to mind is why Medoruma takes pains to differentiate Ishimine's speech in the passage. Even during a magical episode such as this one, Medoruma's attentiveness to language remains painstakingly accurate. While the speech of Tokushō, his wife Ushi, Seiyū and other older Okinawans is marked with a heavy local dialect throughout, the few words in the text voiced by Ishimine are carefully rendered into standard Japanese, conforming entirely to the

reality of wartime, when prewar edicts prohibiting the use of local dialect were pushed to an extreme through the execution of those deemed spies for speaking in dialect.¹² Medoruma's language specificity, easy to overlook, brings the specter of wartime ideology into the text, making it clear that his writing is not generic, but geographically specific.

Another point to note in the scene is that Medoruma, who has posited Tokushō as an aggressor for his self-serving wartime (in)action rather than another in the cast of Battle victims, shows that his protagonist has also suffered terribly from keeping secret his past behavior. Tokushō's decades of silence end in a wail heard throughout the village. The scene's final line underscores Medoruma's efforts to give voice to a dying generation long bound and gagged by painful secrets. This scene in particular, and the story as a whole, muddies the distinction between victim and aggressor. It also explains why Tokushō indulges in escapist pleasures.

Through the discord wrought by the idiosyncratic, private memories that Tokushō relives and the standard communal memories of the Battle of Okinawa such as the Himeyuri trope, the story resists any pat reading. Even the conclusion offers no satisfying answer to questions raised in "Droplets". Most disturbing of these is why Tokushō remains fundamentally unchanged even after he has painfully relived his past and acknowledged his betrayal of Ishimine. The reader is by no means assured that Tokushō will rectify his errant ways; in fact, Medoruma suggests otherwise by having Tokushō return to his former vices of drinking, gambling, and womanizing. The story's formalistic ending—the picture postcard image of a vibrant hibiscus tethered by vine to an enormous gourd that Tokushō beholds with moist eyes—may well satisfy critics seeking local color, but it does nothing to diminish the reality of Tokushō's unwillingness to reform. The order that settles upon the village after Seiyū's expulsion and Tokushō's 'recovery' is superficial at best. Medoruma's rather bleak conclusion may simply indicate that the story has shifted from a fantastic to a realistic mode; however, given the author's predilection for critique, it is far more tempting to read the ending as an open rebuke of Tokushō's habits and perhaps even of Okinawans themselves, who, content in escapist

¹² Tomiyama Ichirō has explored the complexity of the Japanese state's treatment of Okinawans as both national subjects, and potential spies, owing to their occasional, and possibly rebellious use of dialects unintelligible to mainland soldiers. In English, see Tomiyama 2000: 121–32. In Japanese, see Tomiyama 1990, 1995 and 2002.

pleasures such as the playing the samisen and dancing the *kachāshī*, share his apathy.

Medoruma's focus on water, the element shared by Tokushō's story of repressed war memory and Seiyū's parallel tale, represents one of the author's first attempts to incorporate indigenous culture in his fiction. Water figures prominently in the work as evidenced by its title and the contents therein, suggesting that Medoruma is probing folk beliefs of Okinawans, who according to Nakamatsu Yashū, highly revere and worship the spiritual power of water (Kawamura 1990: 75). However, Kawamura Minato counters this view by pointing out that such beliefs in water are not unique to Okinawa: rather, they reflect a more universal faith in the sacredness of water (*ibid*). Kawamura's quibble notwithstanding, by interjecting a nativist element in his writing, Medoruma is by no means paying homage to an ideal ancient state in which water imbibed by village elders courses through the blood of children. The story's emphasis on water naturally causes readers to place it squarely within the tradition of legends involving sacred water, but, as is his tendency, Medoruma refuses to reduce his motif to a single symbolic meaning. Seiyū's discovery that what he sold customers eager to recapture their youth was simply plain water shows clearly Medoruma's fondness for contrivance, his deferral of absolutes, and his penchant for illuminating hidden traces.

It is the story's smallest details—the trace of lime found in the water Dr. Ōshiro takes from Tokushō's toe, the echo of Ishimine's perfectly accented standard Japanese—that function like chinks in an armor, destabilizing the grand narratives of battle so well rehearsed and glibly repeated in classrooms, film, and text. The presence of lime in Tokushō's body, which utters through its grotesque transformation what Tokushō cannot voice about his past, is indisputable proof that he personally experienced war and that his particular hell is contained within the limestone walls of a cave in which he left his closest friend for dead. Tokushō's story, eclipsed by public memories of the war, ultimately speaks itself through the body.

The Lure of the Distant Shore in "Spirit Recalling"

"Spirit Recalling" can be read as a sequel of sorts to "Droplets" since the author's method and the story's content include many of the elements that contributed to Medoruma's Akutagawa Prize-winning text, yet it is eminently engaging even when read as an independent piece.

Not only does Dr. Ōshiro reappear in “Spirit Recalling” as the village physician, but the setting—an unidentified, yet familiar (to readers of Medoruma) village—forms the larger textual space in which the author focuses again on the supine body of one villager whom he connects to the Battle through key flashbacks. “Spirit Recalling”, a work that recounts the failed attempts of Uta, an elderly woman invested with spiritual power to summon back the ‘dropped’ spirit of a middle aged man named Kōtarō whom she loves as dearly as a son, won Medoruma the Kawabata Prize for its skillful depiction of Okinawan beliefs. As in “Droplets”, Medoruma here wages a battle between two forces. Rather than depict a clash between public and private memory, Medoruma pits the indomitable weight of tradition against those mechanized forces that have come to erode long held communal values.

Fond of sake and the samisen, like Tokushō, Kōtarō, married with two children, is a rather ordinary man, though uncommonly prone to the dislodging of his spirit that accounts for his lying inert on a sick-bed through the narrative present. As she has so many times in the past, Uta, who serves as the village shaman, labors to summon back to Kōtarō’s body his willful spirit. Up to this point, the plot is indistinguishable from earlier stories containing references to ‘dropped spirits’ such as those written by Ōshiro Tatsuhiro. Medoruma tweaks the formulaic ‘dropped-then-recovered spirit’ motif by colorfully filling the cavernous void left by Kōtarō’s spirit with an enormous island crab (*āman*) that makes the male body its abode. A startling predator with fierce pincers, the crusty crab figurally rends the superficially smooth aspect of contemporary Okinawan society. As the story unfolds, the narrative retreats into the past where we learn that, during the Battle, Uta and Kōtarō’s mother, Omito, stole away one night from the safety of the caves to hunt for food. Spying the eggs of a sea turtle, Omito began to collect them for sustenance just minutes before she was killed by artillery fire. Uta witnessed a sea turtle enter the ocean that tragic night in 1945, and it is a sea turtle she sees again when she follows Kōtarō’s spirit to the ocean shore where it sits gazing at the vast beyond.

Though he does not use the Okinawan term, the great expanse that transfixes Kōtarō is surely the paradise for the dead known locally as *nirai kanai*.¹³ One of the clearest tensions in “Spirit Recalling” is the

¹³ According to the *Kōjien* (5th ed.), *nirai kanai* is a paradise believed by Okinawa and Amami islanders to exist far beyond the ocean. William Lebra defines the term,

struggle between the shred of life still remaining in Kōtarō's form and the cavern of death in which his mother, Omīto, and thousands of other Battle victims lie. In another of his bleak conclusions, Medoruma shows that the distant shore of death has a greater pull on Kōtarō's wandering spirit than do Uta's well-attested powers. In Uta's failure to shield Kōtarō from the clutches of death—represented through the symbol of Omīto, bifurcated into the twin forms of hermit crab and sea turtle—Medoruma's pessimism is unmistakable. Kōtarō's eventual death underscores a perennial point of Medoruma's that tradition cannot but crumble before the atrocities of the twentieth-century. Unlike Ōshiro's "Turtleback Tombs", in which Ushi's dying prayers suggest that she and other victims of the Battle will enjoy an afterlife with their ancestors, Medoruma shows that war vitiates Okinawa's traditional belief system.

In the opening passage of "Spirit Recalling", which seems unrelated to the story's darker theme of war's impact on the psyche, the narrator dwells on a small detail—the waning tradition of morning tea drinking—a custom that, like spirit recalling, has fallen by the wayside in the wake of modernization:

Sitting on the veranda of a room left wide open, snorting at the radio exercise music that flowed from the civic hall, Uta put a lump of brown sugar in her mouth and sipped hot tea while watching the garden border, moist with morning dew, brighten vividly, infused with sunlight. Even though it was said that old folks had, since early times, boiled water and warmed their bodies with hot tea first thing in the morning, at the beginning of April, the village's education council members and officers of the Senior Citizens' Association started a joint radio exercise program for seniors and children in front of the civic hall, blathering that it would "promote interaction between kids and old folks" and "encourage people to keep early hours". For an entire month, Uta's friend from the Senior Citizens' Association would come by dressed in awful looking sports gear. No matter how many times her friend invited her along, Uta would say, "I won't go" and continue with her ritual of morning tea (Medoruma 1999: 7).

Though the number of senior participants dips after a retired friend of Uta's slumps to his death following a bout of 'healthy' morning radio exercise, soon afterward, crowds of elderly return to the civic hall

which he romanizes *Nirē kanē*, or *Girē kanē*, based on local dialects, as follows: "A name found in early accounts, said to be an island in the eastern seas, the place of origin of the Okinawan people". See Lebra 1966: 221.

for more rousing national calisthenics. From this subtle aside on the rapid disappearance of morning tea under the onslaught of centralized culture, Medoruma segues to the heart of story, which underscores another absence—that of faith in contemporary times.

In a dramatic showdown, the collective will of villagers who circle Kōtarō's bed to shield him from the intrusive lens of cameras held by two mainland filmmakers shooting on location in Okinawa locks horns with Uta, who belatedly arrives on the scene to help Kōtarō. The narrative's far-fetched, tragic-comedic climax occurs when the island crab, startled by camera flashes, scurries inside Kōtarō's mouth and lodges itself in his throat causing Kōtarō's untimely death. In a fit of rage, Uta, who has cared for Kōtarō since Omito's death, lunges after the crab, but to no avail. Finally, a fellow villager is able to hack the elusive crab to pieces with a scoop and hoe just seconds after Uta realizes that the feisty crab must be a reincarnation of Omito, and that it, like the sea turtle, signals, through a reunion of mother and son in death, a restoration in the natural world.

The intensity with which the villagers fight to kill the crab stems not from the kind of fierce loyalty to Kōtarō that Uta possesses, but rather out of fear that, if the cameramen were to document the odd presence of a crab making its home in an Okinawan man, a lucrative hotel construction project would be shelved, leaving the village economically vulnerable. Medoruma uses strong language directly aimed at mainland readers to indicate Uta's wrath toward the cameramen after Kōtarō and the crab die, whereupon she proceeds to smash their cameras: "Keep what you saw here in your heart, do you hear? If not, you can bet that this old lady's coming all the way to the mainland to kill you" (*ibid*: 42). These haunting words contain a pointed critique of the mass media's infiltration of village life, alluded to in the story's opening radio exercise scene and driven home in the climax.

As in "Droplets", a semblance of order returns to the village following the expulsion of the predatory crab, yet the story delivers no moral victory. Medoruma's anti-hero, Kōtarō, dies; hotel construction will surely continue apace; formations of efficient groups of children, seniors, educators, and village officials will march lock step in time to precise instructions delivered nationally by an NHK radio broadcaster.¹⁴ The story's poignant conclusion, in which Uta is left bereft on

¹⁴ NHK, an abbreviation for Nihon hōsō kyōkai, or Japan Broadcasting Corporation, is Japan's quasi-national broadcaster.

the shore after Kōtarō's death, magnifies in its final line the full impact of mechanization, whether in the form of light morning exercise or heavy artillery fire:

Uta stood on the shore and looked around her. The leaves of trees on the shore swayed slightly, and she could hear the sound of hermit crabs clambering through the thickets. She was alone on the shore, where a row of trees formed a black wall, guarding the village from the ocean. Assailed suddenly by a surge of unbearable loneliness, Uta stepped into the water and walked as the waves lapped her ankles. Sea fireflies alighted and disappeared in the ripples. The ocean was gentle and warm. Coming to a stop, Uta looked out to sea, her hands clasped. However, her prayer reached nowhere (*ibid.*: 45).

Yet again, one's expectations are betrayed as the logic of this fable-like story refuses to grant Uta the one wish that would permit her to continue in her role as the village priestess. Medoruma beguiles his readers with clever contrivances—a certified healer, a mythic sea turtle, a predatory hermit crab—yet neither Uta nor the sea creatures are ever securely attached to any convincing symbolic meaning. Nor, in the end, are they any match for the war that engulfs them.

Considering that they are narratives of war, “Droplets” and “Spirit Recalling” make for surprisingly enjoyable reading, due in large part to Medoruma's irreverent ploys. To be sure, ingenious inventions such as drops of water trickling from the toe of an impossibly large, gourd-shaped leg, or a lusty crab staking its territory in a human body serve to entertain; they also force one out of conventional ways of thinking about war, memory, and identity. Deep beneath the surface comedy of the texts lies a tension that Medoruma claims is the essence of literature, at least in the writing he most admires by Nakagami Kenji, Ōe Kenzaburō, and Murakami Ryū (Medoruma and Ikezawa 1997: 185–6). One is struck by the full force of unresolved tension in “Droplets” when Tokushō seethes with anger in a confrontation with his fallen comrade Ishimine, asking, “Don't you know how much I've suffered these past fifty years?” (Medoruma 2000: 281). Tension also comes to the fore in “Spirit Recalling” when Uta threatens to kill the cameramen who have come to document a village secret. In both stories cultural memory, that suspect version of history which the island projects to others in its assertion of group identity, clashes with a different kind of memory, one that is contestatory, idiosyncratic, political. Uta destroys the cameramen's film because what for the men is a priceless shot

that reveals to the mainland an unauthorized, hidden glimpse of Okinawa is for Uta her past. In short, the tension that lies at the heart of Medoruma's battle narratives rises from the question of who owns memory—Tokushō or the Himeyuri? Uta or NHK? While Medoruma gives voice to the former in each case, these stories show clear tensions between and among local and national forces as they vie to narrate the past.

Circuits of Memory in "Tree of Butterflies"

One of the longest and most harrowing of Medoruma's battle narratives is "Tree of Butterflies". Published in 2000, this story relates the deep and abiding love a dying old woman named Gozei has for a man named Shōsei, who, last seen in the midst of war, is presumed dead. After a long absence, Yoshiaki, the story's protagonist, finds himself in his hometown where his arrival coincides with the town's harvest festival. As the annual festivities take place, Yoshiaki is slowly drawn toward traditions in which he had long been uninterested. These include music, dance, and the performance of melodramatic but beloved plays that depict rampant prewar discrimination toward Okinawans. The connection between Yoshiaki's quest for self and Gozei's love is faint, but it becomes more distinct as the work unfolds. Ultimately, it is Yoshiaki's ties to Gozei and Shōsei's generation that emerge as Medoruma's primary concern. The transmission of memory, ever problematic, particularly when related to trauma, was a raging issue among Okinawan intellectuals as the new millennium drew near, and one that clearly informs Medoruma's writing of "Tree of Butterflies".

Two separate but related debates that contribute to a fuller understanding of Medoruma's work filled the pages of local and national newspapers in 1999 and 2000. As both involve identity politics, they are naturally quite complex; here, I sketch only pertinent details to amplify tensions readers, beguiled by Medoruma's absorbing story, might easily miss. The first controversy, centering on proposed changes for Okinawa's new Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum, which opened in April 2000, bore heavily on the issue of cultural memory. In short, committee members who had since 1996 drawn up guidelines for the museum's designs and exhibit captions were treated to a shock on 11

August 1999 when *Ryukyu News* reported that the museum's content had been changed without the committee's knowledge.¹⁵ LDP Governor Inamine Keiichi's defeat of Ōta Masahide in 1998 ushered in a far more conservative administration, which sought early on to tone down what it perceived as inflammatory content in the museum's exhibits. This whitewashing of material included the removal of a gun from a proposed exhibit on the daily lives of civilian refugees. The display was to have portrayed a Japanese soldier commanding a mother at gunpoint to stifle her child's cries. Also airbrushed out of the designs was a Japanese soldier who was to appear in a cave scene in which he handed an injured soldier cyanide-laced milk. Further changes were made in terminology. "Sacrifice" (*gisei*) replaced "massacre" (*gyakusatsu*); "war of attrition" (*jikyūsen*) replaced "sacrificed stone strategy" (*suteishi sakusen*); and "Asia-Pacific War" (*Ajia-Taiheiyo sensō*) replaced "The Fifteen Years War" (*jūgo-nen sensō*). Understandably, many Okinawans were outraged by the fact that a peace museum in Okinawa was itself now part of a national attempt (as noted in the 1982 school textbook controversy) to conceal the facts of Japanese wartime violence toward Okinawans.¹⁶ Eventually the debate died down as Inamine bowed to public pressure and allowed the original displays with some compromise (Figal 2003: 91–4).

The second debate concerned a joint proposal commonly referred to as the "Okinawa Initiative". This initiative was presented at a conference in March 2000 by three University of the Ryukyus professors—Takara Kurayoshi, Ōshiro Tsuneo, and Maeshiro Morisada—each a key player in Governor Inamine's administration. As Julie Yonetani states, the Initiative "constituted an attempt to articulate an Okinawan historical and political position more in concert with the aims of the U.S.-Japan security partnership and Japanese government policy" (Yonetani 2003: 246).¹⁷ What angered so many about the professors' proposal was that underlying the steps they outlined for Okinawa's future economic success was an undeniable acquiescence to the national policy of accepting the bases that former Governor Ōta had

¹⁵ Gerald Figal discusses the Peace Memorial Museum controversy in the context of his overview of the peace movement in Okinawa. See Figal 2003: 65–98.

¹⁶ For details of the 1982 textbook controversy, see Ienaga 1993–94: 113–33.

¹⁷ For an analysis of both the Initiative and the ongoing base problems, see Inoue 2002: 246–67. For an in-depth view of the military base issue, see Inoue 2006.

vehemently opposed at least since the 1995 schoolgirl rape.¹⁸ Not only did the Initiative accept the idea that Okinawa would shoulder the preponderance of bases in Japan, it also sanctioned the construction of a new base in Nago, which a majority of residents opposed in spite of massive financial compensation promised them (*ibid.*: 251). The Initiative, along with the government's continued national cash-for-bases policy and its selection of Nago as the site for the 2000 G-8 summit, was, Yonetani explains, a strategy to "'absorb' Okinawans' sense of identity and desire for political autonomy" (*ibid.*).

Without a doubt, Medoruma has emerged as the most prominent intellectual to voice his dismay before the conservative turn of tide that has swept Okinawa in recent years. The steady stream of political essays published by Medoruma since 1999 effectively quells any doubt as to his preeminence in matters of public concern. Like Ōe Kenzaburō and Nakagami Kenji, Medoruma expends creative energy in writing compelling fiction, all the while fighting for deeply felt political causes. Given his longstanding eschewing of the public eye, Medoruma's decision to abandon his reclusive life in remote Miyako Island to take a teaching position in Nago could not have been easy. His return to northern Okinawa, where he spent his childhood, marked a turning point in the author's life, one that has become increasingly decisive with every new essay that details his efforts to keep the idyllic north free of the U.S. military presence that has bedeviled central islanders. While even the most neutral American reader might bristle at Medoruma's furious lashing out against U.S. military bases, his and many other Okinawans' opposition to the bases reflects resentment toward

¹⁸ On September 4, 1995, a twelve-year-old Okinawan schoolgirl was gang-raped by three American servicemen in a sugar-cane field on the outskirts of Kin village in Okinawa prefecture. The incident, horrific in itself, was compounded by the fact that it occurred during the closing days of a summer that marked the fiftieth-year ceremonies commemorating the end of the War. The timing of the incident, the girl's young age, and the geopolitically entangled location of the crime all contributed to capture the imagination of local, national, and international audiences. Six weeks later, on October 21, in one of the largest protests in the island's postwar history, 85,000 Okinawans gathered together to rally against the American presence. Governor Ōta Masahide, buoyed by this unprecedented show of support, refused to sign the renewal of base leases, confounding officials in both Tokyo and Washington. In large cities throughout Japan, thousands protested to show their sympathy for the plight of Okinawans unduly burdened by military bases. Abroad, the rape of the young girl was likened to the rape of the island prefecture, not only by Americans but also by Japanese who first invaded the region in 1609, annexed it in 1879, and sacrificed the island in 1945. For an excellent in-depth article on this incident, see Angst 2003: 135–60.

the government in Tokyo as much as it does toward officials in Washington.¹⁹ Indeed, as savvy politicians have long recognized, cries over the “Okinawa (i.e. base) problem” (*Okinawa mondai*) have generally resulted in outflows of cash and public works projects from Tokyo. This point was driven home by Inamine when he emerged victorious over Ōta largely because he pointed out how economically vulnerable Okinawa would be without the resources the national government had curtailed in their zeal to punish the former governor for refusing to sign leases that guaranteed the renewal of bases. It was into this political quagmire that Medoruma stepped when he left quiet Miyako for once quiet Nago.

Inamine employed a convincing argument to support his gubernatorial design choices for the new Peace Museum. His assertion that there existed multiple interpretations of the Battle may not have won him the changes in exhibit content he sought, but the Governor’s reasoning unwittingly served to support Medoruma’s fictional enterprise. That is, as Medoruma fills in what Inamine strategically leaves out of representations of the past, he too is putting forth a different interpretation of the Battle. Inamine’s blatant censorship did not stop with attempts to remove indications of violence toward civilians by Japanese soldiers, or with changes in terminology. He also sought to sweep from memory less known atrocities that occurred in so called ‘comfort stations’ by pressing for the removal of a map that indicated their placement throughout wartime Okinawa.²⁰

It is precisely this aspect of the Battle to which Medoruma devotes his attention in “Tree of Butterflies” through a gripping exploration of female psychology in the character of Gozei, who serves as a sex slave to Japanese military officers during the war and as a prostitute to American soldiers during the Occupation. Lest one think that his is yet another portrayal of Okinawa-as-victim, Medoruma pointedly

¹⁹ I should add that Medoruma also points his fingers at Okinawans who enjoy financial gain from land leased to the U.S. military. Local profiteering serves as a backdrop for Medoruma’s 2006 novel, *Rainbow Bird*.

²⁰ In his essays Medoruma has often referred to the extreme violence Okinawans displayed toward Okinawans during wartime. While this type of cruelty is less known than the ill treatment of Okinawans by Japanese soldiers, it is not unrelated in that Okinawans lashing out at their fellow islanders may have done so to show their loyalty to the state. Medoruma voices through Gozei his recognition of such cruelty in “Tree of Butterflies”, and describes in his essays his own mother’s negative experiences of being denied shelter by other Okinawans during the Battle.

includes references to Korean sex slaves, below Gozei in hierarchy, given that their sexual services are restricted to lower-ranking enlisted men. While Gozei is a thoroughly developed character who gives voice to what politicians such as Inamine have tried to suppress, Medoruma characteristically leaves some stones unturned by placing side by side with Gozei's story the untold tragedies of unnamed Korean sex slaves. As in many of his other stories, Medoruma is careful to acknowledge discrimination within Okinawa, even as he writes more broadly of the wartime state's ill treatment of Okinawans, its second-class citizens.²¹

That Medoruma is attempting to write unwritten stories is clear once Yoshiaki begins to investigate his family lineage after Gozei mistakes him three times for Shōsei. As he learns, Shōsei is a distant relative of his, and it is Yoshiaki's resemblance to the older man that confuses Gozei, who is slipping into senility. A broken but still coherent stream of scenes from the past intrudes violently into the narrative present revealing the horrors of Gozei's life as a sex worker employed at the Morning Sun (*Asahi*) 'inn' where Japanese soldiers resided during the war. Shōsei, who was thought to be feeble-minded, nonetheless outwitted the authorities by falsifying an injury in order to avoid conscription. One of the few civilian men left in the village, he worked as a servant at the inn. In the course of their employment, Gozei and Shōsei became lovers. Their only relief from harsh servitude came in stolen moments savored under a tree clustered with masses of yellow blossoms that look like butterflies from a distance. Yoshiaki learns these particulars from a ninety-year old gentleman named Uchima who had previously served as ward chief. In a telling line, the narrator discloses that none of these details are recorded in the "Village History" that Uchima proudly shows Yoshiaki during their conversation. The perilous nature of these memories is underscored as one is made aware that even the orally transmitted history of the ostracized pair would have been lost had Yoshiaki not promptly queried Uchima about his ties to Shōsei. Well advanced in age, Uchima is, until Yoshiaki hears the tale, the sole repository of memories deliberately left unmentioned in village history. Just as Governor Inamine excises from public memory any disturbing hint of comfort stations in the exhibits of the Peace

²¹ Recently, Medoruma has begun to write about the centrality of war in his family. His mother's experience, in particular, taught Medoruma that Okinawans were both victim *and* aggressor in the Battle. See Medoruma 2005.

Museum, so too does Uchima leave for posterity only sanctioned memories secured in his prized “Village History”.

In the story’s final battle scene the soldiers evacuate the inn to take up shelter in a nearby cave where they remain trapped with Japanese, Okinawan, and Korean sex slaves, and Shōsei. As tensions heighten, the soldiers’ already callous behavior worsens, resulting in one among them taking Shōsei, who is suspected as a spy for speaking in dialect, from the cave at gunpoint. Inside, Gozei lies in the mud sexually degraded. She is unable to move, let alone rise to Shōsei’s defense. Despite her repeated wish to die, Gozei is treated infinitesimally better by Japanese soldiers than either the Korean sex workers or Shōsei. The guilt she suffers for this partiality remains with Gozei for decades. After the war ends, she makes the imprudent decision to remain in the village so that Shōsei, his whereabouts unknown, would know where to find her. Disparaged both for her sexual involvement with both Japanese and American soldiers, Gozei is a social pariah, yet she stubbornly refuses to start a new life elsewhere because of her deep feelings for Shōsei. She spends her remaining years living in a hut no bigger than a goat shed, eking out a living by collecting and selling aluminum cans. In a particularly haunting scene of Yoshiaki’s recollections of childhood, he painfully recalls the harsh treatment meted out to Gozei after she returned Yoshiaki, who had been lost, to his family. Owing to her past, virtually all the adults suspected foul play and roundly censured her. For months afterward, Gozei avoided the accusing eyes of the villagers. Violence among fellow villagers, hinted at in many of Medoruma’s early stories such as “Chronicle of a School of Fish”, lurks in the shadows of “Tree of Butterflies”, surfacing most clearly in the villagers’ open rebuke of Gozei based simply on her past (Medoruma 2001b: 182).

Gozei’s declining mental state leads villagers to secure a room for her in a nursing facility where Yoshiaki is her sole visitor. In the three-week span of the narrative, Yoshiaki has come to a finer understanding of himself through encounters with Gozei who awakens in him repressed memories and a desire to know more about his family and culture. In his first brush with Gozei at the harvest festival, Yoshiaki realizes that “the music of the island in which he had been born and raised flowed through his blood” (*ibid*: 223–5). And, as Gozei lies bedridden at the story’s conclusion, Yoshiaki painfully recalls that the reason he has always detested brown sugar, the traditional island sweet, is because of its association with Gozei who, after rescuing him as a child,

had given him a lump of sugar to calm his fears. It is also as she lies dying that readers are presented with Medoruma's skilled rendering of Gozei's heart-wrenching psychology, which shows that despite her imminent death, Shōsei, and by extension, Yoshiaki, remain etched in Gozei's mind:

"Gozei! Gozei!" Shōsei called from far off. No, he was very close. Bathed in moonlight, the clusters of yellow butterflies on the hibiscus tree seemed on the verge of taking flight. When she went in the shade of the tree she was immediately drawn in by a strong force, and for an achingly short time, his hot tongue played at her throat, and his firm left hand pressed her back. She buried her face in his chest, and, choked with the scent of the forest and tide, she whispered in his ear, "I never thought a woman like me could feel this way being held by a man". She gently held his hands and stroked his hair. "Gozei! Gozei!", he said in a voice she could hear from the depths of the darkness. "It's ok", she said, recalling how Shōsei embraced her, coated in sweat down to the innermost folds of his body by the skin-clinging muggy night air. I had already oozed into the dirt. The Korean woman was saying something. She pressed something in my mouth. It was a piece of brown sugar. My saliva overflowed and I felt the thin shred of life inside me grow. "I'm ok now, thanks". The woman grasped my hand and stroked my fingers. Sensations throughout my body abated, and even the sharp pain in my pelvis went away. "Gozei! Gozei!" Kneeling down, beaten Shōsei raised his head to look at me. A shadow stood at the entrance to the cave, his back to the moonlight. "Ah. You know all about what kind of a person I am". I could see the figure of a girl walking along the road to a warehouse, carrying a single bundle wrapped in cloth. "Go back. Don't take another step". I couldn't do it. No matter how narrow or twisted the path, even if it led to a dead-end, I just kept going. "Gozei! Gozei!" Pressing my forehead to Shōsei's chest, I stared at the hibiscus flowers that had just fallen to the ground, and laughed aloud. Opening the front of my kimono, I listened for the voice that sent blood rushing through my body and warmed it so. Turning my eyes away from the "I" that ridiculed me, I prayed that the special time would continue only under this tree. "He's got to be alive somewhere. How do you know that he's dead when you haven't seen it with your own eyes? Do you really believe he's dead? Is that the reason you've lived by the hibiscus tree?" Waiting for him... pulling a cart, collecting empty cans and selling them to the brewery for a few coins to live on.... A road so glitteringly white from limestone dust I can't keep my eyes open. I'll never walk that road again. Wearing rubber sandals, my feet tainted white. The figure of a young boy crying at the roadside appears before me. For the first time ever I held a child who clung to me, crying. The feel of his thin arms around my neck. I never thought my own heart could hurt so much at hearing his cries in my ear. "Is this what children smell like?" I thought, pressing

my nose against his thin chest. I felt awful that my washcloth was dirty, but that's all I had, so I used it to wipe his face and the back of his neck, then put a piece of brown sugar in his mouth. Thinking that I mustn't frighten the child who had finally stopped crying, I put on an unfamiliar smile, seated him in the cart, and took him back to town. Afterward his parents gave me hell, but that brief time was the happiest I've had since I began living in the village. If only I could have had your child... "Gozei! Gozei!" Do I have any cause for regret? In the end, my body and soul become viscous and murky, and, like the river near the hibiscus tree, I mingle with all the ephemera in this world to become one with the ocean. Trickling from my palm, seeping out of my hair, coursing over my thighs, flowing from my eyes and ears, from my slack cells, one by one, matter dances in the air, like coral eggs. At last, a spirit emerges from my mouth as from a hollow tree, and, taking a butterfly shape, it flutters in the room, then escapes through the glass window, dancing toward the moonlit sky (*ibid*: 226).

Encapsulated in this remarkable stream of consciousness is no less than the life story of Gozei into which the narrator also embeds the critical and formative experiences of Shōsei and Yoshiaki.

Just as deftly as the narrator inter weaves the life stories of Gozei, Shōsei, and Yoshiaki, culminating in poignant portraits of three individual selves, so too does he craftily suggest the impossibility of constructing an impenetrable self. Returning home from his visit to the nursing facility, Yoshiaki mentions in passing that his father might rewrite the faded characters inscribed on the memorial tablet dedicated to Shōsei. In the story's revealing last line, Yoshiaki's father, taciturn throughout the story, vehemently opposes Yoshiaki's suggestion:

Since there were no bones for Shōsei, ten years or so after the war, I went to the beach with my father, picked up several fragments of coral that resembled bones, put them in a new urn, and placed it in the family tomb (*ibid*).

Washed by the tide, the smooth coral fragments that lie one on top of the other at the bottom of the urn in the dark tomb, serve as a powerful yet contingent substitute for Shōsei, whose brutal wartime experiences, together with his lover Gozei's, would otherwise be expunged from history. It is precisely such perilous memories, which wash over fractured shards of identity, like tides over coral, that impel Medoruma to continue writing about a war he never experienced, but which he knows full well has not ended.

Since his debut in 1984, Medoruma has written insistently about Okinawa generally, and the Battle of Okinawa in particular, despite the

fact that he was born fifteen years after the end of the War. The small size of the island prefecture, coupled with the huge civilian casualties the Battle exacted, make the fierce ground conflict the central theme of postwar Okinawan fiction. Whereas earlier writers, such as Ōshiro Tatsuhiro, wrote of individuals in the midst of the grim Battle, Medoruma extends the tragedy of 1945 to the present day, showing clearly the residual effects of war in contemporary Okinawa. By so doing, he forges a link between himself, spared from war, and the vast majority of his family and acquaintances who lived through it and then, more often than not, repressed their darkest war memories. Not only does Medoruma imaginatively draw the past into the present, he does so by using to comic effect the physical bodies of his characters. Despite the wry humor of his works, these bodies are solemn and contemplative spaces through which Medoruma engages in a never-ending war.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

FRAMING THE RUINS: THE DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHS OF YAMAHATA YŌSUKE (NAGASAKI, AUGUST 10, 1945)*

Mark Silver

Alongside overtly artistic media such as paintings, sketches, novels, short stories, poems or feature films, wartime documentary photographs look decidedly minimalist by comparison. The documentary photograph eliminates verbal language, memory, and forgetting (though not, perhaps, repression) from the act of representation, obscures the role of creative intention by rendering it susceptible to happenstance, trades away the diachronic element of narrative for a relentless insistence on a single instant in time, and seemingly banishes imagination and metaphor by means of the camera's mechanically enforced materialism. Documentary photography thus provides something of a limit case in the representation of war and its aftermath, a case in which we might expect art and rhetoric to be at their most severely attenuated.

It is precisely this power of the photograph as a seemingly unmediated sign that the critic Roland Barthes points to in his most extended meditation on photography, *Camera Lucida*, when he describes the magnetic pull he felt as a child from a photograph of a slave market:

[T]he slavemaster, in a hat, standing; the slaves, in loincloths, sitting. I repeat: a photograph, not a drawing or engraving; for my horror and my fascination as a child came from this: that there was a *certainty* such a thing had existed: not a question of exactitude, but of reality: the historian was no longer the mediator, slavery was given without mediation, the fact was established *without method* (Barthes 1981: 80).

Barthes goes on to describe this effect of photography in strikingly physical terms: “the photograph is”, he observes, “literally an emanation

* James McFarland, James Austin, Michael Simon and George Silver generously commented on draft of this essay. I am grateful to them for their suggestions.

of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here. . . ." (*ibid*).

Barthes captures in these memories and musings what is perhaps the distinctive characteristic of the photographic medium. Even if one stops well short of naïve belief in the 'objectivity' of documentary photographs (a naïveté that Barthes implicitly underlines in his evocation of the innocence of childhood), such photographs still command our attention primarily as denotative signs—that is, as signs whose meaning derives from their status as physical analogs of the things or events photographed. The alternative possibility—that we read the photograph as a connotative sign, or one whose meaning derives from the associations evoked by the photographer's particular treatment of the subject—is overshadowed by the documentary photograph's powerful evocation of 'reality'. In other words, we are accustomed to thinking of documentary photographs as being primarily about what they depict, not how they depict it. Indeed, it is part of the mystique of the documentary photograph that it seems to subordinate the 'treatment' of its subject so completely to the imperative to create an evidentiary record. The police photograph of a corpse snapped at the scene of a crime, to take an extreme example, shows us that there was in fact a corpse, that it lay in a particular position, that it was bludgeoned or shot in particular places. Its purpose has nothing to do with art. So too, it would seem, with photographs taken under the duress of combat or as records of its aftermath. Although we are alive to the possibility that such photographs may be colored by a particular political viewpoint, and that their capture requires a certain 'artfulness' in the sense of professional technique, it takes some mental effort—a shifting of registers—to think of them in aesthetic terms.

And yet the denotative function of a documentary photograph does not always—or even usually—exhaust its meaning. For one thing, the photograph's status as 'document' is at least in part a result of its own rhetorical signals to the viewer, signals that are given through nothing other than its treatment of the subject. The use of either natural lighting or of a single powerful frontal flash, a preference for black and white as opposed to color, a graininess of texture, subjects who have been caught unaware rather than posed, the failure to exclude 'extraneous' elements from the frame, and a caption that connects the image to a specific time and place—all of these elements belong to a rhetoric of the documentary image that emerged in the late 1920s with the advent of the handheld camera and high-speed film, and with the

ascendancy of professional photojournalists such as as Erich Salomon, Alfred Eisenstadt, André Kertész, and Martin Munkácsi.¹ In his analysis of Japanese post-atomic bomb writings, John Treat has observed that “the eye-witness subject is itself a rhetorical position”; this seems no less true for documentary photographs than it does for testimonial literature (Treat 1995: 49).²

But in addition to the rhetorical elements of the documentary photograph that announce and verify its own status as a ‘document’, such photographs may also include additional rhetorical elements that result in a blurring of the lines we are accustomed to drawing between documents and art. Another oft-quoted essay by Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message”, is seminal in its identification of what he calls the “photographic paradox”, which he describes as the “co-existence [in photographs] of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the ‘art’, or the treatment, or the ‘writing’, or the rhetoric of the photograph)” (Barthes 1977: 19). Naomi Rosenblum, offering a variant paradox of her own, has observed, “it is a paradox that the most memorable documentary photographs are those that transcend the specifics of time, place, and purpose” (Rosenblum 1997: 188). That is to say, it is those documentary photographs whose connotative, rhetoric-derived meanings remain active that shape our memory of historical events most compellingly. One thinks, for example, of Joe Rosenthal’s Pulitzer-Prize winning photograph of six soldiers raising the United States flag atop Mt. Suribachi on Iwo Jima, with its powerful evocation of the neoclassical lines of painters such as John Singleton Copley.³ Such photographs perhaps attain their iconic status because they seem to connect the raw material of their subject to a larger set of cultural, and therefore communal, conventions and meanings. As Barthes has intriguingly observed,

¹ A concise discussion of the work of these and other European photojournalists, including reproductions of a number of their images, is contained in Rosenblum 1997: 466–76.

² Treat also notes, in his discussion of what he calls “the documentary fallacy”, that “documentary techniques, while they differ in approach and thus confirm their arbitrary (in the sense that language, too, is ‘arbitrary’) nature, are united in their appeal to rhetoric no less than that of any other variety of literary language” (Treat 1995: 137).

³ Rosenthal’s image recalls, for example, Copley’s treatment of outstretched arms and bent, weight-bearing legs in his painting *Death of Major Pierson* (1782–84), which, as Robert Rosenblum has noted, turns a death on the battlefield into something akin to ballet (Rosenblum and Janson 1984: 18). Copley’s painting is reproduced in Rosenblum as color plate 1.

“photographic connotation...is an institutional activity; in relation to society overall, its function is to integrate man, to reassure him” (Barthes 1977: 31).⁴

Barthes’ observation here is highly suggestive, but it is also overly narrow. His assertion that “integration” and “reassurance” are the necessary results of the processes of connotation neglects the possibility that a photograph’s gestures toward the integration of its subject matter into a community of meaning may in fact result in fragmentation and trauma.⁵ It is such an outcome that this essay attempts to demonstrate in the photographs of Yamahata Yōsuke, a Japanese army photographer who was sent into Nagasaki the day after it was bombed with orders to document the condition of the city and its people. The limitations of his view notwithstanding, Barthes’ basic insight that photographic connotation is no less significant than photographic denotation—in spite of the documentary photo’s compelling power to focus our attention on the latter—suggests a point of departure for the analysis of Yamahata Yōsuke’s Nagasaki images.

The usefulness of such a point of departure is validated by a remark of Akira Mizuta Lippit, one of the few critics who has written about Yamahata’s images. Lippit notes that “as a presentation of the facts at Nagasaki, Yamahata’s photographs serve as documentation. Yet something slips, surpasses, the frame of the document. Something speaks

⁴ Barthes’ essay is, strictly speaking, about what he calls “the press photograph”, rather than the documentary photograph, but his discussion of denotative and connotative meanings applies equally to both.

⁵ Barthes’ essay touches on this question when it makes passing mention of “absolutely traumatic images”, which he suggests are the only images that might in fact be capable of existing in a state of “pure denotation, a *this-side of language*”. As Barthes notes, however, “truly traumatic photographs are rare, for...*the photographer had to be there*. Assuming this (which, in fact, is already a connotation), the traumatic photograph (fires, shipwrecks, catastrophes, violent deaths, all captured from ‘life as lived’) is the photograph about which there is nothing to say; the shock photo is by structure insignificant: no value, no knowledge, at the limit no verbal categorization can have a hold on the process instituting the signification. One could imagine a kind of law: the more direct the trauma, the more difficult the connotation...” (Barthes 1977: 30–1, italics in original). This suggests that, under Barthes’ definition, Yamahata’s photos are not “absolutely traumatic images” since Yamahata was not present to photograph the instant of trauma itself, but (as explained below) was dispatched after the fact with the express mission of photographing the ruins for propagandistic purposes. The proposition that the resulting images are not “truly traumatic” is thoroughly counter-intuitive and even on its face morally repugnant, but it is technically correct for the purposes of Barthes’ analysis. It also squares with the persistently connotative quality of the photos themselves, about which it is hardly true that “there is nothing to say”.

in excess of Nagasaki....” (Lippit 1995: 28). Attempting to characterize this slippage, Lippit uses terms that are wholly consonant with Barthes’ distinction between denotative and connotative meanings: Yamahata’s series of Nagasaki photographs, he says, “exceeds its function as evidence”, at least intermittently displaying “the indices of art” (*ibid*: 27).

Following the leads provided by Barthes and Lippit, we can begin to describe the role of visual rhetoric in some of Yamahata’s work, and to demonstrate this rhetoric’s importance in what might at first seem the most mechanical and artless of genres for the representation of war. If one attends to the rhetorical elements of Yamahata’s photographs, it becomes clear that they are not only documents of physical trauma. They are that, without question, but the photographs also establish an emerging iconography of the post-atomic world, an iconography in which the bomb dropped on Nagasaki is represented not only as a physically destructive force, but as one that threatens to shatter the communal and ideological codes of meaning that form the very basis of culture.

Yamahata’s images employ, at the connotative level, aesthetic devices that include both a set of internally consistent *sui generis* motifs in the photos themselves and persistent but always fragmentary allusions to previously existing traditions of Christian iconography and Japanese pictorialist and landscape photography. His images thus gesture toward pre-existing traditions of visual representation (and with them, to social, religious, or ideological communities), but Yamahata’s photos ultimately fragment those traditions rather than integrating the bombing into them.

The motifs and allusions operating at the level of connotation in Yamahata’s photographs are not necessarily present by conscious design or positive intention on his part. Indeed, much of the photographs’ effect derives from the sense they create that they are the record of an encounter with things that exceeded the photographer’s own understanding. Yamahata no doubt realized that he was photographing something unprecedented, but he had at best a sketchy knowledge of atomic weaponry, and no knowledge of the sinister presence of the residual radiation that is visible in none of his photos but must disturbingly haunt all of them for any viewer with the benefit of hindsight. Nor could Yamahata know as he worked that the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki would precipitate Japan’s surrender. These meanings of the photographs are only available to us after the fact.

We can, I would like to suggest, look upon the photographs' fragmentary evocations of pre-existing traditions of visual representation in the same way, as meanings that are available at least—and perhaps only—in retrospect. Given the role of happenstance in documentary photography (things may, for example, be included in the frame by accident) the role of the photographer's intention is in any case always murky and seldom determinative. Ultimately it does not matter so much whether Yamahata intended his photographs to evoke particular connotative meanings as it does that his photographs may be read as evoking them. That is sufficient, given the nature of connotation, to activate and demonstrate the photographs' rhetorical component.

To reiterate: in spite of their overtly documentary character, Yamahata's Nagasaki photos confront us with a variety of noteworthy rhetorical elements. Through these elements, his photographs demonstrate the inadequacy of pre-existing modes of visual representation to contextualize the atom bomb. The working of these rhetorical elements, moreover, underlines the surprising degree to which the medium of the wartime documentary photograph can combine the real and the aesthetic.

*The Genesis of Yamahata's Photos and
Their Early Publication History*

On August 10, 1945, the day after the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, Yamahata Yōsuke, then a young propaganda photographer attached to the News and Information Bureau of the Japanese Western Army Corps (*saigun hōdōbu*), was sent to document the devastation caused by the 'new style bomb'. His orders, as he recalled them in a remembrance written six years later, were to "photograph conditions as tragic, and as useful in propaganda against the enemy, as possible" (Yamahata 1952: 24).⁶ Yamahata reached the last operating railway station outside Nagasaki (at Michi-no-o) two hours before dawn, walked south through the hypocenter in the dark, and then began taking photos shortly after sunrise. Working with a handheld Leica camera and 35mm film, Yamahata made in all over one hundred exposures during

⁶ Yamahata's remembrance has been reprinted, together with an English translation by Miryam Sas, in Jenkins 1995: 44–7.

a second, harrowing northerly trek through the incinerated hypocenter and back to the railway station, which he recalls reaching at about three in the afternoon of August 10.⁷

A small number of other photographs taken within a day of the atomic bombings in Japan survive (most notably five exposures made in the streets of Hiroshima on August 6 by Matsushige Yoshito), and at least a score of other Japanese photographers took pictures of the bomb sites and of bomb victims (or, in Japanese, *hibakusha*) in subsequent weeks and months.⁸ But thanks to their combination of immediacy and quantity, Yamahata's images constitute the single most important photographic record we have of the destruction the bombings wrought, whether in Hiroshima or in Nagasaki.

Perhaps as an act of conscience, or perhaps simply as a byproduct of disarray in the military chain of command after the bombings,

⁷ Yamahata recorded these movements in his "Genbaku satsuei memo" (Notes on Photographing the Atomic Bomb: A Memo) (Yamahata 1952: 24). Christopher Beaver and Rupert Jenkins have identified a total of one hundred and nineteen exposures made by Yamahata on August 10, 1945, but as they explain in the notes included in Jenkins's book *Nagasaki Journey*, the quality of his film stock was extremely variable, and a number of the negatives were damaged or eventually lost (although in some cases prints are still extant). See Jenkins 1995: 116-7, which also includes additional technical details about Yamahata's Nagasaki photographs and the digital restorations of them that were made in 1995.

⁸ These other photographers include Hayashi Shigeo, who shot dramatic three-hundred and sixty degree panoramic images of the bombed landscapes in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Miyatake Hajime, whose images focus mainly on the bodies and faces of bomb victims, Shiotsuki Masao, a doctor and medical researcher in Nagasaki who photographed his patients primarily for clinical purposes, Kimura Gon'ichi, who shot color film of victims undergoing treatment at the Ujina Branch of the First Army Hospital in Hiroshima (including a widely reproduced image of a woman's back burned in the pattern of her kimono), Kikuchi Shunkichi, many of whose photographs were also taken in hospitals and at first aid stations, Onuka Masami, who took a series of particularly unflinching images of thermal burn victims at a former army quarantine station on Ninoshima Island in Hiroshima, and Sasaki Yūichirō, perhaps best known for his photographs of apparently uninjured people, including children, walking or standing among the burned and twisted ruins of Hiroshima. A group known as the Association of the Photographers of the Atomic Destruction of Hiroshima numbers no fewer than twenty photographers, both living and dead, in its membership; their photographs and first-person recollections have been collected in Hiroshima genbaku hisai satsueisha no kai (ed.) 1996. Domon Ken's collection *Hiroshima* (Domon 1958) is perhaps the single best-known collection of post-bombing images, but here the photographs were taken years, rather than weeks or months, after the bombing. An extensive selection of most of these and other photographers' work may be found in Ienaga 1993. A handier single volume of representative post-bombing photography from the same publisher is Kuroko and Shimizu 2005. Both volumes also contain a number of Yamahata Yōsuke's images.

Yamahata retained possession of his negatives after reporting back to the News and Information Bureau on August 10, thus preventing their use as propaganda.⁹ Recalling this episode later (and showing a notable change of attitude compared to some of his wartime writings), Yamahata would say that “it was good fortune in the midst of misfortune that the photographs were not developed and disseminated by a desperate military as the final spur to the spirit of Japanese patriotic feeling, or as a demonstration of how to take shelter from a probable subsequent nuclear attack, or put to a similar misguided use” (*ibid.*).¹⁰

When Japan surrendered on August 15, and orders came down to burn all sensitive documents connected with the News and Information Bureau’s operations, Yamahata decided the negatives were too valuable to destroy, and secreted them in the bottom of a bamboo basket to carry them home to Tokyo.¹¹ Once there, through the offices of his father, who operated a prominent commercial photographic studio, Yamahata published a selection of his images in four national newspapers.¹² But it was only a matter of weeks before General MacArthur imposed a strict ban on the dissemination and even the possession of any materials relating to the atomic bombings (Dower 1996: 129). Not until the U.S. Occupation of Japan ended seven years later, and this ban was lifted, did the bulk of Yamahata’s photos reach the public in the form of a book titled *Genbaku no Nagasaki* (Atom-bombed Naga-

⁹ Rupert Jenkins, in his introduction to *Nagasaki Journey*, implies that it was the pricking of Yamahata’s conscience that led him to keep his negatives: “It was, perhaps, in response to...his participation in the military’s efforts to exploit the trauma of Nagasaki that he withheld his film from the News and Information Bureau” (Jenkins 1995: 19). The commentary by Ishii Ayako contained in Yamahata 1998, however, indicates that Yamahata “reported to the News and Information Bureau on the morning of the twelfth” and that he “unveiled the pictures at the customary morning assembly” there (Yamahata 1998: 62, 68).

¹⁰ It seems probable that Yamahata himself initially entertained the hope that his photographs would provide clues about the survivability of nuclear attack. He records in the same reminiscence that as he waited for the light of dawn, he “resolved to photograph the bombing of Nagasaki with two themes in mind: the orders I had been given...and the discovery of the key to solving how to survive in the face of such a tragic reality” (Yamahata: 1952, 24).

¹¹ For mentions of this episode, see Ishii Ayako’s commentary in Yamahata 1998: 62; Hino 1952: 27; and Jenkins 1995: 22n14.

¹² According to Ishii Ayako’s chronology in Yamahata 1998, the pictures appeared in the *Mainichi shinbun* on August 21, 1945, the *Yomiuri hōchi shinbun* on August 23, and the *Asahi shinbun* and *Tokyo shinbun* on August 25 (Yamahata 1998: 68).

saki), published August 15, 1952 (cited in the bibliography as Kitajima 1952).

Roughly two-thirds of this ninety-six page book were taken up by Yamahata's images: these pages depict moonscape-like vistas of smoking hillsides and valleys, corpses charred almost beyond recognition and corpses all too recognizable, the twisted skeletons of factories, the haunting gazes of the wounded and the dying, lines of survivors picking their way through the ruins, rescuers tending to victims under the glare of a hot sun, fathers and mothers cradling bandaged or wounded babies, and—on virtually every page—the variegated jumble of rubble created by the bomb's powerful blast. The book also includes three additional pages of photographs of hospitalized atomic bombing victims taken in 1948 by Shiotsuki Masao (a doctor who had been stationed near Nagasaki when it was bombed), essays by Yamahata, Shiotsuki, Higashi Jun (a writer ordered into Nagasaki together with Yamahata), and the more well-known writer Hino Ashihei (author of the 1938 trilogy *Mugi to heitai* (Wheat and Soldiers), *Tsuchi to heitai* (Earth and Soldiers), and *Hana to heitai* (Flowers and Soldiers), who was attached during the war, like Yamahata, to the News and Information Bureau of the Western Army Corps), as well as sketches by Yamada Eiji, an artist who, like Higashi Jun, was ordered into Nagasaki together with Yamahata. Apart from an issue of *Asahi gurafu* magazine published two weeks earlier, in which eleven photographs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki victims had appeared, the publication of Yamahata's book was for many Japanese the first opportunity to see photographic imagery of the bombings' aftermath.¹³

Thanks in part to the publication of this volume, Yamahata followed in his father's footsteps, becoming one of Japan's most prominent and internationally well-known photographers. A selection of his photographs of Nagasaki was published in the United States in the September 29, 1952 issue of *Life* magazine. And in 1956, G. T. Sun, the Yamahatas' commercial studio, was charged with preparing the prints for Edward Steichen's famed photography exhibit *The Family*

¹³ As John Dower has noted, "In this milieu [of Occupation censorship], where time was so peculiarly warped, the Japanese as a whole did not begin to really *visualize* the human consequences of the bombs in concrete, vivid ways until three or four years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been destroyed", when drawings and paintings by the husband-and-wife team of Iri and Toshi Maruki began to circulate (Dower 1996: 128).



Plate 1. Boy with riceball (Nagasaki, August 10, 1945), Yamahata Yōsuke, courtesy of Yamahata Shōgo/IDG Films

of Man when it came to Japan that year. A waist-up portrait Yamahata had taken in Nagasaki—of a small boy wearing a quilted air raid hood, his head bandaged and his face smudged with dried blood or dirt, looking forlornly at the camera as he holds a rice ball—was included in the exhibit (*pl. no. 1*).¹⁴ This portrait, which was also used on the jacket of Yamahata’s 1952 book, is probably the single most famous photograph he took in his career, and deservedly so. Among the many images Yamahata captured of the shocked faces of our first contemporaries in the post-nuclear age, this one stands out for its power to project the flat intensity of childly incomprehension, an incomprehension that may aptly stand as the most natural response to the bombing of Nagasaki, no matter what one’s age, and no matter how wide the scope of historical knowledge and context one may command with the benefit of hindsight.

¹⁴ The photograph also appears in the exhibition book that was subsequently produced (Steichen 1955: 179) and in Jenkins 1995: 18. (I have provided references throughout to published reproductions of all the images mentioned, even when they are also reproduced here, for the benefit of those who may wish to see larger versions of them.)

Yamahata later took over his father's studio, but his career and his life were cut short in 1966 at the age of forty-eight, when he died of a cancer of the small intestine that was probably a consequence of his exposure to residual radiation in Nagasaki. Yamahata's Nagasaki photographs have enjoyed wide circulation in the years since his death, but critical commentary—apart from the terse captions that sometimes accompany the photos—has been remarkably scant.¹⁵ Yamahata himself was notably reserved on the subject of his photographs, suggesting that he preferred to let them speak for themselves. "I believe it is my duty", he wrote in his remembrance of his mission in Nagasaki, "to maintain my position as the photographer, and to have you the viewers contemplate these photographs with complete freedom, rendering your own judgments on the basis of the camera's starkly recorded data" (Yamahata 1952: 24).

Composition in Yamahata's Photography

An entry Yamahata made in his diary in 1942 suggests both the early depth of his commitment to Japan's wartime goals and his keen awareness of the power of photographic 'data'. "For someone unable to take up a sword and fight", he wrote, "there is not the slightest contradiction in the thought that one will spur on the nation's progress by means of an occupational expertise in which one can make use of a weapon", as he called his camera, "that is not a weapon" (Ishii 1998: 59). And indeed, the black and white images Yamahata made for the Army's News and Information Bureau before being dispatched to Nagasaki are the work of a man who seems to have thoroughly understood the subtly violent potential of photographic composition.

A photo taken in Penang, Malaysia in April of 1942, for example, shows a line of apparently Malaysian children waving Japanese flags. Dominating the central foreground, wearing a white (and therefore eye-catching) blouse, stands a girl who seems to be in particularly high spirits, her left arm akimbo at her waist, her right arm holding a Japanese flag aloft at full arm's length. Upon close inspection, the other

¹⁵ Akira Mizuta Lippit's "Photographing Nagasaki: From Fact to Artefact" and Masafumi Suzuki's "The Atomized City and the Photograph" (both included in Jenkins 1995: 25–9 and 35–42, respectively), together with Jenkins' own introduction to the volume, are the most extensive previous commentaries in English. In Japanese, see Iizawa 1998 and Ishii 1998 (both included in Yamahata 1998).

children near her look, for the most part, rather less enthusiastic, but their faces are obscured by shadows, so that the dominant impression created by the photograph is that of a budding patriotic fervor on the part of the colonized populace for its adoptive Japanese empire (Yamahata 1998, pl. 1 and Jenkins 1995, 110). The photograph was originally published with the caption “Native Children Waving Japanese Flags at the First Imperial Birthday Celebrated in the New Land” (Jenkins 1995: 110).

Children were already a recurring motif in Yamahata’s work in this period. Another shot, taken in 1940 on one of the Zhoushan Islands in China, shows a bespectacled Japanese soldier sitting in a storefront, a sword or machete sheathed but visible at his hip, gesturing with a folded paper fan as he chats good-naturedly with a small boy (*pl. no. 2*). The boy looks up at him, a grin apparently forming on his face.

Behind this small boy stand two others, slightly taller, whose attention is also held rapt by the soldier’s words. The spectacles suggest that this is a thinking soldier; his friendliness toward the native children and their apparent receptiveness underline his fundamental humanity, and by subtle implication the humanity of Japan’s occupation of China (Yamahata 1998: pl. 5).



Plate 2. Soldier with children (Zhoushan Islands, 1940), Yamahata Yōsuke, courtesy of Yamahata Shōgo/IDG Films

In an interview Yamahata gave to the magazine *Shashin bunka* in May 1942, he describes missions in China involving photography of Japanese naval airplanes. One of his responses in the interview offers a further indication of the effort Yamahata invested in composing his propaganda photographs:

The most troublesome aspect of aerial photography is that even if you get a shot of the squadron, if it's taken above the clouds one can't tell where they are on their way to bomb, so I try as much as possible to put in [something distinctive]—if it's Shanxi Province, for example, the characteristic shape of the mountains there, or if it's Qinghai, there is snow there even in June, so I would put in something like that. I went to great lengths to include such geographical features (Ishii 1998: 60).

It thus seems reasonable to assume that Yamahata's acute sensitivity to the question of what was included in the frame, and to the narrative implied by his choices, did not completely desert him when he was dispatched to Nagasaki in August 1945. And indeed, despite the suggestion of some commentators to the contrary, many of the photos he took in Nagasaki show ample evidence of deliberate composition.¹⁶ (This distinguishes his work from, for example, the five comparatively haphazard-seeming exposures made over a six-hour period in Hiroshima on August 6 by Matsushige Yoshito, who later stated that it took twenty minutes of wavering before he could bring himself to take his first shot, and that after taking the second his camera's finder was blurred with tears (Hiroshima genbaku hisai satueisha no kai 1996: 68)). Apart from the process of selection evident in Yamahata's choice to photograph (for example) women, children, and babies, his images also show that he occasionally framed and reframed the same scene more than once, repositioning himself as he did so. Among his photos, for example, is a surrealistic shot that places in the foreground a corpse so blanketed by debris that it is recognizable only by a naked leg, bent at the knee, sticking out and dangling over the lip of a narrow drainage ditch. But Yamahata also took a second shot of the same scene from a vantage point several strides away; this frame cuts out the seemingly disembodied leg in order to release the attention of the eye

¹⁶ Rupert Jenkins has asserted that "Yamahata...had no time to consider photographic or conceptual strategies..." (Jenkins 1995: 21), and Markus Nornes says of Yamahata's work in Nagasaki that "the composition of the photos always seems to miss its mark, as though Yamahata literally had no idea how to frame his experience" (Nornes 2003: 191).

to a solitary upright utility pole and to the wider landscape beyond. And there is still a third shot, again taken from the same position—but now with a telephoto lens—that picks from the far landscape a stand of trees, another utility pole, and a group of smokestacks.¹⁷

Not only do Yamahata's images show considered choices concerning his framing and his lenses, there is also evidence of Yamahata's having adhered to, or at least been aware of, fundamental rules of photographic composition. Such rules had been increasingly codified and circulated in Japan (and elsewhere, for that matter) in the 1920s and 1930s as cameras became smaller and more readily available, and photography found increasing favor with amateurs. Evidence of this codification may be seen in books of photographic instruction aimed at these amateurs. One such book published in Tokyo in 1935, titled *Shashin-jutsu shoho*, or *First Steps in Photographic Technique*, includes a section titled "Kōzu no gensoku", or "Rules of Composition". "For a body in forward motion", the book prescribes, "leave some empty space in front so that it can advance without running into anything" (Matsuyama 1935: 173).¹⁸ In a photo of an old woman crawling on hands and knees, we see Yamahata following this very rule (*pl. no. 3*). The woman is dressed in black, so that she stands out against the field of grayish rubble behind her, heightening the contrast between figure and ground. By placing the woman not in the center of the frame, but in the lower right corner, Yamahata's composition leaves room in the frame into which its subject can advance.

Another rule in the same section of this book recommends using leading lines to heighten perspective. Again, we see Yamahata following this prescription in a photo of corpses that have been thrown out of a railway car into the ditch by a railroad embankment. Yamahata composes the image so that the snaking line made by the corpses themselves, which have been rendered eerily uniform by the blast (their torsos are all naked and similarly burned, yet they all still wear their pants), together with the curve of the ditch and the stone embankment, lead the eye first to a pile of debris at the upper center of the

¹⁷ Two of these pictures appear in Yamahata 1998 as plates 13 and 11; the third appears in Jenkins 1995: 55.

¹⁸ Yamahata made other photographs of the same subject that confirm she was crawling forward, and had not simply stumbled. See Kitajima 1952: 47. (The photographic plates in Kitajima 1952 are unnumbered. For the sake of convenience, I have assigned them numbers in my references to them, counting the frontispiece plate of the mushroom cloud as p. 2.)



Plate 3. Crawling woman (Nagasaki, August 10, 1945), Yamahata Yōsuke, courtesy of Yamahata Shōgo/IDG Films

frame, and then through a tunnel of powerline gantries and along the railroad tracks to the indistinct mountains on the distant horizon (for the image, see Jenkins 1995: 62).

Further evidence that Yamahata's photos are not merely passive or haphazard registrations of the Nagasaki landscape on the day after the bombing may be found in the recollections of some of the people he photographed. In 1995, NHK, the Japanese national television network, produced a television program and a companion book about Yamahata's photos. As part of this project, NHK researchers tracked down a number of people who appear in Yamahata's photos. All but one of these people recalled the moment of their photographing, and several of them attest to Yamahata's influence in staging the shot he wanted. A young woman photographed standing in a bomb shelter (*pl. no. 10*), for example, recalls that Yamahata directed her to get down into the shelter and commanded her to smile. "Having been told that he wanted to take my picture, I got down into the bomb shelter, but at the time I was so frightened that escaping was the only thing I was thinking of. He told me he wanted a smile, and I forced myself to make one", she later said (NHK shuzaihan 1995: 116).¹⁹ The mother of the boy holding

¹⁹ Yamahata seems to have been reluctant for some years afterward to admit that



Plate 4. Sketching the rubble (Nagasaki, August 10, 1945), Yamahata Yōsuke, courtesy of Yamahata Shōgo/IDG Films

the rice ball recalls stopping to cooperate in response to “a voice that called out ‘let me take your picture!’” (*ibid*: 142).

Some of Yamahata’s photographs even seem to make self-conscious reference to his own acts of visual composition. At least two of Yamahata’s shots include in the frame the figure of Yamada Eiji, the artist who was sent to Nagasaki together with Yamahata in order to sketch the catastrophe and its victims. In one of these photos, the main subject of which is a group of victims who have gathered near a broken down pickup truck, Yamada’s uniformed back occupies the entire left

he posed this shot. The caption published with the photo in 1952 says “A girl who was saved by retreating to a bomb shelter constructed by the road in front of her house, in the vicinity of Nakamachi Cathedral. Her impression of the bomb was of a powerful flash and the noise of a preternatural strong wind. But her joy at surviving was stronger than this memory, and she called out to me spiritedly as I was taking photos. Early morning, August 10” (Kitajima 1952: 25). Yamada Eiji, the artist who accompanied Yamahata, later publicly revealed that the picture was posed. See NHK shuzaihan 1995: 115–7.

third of the image. The corner of his sketchbook, which he holds in front of him as he works, is plainly recognizable (Jenkins 1995: 95).²⁰ The framing and perspective thus indirectly highlight Yamahata's own compositional choice, since they literally foreground the act of sketching the ruins in the person of Yamada. Similarly, a panoramic shot of charred bodies lying in a field of debris next to a railroad track includes Yamada's figure at the left of the frame, again sketching the scene on his pad (*pl. no. 4*). Another shot, of a nurse crouching on the ground to aid a bloodied and bandaged victim, her hands immersed together with his in a basin of water, includes the photographer's own shadow at the bottom center of the frame (*ibid.*: 88). Such signs of the presence of the cameraman (and of his influence over the scenes he captures) hardly make Yamahata's images into photographs about photography—the denotative force of the bombed ruins and the victims that people them remains too powerful for that. But they do function as subtle reminders that the photographs are composed, and that they are abstractions of the reality they denote rather than complete and seamless analogs for it.

The Atomic Difference

The defining characteristic of Yamahata's Nagasaki compositions is not, however, a matter of camera angle or lens choice or of the placement of graphic elements or proxies for the photographer within his frame. It is their more comprehensively applied strategy of representation, which positions the photographs in the realm of the artistic with surprising regularity. This basic strategy may be summed up as the presentation, or the implicit evocation, of something familiar that has been altered by a disturbing difference.

This strategy can be seen, for example, in Yamahata's photograph, shot through the interior of a house, of a shirtless boy lying on his stomach in a patch of sun on the veranda (*pl. no. 5*).²¹ His cheek is

²⁰ Yamada's lower legs have also found their way into the frame at the top center of the photo on the following page in Jenkins.

²¹ This photograph appears both in Yamahata 1998 (as *pl. 30*) and Kitajima 1952 (p. 39).

to the floor, his arms extended above his head. Visible behind him are signs of a benevolent natural world: brightly sunlit leaves and the gracefully bending darker trunks of birch trees. The veranda, the patch of sun, the leafy background, and the boy's position all combine to suggest that we might be looking at a child napping on a lazy afternoon. Upon closer inspection, however, one notices the debris in the foreground in the shadowed interior of the house, the odd angle at which the door hangs, a rectangular piece of the eaves dangling down



Plate 5. Boy lying prone (Nagasaki, August 10, 1945), Yamahata Yōsuke, courtesy of Yamahata Shōgo/IDG Films

from the roofline, and what looks like a tear in the boy's shorts. These anomalies are rendered all the more disturbing by the off-kilter angle of the entire rectangle defined by the light, high-key areas of the photograph. The boy is not asleep; he is lying wounded or dead. The realization comes as a shock because of the way Yamahata's image invokes something familiar (a nap on a lazy afternoon) only to replace it with the radical difference of a post-nuclear-attack tableau. It is through this overlapping of the known and the unknown, the familiar and the uncanny, that Yamahata's images both capture the radically disruptive force of the bomb and prompt an aesthetic response in the viewer.



Plate 6. Victims on white bedding (Nagasaki, August 10, 1945), Yamahata Yōsuke, courtesy of Yamahata Shōgo/IDG Films

In another photograph that illustrates the same strategy of representation, Yamahata frames for us a group of four victims of the bombing who are sitting and lying on the ground out of doors (*pl. no. 6*).²² Three of them rest on a white square of bedding. The fourth lies supine, partially covered by a separate white sheet that is rumpled rather than smoothly spread. Of the first three, one lies on her side, one sits with his feet extended off the edge of the bedding, presumably in order to keep it as clean as possible, and the third drinks from a canteen. Visible on the white bedding in the foreground is a scattering of biscuits. Just as the previous photograph suggested ‘napping’, here the disposition of the bodies in positions of repose, the white cloths spread over the ground, the girl holding the canteen to her lips, and the presence of the biscuits conspire to suggest ‘a picnic’.

One would never actually mistake the scene for a picnic. Such a misreading is prevented by any number of elements: the vacant stare of the woman lying on the white square of bedding, the dirty or blood-spattered faces and ragged clothes the group wears, the bare breast and strangely blackened, mask-like visage of the woman lying at the rear, the ominous diagonal of a fallen powerline cutting across the upper right hand corner of the frame. And yet because the idea of a picnic haunts the image, it reminds one all the more powerfully of the difference between what it shows us and the known realm of familiar experience.

Although it takes on a number of variations, this is the basic dynamic of nearly all Yamahata’s photos: they uncannily show or hint at something familiar, but present it to us in an utterly transformed or radically altered state, bringing the viewer up short at the shock of the fit which is only a half-fit—the shock at what we might call the atomic difference.

Rubble as a Photographic Motif

As part and parcel of their repeated evocation of atomic difference, Yamahata’s photographs regularly incorporate a number of isolatable motifs. One of the most powerful of these motifs is also the most

²² This photograph appears as pl. 29 in Yamahata 1998; it is also reproduced in Jenkins 1995: 97.

ubiquitous—that of rubble. Rubble is present in photo after photo: vast expanses of rubble stretching from the bottom of the frame into the photographic grain of a distant horizon, close-ups of the rubble incidentally included in tightly framed shots of charred corpses, and rubble in the middle distance, confronting the eye with a jumble of forms both recognizable and unrecognizable.

At the most basic level, these quantities of rubble function simply as an index of the enormous destructive power of the bomb. But like those photos that show us a nap that is not a nap, or a picnic that is not a picnic, the rubble also presents us with the spectacle of the familiar made strange. One knows that the narrow paths through this rubble must be the vestiges of much wider roads that have been all but completely covered with debris. One knows that these ruins are constituted of everyday things: roof tiles, building timbers, sheets of corrugated metal, packing crates, metal barrel hoops, an unhinged door, an overturned motorcycle, a human body. And yet these things, when they are broken and jumbled and burned in such eye-boggling, variegated expanses as the ones in Yamahata's photos, are transformed into something alien. The presence of the rubble in photo after photo thus comes to govern much of one's response to them. Confronted with the rubble's combination of uniformity and particularity, one's eye is induced to search through it for familiar objects (*there's a bit of straw matting—that must be a window frame*) and for domesticating narratives of cause and effect (*there is a horse's neck and head—it must have been pinned beneath the wagon it was pulling at the moment of the blast*). Many of the captions published with Yamahata's photos in 1952 crystallize and encourage this mode of readerly activity. "The remains of the Nagasaki Steel Works", we will be told, by way of explanation for the skeleton of a building, or "a city trolley that was on its way to Michi-no-o. The corpses at the lower left were all passengers" (Kitajima 1952: 26 and 17).

This rendering of the familiar as something utterly transformed and therefore strange and uncanny, a work performed in the first instance by the bomb itself, is relayed through Yamahata's photographic record as an aesthetic principle. The eye sifts through the rubble, trying to read what it sees there, half hoping that it will not recognize what it sees, resigned to the probable presence of human remains but dreading the moment of their recognition, reluctant to perform the mental work necessary to make the leap from a blackened lump to the body part of which it is the remnant and the sign.

In some cases this process of recognition and recovery changes the significance of a photograph almost before one's very eyes. In a photograph of a train car roof hanging from an electrical gantry, for example, the main subject of the photo is the striking and puzzling silhouette formed by the juxtaposition of these two objects (*pl. no. 7*). Because of the visual pull of the silhouetted bars and slats of the roof and gantry against the sky, the picture requires considerable scrutiny before it reveals a more gruesome aspect: at the extreme bottom edge of the frame, just to the right of center, one can make out a partially clothed corpse, lying on its back with one knee bent and both hands resting across its chest.²³ Thus tipped off to the presence of corpses in the scene, one must then reconsider how to read the other dark roundish lumps among the rubble in the foreground; they are difficult to make out, but there is a bent limb here and the top of a head there, and suddenly a picture that seemed willfully cerebral in its concern with abstract form becomes starkly immediate, the strangely hanging train car roof becoming a makeshift monument for the dead lying at its base.

By thus making the familiar strange—and the strange familiar (as when the puzzling forms of the roof and the gantry become legible as a monument to the dead)—the rubble in Yamahata's photographs acts not only as an index of the bomb's disruption, but also as an important arbiter of our response to it as viewers.

Electrical Power Lines as a Photographic Motif

A second somewhat less frequent but still noteworthy visual motif in Yamahata's photographs is that of electrical power lines. These power lines were a familiar sight in Nagasaki, as a photo Yamahata took near Nagasaki station shows. In the photo, one sees a line of people walking next to a spiderweb-like network of power lines that seems to have escaped damage, the impressively long rank of poles supporting the many lines growing shorter and shorter as it recedes alongside the road into the distant haze at the middle right of the frame (*ibid*: 62–3 and

²³ Indeed, some reproductions of this photograph are cropped in such a way as to omit this, the most recognizable corpse in the photo. See, for an example of such cropping, *Kodomotachi ni sekai ni hibaku no kiroku o okuru kai* 1984: 249. The uncropped frame is reproduced in Yamahata Yōsuke 1998 as pl. 23.



Plate 7. Train car roof (Nagasaki, August 10, 1945), Yamahata Yōsuke, courtesy of Yamahata Shōgo/IDG Films

Jenkins 1995: 24). But once thrown by the bomb's blast into hanging tangles, or down to ground level, these power lines became a newly sinister and lethal presence. Yamahata would later say about his mission among the ruins of Nagasaki that "the worst thing was when the electric and telephone wires got twisted around people's legs and they couldn't escape... their legs got twisted in the telephone wire, and they died in that position, fallen to their knees"²⁴ Yamahata

²⁴ The quotation appears in an interview with Yamahata that Jenkins identifies as

documents such a death in a closely framed image of a child's body, pinned beneath a thick exposed cable (Kitajima 1952: 10).

In some of Yamahata's photos, the dark slashing diagonals of fallen power lines seem an almost deliberate attempt to disrupt his photographic compositions, to interpose another plane of signification between the viewer and his subject on which have been left the marks of a frenetic partial erasure of the image itself, as if its nightmarish content were too terrible to confront full-on.²⁵ This effect is most striking in an image of a team of stretcher bearers carrying a victim at shoulder height, walking away from the camera. In this image, fallen power lines create nine diagonal slashes in all, most of which extend all the way from the upper left corner of the frame to the rightmost edge (Jenkins 1995: 83). This effect of partial erasure is also present to a lesser extent in a second shot of the same group taken at closer range, in which three such lines cut across the frame, in another shot of people near Nagasaki station, running toward the camera (here the lines dangle into the frame in lazy loops), and in two shots of a woman kneeling or crawling in front of a pile of debris (*ibid.*: 82; Yamahata 1998: pls. 17 and 24; Kitajima 1952: 47).

This device of the deadly powerlines obtruding into the frame becomes in some of Yamahata's images a reworking of a longstanding stock motif in Japanese traditional graphic arts, that of the tree branch (often acting as a signifier of the season) obtruding into the foreground of the frame. One sees this, for example, in the screen and scroll paintings of the Kanō School, particularly in the genres of *kachō-zu* (pictures of birds and flowers) and *shiki-kachō-zu* (pictures of birds and flowers of the four seasons).²⁶ The device was also picked up by Japanese art photographers of the pictorialist tradition in the 1920s and 1930s. Fukuhara Shinzō, for example, used it repeatedly in his photographs of seasonal and rural scenes. Fukuhara's *Spring, Oku-*

having been conducted by Hidezoh Kondo and first published in the *Yomiuri Weekly*, August 20, 1962.

²⁵ This scribble-like effect is strikingly visible as well in a photograph by Fudō Kenji of corpses lying in the street after the Nanking Massacre (taken in December 1937). In Fudō's image, a large rat's nest of powerlines hangs over the entire left foreground of the frame. See Japan Photographers Association 1980: 338.

²⁶ Established by Kanō Masanobu (1434–1530), the Kanō School enjoyed an extraordinary three-hundred years of prominence, setting the most influential fashions in Japanese painting during the Momoyama and Tokugawa Periods. The school included, in addition to Masanobu, Kanō Motonobu (1476–1559), Kanō Eitoku (1543–90), Kanō Sanraku (1559–1635) and many others.



Plate 8. *Spring, Okutama*, 1930, Fukuhara Shinzō, courtesy of the Japan Photographic Society

tama (1930 pl. no. 8) and *Autumn, Okutama* (1925) both show tree branches dangling down into the foreground of the frame against the rough-hewn wooden entryway of a house (Tucker 2003: 129 and Japan Photographers Association 1980: 163). He used the device yet again in *Pond at Shuzenji Temple*, which shows a pine branch extending across the frame from right to left, partially obscuring the view of a stone lantern (Japan Photographers Association 1980: 163).

Two photos Yamahata took of figures walking down a debris-strewn road suggest that he saw the dangling electrical lines in his frame as a darkly ironic substitute for the traditional branches. Both of these shots juxtapose dangling leafy branches or bare tree trunks with dangling powerlines in the foreground, as if to fuse them together, or to suggest an interchanging of the one for the other. Yamahata maintains an identical foreground setup in the two shots, suggesting that he was just as concerned with the framing of trunks, leaves, and electrical lines



Plate 9. Wires and branches (Nagasaki, August 10, 1945), Yamahata Yōsuke, courtesy of Yamahata Shōgo/IDG Films

as elements in the composition as he was with the framed human figures on the road in the middle distance (*pl. no. 9*).²⁷ If one accepts such a visual equivalence between the power lines and the traditional device of the obtruding branch, their fusion here may be seen as another example of Yamahata's replacement in his photographs of the known and the familiar with the sinisterly uncanny other. It is a replacement that depends for its significance on both its reference to earlier traditions of representation and its difference from them, an aesthetic meaning that depends far more heavily on allusive connotation than on photographic denotation.

Fragmentary Allusions to Christian Iconography

The city of Nagasaki has well-known, long-standing associations with Christianity. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as the proscription edicts against Christianity intensified, it was a site

²⁷ One of these photos appears in Yamahata 1998 as pl. 25; the other appears in Kitajima 1952: 35.

of Christian martyrdom and massacre. In the late nineteenth-century, after the ban on Christianity was lifted, it was in and around Nagasaki that the largest community of secretly practicing Christian believers (so-called *kakure-kirishitan*, or ‘hidden Christians’) came to light. And the city continued, in the twentieth century, to have the highest relative density of Christian residents in Japan. As John Treat has pointed out, these associations have deeply influenced the post-bombing literature treating Nagasaki, in which Christian metaphors figure prominently. Nagai Takashi, for example, author of the novel *Nagasaki no kane* (The Bells of Nagasaki, 1949 [1984]), puts into the mouth of his main character an elegy for the dead in which he asserts that his city was bombed as part of a divine plan for a Christ-like martyrdom that would expiate the sins of humanity and deliver the nation from the war (Treat 1995: 313).²⁸

Nagasaki’s Christian history came readily to mind for Higashi Jun, the writer who accompanied Yamahata when he entered the city on August 10. In one section of the essay he wrote based on his trek through the ruins, Higashi describes a series of particularly jarring experiences, including his stumbling across the naked corpse of a beautiful young woman who had, he guesses, been on the point of entering her bath when the bomb hit. After describing this encounter he writes, “I offered a reverent prayer for the Assumption of that Virgin Mary, there in Nagasaki, the ground of the Christian *padres*, and hurried on my way” (Higashi 1952: 21).

Christian tropes also play an important role in some of Yamahata’s photographs. His photograph of a girl in the mouth of an air-raid shelter, for example, derives a potential connotative meaning from its subtle reference to narratives of resurrection (*pl. no. 10*).²⁹ The girl’s emergence from the rectangular black mouth of the tomb-like bomb shelter, her head wrapped in a scarf whose ends resemble a winding sheet, echoes the Biblical story of Lazarus of Bethany, whose face, according to the Gospel, “was bound about with a napkin”.³⁰ The image thus gestures toward such examples of Christian iconography

²⁸ For the relevant passage in Nagai’s novel, see Nagai 1984: 106–9.

²⁹ The photo appears in full frame in Yamahata 1998 as pl. 34. The cropped version mentioned below appears in Kitajima 1952: 23–4.

³⁰ For the story of Lazarus, see John 11. The phrase “face was bound about with a napkin” is from John 11:44, King James Version.



Plate 10. Girl in air-raid shelter (Nagasaki, August 10, 1945), Yamahata Yōsuke, courtesy of Yamahata Shōgo/IDG Films

as Rembrandt's *Raising of Lazarus* (c. 1630), Van Gogh's subsequent reworking of the theme under the same title (in 1890), or Albert van Ouwater's earlier treatment, also under the same title (c. 1455), all of which depict Lazarus half emergent from a dark rectangular hole in the ground, his head duly wrapped. Not only is there a thematic similarity between the story of Lazarus and the photograph's implied narrative of the girl's return to the world of the living after her close brush with death. The presence, against the photograph's sky, of Nakamachi Cathedral, the cross on its steeple just discernible in the haze directly above the girl's head, provides additional license to read the image (one known to have been posed by Yamahata) as an allusive variation on the emergence of Lazarus from his tomb, a miracle which doubles

in the Bible for the resurrection of Jesus himself.³¹ Interestingly, the version of this photo published in 1952 crops out the entire upper half of the frame, including the cathedral, presumably because of physical damage to the emulsion in that region of the negative (damage which is visible in later full frame reproductions).³² But as if to make up for the loss of the cathedral's symbolic potential in the cropped shot of the girl, a shot of a different bomb shelter entrance, with the same cathedral, steeple, and cross visible behind it in the haze, has been placed immediately to the right of it on the same two-page spread.

Another photo that slips from the realm of document into that of art through its invocation of Christian iconography is Yamahata's shot of a mother nursing a baby (*pl. no. 11*). The photograph is from a series of five shots, three of which are taken from a position looking down on the seated woman, suggesting that Yamahata squatted for the remaining two, altering his perspective to create waist-up, frame-filling, three-quarter-view portraits.³³ The results vividly recall the representations of the Madonna and Child in such paintings as Leonardo da Vinci's *Madonna Litta* (c. 1490–91) and the several paintings of the subject by Dieric Bouts (c. 1400–75), among numerous others. Yamahata's Madonna and Child, however, in accordance with his usual strategy of representation, are a Madonna and Child who bear the marks of atomic difference. The child's face is covered with dark blotches that seem to be either burns or dried blood. These blotches unite the child with its mother—who has a similar blotch covering much of her right cheek—at least as closely as the fact of its suckling at her breast.³⁴

³¹ For more on Yamahata's posing of the photograph, see note 19, above.

³² The full frame has been reproduced in Yamahata Yōsuke 1998 as pl. 34.

³³ This photo and others in the series are reproduced in Yamahata Yōsuke 1998: pl. 27, in Kitajima 1952: 50 and in Jenkins 1995: 92–3. As John Dower and John Treat have noted, the Maruki scrolls (which were painted after Yamahata took his photographs, but commanded wide public attention sooner than Yamahata's photos did) made similar use of the imagery of mother and child (in Japanese, *boshi-zō*)—though not necessarily of Madonna and Child—as an element in the emerging iconography of nuclear devastation. See Dower 1996: 134 where Dower also connects such imagery to its occurrence in the classic medieval Japanese text *Hōjōki* (An Account of My Hut, 1212 [1955]) and Treat 1995: 328–30, which includes a reproduction of a detail from the Maruki scrolls showing a mother cradling her child in her arms. Handsome color reproductions of the scrolls may be found in Ienaga 1993, vols 5 and 6.

³⁴ The woman in these photos was among those of Yamahata's subjects later traced by the NHK research team for its television special. She identified the child as a son, lending some additional marginal support for a reading of the image as a 'Madonna and Child'. See NHK shuzaihan 1995: 228–34.



Plate 11. Nursing mother with baby (Nagasaki, August 10, 1945), Yamahata Yōsuke, courtesy of Yamahata Shōgo/IDG Films

The exposure of the photograph is perfectly gauged; there is a gesture toward the aestheticization of this tableau not only in the echo of the Madonna and Child but also in the sensual tonalities of the photographic medium itself. We can see areas of brighter sunlight playing over the cloth of the woman's kimono and over the white of her flesh and that of the baby. The photo's technically perfect exploitation of the full range of tones from the black of the woman's hair and eyes to the white of the flesh of her breast would be worthy of Ansel Adams. Yet even as it gestures toward such aestheticization, the photo's insistent direction of the eye toward the enigmatic black marks on these

victims' skin seems calculated to reject aestheticization. The baby's blackened head is positioned near center in the frame, and in those frames shot from a squatting position, the brightness of the flesh of the woman's breast heightens the sense of contrast with the marks on the baby's forehead. Like his incongruously smiling Lazarus, who returns to a now-poisoned world, Yamahata's Madonna smacks of travesty, holding as she does a would-be savior who is on the point of death.

A final example of the way that Yamahata's photos interrupt their own congruity with pre-existing traditions of Christian iconography may be found in his image of a young woman with human remains (*pl. no. 12*).³⁵ The young woman stands in profile at the right of the picture, facing out of the frame, her back to the largely undifferentiated jumble of rubble behind her.³⁶ Here Yamahata violates the conventionally accepted rules of composition by placing the girl at the extreme margin of the photo and by blocking her gaze with the frame edge.³⁷ That edge, together with the other three frame edges, forcibly unites the girl with the blackened skull that occupies the central foreground against an otherwise undifferentiated chaos of rubble. The gaze implied by the skull's eye sockets angles downward to the ground, while the direction of the girl's gaze, away from the skull behind her, suggests that the very sight with which we, as the viewers of the photograph, are confronted is one too horrible to behold. The photo thus both enacts and engages us in a play of gazes that do not meet, a confrontation of life with death that is enforced by the camera regardless of the will of the participants.

This forcible yoking together of disparate, resistant elements in the same frame also evokes the image's own broken, half-fit with pre-existing traditions of iconography. The juxtaposition of the woman's figure with the skull recalls the traditional use of the skull as a *memento mori* (a reminder of death and the vanity of all things) in countless European

³⁵ The version of the photograph published in 1952 was cropped to enlarge only the human remains (Kitajima 1952: 5) changing its effect considerably.

³⁶ In the course of making its television special about Yamahata's photos, NHK interviewed this woman, Ryū Chieko, about her life and her memories of the Nagasaki bombing. See NHK shuzaihan 1995: 170ff.

³⁷ Matsuyama Shisui's manual for amateur photographers, for example, instructs readers that "it is necessary that there be ample space in the direction of the [subject's] gaze; if it is only minimal [the image] will feel cramped" (Matsuyama 1935: 187).



Plate 12. Girl with skull (Nagasaki, August 10, 1945), Yamahata Yōsuke, courtesy of Yamahata Shōgo/IDG Films

Renaissance paintings. More pointedly, it also recalls depictions of the penitent Mary Magdalene in paintings such as those by Guido Reni (1633 and 1635), and El Greco (c. 1587–97 and again c. 1603–07), which show Mary Magdalene together with a skull (sometimes interpreted as a sign of Golgotha, the site of Christ’s crucifixion—literally, “place of the skull”). But having evoked these elements of traditional iconography (young woman and skull), Yamahata’s image leaves them in only fragmentary and disrupted form. The young woman looks neither skyward nor toward the skull, as she does in the iconic renderings; it is as if the cutting right-hand edge of Yamahata’s frame has also cut

off any expectation of redemption or salvation from the woman's hellish post-atomic world.

There is, admittedly, no reason to think that Yamahata, who dropped out of Hōsei University after one year of study, necessarily knew any of the particular paintings mentioned here, although it is not implausible that he might have been familiar with the broader Western iconographic traditions to which they belong. But film, at least, sees all that is before the camera's lens, whether or not the photographer sees it too; happenstance at the moment of the shutter's click is a defining element of the photographic medium. If we are willing to set aside the question of intention and take a formalistic approach to reading photographs in instances where they happen to have fortuitously captured some meaningful object—a passing airplane, say, in a picture of the Twin Towers taken in Manhattan on September 10, 2001—it would be churlish to insist that the photographer's demonstrable knowledge and intention should limit the meaning of a photograph in which he may have accidentally captured an entire *tableau vivant* of a parodically altered Lazarus, Madonna and Child, or Mary Magdalene, as seems to be the case in Yamahata's images.

*Allusions to Secular Japanese Traditions of
Landscape Photography*

In addition to their fragmentary evocation of Christian iconographic traditions, Yamahata's photos also evoke and recombine secular Japanese traditions of the photographic representation of landscape. When Yamahata made his images of Nagasaki, there was already a tradition of desolate landscape imagery in Japanese art photography, a tradition that had dominated Japanese photographic landscape exhibitions from the 1910s to the 1930s. Among these exhibitions, it was the prestigious *Kenten* (Photographic Research Society Exhibit) in Tokyo that acted as the most important arbiter of photographic tastes, providing, as Kaneko Ryūichi has observed, "a sense of direction for photographers who gathered in amateur associations in other parts of the country" as well (Tucker 2003: 107).³⁸ These photographs of deserted or nearly deserted swathes of natural countryside, often hemmed in by distant mountains, probably owed their popularity in large part to their

³⁸ *Kenten* is short for *shashin kenkyū tenji-kai*.



Plate 13. *Unknown Flowers*, 1912, Yoshino Makoto, courtesy of Yoshino Toshiko

consonance with earlier traditions of Japanese painting.³⁹ Hidaka Chōtarō's *Spring on the Kiso Road* (1920) and Yoshino Makoto's *Unknown Flowers* are representative of the fashion. The latter work, which won the first prize at the prestigious exhibition in 1912, had relied on its own brand of visual rhetoric in its rendering of vast expanses of unsullied nature (*pl. no. 13*).⁴⁰ The twelve by fifteen inch photograph offers the eye a deep space in which to lose itself. In the lower left foreground of *Unknown Flowers*, visible at close range, are the flowers in question. Their white petals, which stand out against the black earth of an embankment, initially draw the eye, but ultimately the flowers serve only to lend a sense of scale to the vast wild and natural landscape that extends behind them. Beyond the embankment on which the flowers grow we see, rendered in a lighter palette of grays, the curves of distant mountains against a low hanging, textured sky. The photo's emphasis on the phenomenon of what painters refer to as aerial perspective (that is, the apparent reduction in contrast due to the scattering of

³⁹ Kaneko Ryūichi draws this connection in his essay in Tucker 2003: 108.

⁴⁰ The image is reproduced in Tucker 2003: 118. For the Photographic Research Society, see *ibid.*: 107–8. For Hidaka Chōtarō's similar photograph, see *ibid.*: 119.

light by the atmosphere between the viewer and distant objects) creates an extraordinary sense of space. As they recede toward the horizon, which is positioned above the midline of the frame, each successive range of mountains is rendered in the print with less and less contrast against the sky. By the time the eye reaches the horizon line and the most distant, lightest-toned mountains, it has traversed many miles.

Yamahata's panoramic landscape photographs frequently make use of the same aerial perspective and high horizon-line that characterize *Unknown Flowers*. In a two-frame composite that includes (among other ruins) the remains of the bleachers from the Mitsubishi baseball stadium (*pl. no. 14*), we see the same sensual curve of distant mountains against the sky that dominates the photographs of Yoshino and Hidaka.⁴¹ His frame, too, includes in the distance serried ranks of mountains becoming increasingly obscured by the atmosphere as the eye follows them to the right edge of the frame. Only now the 'desolate' has taken on a completely new meaning. The desolation we see is not that of a remote and wild mountainside, but is rather the result of large-scale atomic destruction.

In the left foreground is visible a rubble of timbers, roofing tiles, exposed foundations and stonewalled terraces. At right, further away, are the twisted iron skeletons of several buildings. Tiny human figures walk a pathway cut through the rubble. Others sit or lie some way off the path, and still others stand antlike among the ruins in the middle distance at left. The largest human figures in the scene impinge on it from the bottom center of the panorama, two surrogate observers of the bombed landscape. Because Yamahata has adopted such a distant vantage point, what we contemplate together with them is not only the vastness of the ruin, but the contours of the land itself, contours that have been revealed by the bomb's razing of the buildings that formerly stood there. The scene, in other words, shows us a return to nature and desolation that has been brought about by a most unnatural means. Like *Unknown Flowers*, Yamahata's panorama captures the sheer scale of the landscape, but now the effect is not one of the grandeur of nature, but rather of the expanse of the devastation wrought by the bomb. Thanks to the different foreground of the image, the mountains in Yamahata's composite, in contrast to those in *Unknown Flowers*, are now made to bear silent witness to the bomb's unique irruption into the continuum of both human and geologic time.

⁴¹ The panorama appears in Jenkins 1995: 52-3.



Plate 14. Ruins with mountains (two-frame composite) (Nagasaki, August 10, 1945), Yamahata Yōsuke, courtesy of Yamahata Shōgo/IDG Films

A second useful point of reference in the Japanese photographic tradition may be found in the urban landscapes of the pictorialist movement, a tradition that is represented by such works as Umesaka Ōri's *Smoking City* (1924), Takayama Toshio's *Scene with Factory* (1930), and Kōno Tōru's *Chimney* (1940).⁴² These works show scenes of monumental urban structures and urban productivity (or, depending on one's view, pollution and blight) that often emphasize smokestacks as a prominent vertical element.

The frame of Umesaka's *Smoking City*, for example, is divisible into three bands. In the lowermost band, occupying the bottom third of the photograph, we see a field of densely packed dark rooftops, broken here and there by lighter colored gables. The middle band of the photo is filled with a forest of tall industrial smokestacks, most of which are indistinct in the thick atmosphere. In the upper half of the photograph, there are only clouds of dark smoke trailing from the ends of the stacks, and a gray sky. The top third of the photo looks like the murky wash of an ink painting or a watercolor done strictly in shades of gray.

Returning to Yamahata's two-frame panorama, we can see black silhouettes of a distant forest of smokestacks (the most prominent vertical element in a cityscape that has otherwise been laid to waste), echoing those in *Smoking City*. But now the stacks are not the source of the smoke in the scene. They stand marginalized and abandoned, while smoke rises to the sky from the smoldering ruins of Nagasaki itself, suggesting a grimly ironic twist to the notion of the smoking city.

This photo is typical of Yamahata's vast and desolate landscapes in its unexpected joining of the visual rhetoric of two disparate pre-existing traditions in domestic Japanese photography (traditions that, thanks to his father's profession, had probably been familiar to him from a young age), that of the desolate rural landscape and that of urban and industrial landscape. The photo's combination of these elements in a single image disrupts existing conventions of landscape photography even as it documents the disruptive force of the weapon to which Nagasaki had been subjected. It also stands as another example

⁴² *Smoking City* is reproduced in Tucker 2003: 109. For Takayama's *Scene with Factory* and Kōno's *Chimney*, see Japan Photographers Association 1980: 159 and 188.

of the degree to which an ostensibly documentary photograph may partake of meanings that are primarily connotative.

Conclusion: Rhetoric in the Documentary Photograph

Yamahata's *ad hoc* system for representing his historic subject arose from a tangled combination of the deliberate, strategic choices he made as a photographer, the particular sorts of physical damage and harm inflicted on Nagasaki and its people by the bomb itself, the premeditated and happenstance collocations of graphic elements in his frames, and, quite probably, from some mere accidents of connotation.

Yamahata's photos, in pursuing their basic strategy of presenting the familiar in strangely altered form, funnel into themselves a variety of representational grammars, ranging from the *sui generis* motifs of rubble and fallen electrical lines to pre-existing traditions of Western Christian iconography and domestic Japanese conventions of rural and urban pictorialism and landscape photography. Yet in the cases where Yamahata's work makes allusions to pre-existing codes of representation, those allusions are by turns fragmentary, or parodic, or incongruous, or some combination of these things. These traditional codes thus are not called upon—at least not in intact form—to provide context and meaning for the bombing of Nagasaki. The allusions to these pre-existing codes instead break those codes in the very act of referring to them, as a means of differentiating Yamahata's own emerging system of post-atomic representation from those existing codes, codes which his photographs continually suggest are in fact inadequate to the task of contextualization in this traumatic instance.

This persistent presence of connotative meanings in Yamahata's photographs—whether by accident or by design, and whether they take the form of allusion to pre-existing cultural traditions or whether they shatter those traditions—indicates the importance of connotation and rhetoric, of the 'treatment' of the subject even in the limit case of documentary photography, a genre of representation that might be taken as epitomizing mechanized artlessness. Yamahata's photographs suggest that even the most seemingly minimalist acts of representation, including the pressing of a camera's shutter button, may involve a rhetorical component that is much more elaborate than the circumstances of its production might imply. Minimalism of intervention or intention in the act of creation does not translate into a corresponding limitation in the range of resulting referents.

Yamahata's photographs also show that such connotative meanings do not always have a predictable ideological valence. Since Yamahata's system of representation does not place the things he photographs within the realm of the 'already known' and the familiar (on the contrary, they emphasize the uncanny strangeness of his subjects), his photographs do not carry out the sort of integrative, institutional function that Barthes asserts is characteristic of photographic connotation. Indeed, Yamahata's photographs suggest that the connotative meanings of a photograph can simultaneously refer to and undercut the cultural ideologies that activate them, whether those ideologies call for a quasi-fetishization of natural seasonal cycles and the tree branches that signal them or for a belief in the redemptive power of Christian faith.

Ultimately the rhetoric of a documentary photograph, together with its resulting connotative meanings, has tremendous power to shape the denoted subject itself. Indeed, our own retrospective understanding of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a moment of radical rupture, or as a fragmentation of history into a pre-atomic age and a radically different post-atomic one, is discernable in—and perhaps even partly traceable to—the aesthetic component of Yamahata's ostensibly documentary photographs. That is not to say that our perception of such a rupture is a false one, or a mere artifact of a visual rhetoric that might have been otherwise, but rather that there is, in the end, no complete separation possible between connotation and denotation, however inherently insistent a particular medium may be on one or the other of these poles.

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CHAPTER NINE

RESPONSIBILITY AND JAPANESE LITERATURE OF
THE ATOMIC BOMB

Karen Thornber

Brutality and carnage have long been part of the human experience; violent death has long scarred the human narrative. The twentieth century was arguably the most vicious in history, with the Holocaust, nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, genocides in Armenia, Cambodia, Bosnia, and Rwanda, and numerous other crimes against humanity. The nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 stand out from other atrocities not in terms of numbers of people killed or square miles destroyed; more people were killed and more square miles destroyed in the firebombings of Tokyo and other major Japanese cities during the Asia Pacific War than in the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Rather, as the first tactical deployment of nuclear weapons, the strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki revealed the fragility of existence, exposing how quickly people can annihilate both one another and the (a)biotic nonhuman. Just as significant, the aftermath of these attacks revealed a newfound willingness to risk obliteration. Far from leading to a worldwide ban on nuclear weapons, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki marked the beginning of the atomic age. More than six decades later, policy specialists and activists continue to debate the future of nuclear weapons in the face of worrisome proliferation, increased sophistication, and ominous threats of use.

Creative writings that engage with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—self-consciously literary works that address circumstances leading to the attacks, the attacks themselves, their immediate aftermaths, their long-term consequences (imagined and actual), and their implications for individuals, societies, and the planet—have been an important part of global literary production from 1945 to the present day.¹ Although long spurned by Japanese readers, critics, and

¹ The American writer John Hersey's (1914–93) novel *Hiroshima* (1946), for

scholars, and until recently conspicuously absent from international bibliographies and anthologies of nuclear literature,² Japanese atomic bomb literature is the most substantial subset of this corpus. In the last sixty-five years, authors writing in Japanese have created thousands of novels, poems, plays, and short stories, as well as testimonials, essays, and manga that discuss the atomic bombings.³ The multiplicity of Japanese creative work on the atomic bombings is in no small part attributable to disparities in writers' experiences and motivations, as well as differences in the political and social circumstances surrounding textual production. At first, most Japanese who wrote self-consciously creative work on the atomic bombings were themselves *hibakusha* (survivor; lit. explosion-affected person); some had been established authors before the bombings, while others launched their careers with writings on the nuclear attacks. Many *hibakusha* were driven by survivor guilt (death guilt), understood as "the need to justify [one's] own survival in the face of others' deaths, a sense of 'guilt over survival priority'" (Lifton 1967: 35). Many used writing about their experiences, and those of their loved ones and communities, in part as a way to work through some of their trauma, establish agency,

instance, is one of the world's best-known creative works on the bombings. Since the mid-1940s numerous creative artists outside Japan have incorporated discourse on the bombings into their poetry, prose, and drama. These include the Palestinian writer Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008), who in *Dhākirah lil-nisyān* (Memory for Forgetfulness, 1986) likens the Israeli siege on Beirut (particularly on August 6, 1982) to Hiroshima and the "forgetfulness" surrounding Hiroshima to that surrounding Palestine.

² It was not until 1984 that Japanese published their first major anthology of atomic bomb literature, the fifteen-volume *Nihon no genbaku bungaku* (Japanese Literature of the Atomic Bomb), edited by the Kaku-sensō no kiken o uttaeru bungakusha. John Treat's *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb*, published half a century after the bombings, is the first monograph in English on Japanese literature of the atomic bomb. Likewise, in *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895–1984*, a 250-page bibliography of creative texts on nuclear weapons, Paul Briens lists only a handful of Japanese writers, while Morty Sklar's anthology *Nuke-rebuke: Writers and Artists Against Nuclear Energy and Weapons* contains only one selection by a Japanese writer.

³ For an overview of Japanese literature of the atomic bomb, see Thorner 2001. The present chapter looks primarily at narratives that are self-consciously literary, but it is important to keep in mind the increasing accessibility and popularity of other discourses on the atomic bombings. Websites such as www.geocities.jp/s20hibaku/index.html (English translations available at www.voshn.com), launched in 2006 and making accessible recordings of the stories of nearly 300 survivors, are greatly improving the availability of survivor testimonials. The popularity of Nakazawa Keiji's (1939–) manga series *Hadashi no Gen* (Barefoot Gen, 1973–74 [1987–2008]) and its many adaptations, a series based on Nakazawa's childhood experiences in Hiroshima, reveals sustained Japanese and foreign interest in survivor narratives.

and help fulfill responsibilities they believed they had to those who did not survive and to future generations.⁴ They did so even while calling attention both to the impossibility of translating the suffering of *hibakusha* into words and to the importance of continuing to attempt to do so.⁵ Although strongly believing it was their responsibility to translate into words what they saw and heard, they recognized the pitfalls inherent in any writing about atrocity; the same words that make the trauma at least somewhat intelligible both to themselves and to those

⁴ As Dori Laub has argued, “repossessing one’s life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change, which one has to actually pass through, in order to continue and complete the process of survival after liberation” (Laub 1992: 85). Trauma theorists have examined at length the close connections between survivor guilt and bearing witness. In an interview with trauma scholar Cathy Caruth, Robert Jay Lifton argues that “carrying through the witness is a way of transmuting pain and guilt into responsibility, and carrying through that responsibility has enormous therapeutic value... that responsibility becomes a very central agent for reintegration of the self... The only way one can feel right or justified in reconstituting oneself and going on living with some vitality is to carry through one’s responsibility to the dead. And it’s carrying through that responsibility via one’s witness, that survivor mission, that enables one to be an integrated human being once more” (Caruth 1995: 138; cf. Des Pres 1976: 39–50). See also Herman 1992: 70, 178, 193; LaCapra 2001; Lifton 1979: 132–78.

Survivor guilt appears prominently in a number of Japanese trauma narratives. For instance, atomic bomb writer Hayashi Kyōko’s (1930–) short story “Futari no bohō” (Two Grave Markers, 1975 [1989]) features a young girl haunted by her failure to rescue her friend who died in the ruins of Nagasaki. Likewise, the Okinawan writer Medoruma Shun’s (1960–) short story “Suiteki” (Droplets, 1997 [2000]) focuses on Tokushō, a former soldier and survivor of the Battle of Okinawa (1945), who is haunted by his failure to rescue his comrades (see chapter 7 in this volume). Japanese trauma narratives also reveal survivor guilt as affecting even those who did not experience trauma directly, an issue Hayashi explores in her short story “Akikan” (The Empty Can, 1977 [1985]), where Nishida, a former classmate of several *hibakusha*, but not a *hibakusha* herself, remarks that she feels extremely awkward and guilty whenever talk turns to the bombing. When her friend Oki comments that naturally it is better not to have experienced the bombing, Nishida repeats that she wishes she had been with the others that day.

For more on the connections between witness and agency, see LaCapra 1998: 12.

⁵ Shoshana Felman’s comments concerning the French writer Albert Camus’ (1913–60) novel *La chute* (The Fall, 1956 [1956]) hold true for much trauma narrative: “Narrative has thus become the very writing of the impossibility of writing history” (Felman 1992: 200–1). As LaCapra argues, “Extremely traumatic series of events beggar the imagination, and such events often involve the literalization of metaphor as one’s wildest dreams or most hellish nightmares seem to be realized or even exceeded by brute facts. Such facts go beyond the imagination’s powers of representation” (LaCapra 1998: 181). Another topos in narratives by *hibakusha* and other trauma survivors relates to misgivings concerning the reception of their work: Will people understand? Can they understand? For more on this phenomenon, see Hirsch and Kacandes 2004a: 1–5.

who did not witness the destruction also tame it beyond recognition. Thus, atomic bomb texts by *hibakusha* rarely adhere to conventional literary forms and often are very fragmented.⁶

There has been much discussion in Japan and in the English-language scholarly world about the inconsistencies between *hibakusha* accounts of the bombings and representations by people who did not themselves experience the bombings.⁷ The legitimacy of non-*hibakusha* writings was of particular concern in the decades following the bombings; the prominent writer Ibuse Masuji's (1898–1993) novel *Kuroi ame* (Black Rain, 1966 [1969]), regarded by many as Japan's foremost work of atomic bomb literature, proved especially controversial. The aestheticization of Hiroshima arguably responsible for this novel's unparalleled critical and commercial success among atomic-bomb writings angered many *hibakusha*, who criticized Ibuse for failing to give a more realistic portrayal of the atomic aftermath. They also claimed that, because he had not personally experienced the bombing of Hiroshima or Nagasaki, he had no right to speak of the destruction of these cities.⁸ But receptiveness to and even encouragement of non-*hibakusha* writings on the atomic bomb has increased in recent decades. Projects like Nagatsu Kōsaborō, Suzuki Hisao, and Yamamoto Toshio's recent edited volume *Genbakushi 181-ninshū, 1945–2007 nen* (Atomic Bomb Poetry: Collection of 181 Writers, 1945–2007, 2007),

⁶ Although a number of writers have composed *tanka* and *haiku* on the bombings, these are far outnumbered by free verse poetry. Tōge Sankichi (1917–53) was one of Japan's founding poets of the atomic bomb and compiler of the *Genbaku shishū* (Poems of the Atomic Bomb, 1952 [1990]), generally regarded as one of the two principal collections of Japan's atomic bomb poetry. Tōge, a prolific *tanka* poet before the bombings, tried his hand at atomic bomb *tanka* but quickly realized the inadequacy of conventional forms.

⁷ For discussion of distinctions between Hiroshima 'insiders' (*hibakusha*) and 'outsiders' (non-*hibakusha*), see Lifton 1967: 448; Stahl 2007: 211–29. Scholars examining the paradoxes of vicarious trauma and questions of authenticity include Ezrahi 2004, LaCapra 2004: 125, and Sicher 2004.

⁸ Ibuse was born in a village in Hiroshima prefecture but did not experience the bombing of the city. Instead, he relied heavily on the oral and written testimony of survivors while working on *Black Rain*; Ibuse repeatedly stressed the documentary nature of the novel, arguing that he had gathered as much information as possible on the experiences of *hibakusha*. The Japanese literary establishment applauded him both for speaking of the horrors in "ordinary" language and for not coloring his text with ideology. American critics were particularly receptive to *Black Rain*'s aestheticization of the atomic aftermath and congratulated Ibuse for transforming Hiroshima into a "work of art". Yet Ibuse himself, distressed by the vocal critiques of *hibakusha*, ultimately declared *Black Rain* a failure.

the majority written since the turn of the twenty-first century, and nearly one-third of these twenty-first century poems by Japanese born after 1945, indicate the continued concern of Japanese writers with the atomic bombings and their legacy.⁹ The editors of this collection appeal in their foreword to writers worldwide to submit atomic bomb poems for possible publication in a “future edition of the anthology on a global scale”.¹⁰ In so doing, they echo the determination of Japanese activists to ensure that anti-nuclear discourse will not expire with the aging *hibakusha* population, and that this discourse instead will flourish both in Japan and globally.¹¹

Japanese literature of the atomic bomb is characterized by two related concerns: the extreme and persistent suffering of *hibakusha* and the continued proliferation of nuclear weapons. Much of this literature discusses the excruciating physical and psychological wounds from which hundreds of thousands suffered and died and with which even larger numbers continued to live,¹² in many cases for decades

⁹ Approximately one-third of the poems included in *Atomic Bomb Poetry* written between 1990 and 1999 were also by poets born after the atomic bombings. Moreover, many of the writers included in this collection born before 1945 did not themselves experience the bombings. The anthology is divided into six sections: texts written between 1945 and 1959, a section each for those of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and a final section of texts written after the turn of the twenty-first century. The writers featured are from all backgrounds and several nationalities. The total numbers of twenty-first century writers and texts both exceed those of all the other sections combined. *Atomic Bomb Poetry* is marked by both intra- and intertextuality, many of the later poets citing and reconfiguring the work of lauded predecessors such as Tôge and Hara Tamiki (1905–51).

¹⁰ Nagatsu and his co-editors compiled the collection not only so that “the victims of the atomic bombings on August 6 and August 9, 1945 would never be forgotten”. They also were determined that “the nuclear weapons used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki would be the first and the last to be deployed” and that “as soon as possible in the twenty-first century the planet would be made a homeland free of nuclear weapons” (Nagatsu et al. 2007a: 3).

¹¹ Photographic discourse is another important subset of international anti-nuclear articulation. See slavick 2009.

¹² Although there is no question that Auschwitz and Hiroshima “did not occur on the same level”, Japanese writers at times even draw parallels with the horrors unleashed in Nazi concentration camps (Shillony 2007: 2). See also Lifton and Markusen 1990. Alain Renais and Marguerite Duras’s film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) is one of several creative pieces to interweave Japanese and European perspectives on the Second World War. Cathy Caruth notes that Renais had been commissioned to make a documentary on Hiroshima but after several months of research had dropped the project, “claiming that such a film would not significantly differ from his previous documentary on concentration camps” (Caruth 1996: 27).

after the bombings.¹³ This genre challenges scientific and historical accounts that focus primarily on the physical destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and it offsets medical records that reduce individuals to lists of bodily functions if not mere statistics. But at the same time that they translate into words an extraordinarily painful landscape, atomic-bomb writings also impress on the reader explicitly, and repeatedly, that words are woefully inadequate, that the traumas experienced by *hibakusha* are not conveyable by conventional means.¹⁴

In addition to depicting the (Japanese) body and society in pain, Japanese literature of the atomic bomb also addresses the future of the planet, expressing particular concern with the continued testing and proliferation of nuclear weapons and the fear that, if people are not careful, Hiroshima and Nagasaki will be repeated many times over.¹⁵ Japanese atomic bomb writers have been articulating such sentiments at least since the poet Tōge Sankichi's (1917–53) *Genbaku shishū* (Poems of the Atomic Bomb, 1951 [1990]), Japan's first anthology of atomic bomb poetry. Yet this tendency became more prominent with time, as *hibakusha* grew increasingly frustrated with global military maneuvers and as more non-*hibakusha*—whose discourse, for per-

¹³ Postwar Japanese society showed a shocking lack of empathy for *hibakusha*, quickly transforming them into pariahs; *hibakusha* have had to fight tenaciously to obtain the medical and financial assistance necessary for their survival, a fight that has continued into the twenty-first century. See “A-bomb Victims Win Recognition of Pain” 2009. The experiences of Korean *hibakusha*, primarily those who were in Hiroshima as colonial labor conscripts at Mitsubishi's shipyard, have been particularly harrowing. It was not until November 1, 2007 that the Japanese Supreme Court ruled illegal the Japanese government's denial of the healthcare benefits of Korean *hibakusha*, but this was only a partial victory, the Court refusing their demand for compensation for unpaid wages (Palmer 2008: 1). See also “Court Grants S. Korean Hibakusha Benefits” 2008. In Hapch'ŏn, South Korea, home to many Koreans repatriated after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Koreans and Japanese are working on a peace park akin to the one in Hiroshima. Koreans also are producing a growing corpus of writing on the atomic bomb and nuclear power, including their environmental impact (Gu 2004; Kim 1993: 56–7).

As is to be expected, in Japanese literature of the atomic bomb portrayals of Japanese suffering far outweigh those of the suffering of other peoples, but a number of texts also address American and other casualties. The best known of the latter is Oda Makoto's (1932–2007) novel *Hiroshima* (1981 [1990]), which underlines the trans-Pacific impact of the development and use of the atomic bomb and juxtaposes the injustices faced by *hibakusha* with those experienced by other marginalized groups. Oda Makoto was both a writer and a peace activist.

¹⁴ Remarks on the impossibility of translating *hibakusha* suffering into words appear most frequently in atomic bomb literature written in the two decades following the bombings, but they remain prevalent even in twenty-first century texts.

¹⁵ For more on nuclear disarmament activism in Asia and the Pacific more generally, see Wittner 2009.

sonal, practical, and political reasons, tends to focus less on individual suffering—began writing literature on the atomic bomb.¹⁶ Much poetry and prose by both *hibakusha* and non-*hibakusha* intertwines exposés of the agonies experienced by *hibakusha* with discussion of the dangers continued nuclear testing poses to individuals, societies, and ultimately the planet. These writings posit that one of the greatest deterrents to nuclear deployment, if not proliferation, is the knowledge that human beings now are capable of turning the globe into a vast Hiroshima or Nagasaki, that the unimaginable suffering experienced by *hibakusha* itself would pale next to the suffering human beings now are capable of inflicting on one another.

Japanese literary responses to the trauma of the atomic bombings include not only creative representations of trauma but also engagement with trauma's causes and its futures. Most studies of Japanese literature of the atomic bomb, like those of trauma literature more generally, focus on the deep structures and recurring patterns writers use in trying to depict the undepictable. These studies also highlight the relationships among individual, social, and historical memory and representation.¹⁷ This scholarship has yielded valuable insights into how human beings are affected by and attempt to work through the unimaginably horrific. Less frequently examined, but equally important, are the structures and patterns used to articulate responsibility for suffering, actual and anticipated, Japanese and global. In speaking of responsibility, my focus is not primarily on the complex sense of responsibility felt by writers of the atomic bomb, particularly by *hibakusha*, an important area of trauma theory.¹⁸ Instead, it is the responsibilities that literature of the atomic bomb—written by both *hibakusha* and non-*hibakusha*—imposes on others, including readers: on the one hand, its assigning *culpability* (i.e. identifying enablers of the bombings, agents of other atrocities, and propagators of nuclear proliferation) and, on the other, its appeals to *obligation* (primarily regarding preventing future suffering).¹⁹

¹⁶ I address differences between *hibakusha* and non-*hibakusha* writing below.

¹⁷ For more on the latter, see Suleiman 2006; for more on the former, see Orbaugh 2007, esp. 202–12. Orbaugh argues that the images and conceptualizations of the body in early literature of the atomic bombing “formed the repertory of body-images from which [later] writers had to draw” and that these were “used to metaphorize various domains of experience of life under Occupation” (212).

¹⁸ For more on this sense of responsibility as articulated in Japanese literature of the atomic bomb, see Treat 1995.

¹⁹ Cf. Des Pres 1976: 46–7.

To be sure, the multiple responsibilities felt by *hibakusha*, and arguably by most writers who discuss the atomic bombings, are closely related to and often coincide with those articulated in atomic bomb literature. Many writers talk explicitly in their creative work about their personal culpability and obligations, and those of other survivors; these articulations are addressed on the following pages where appropriate. But one of the key, yet understudied, dynamics of Japanese literature of the atomic bomb is how the creative texts themselves implicate everyone, from the Japanese emperor, army, and civilians during wartime, to readers situated half a world and more than half a century away. Exploring how Japanese literature of the atomic bomb probes questions of culpability and obligation adds new understandings to the dilemmas confronting a world seemingly so unconcerned about its future that, as Japan's recent Niigata-Chūetsu Oki Earthquake (July 16, 2007) reminded us, the nation most profoundly affected by nuclear fallout not only houses the world's largest nuclear generating station but also operates it on an active earthquake fault.²⁰

Culpability

The dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was what the columnist James Carroll has termed an “absolute marker in time”.²¹ But these attacks did not occur in a vacuum, and interpretations of the circumstances leading to these events, and in particular their justification, have been nothing if not conflicting. Deflecting culpability for the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been at the center of much discourse; the multiple strategies used to do so mirror the very different meanings of the bombings to different groups of Americans, Japanese, and other East Asians, particularly Chinese and Koreans. One of the simplest ways of deflecting culpability has been to replace human agency with atomic agency. Visitors to museums devoted to the bombings—whether the Hiroshima *heiwa kinen*

²⁰ The epicenter of the Niigata-Chūetsu Oki Earthquake was only nineteen kilometers from the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant (Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Genshiryoku Hatsudensho), the world's largest nuclear-power complex. Tests to restart the plant took place in May 2009. Resuming operations is seen as a key part of reducing Japan's emissions of greenhouse gases (Ajima 2009). Cf. McCormack 2008.

²¹ Comments made at the Hiroshima/Nagasaki 2005: Memories and Visions Conference (Tufts University, April 22, 2005).

shiryōkan (Peace Memorial Museum), the Nagasaki genbaku shiryōkan (Atomic Bomb Museum), or the National Atomic Museum in Albuquerque, New Mexico—cannot but be struck by the overwhelming use of the agentless voice in discussions of the bombings: “The war began”, “It was decided to use the bomb”, “The bomb was dropped”, “The bomb burst”.²² The United States has deflected culpability with claims of operational necessity: before its detonation, and despite warnings of scientists working on the project, American political and military leaders considered the atomic bomb simply another weapon, one that would be deployed as soon as it had been satisfactorily tested.²³ In the aftermath of the attacks, the American public—harboring tremendous resentment about Pearl Harbor, weary of war, and frustrated with Japan’s refusal to surrender—was relieved to see the fighting come to an end and generally was not concerned with the means used to achieve this outcome. The continuing grip of operational necessity as justification for dropping the bombs is reflected in the lack of outcry from the American public in 1995 when the Smithsonian Institution gave in to the demands of veterans’ groups and displayed the *Enola Gay* (the airplane used to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima) without the planned artifacts from Hiroshima’s Peace Memorial Museum and without “discussion of human suffering caused by [the bombs] or the ambiguous legacy of nuclear weaponry since 1945” (Hein and Takenaka 2007).²⁴

²² Visitors to these museums also are likely to be struck by the sometimes excessively hygienic exhibits into which fragments of the bombings have been transplanted, a notable contrast from the starkness of the Memorial Hall in Nanjing commemorating the 1937 massacre, particularly before the hall’s recent renovation. Interesting in this context is the case of former Defense Minister Kyūma Fumio, a Nagasaki native who was forced to resign after claiming in June 2007 that the atomic bombings were inevitable (*shōganai*) (Shillony 2007: 4).

²³ The atomic bomb was tested successfully at Trinity, New Mexico on July 16, 1945; two bombs were then shipped to Tinian Island in the Northern Mariana Islands. President Harry S Truman’s (1884–1972) comments, after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, that “the force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East” and that the United States would not share the science behind the bomb “pending further examination of possible methods of protecting us and the rest of the world from the danger of sudden destruction”, were the first acknowledgements from American officials that the atomic bomb signaled a qualitative change in warfare. Truman’s remarks are cited in Bliss 1991: 173.

²⁴ For more on the Smithsonian controversy in the context of museum portrayals of World War Two, see Hein and Takenaka 2007. For more on the inability of some Americans to confront the consequences of the bombings, see Wittner and Samuels

Postwar public opinion in Japan was largely pacifist until the end of the Cold War and the death of Emperor Hirohito (1901–89), people being plagued by memories of suffering and loss. In the 1990s, many Japanese began “taking a more self-critical look at their wartime past”, expressing concern with Japanese atrocities committed in Asia and debating the culpability of Japanese civilians (*ibid.*).²⁵ To be sure, the Japanese government has since 1952 often been credited with great cleverness for using atomic victimhood as a lever to win diplomatic concessions from the United States. Likewise, conservative elements in Japan—including lawmakers, bureaucrats, educators, businesspeople, and retired military officers—have hidden behind a shield of victimhood to fend off charges of committing atrocities in Asia and to deflect attention from Pearl Harbor and Japan’s role in drawing the United States into the War.

On the other hand, the *Yomiuri shinbun*’s (Yomiuri Newspaper) non-analytical publications on war responsibility, culminating in the two-volume *Kenshō sensō sekinin* (Examining War Responsibility, 2006) and its English abridgment *From Marco Polo Bridge to Pearl Harbor: Who Was Responsible?* (2006) are among the latest in a long line of Japanese examinations of both individual guilt and the economic and social forces that led to war and ultimately to the dropping of the atomic bombs.²⁶ Yet such extensive soul-searching has done little to appease Japan’s East Asian neighbors, who—faced with Japanese denials of blame concerning everything from wartime Korean ‘comfort women’ to the vivisection of Chinese in Manchuria—continue to demand that Japan confront its past, accept responsibility, and apologize fully for its war crimes.

Japanese literature of the atomic bomb has always negotiated multiple culpabilities; at the same time that it emphasizes Japanese suffering, it refuses to allow Japan to see itself solely as victim. To be sure, a number of Nagasaki survivors have portrayed the bombing of their city, which has the highest concentration of Christians in Japan and

2008. See also Bird and Lifschultz 1998. The United States government suppressed images of the bomb’s effects for decades (slavick 2009).

²⁵ This is not to imply that pacifism has been replaced by blame. Although slavick’s (2009) claim that “it has been over 60 years since the atomic bomb was dropped, but the A-bomb is everywhere in Hiroshima” is somewhat exaggerated, Hiroshima is still very much a “City of Peace”.

²⁶ See Morris-Suzuki 2007; *Yomiuri shinbun sensō sekinin kenshō iinkai* 2006; and Auer 2006. For a recent American discussion of responsibility, see Kort 2007.

a long history of Christian martyrdom and ghettoization, as the will of God and the people of Nagasaki as chosen martyrs. These include the radiologist and *hibakusha* Nagai Takashi (1908–51), who asserts in his highly acclaimed *Nagasaki no kane* (The Bells of Nagasaki, 1949 [1984]), written several years after the bombings:

We have to understand the bomb being carried to the Urakami section of Nagasaki [marked by the Urakami Cathedral, Japan's largest Catholic cathedral and only 500 meters from ground zero] as the providence of God.... Was not Japan's only sacred place chosen as a pure lamb to be butchered and burned on the sacrificial altar to atone for the sins humanity committed in the world war? (Nagai 1995: 145).²⁷

But even here, speaking of the “sins of humanity”, and of Japan as possessing only a single sacred space, Nagai depicts responsibility as transcending nation and ideology.²⁸

Much Japanese literature of the atomic bomb contains more explicit accusations. Not surprisingly, many texts focus on American culpability, lashing out at the United States not only for using atomic weapons against Japan, but also for failing to appreciate the intensity of the suffering to which it subjected its victims, suffering that continues unabated years after the bombings. Japanese literature of the atomic bomb written in the first decade after the War often accuses the United States of rushing to deploy nuclear weapons, arguing that there was no need to unleash the power of the atom against a nation whose fate was sealed. For instance, addressing a young woman whose corpse lies forgotten on the road, Tōge Sankichi's “Sono hi wa itsu ka” (When will we See that Day?, 1952 [1990]) asserts:

little did you know that
in the eyes of the world
Japan's surrender was only a matter of time...
(they [the Americans] hurried to drop the atomic bomb
they felt the need to crush Japan to pieces themselves before the arrival
of that day [the Soviet attack on Japan])²⁹

²⁷ Cf. Hotta Kiyomi's play “Shima” (Island, 1955 [1994]), 19. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

²⁸ Nagai was badly injured in the attack on Nagasaki, but he worked tirelessly to help others in his city. He is best known in the English-speaking world for *Bells of Nagasaki*, but he in fact wrote prolifically on the bombings and more generally on war and death.

²⁹ The Soviet entry into the War against Japanese forces in Manchuria was long scheduled for 90 days after Victory in Europe (VE) Day (May 8, 1945). The Soviets

with a dark and ugly will
they hurried to drop it...)...

Aaaa! This was not an accident, not a natural disaster
mankind's first atomic bomb
owing to a precise plan and a will of insatiable ambition
was dropped with a flash, one flash
over the eastern archipelago, the Japanese people
as one of the 400,000 victims extinguished contorted and writhing,
you were murdered (Tōge 1975: 199, 201).

Addressing the psychology of those who planned the attacks, Tōge's poem makes it very clear who is to blame. At the same time, including as the narratee a forgotten corpse personalizes suffering; the United States is depicted not simply as devastating a city, but also as mercilessly annihilating hundreds of thousands of innocent, individual human beings.

Creative work on the atomic bombings published in subsequent years expresses exasperation with the United States for expanding its nuclear program. In Kurihara Sadako's (1913–2005) "Nebada ni suite" (On Nevada, 1961 [1994]), the poet asks incredulously:

Nevada!
Can't you hear the sobs,
can't you hear the groans,
can't you hear the prayers,
from the ruins of Hiroshima
that you created?
Don't your hands terrify you?
Hands that hold
A hundred thousand Hiroshimas? (Kurihara 2005: 226).³⁰

"On Nevada", written on the resumption of nuclear testing by the United States and the Soviet Union, combines reference to the endur-

attacked Manchuria, as planned, on August 8, 1945. For more on Soviet military actions in East Asia and the ending of the War, see Hasegawa 2005.

³⁰ The first published atomic bomb poet, Kurihara was also the most prolific, producing more than ten books of poetry and five volumes of essays. In both her writing and political activities, she was one of the most outspoken critics not only of American and Japanese policies during the War but also of Japanese treatment of Koreans (particularly Korean *hibakusha*), of the continued proliferation of nuclear weapons, and of the apathy of individuals everywhere. She also wrote extensively on literature of atrocity, including literature of the atomic bomb and literature of the Holocaust; she made little secret of her distaste for the postwar Japanese literary establishment, which called on writers to refrain from discussing the atomic bombs.

ing plight of *hibakusha* with warnings that the wasteland of Hiroshima is only a microcosm of what would be created were the newly developed weapons to be deployed. It does so while pointing the finger solely at the United States—and expressing disbelief that the United States is not terrified by what its government has done.

Expressions of similar sentiments are scattered throughout Japanese literature of the atomic bomb. Creative works discuss the agony of *hibakusha* while implying, if not declaring explicitly, that the onus of responsibility lies on the United States and that the Japanese were and continue to be essentially helpless victims. But from its beginnings, much Japanese literature of the atomic bomb tempers if not overpowers these accusations with assertions of hybrid culpability. Many works in fact denounce Japan's leaders not only for refusing to surrender before the United States used atomic weapons but also for going to war in the first place. Such writing also addresses the responsibility of the Japanese people, chastising them for failing to denounce their leaders, while criticizing the government for silencing protests.

Such views are evident as early as Ōta Yōko's (1903–63) novella *Shikabane no machi* (City of Corpses, 1948 [1990]), one of Japan's first novels of the atomic bombing. Here the narrator speaks of terror and anger intertwining inside her like snakes, and she emphasizes that this is “anger at the war itself, not at the defeat” (Ōta 1982: 7). Soon thereafter, she has harsh words for Japanese who criticize the United States for using the atomic bomb. Like the poet in Tōge's “When will we See that Day?” she states that the Americans dropped the bomb on Hiroshima “after the outcome of the war had been determined”, but rather than condemning them for so doing, she instead points to Japanese culpability:

Japan's opponent used the atomic bomb at the end of the war. This generally seems to be resented. But such opinions are based more on emotion than on reason... We lament only the “misery of war's devastation”. But what we should lament is what “comes before” the misery of war's devastation... That we had to go to war at all was the result of ignorance and corruption... Had the militarists not resisted so desperately and pointlessly, the war truly would have been over... America and Japan's militarist government together dropped the bomb on our heads (*ibid.*: 23–4).³¹

³¹ Ōta was an ardent supporter of the War and wrote many prize-winning patriotic texts, including *Ama* (Women of the Sea, 1940), which encouraged selfless devotion

In the next section of *City of Corpses*, the narrator comments that, had Japanese militarists and intellectuals alike been paying more attention to Allied bombing patterns, not to mention the global race for “modern scientific weapons”, Japanese lives might have been spared. But she then ambiguously remarks: “Unfortunately, the war had left everyone distracted and exhausted” (*ibid*: 28). The narrator thereby implies that not much separated Japanese leaders from their constituents, but she stops short of directly blaming ordinary Japanese for the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Kurihara Sadako’s poem “*Ōsama no mimi wa roba no mimi*” (His Majesty has Donkey Ears, 1980 [1994]), written more than three decades later, similarly grapples with the responsibility of ordinary Japanese. It begins:

Because no one said,
 “His Majesty has donkey ears”,
 because those who said “His Majesty has donkey ears” were jailed,
 innocent adolescents
 and even young Koreans, whose homeland had been snatched by the
 emperor,
 volunteered (Kurihara 2005: 381).

to the nation, and *Sakura no kuni* (Land of Cherry Blossoms, 1940), which extolled Japanese aggression in Asia. Ōta’s earliest depiction of the bombing appeared in the *Asahi shinbun* on September 30, 1945; this was the last time she proclaimed the beauty and the glory of the war and its victims. Increasingly haunted by the tragedy that had befallen her city, Ōta became more and more committed to speaking for the *hibakusha*. Although much of her writing is concerned with portraying the physical destruction of Hiroshima and the lingering effects of the bombings on *hibakusha*, she also questions at length the duty of the writer confronted with tragedy of such magnitude, and she makes no secret of her anger—at the United States for dropping the bomb and at the apathy of the Japanese before, in the immediate aftermath of, and in the years following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. *City of Corpses* is Ōta Yōko’s most famous publication. Containing thirty chapters divided into seven sections, it is narrated in the first person by a *hibakusha* known only as *watakushi* (“I”). Written by *watakushi* between early September and late November 1945, the text begins with a discussion of the narrator’s current situation, flashes back to the day of the bombing, and then with numerous twists and turns gradually moves toward the present, where it concludes.

For additional perspectives on joint American and Japanese culpability, see the prominent Japanese dramatist Noda Hideki’s (1955–) play *Pandora no kane* (Pandora’s Bell, 1999). Noda burst onto the Japanese theatrical scene in the mid-1970s, when he launched the highly successful company *Yume no Yuminsha* (Dreaming Bohemian, 1976–92); Noda Chizu (Noda Map, est. 1993), his current theatrical company, continues to play to full houses. Noda has written plays on a number of sensitive topics, including the atomic bombings, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, and war more generally.

Here the poet declares that seemingly no one criticized the emperor, only to reveal that some did speak out. But these protesting voices are forgotten almost immediately, the poet asserting in the following stanza that because virtually no one criticized the emperor the Japanese became more violent:

Because no one said,
 “His Majesty has donkey ears”,
 they thought His Majesty was a god,
 they slandered countries that disobeyed the divine country, calling them
 savage
 burned them,
 pillaged them,
 murdered them (*ibid*: 382).

Even more intriguing is the third stanza, where the poet asserts:

Because no one could say,
 “His Majesty has donkey ears”,
 to preserve the monarchy, His Majesty did not surrender,
 and bombs were dropped
 on Hiroshima and Nagasaki,
 and 300,000 residents were burned alive (*ibid*).³²

This verse implies that, had people criticized the emperor, he would have ended the war before the United States had the opportunity to deploy nuclear weapons. Claiming that no one could protest—which implies both that no one was allowed to protest and that no one was willing to do so—the poet does not implicate ordinary Japanese as strongly as she does in the second stanza. On the other hand, in contrast with the first stanza, she does not indicate that people are in fact protesting despite the consequences. Like her counterpart in *City of Corpses*, the speaker in “His Majesty has Donkey Ears” equivocates: she is just as hesitant to portray Japanese civilians as victims of their military government, and thus relatively free from blame, as she is to depict ordinary citizens as in some sense responsible for the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In addition to equating Japanese culpability with failure to prevent the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Kurihara’s “His Majesty has Donkey Ears” also looks at culpability in terms of Japan’s crimes

³² As Kurihara’s poem suggests, Emperor Hirohito’s transcendent goal throughout the War was to preserve the monarchy.

against humanity. In the 1960s, deeply disturbed by their nation's tacit support of the American military in the Vietnam War (the United States used Japan as a staging area), Japanese intellectuals—including writers of the atomic bomb such as Oda Makoto (1932–2007)—began underlining their nation's dual role as victim and victimizer in the War.³³ Although they rarely argue that people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki died such horrific deaths because of what Japanese did to other Asians, a number of atomic bomb texts suggest that it would be hypocritical for Japanese to condemn what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, regardless of who was responsible, without also condemning Japanese atrocities in Asia. For instance, Kurihara's "Hata (2)" (The Flag (2), 1975 [1994]) declares Japan's flag one of "bones and blood". The poet alternates references to foreign blood, including that of women and children, and foreign bones lying in mass graves and blanching on southern islands, with discussion of both the forgotten bones of Japanese soldiers in China and the traumas faced by Japanese at home. The poet queries whether people already have forgotten the atomic flashes that killed so many, but she concludes, "Even if the Japanese forget/ Asians will never forget", turning the spotlight back to Japan's wartime aggression (*ibid.*: 344).

Kurihara's "Hiroshima to iu toki" (When we Say Hiroshima, 1972 [1994]) deals with international responses, describing the reactions of Asians who "will never forget":

When we say "Hiroshima",
do people gently answer
"Ahhh Hiroshima".
If we say "Hiroshima", "Pearl Harbor"
If we say "Hiroshima", "Nanjing Massacre"
If we say "Hiroshima", women and children
trapped in ditches
doused in gasoline
burned alive in Manila.
If we say "Hiroshima",
echoes of blood and fire.

³³ Interestingly, with the exception of Kurihara and Oda, a founder of Beheiren (Betonamu ni heiwa o! Shimin Rengō; Citizens Federation for Peace in Vietnam) and of other citizens' movements concerned with war and nuclear issues, very few Japanese writers protested the Vietnam War in their creative work; as Thomas Havens has noted, "Vietnam was the era of journalists, not novelists or scholars" (Havens 1987: 74). For more on Oda's pacifism, see Tanaka 2007.

If we say “Hiroshima”,
 we don’t get the gentle reply
 “Ahhh Hiroshima”.
 Asia’s dead and voiceless masses
 together spout out the anger
 of those we violated (*ibid*: 317).

In addition to exposing Japanese guilt, the poet also highlights Asia’s refusal to forgive, much less forget, Japan’s wartime activities; she portrays wounds everywhere as continuing to fester. Yet interestingly, the focus of “When we Say Hiroshima” then turns, not to the importance of apologizing or making reparations for past crimes—a principal concern among Chinese, Koreans, and other Asians—but instead to garnering sympathy. The poet advises that “For us to say ‘Hiroshima’/ and get the gentle reply/ ‘Ahhh Hiroshima’”, the Japanese must “remove foreign bases” and “truly reject/ the weapons we were supposed to reject” (*ibid*). Until Japan removes evidence of military proclivity, she warns, Hiroshima will be a bitter city of cruelty and duplicity. In the final stanza she offers a vaguer prescription: “For us to say ‘Hiroshima’/ and get the gentle reply ‘Ahhh Hiroshima’/ we first/ must cleanse/ our soiled hands” (*ibid*: 318). Cleansing soiled hands potentially involves much more than expelling foreign troops and destroying weapons, but the poet avoids chastising Japanese by exploring how they might convince the world to be more sympathetic.³⁴

Japanese literature of the atomic bomb paints an ambiguous picture of culpability. Numerous texts assert that, although the United States was by no means justified in using nuclear weapons against Japan, the Japanese—military government and private citizens alike—are not without blame. To be sure, in many cases the more writers accuse the more they ultimately pull back, tempering reproach by revealing vulnerability. In addition, the more blame is spread, the more all parties are excused from culpability: if everyone is guilty, can anyone be

³⁴ Paradoxically, one of the few Chinese from whom Kurihara did receive the longed for “Ahhh Hiroshima” was the renowned writer Ba Jin (1904–2005). Although during the War Ba harshly criticized Japan, in the essay “Fangwen Guangdao” (Visiting Hiroshima, 1981), he reveals that he had been thinking about Hiroshima for the last thirty-five years and applauds the resilience of the survivors, which he claims gives him hope for humankind. He expresses similar sentiments in “Changqi de meng” (Dream of Nagasaki, 1981). See Penney 2007 for more on postwar Japanese literary and media exposure of Japan’s wartime atrocities. *Hibakusha* continue to call attention to Japan’s war crimes in Asia. See “Hibakusha” 2008.

guilty? The confusion inherent in atomic bomb narratives exposes the tremendous difficulties of confronting such a traumatic past.

Obligation

Accusations are an important part of Japanese literature of the atomic bomb. Texts reveal the multiple and often ambiguous origins of atrocity even while they mourn the suffering of those caught in its path. But many creative works also look to the future and speak of responsibility in terms not of culpability but of obligation, obligation to make choices and to act on those choices.³⁵ Not surprisingly, creative texts written by *hibakusha* frequently address the duty of survivors, writers, and especially writers who are survivors to educate people the world over about the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But a key feature of Japanese literature of the atomic bomb—particularly that written in the decades following the immediate atomic aftermath—is its equally insistent call for international participation in the antinuclear movement, and, more generally, for eradicating violence worldwide.³⁶ This is true of creative works by writers ranging from those who survived the bombings, including Nagai, Hara Tamiki (1905–51), Ōta, Kurihara, and Tōge, to those who were not in Hiroshima or Nagasaki but are deeply concerned about the atomic bombings and their aftermaths, particularly Hotta Kiyomi (1922–), Ibuse, Oda, and Ōe Kenzaburō (1935–), to literary figures born after the bombings such as Noda Hideki (1955–) and Taguchi Randy (1959–). These writers naturally approach questions of obligation in different ways, but they all emphasize how, with the escalation of nuclear testing in the years and decades after the War, a local and regional tragedy quickly became a global threat; they insist that, if this threat is not eradicated quickly, the future of the planet is at stake. Far from confining the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to historical events that, however traumatic, are safely in the past, to be studied from the silence of archives (if one is not a *hibakusha*), much literature of the atomic

³⁵ Susan Suleiman's observations concerning responsibility and atrocity readily apply to articulations of this dynamic in literature of the atomic bomb (Suleiman 2004: 374).

³⁶ Significantly, there is very little if any Japanese literature of the atomic bomb that takes a conservative or militarist standpoint.

bomb warns of the slippery slope down which society in the nuclear age continues to slide, imperiling the future of both human beings and the nonhuman. These texts emphasize that, while not all persons are directly culpable, all have obligations. Far from lessening the burden on any one individual or people, emphasis on shared responsibility only highlights impending crisis.

The past looms large in Japanese literature of the atomic bomb, but the future is just as overwhelming. Many texts of this genre, whether written in the late 1940s or in the twenty-first century, argue that taking proactive measures is equally if not more important than reactively assigning blame. Much Japanese literature of the atomic bomb asks complex questions concerning obligation: the obligation not only of survivors, writers, and particularly writers who are survivors, but also of people everywhere to ensure their own well-being, that of future generations, and that of the planet more generally, by demanding that existing nuclear weapons be destroyed and that further testing of nuclear weapons be outlawed. Some take an additional step, calling for the abolition of war itself. As Kurihara declares in the final lines of “Watakushi wa Hiroshima o shōgen suru” (I Bear Witness for Hiroshima, 1952 [1994]): “As a survivor, witness for Hiroshima,/ I testify wherever I go,/ I devote my life to singing,/ ‘Let’s stop war!’” (*ibid.*: 178). Indefatigable, Kurihara sang “Let’s stop war!” for the next half century, devoting the remainder of her life to world peace. There is no question that such pleas are genuine, but the near impossibility of realizing them haunts numerous creative works.

Japanese literature of the atomic bomb, like much literature of trauma, speaks frequently of the tremendous burden of survival, not only revealing to people with little understanding of Hiroshima and Nagasaki the traumas faced by those who lived through the horrors, but also speaking directly to *hibakusha* themselves, imploring them—no matter how old or sick—to resist the temptation to sequester themselves and instead to fight as tenaciously as they can for a more peaceful future. This is a common entreaty in Tōge’s *Poems of the Atomic Bomb*. The poet in “Toshi o totta okāsan” (Old Mother, 1951 [1990]), for instance, pleads with an elderly widow who lost her family in the bombing of Hiroshima and appears to have given up on life:

you must not die
old mother
you must not go in this way...

your grief that is something other than grief
 your hatred that transcends hatred
 will join with the thoughts of everyone else
 whom that war left without family
 and will stop such a thing
 from occurring again in the human world...
 you must not end up dying this way
 you must not end up
 going (Tōge 1975: 172–5).

Although speaking directly to an aging and lonely *hibakusha*, this poem does not make having survived the atomic bomb a prerequisite for activism. The poet claims that the woman's grief and hatred will join with the thoughts not just of those who endured the attacks, but also with those "whom that war left without family". This assertion implicates not only *hibakusha* but ultimately grieving families the world over.

Depicting fiery protests as replacing atomic fires, in Tōge's "Keikan" (Scenery, 1951 [1990]) the poet describes just how survivors might avert a replay of August 1945:

We rise up even at experiments on atolls...
 the dance of tongueless flames
 the convolutions of lungless tongues
 teeth pierce lips lips spout forth liquid fire
 and little by little voiceless flames spread out across the world
 Hiroshima burning fiercely in London
 Hiroshima blazing in New York
 Hiroshima clear and incandescent in Moscow
 the voiceless dance that permeates the world the rage of the figures
 we are still ourselves
 like a forest like lava
 covering the entire earth, flames heat

 the lumps of fire the madness that crushes to death
 the plans, again refined, for death by the atom (*ibid.*: 196).

Writing only six years after the atomic bombings, the poet in "Scenery" (and likely Tōge himself) still could have confidence in the ability of survivors ultimately to triumph over atomic fires, to have their voices heard around the world, if only they were willing to make the effort. Tōge's optimism is notable considering the circumstances behind the creation of *Poems of the Atomic Bomb*: Truman's announcement on November 30, 1950 of the possibility of employing nuclear weapons in Korea, an announcement that drove Hara to suicide and Tōge to

poetry.³⁷ The United States did not use nuclear weapons in Korea, but the global arms race of the following decades revealed as misguided Tōge's confidence, and that of many of his contemporaries.

Japanese literature of the atomic bomb urges survivors not only to stage protests but also to bear witness, to speak and write about their experiences at once to commemorate those who perished and to warn others about the dangers of nuclear weapons. Atomic bomb literature also often implies that so doing will allow survivors to work through some of their seemingly inevitable survival guilt. This is as true in Ōta Yōko's *City of Corpses* and Tōge's anthology *Poems of the Atomic Bomb*, both written in the immediate atomic aftermath, as it is of Ibuse's novel *Black Rain*, published in the shadow of Japan's support of increasing American military involvement in Southeast Asia, and Taguchi Randy's collection of short stories *Hibaku no Maria* (Bombed Maria, 2006), appearing in the wake of Japanese acquiescence to American demands in the early twenty-first century's 'war on terror'.

The dead haunt the living in literature of the atomic bomb perhaps nowhere more poignantly than in Tōge's "Me" (Eyes, 1951 [1990]), where scattered body parts fasten themselves to the poet:

Now lumps of decayed and rotten flesh, only the eyes afire
 the human seal, wrenched away
 sinking into the concrete floor
 pinned down by some force, without even a shiver...
 eyes that adhere to and do not separate from my back, my shoulders,
 my arms.
 why do they look at me like this?...
 eyes that moved, shedding in drops a transparent secretion
 and from ripped lips
 bloody teeth
 grinding out my name (*ibid*: 168–9).

The mutilated bodies in *City of Corpses* are equally compelling, but the eyes in question are those of the survivor/writer, and it is they who cannot pull away from the atomic landscape. The narrator of Ōta's novella describes walking through the rubble of Hiroshima immediately after the bombing, revealing that she tearfully "wrote on her heart the forms of the dead bodies". And when her sister disapproves, telling

³⁷ Having experienced severe hemorrhaging during the fall of 1950, Tōge entered hospital in January 1951. He spent the next months there, writing all but one of the poems included in *Poems of the Atomic Bomb*.

her that she personally cannot stare at corpses, the narrator responds: “I’m looking with two sets of eyes: the eyes of a human being and the eyes of a writer” (Ōta 1982: 73). The narrator veils criticism of her sister and by extension of all those who turn their heads away from the ruins—all human beings, she implies, should be looking at the corpses—behind declarations of the writer’s special vision.

When the narrator’s sister then asks, “Can you write? About something like this?” she states explicitly that so doing is her obligation: “Someday I’ll have to. That’s the responsibility of a writer who’s seen this” (*ibid*). But far from reducing survival guilt, writing at times only intensifies feelings of obligation. In “Koi-negai—*Genbaku no zu ni yosete*” (Plea—for *Pictures of the Atomic Bomb*, 1951 [1990]), the final selection of *Poems of the Atomic Bomb*, Tōge writes: “Before these pictures [of the atomic bomb] I let myself pledge my steps/and before this history I will make sure the future is not one we need to repent” (Tōge 1975: 203). The anthology has drawn to a close, but it is clear that the survivor’s task has just begun. Likewise, at the conclusion of Ibuse’s *Black Rain* the narrator states that Shigematsu—whose sense of responsibility for his niece’s future has blossomed into a sense of responsibility for the future of society more generally—has finished transcribing his “Journal of the Bombing”. The narrator claims that all he needs to do is re-read his manuscript and find it a cover. Yet throughout the novel re-reading has led to re-writing, and it is doubtful this rhythm will be broken anytime soon; Shigematsu likely will continue revising for years to come (Ibuse 1975). As Tōge laments in the afterword to his collection, conditions continue to deteriorate and Japan is forever pulled toward combat.³⁸ There is no hiatus in the struggle for peace, which more often than not takes on Sisyphean dimensions.

Much contemporary literature on the atomic bomb today depicts the obligations of survivors as steadily increasing. For instance, Taguchi’s “Toki no kawa” (River of Time, 2006) features a *hibakusha* named Mitsuko who talks about her experiences with visitors to Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. These include children, many of whom have

³⁸ Tōge, writing in 1952, likely is referring both to the United States-Japan Mutual Security Treaty (1952), which subordinated Japan to America’s military and diplomatic policies, and to Japan’s role in supplying non-military goods for United States procurement during the Korean War (1950–53).

read about the bombing but have not had the opportunity to speak with a survivor. The narrator highlights Mitsuko's initial hesitance to take on this job, revealing that she longed to forget about what had happened but eventually realized that she could not afford to do so, that she had to share her story with as many as possible, particularly from the younger generation:

Mitsuko began passing down her story five years ago. Before then, she had vehemently refused to do so. People who lived to transmit the story of the war, together with employees of the museum, kept trying to persuade her to tell her story, but she continued to refuse. Speaking was difficult. She wanted to forget... Why do I have to talk about those things?... But as the interpreters aged, the expectations for Mitsuko gradually increased... "Mitsuko, today the world once again is falling into the crisis of nuclear war. Whatever we do, we must prevent this from happening. Nuclear weapons are a crime. They destroy humanity. For the sake of future generations, can't you please share your experiences?"... Mitsuko listened to many of the senior interpreters, who all told her, "This sort of thing must not be repeated; if we don't convey this to the children..." She gradually began to see their point (Taguchi 2006: 95-6).

The narrator then describes how difficult it is for Mitsuko to translate her experiences into words, but she ultimately depicts Mitsuko's co-workers as very appreciative of her dedication and the visiting students as deeply moved by her story. "River of Time" concludes with one of these students wandering lost around the city. The sun begins to set, blanketing the sky with dark red clouds, which the narrator claims are the color of "muddy blackish blood". The student quickly begins hallucinating; he hears people calling for water and sees scorched corpses and fallen and burning buildings (*ibid*: 103-5).

This scene has conflicting implications. Anticipating a second Hiroshima, it in some ways recalls Hara's three-part novella *Natsu no hana* (Summer Flowers, 1947 [1990]) where the disaster is denied a beginning and an end: "Natsu no hana" (Summer Flowers), the opening of the trilogy, takes the reader from August 4 to September 1945; "Haikyō kara" (Out of the Ruins), the second part, carries the reader from August 8 to December 1945; and "Hametsu no jokyoku" (Prelude to Annihilation), the third part, from the early months of 1945 to the first days of August. Retracing in the second part of his novella much of the ground covered in the first, and more importantly, bringing *Summer Flowers* to a close on the same day as it opens (two days before the bombing of Hiroshima), the narrative points to the imminence and the

repetitiousness of nuclear disaster. Most striking is the transition from “Out of the Ruins” to “Prelude to Annihilation”. The narrator concludes the former with descriptions of the survivors’ continued search for friends and relatives; he opens the latter with a nameless traveler who suddenly—like the student in Taguchi’s story—has a vision of the world coming to a terrible end (Hara 1965).

To be sure, the closing section of “River of Time” suggests that, because this student has been so affected by his visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Peace Memorial Park, and by Mitsuko’s story in particular, he and perhaps others of his generation just might work to prevent a second Hiroshima. But the final lines of the story find the students on a bus bound for Miyajima, an island several miles from Hiroshima and home to the famous Itsukushima Shrine. Hiroshima has been but one stop on their field trip. Battles against forgetfulness continue, but as Taguchi reveals in “Iwagami”, which follows “River of Time” in *Bombed Maria*, literature of the atomic bomb plays a central role in this process. Few Japanese writers of the atomic bomb go as far as the Nobel Prize winning Polish writer Czeslaw Milosz (1911–2004), who in his poem “Dedication” condemns poetry that does not “save nations and people” as “a connivance with official lies/ A song of drunkards whose throats will be cut in a moment” (Milosz 1988: 78). But many creative texts on the atomic bomb—whether or not they are written by *hibakusha*—do highlight survivor obligation.

On the other hand, it is vital to recognize that in much Japanese literature of the atomic bomb obligation is not depicted as the sole provenance of survivors.³⁹ Declaring that nuclear war is inevitable without active intervention on all fronts, atomic bomb literature inevitably stresses the obligation of people everywhere to insist that nuclear weapons be abolished. Some texts do so by highlighting the immediacy of the crisis, while others explicitly exhort everyone from *hibakusha* to those with no direct connection to Hiroshima and Nagasaki to become more politically engaged.

Japanese literature of the atomic bomb frequently condemns the continued proliferation of nuclear weapons, asserting that the danger of their deployment has only increased since they were first used in August 1945. And with survivors steadily dying off, with Hiroshima

³⁹ Involving the wider community also can help survivors mitigate trauma. See Herman 1992: 70–3.

and Nagasaki now thriving cities showing few obvious scars of the atomic bombings, fewer and fewer people, not to mention world leaders, appreciate the consequences of nuclear war. Such poems as Kurihara's "Kondo wa anata no ban yo" ("You're Next!", 1960 [1994]) and "America no higeki" (American Tragedy, 1986 [1994]) counter this obliviousness by depicting human civilization as doomed. In "You're Next!" the poet contrasts the fate of humanity with the destiny of the atom, declaring:

"You're next!"
 One person dies,
 and someone at the wake [is next] ...
 Atoms boil,
 atoms bubble.
 One bomb explodes,
 and bombs explode one after the other.
 Countless bombs explode.
 The earth becomes an inorganic desert
 like the moon.
 Yet remnant radioactivity boils, boils and burns,
 in this uninhabited desert it bubbles, bubbles and burns (Kurihara 2005:
 249-50).

People, the earth, and atoms: the poet depicts the former two as dying off and the latter as multiplying, transforming the planet into an unlivable wasteland.

Even in poems like "American Tragedy", which focus primarily on the traumas experienced by the citizens of a single country, Kurihara links national and international concerns. "American Tragedy" laments the plight of Americans exposed to radiation, including everyone from workers directly involved in manufacturing atomic bombs and those operating nuclear submarines, to people who simply were in the wrong place at the wrong time, including celebrities like John Wayne and even the American president himself:

Together a million people,
 an atomic hell
 the superpower created itself ...
 The America that holds
 a million *hibakusha*
 creates new *hibakusha* with each test,
 and is eaten through from within.
 John Wayne and the entire group that shot the Western on location in
 Nevada

died of cancer.
 And a strong American president
 developed skin cancer on his prominent nose
 and polyps on his intestines (*ibid*: 454–5).

Significantly, however, between references to American *hibakusha*, the poet speaks of the damage inflicted on the residents of the Bikini atoll, the site of several dozen atomic tests in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and remarks, “The atomic soldiers of United States the aggressor/and the *hibakusha* of Bikini, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki/are siblings/in atomic suffering” (*ibid*: 455). This particular nuclear family spans the Pacific, if not the globe.

Parallels are even more ambiguous in the final lines of the poem, where after calling for a ban on weapons that attack targets from outer space, Kurihara turns to the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger* (1986). Undermining NASA’s attempt to make the space program appear more innocuous by inviting a teacher, Christa McAuliffe (1948–86), on the shuttle mission, the poet declares that the “commando space crew” vanished into America’s “bloody red sky” and concludes the poem with the following observation: “Japan’s commando spirit/of ‘Never give up, no matter what’/The American tragedy is amplified” (*ibid*). This comment likens America’s refusal to let anything get in the way of developing an increasingly deadly arsenal (the space program being deeply integrated with the military) to the countless suicide missions of Japan’s wartime military. In so doing, it creates a vicious siblinghood, a union where shared aggression has replaced shared suffering.

Underlining the potential of nuclear annihilation, poems like “You’re Next!” and “American Tragedy” allude to the universal obligation to do something to impede the festering nuclear crisis. Other works of Japanese literature of the atomic bomb are more explicit, exhorting both survivors and those who did not experience the bombings to work for world peace. This tendency is as evident in the work of Tōge as it is in that of twenty-first century Japanese poets. Tōge’s poem “Yobikake” (Appeal, 1951 [1990]) initially focuses on survivors, pressing upon them the need to work together to forestall annihilation:

it is not too late, even now
 it is not too late to call forth your true strength...
 provided that you carry with you the brand of Hiroshima...
 to extend high those deformed arms
 and together with the many similar arms

to support the anathematized sun
 that is soon to fall again
 it is not too late, even starting now (Tōge 1975: 196–7).

Repetition of the phrase “it is not too late” a mere six years after the atomic bombings points to the hopelessness of many *hibakusha*, their belief that their suffering has been in vain—particularly in the wake of Truman’s announcement concerning the possibility of using atomic bombs in Korea—and that they are incapable of contributing productively to society.

Yet the lines that follow are ambiguous, the poet ultimately suggesting that survivors not only are to seek out fellow *hibakusha* but also are to unite with those who oppose war in principle but have done little to secure peace:

to cover up with your back that carries the brand of death
 the tears of all the gentle people
 who although loathing war only loiter about
 to take up and grip firmly
 in both your palms, raw and red
 these trembling and drooping hands
 no
 it is not too late, even now (*ibid.*: 197).

All are to participate in the fight for peace, the poet urges, before it is too late. Such fervent hope might appear somewhat out of place in the immediate aftermath of the bombings, but it in fact was not unusual. Even writers who, unlike Tōge, lived long enough to see dreams of postwar harmony shattered, even those born into a nuclear world, continued to urge readers to fight for peace.⁴⁰

Taguchi Randy’s “Eien no hi” (Eternal Flame, 2006), which opens the anthology *Bombed Maria*, takes place six decades after the bombing and provides an interesting twist on questions of obligation, particularly the obligations of those with no immediate connection to Hiroshima.⁴¹ This short story is narrated by a woman in her thirties whose father wants her to incorporate into her wedding the “atomic flame”;

⁴⁰ For instance, Kondō Meiri’s (1954–) twenty-first century poem “Sekai no kyōtsūgo” (Global Language), included in Nagatsu’s *Atomic Bomb Poems*, similarly urges those who have lost loved ones to continue to fight for peace until their cries “extinguish the fires in all nuclear reactors/dampen the bullets of all machine guns” are heeded (Kondō 2007: 200).

⁴¹ Born in Tokyo, the Japanese novelist and essayist Taguchi Randy burst on to the Japanese literary scene in 2000 with her novel *Konsento* (Outlet); although best known

her father currently is responsible for maintaining this fire, which is said to have been lit by embers from the atomic impact.⁴² Not only is the narrator adamant that the flame not be part of the ceremony, but she also worries what will happen to it after her father dies, claiming it is too great a burden for her or any one person. Balking at the suggestion that she be responsible for the atomic flame, she declares:

My life is simple. Even if I don't raise money, even if I don't vote, even if I don't read the newspapers, even if I don't think about the Yasukuni Shrine problem, isn't that o.k.? I pay taxes. Even my pension has always been paid up. I live an extremely honest life. I think it's permissible for me not to help turn the atomic flame into the peace flame (Taguchi 2006: 45).

In one sense, Taguchi's protests ultimately ring hollow in an anthology that, critiquing outside intervention in Iraq and the deploying of Japanese soldiers in particular, underlines the need for everyone to become involved in the struggle for world peace, taxes or no taxes.⁴³ Ironically it is the narrator's taxes and those of millions of other 'responsible' and 'honest' citizens that support Japanese and ultimately American military campaigns in the Middle East. On the other hand, the longer the struggle to replace weapons with peace continues, the more futile it appears. Is transforming the atomic flame into the peace flame any more of a possibility for the characters of "Eternal Flame" than it was for the people about whom Tōge wrote in the poem "Scenery" more than fifty years earlier?

Indeed, although much Japanese literature of the atomic bomb deplores the continued manufacture and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and calls more generally for world peace, suggestions as to how the nuclear arms race might be tempered and harmony achieved often are very vague. People, regardless of their connection with Hiroshima/Nagasaki, simply are exhorted to rise up in protest, to make themselves heard. For instance, Tōyama Nobuo (1921–) concludes his

for her 'chick lit' and science fiction, her texts also address a number of environmental and human rights issues.

⁴² The atomic flame accompanied six decades of pacifist marches. It was extinguished in a ceremony at the Trinity Test Site in New Mexico, the location of the world's first nuclear detonation, on August 9, 2005, sixty years to the day after the atomic bombing of Nagasaki.

⁴³ Japan's deployment of soldiers to Iraq in 2004 marked the first time since the War that Japanese troops were sent to a war zone, even though the postwar Japanese Constitution forbids use of military force to solve international conflicts.

twenty-first century poem “Shi mo mata kōdō shimasu” (Poems also Act) with the plea: “Abolish all nuclear weapons from the earth’s horizon!/For the sake of this shining blue earth/For the sake of all the shining human beings, living things/Abolish nuclear weapons!” (Tōyama 2007: 223). In Kurihara’s “Hiroshima” (1960 [1994]), the poet declares her emotions more powerful than atomic sites and explosions, asserting that her tears are deeper than Bikini’s seas, her anger stronger than Nevada’s blasts, and her love greater than Novaya Zemlya’s sands.⁴⁴ She then proclaims, “My prayers will transform the Taklamakan Desert/into fertile green fields” (Kurihara 2005: 241). The poet’s anguish is poignant, but she can rely only on her prayers. That she prays for the virtually impossible—the transformation of one of the world’s largest deserts, located in Central Asia, into fertile fields—is revealing on several accounts. Not only does she expose her great faith in the potential for recovery, but her assertion impresses on readers that the only goals they are virtually guaranteed not to attain are those for which they do not at least strive. Whether her assertion is realistic is another matter. What is important here is the optimism of Kurihara and so many writers of the atomic bomb, their belief that disarmament and peace are possible, if enough people are convinced of their importance.

Many writers believe the foundation has already been laid. As Ōe Kenzaburō argues in *Hiroshima nōto* (Hiroshima Notes, 1965 [1981]), his moving account of human dignity:

Even now, there is no evidence that the human goodness that came to the aid of the *hibakusha* has won out over the human evil that produced nuclear weapons. However, people who think that in this world human harmony and human order can eventually be restored should pay attention to the fight of the Hiroshima doctors, which has been going on for twenty years against doubtful odds (Ōe 1965: 130).⁴⁵

Ōe argues that doctors and their patients continue to struggle, despite unimaginable challenges, and that it is precisely in their struggles that “human harmony” and “human order” are found. But the degree to

⁴⁴ Nevada, the Bikini Atoll (located in the Western Pacific), and Novaya Zemlya (a Russian archipelago in the Arctic Ocean) were all used as nuclear test sites during the Cold War.

⁴⁵ One of Japan’s most famous writers, Ōe won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1994. Although not a *hibakusha*, Ōe has long been an anti-nuclear activist and pressed for *hibakusha* rights. For more on his writings on the atomic bombs, and *Hiroshima Notes* in particular, see Stahl 2007.

which this “harmony” and “order” can impact society more generally remained to be seen.

Just as importantly, Kurihara’s prayer in “Hiroshima” raises questions concerning the impact of nuclear war on the nonhuman world. Much Japanese literature of the atomic bomb comments on the speed with which the flora and fauna of Hiroshima and Nagasaki reappeared, defying assertions made directly after the bombings that it would be decades before anything, human or nonhuman, could live in these cities. Echoing centuries of East Asian literatures, these texts often contrast the resilience of the nonhuman world with the fragility of human structures and societies. For instance, surveying the ruins of Hiroshima, Shigematsu, the protagonist of Ibuse’s *Black Rain*, remarks, “This bomb was fostering the growth of plants and flies while increasing the power that deters the essence of humanity. Flies and plants were raging unbelievably” (Ibuse 1975: 188). But often atomic bomb literature paints a more dire picture, focusing on the death rather than the renewal of the nonhuman. Earlier in *Black Rain*, Shigematsu notes that the ancient camphor trees at the Kokutaiji Temple have been uprooted: “The camphor trees were said to be more than one thousand years old, but today they had been brought to an end” (*ibid.*: 97). Ibuse’s short story “Kakitsubata” (Iris, 1956 [1985]) depicts the palms as the only trees in Hiroshima with new buds; it also features an iris blooming out of season, reminding the contemporary reader of the effects of global warming. Similarly, several of Kurihara’s poems address the devastating environmental impact of nuclear pollution, as do many of the selections in Nagatsu’s *Atomic Bomb Poems*. In the coming decades, Japanese literature of the atomic bomb, and in fact literature more generally, is likely to engage even more extensively with environmental crises instigated by atomic power and testing, as the symbiotic relationship between human-on-human violence and human degradation of the nonhuman is increasingly understood.⁴⁶

Japanese literature of the atomic bomb discusses experiences and circumstances most non-*hibakusha* can never hope fully to understand. Filled with images of burning and dismembered corpses lying in piles beside roads or floating in rivers, and replete with descriptions of horribly disfigured bodies staggering along streets and images of the

⁴⁶ For more on relationships between human beings and the nonhuman in literature of the atomic bomb, see Thornber 2009, 2011.

terrors of radiation sickness, literature of the atomic bomb paints a vivid portrait of the atomic aftermath, even while explicitly emphasizing the impossibility of capturing in words the horrors that descended on those cities. But at the same time it refuses to depict the atomic bombings as occurring in a vacuum. Arguing that the deployment of nuclear weapons not only was the culmination of past actions but also led to other series of events that continue to threaten the future of the human and nonhuman alike, this literature emphasizes that just as nuclear weapons like all weapons are conceived of, manufactured, and used by human beings, only human beings can stop the vicious cycle they have created before they destroy themselves and everything else on the planet. On the other hand, that writers of the atomic bomb have had to repeat many of the same pleas for more than six decades underlines the tremendous difficulties of transforming consciousness, no matter how compelling the images, the arguments, and the evidence.

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CHAPTER TEN

OF BRUTALITY AND BETRAYAL: YOUTHFUL FICTION AND THE LEGACY OF THE ASIA PACIFIC WAR

Christine E. Wiley

Adults were teaching us how to die, but they weren't teaching us how to live (Fukasaku Kinji, cited in Schilling 2003: 47).

Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945 brought an end to the military conflict in the Pacific and to fifteen years of Japanese imperial aggression in Asia. More importantly for the Japanese people, Japan's surrender meant the end of years of militaristic rule and suffering at the hands of Japan's war machine. As the U.S. occupying army arrived with its mission of reconstructing the defeated nation as peaceful and democratic, the exhausted and starving Japanese populace longed to forget the misery and atrocities they had been forced to endure in the name of the emperor and to overcome a devastating defeat and the disastrous postwar conditions of their homeland. In an effort to transcend Japan's militaristic and violent past, the occupiers and occupied collaborated in reconfiguring postwar Japan into a democratic and peaceful nation. This collaboration produced an official narrative of the War that lacked serious reflection on, or atonement for, Japan's wartime acts, without which the specter of the Asia Pacific War could not—and still cannot—be adequately put to rest. The recent tensions between Japan and its neighboring countries over the perceived lack of adequate apology and reparations from Japan for atrocities committed during the War suggest that the peace realized at the end of the conflict and in the subsequent postwar period is in danger of falling apart. Thus, the War continues to haunt the peace of contemporary Japan.

As the War recedes further and further into the past and into memory, questions and concerns about the importance of remembering its traumatic realities abound. Specifically, those who experienced the War at first-hand worry that the hardships they suffered and the sacrifices they made for their country will fade into a past that will soon be forgotten in an official history that elides the brutality of the war. For

those who survived, remembering—and, in the case of artists, representing—the suffering that the Japanese people had to endure becomes a powerful tool to criticize not only postwar Japan's inclination for overlooking the pervasive violence that accompanied the War, but also the wartime government that called on its citizens to sacrifice themselves to support the war effort no matter the cost.

This paper will examine Ōe Kenzaburō's first novel, *Memushiri kouchi* (Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids, 1958 [1995]), and Fukasaku Kinji's film *Batoru rowaiaru* (Battle Royale, 2000) as allegorical critiques of Japanese nationalist wartime indoctrination and postwar evasion. These texts present harsh criticisms of a government which promised its citizens that Japan could win the War and yet which, after defeat, was quick to ignore the people's sacrifices. Thus, both works condemn the fallacy of 'official' war memories that suppress the sheer brutality of the War. The fact that these texts were created long after the end of the conflict—thirteen years in the case of Ōe's novel and fifty-five years in the case of Fukasaku's film—indicates that the suffering the children had to endure cannot be suppressed despite any amount of temporal distance. The graphic images of extreme violence in both texts are not simply gratuitous but are shocking reminders of the harsh reality of war as experienced by Ōe and Fukasaku as youths. Representation of the violence—both physical and psychological—to which they were subjected is the means these two artists employ to condemn the viciousness of war.

Despite the fact that these two texts are separated by over forty years and represent different artistic genres, they contain striking similarities in their narrative structures, which I argue demonstrate the lasting effects of war trauma on the youth of Japan. Both the novel and the film involve groups of children who are forced by the adults whom they trust and upon whom they rely to fend for themselves and fight literally for their lives. The young people in these works are ultimately betrayed and abandoned in their hour of need by the adults who are supposed to protect them. The similarities in the narratives confirm the communal experience of Japan's children during the War and suggest the victimization of Japan's youth through their vivid depictions of violence and death. The centrality of this theme in both narratives reveals that children were not spared the brutality that accompanied the war but were exposed to its violence in just the same way as adults. The governmental policy of 'total war' called for the mobilization of every civilian on the home front, and children were conscripted

to work and fight alongside adults, thus exposing them to brutality and violence at an early age, leaving many of Japan's youth with vivid and painful memories of their wartime lives.

Remembering and Rendering Brutality and Betrayal

Both Ōe (b. 1935) and Fukasaku (b. 1930) were raised in wartime Japan—a period well-known for a pervasive national rhetoric that exhorted loyalty to the nation and unwavering support for Japan's efforts during the protracted war. Ōe's and Fukasaku's texts both explicitly and implicitly reflect the authors' individual wartime experiences as well as evoke traumatic memories of this wartime indoctrination. Wartime propaganda, as Sheldon Garon in his book on social management in modern Japan rightly argues, was a method of social control that built on existing systems established in the 1920s and early 1930s. Garon argues against the widely held 'emperor system' theory which asserts that the Japanese people during the war years were urged to support the nation's war machine in the name of the emperor; instead, Japanese bureaucrats and private groups spearheaded programs that aimed for social management (Garon 1997: 6). Because of the range of moral suasion campaigns and the collaboration of officials and groups at local levels, wartime propaganda was successfully manipulated to indoctrinate Japanese citizens, from the large cities to even the remotest of villages, as demonstrated by the savage acts of the villagers in *Nip the Buds*.

As the war dragged on and circumstances at the front and at home deteriorated, wartime propaganda exhorted every Japanese citizen to fight to the death if need be, forcing them to live perpetually under the specter of death. Considering the psychological strain of living under such a demand, it is not surprising that extreme violence and brutality became a part of people's everyday lives and that it plays an integral role in the two works under examination. According to John Dower, surrender for most Japanese meant not so much a political liberation as a psychological one. Liberated from years of struggle and the probability of death, many experienced a profound sense of exhaustion and despair, or what Dower calls the "*kyodatsu* condition". This overwhelming weariness and despondency was not simply due to the shock of defeat, "for exhaustion of a deep and complex sort had set in long before August 15, 1945 as a result of the government's policy

of wasting its people in pursuit of impossible war objectives” (Dower 1999: 104). Suffering from disbelief at their defeat and the harsh political and economic conditions of the postwar, “it is not surprising that a pervasive victim consciousness took root, leading many Japanese to perceive themselves as the greatest sufferers from the recent war” (*ibid*: 119). Many felt betrayed by their government which had promised “certain victory”.

The theme of betrayal is central to both Ōe’s novel and Fukasaku’s film. In these two works, the issue of trustworthiness centers on the relationships between adults and children, and the ability or inability to trust one another is a question that is raised repeatedly, with the majority opinion leaning toward distrust. Both groups of children place a certain level of trust in adults simply because of their dependent relationship. According to sociologist Nachman Ben-Yehuda in his discussion of trust and loyalty in relation to betrayal, “[t]rust involves a particular type of relationship, where the participants perceive that genuine, authentic, and truthful interaction exists” (Ben-Yehuda 2001: 6). With the adults’ authority over the children comes a responsibility to look after their safety and well-being. Therefore, the nature of the children’s relationship with adults assumes trust on a basic level.

The acts of betrayal depicted in the texts also function as macrocosmic allegories for wartime experiences. Ben-Yehuda writes that

an act of betrayal violates, on the personal level, an imagined consensus regarding shared interests and personal identities and, on the collective level, a sense of an imagined community (Anderson 1991) and of collective memories and national identities. Betrayal, therefore, breaches the symbolic moral boundaries of some of the values we cherish the most—those we consider to be very high in our moral hierarchies and priorities. The challenge created by betrayal on the very boundaries of any symbolic moral universe is formidable (*ibid*: 28).

Betrayal can take the form of something as intimate as a lie or deceiving a friend to acts of treason where an individual, or individuals, violate the trust and loyalty of an entire nation, but in each case there is a transgression of communal values and identities. The groups of children in the texts under consideration form a community based on shared experiences, or a nation in microcosm. They are surrounded by authoritarian figures who wield weapons with deadly intent, coercing them into acquiescence and compliance.

Such circumstances undoubtedly shaped the young lives of Ōe and Fukasaku, giving rise to the necessity for these artists to constitute

their traumatic experiences through artistic representation. As the editors of this volume elucidate in their discussion of trauma in their Introduction, artistic representation is an effective means of working through and coming to terms with overwhelming experience. And, as Sharalyn Orbaugh argues in her book on Occupation era literature, “under circumstances of extraordinary cultural upheaval and epistemic trauma, the act of weaving some sort of connection between experienced history and present/future continuity, though terribly difficult, is at the same time utterly necessary” (Orbaugh 2007: 14). Orbaugh argues that narrativizing a traumatic event “naturalizes” the experience, thus destroying experience and creating memory. She goes on to discuss the idea of “prosthetic memory”, stating that

all memory is prosthetic. All memory is mediated through the available cognitive technologies, including, most commonly, narrative; and that narrative—whether produced in one’s own mind or received from other cultural sources—functions to ‘naturalize’ past experience into cognitively viable patterns as determined by *present* necessity (*ibid*: 14–5; emphasis in original).

In other words, “the very act of surviving on through the present and into the future entails a *rewriting* of memory, newly necessary at each moment for the constitution of a *currently* viable identity in the *current* context” (*ibid*: 484; emphasis in original). Orbaugh’s argument is particularly useful in helping contextualize the extremely different historical moments when Ōe’s novel and Fukusaku’s film were created and released—a difference of over forty years—and how each artist addressed his contemporary audience.

Ōe’s novel was originally published in 1958, thirteen years after the end of the war and six years after the end of the Allied Occupation. Although Japan was in the process of economic and social recovery, the humiliation of defeat and occupation were not yet distant memories, and narratives dealing with the trauma of war and loss were still being widely released. The victim consciousness that emerged immediately after surrender continued to develop, more often than not masking Japan’s role as aggressor during the War. Perhaps most significantly, the Cold War was in full swing, and the Japanese state was enmeshed in an alliance with the United States that forced it to support the U.S.’s Cold War efforts internationally. Although Japan was well along the road to recovery from the losses of the war, it had yet to see the economic successes of the 1960s and beyond that would

transform it from defeated nation to economic powerhouse: Japan of the late 1950s occupied a very liminal space. It was in this milieu that a young Ōe at the start of his literary career wrote and published *Nip the Buds*.

Ōe's early career as a writer had been shaped in part by Japan's war and defeat. Growing up in rural Shikoku, he did not escape the nationalist indoctrination of wartime education, but for him and for many Japanese, the defeat signaled a major rupture between wartime nationalist ideology and postwar Occupation democracy. Postwar Japanese fiction, according to Susan Napier, is characterized by what she calls the "wasteland":

The loss of the war and the emperor's renunciation of his divinity intensified the sense of being potentially orphans of history. This sense of loss, indeed abandonment, is sharply highlighted in postwar Japanese fiction (Napier 1991: 12).

Translator John Nathan has drawn attention to two interrelated traumatic childhood experiences that had particularly profound effects on Ōe. The first had to do with a terrible ritual that was enacted in school. During the War, children were taught to fear Emperor Hirohito as a living god, and students were periodically called up before the class to pledge their loyalty. When Ōe's turn came, and he was asked: "What would you do if the Emperor commanded you to die?", he had to answer: "I would die, Sir. I would cut open my belly and die" (Ōe 1977: xiii). Nathan goes on to introduce the following passage from "A Portrait of the Postwar Generation" to convey the impact of the second incident—Emperor Hirohito's announcement of unconditional surrender—on young Ōe, an experience that Nathan argues both "deprived [him] of his innocence" and created the enduring sense of betrayal, anger and humiliation that came to inform so much of his literature:

The adults sat around their radios and cried. The children gathered outside in the dusty road and whispered their bewilderment. We were most surprised and disappointed by the fact that the emperor had spoken in a *human* voice. One of my friends could even imitate it cleverly. We surrounded him, a twelve-year-old in grimy shorts who spoke in the Emperor's voice, and laughed. Our laughter echoed in the summer morning stillness and disappeared into the clear, high sky. An instant later, anxiety tumbled out of the heavens and seized us impious children. We looked at one another in silence.... How could we believe that an

august presence of such awful power had become an ordinary human being on a designated summer day? (*ibid.*: xiii–iv).

Expressions of confusion and anger over betrayal and abandonment are prominent in much of Ōe's early work in which his characters occupy a liminal space in contemporary society (see Wilson 1986: 3–9), a prime example being offered by the boys—and even the villagers—in *Nip the Buds*. What distinguishes this narrative from Ōe's other works from around the same time that deal with war, defeat, and occupation (most notably “Shiiku” (Prize Stock, 1958 [1977]) and “Ningen no hitsuji” (Human Sheep, 1958)) is the focus on Japanese treatment of other Japanese during the war—an important difference that highlights Ōe's concern in *Nip the Buds* with the theme of broken trust. Ōe, in imag(in)ing these traumatic experiences, urged his contemporary audience to re-evaluate the War and its relation to postwar society.

Fukasaku's film was released in 2000, fifty-five years after the end of the war and forty-eight years after the end of the Occupation. Since publication of *Nip the Buds*, Japan had undergone tremendous economic and social changes, and the war, defeat, and Occupation were indeed distant memories, both for the dwindling number of survivors who were old enough to have experienced the war, and for the younger generations, for whom the war and its aftermath had become nothing more than relics of Japan's modern history to be found in the sanitized pages of history textbooks. Japan had become not only an international economic power but also a rich source of popular culture that had gained legions of fans around the globe. Japanese manga, anime and films had grown in international popularity among young consumers, which would come to include Fukasaku's film *Battle Royale* as well. Very few people at the time of release of the film in Japan would connect it to wartime experiences, but Fukasaku is explicit in acknowledging this relationship, his penchant for violence a direct reflection of his traumatic experiences as a youth.

Fukasaku is perhaps best known for his series of yakuza films from the 1970s. In a career that spanned over forty years, Fukasaku unflinchingly and realistically portrayed extreme brutality in his films. Fukasaku's concern with violence originates from his wartime and immediate postwar experiences, which left an indelible mark on him. According to the director, the violence in *Battle Royale* is an accurate reflection of his experience as a teenager in wartime Japan: “I was

working at an armaments factory—I was in junior high then. And everyday, the factory was bombed. I had to clean up the corpses of other kids who were killed” (Fukasaku 2001). Fukasaku has said of his yakuza films, “[They] come from my experiences when I was fifteen, in the burnt-out ruins and the black market” (Schilling 2003: 53). Fukasaku’s experiences during the war and the immediate postwar shaped his concern with contemporary society, and the violence in his yakuza films is a powerful metaphor for the breakdown of postwar Japanese society.

By 2000, the director was seventy years old, but the trauma he experienced during the war was not something that had faded with time. Indeed, it was this indelible experience that he called upon in his depiction of violence in *Battle Royale*. The public backlash against Fukasaku’s ultra violent film and its portrayal of the bloody brutality forced upon youths demonstrates how far removed from the violence of the past contemporary Japanese had become. Fukasaku, however, in representing these war experiences, hoped, like Ōe, to problematize his audience’s perceptions of postwar Japanese society and their relation to it. Close examination of the striking parallels between Ōe’s novel and Fukasaku’s film reveals how both artists endeavored to (re)constitute the betrayal, brutality and abandonment to which children were subjected during the War.

Ōe and the Hidden Violence of the Countryside

Nip the Buds follows the story of a group of reformatory boys who are evacuated to the countryside during the increased air raids during the last days of the War. Left by the reformatory warden in the care of peasants in a remote and secluded mountain village, the boys must rely on the villagers for sustenance and care. The village, however, is under siege by a deadly plague that has claimed the lives of a number of animals and, most likely, two villagers as well. The boys are distressed one night to discover the villagers abandoning the village and leaving them behind to look after themselves amid an outbreak of plague. Finding that the adults have blocked the only way out of the village and posted an armed sentinel to keep them from escaping, the boys are initially confused and scared. Used to being under strict supervision, they are unsure how to handle their newfound freedom. But they quickly come to relish this relative

liberty and claim the village as their own, living in the villagers' houses and eating the food that was left behind. The boys band together in solidarity, making new friends in the three people also abandoned in the village and creating an idyllic space in the middle of a country racked by war and violence. But their temporary utopia is disrupted when the plague takes the life of a village girl and the precarious reality of their situation takes hold. There is temporary relief when the villagers return, but this relief is shattered when they reclaim the village and threaten to report them to the authorities for breaking into their houses and stealing their food. The boys are again imprisoned in a wooden shed while the adults hunt down and kill the runaway soldier who was hiding out in the village. When the headman forcefully suggests that he will overlook the boys' crimes in exchange for their silence about being abandoned, the boys meekly acquiesce under threat of violence, except for the protagonist who is beaten and then led away. The novel ends with the young protagonist running blindly into the dark forest, attempting to escape from the vicious villagers who pursue him.

The adults in *Nip the Buds*, constantly regard the boys as untrustworthy, disloyal, and dishonest because of their status as 'delinquents'. In fact, the adults view the boys as less than human. The narrator repeatedly mentions how the boys are like wild beasts in cages, and Ōe's recurrent use of animal imagery to describe the actions of the boys belies their status as sub-human. Upon their arrival, the headman of the village to which the boys are evacuated unequivocally explains their position in the village:

Anyone caught stealing, starting fires or making a row will be beaten to death by the villagers. Don't forget that you're vermin here. Even so, we'll shelter and feed you. Always remember that in this village you're only useless vermin (Ōe 1995: 45).

From the boys' perspective, their relationship with the adults around them is not as much a matter of trust or distrust as it is one of obedience. As reformatory boys they have no choice but to accept the authority of adults and submit to their demands or else suffer the consequence. For boys in their position, adults strictly supervise and control their every action, as the narrator acknowledges when the boys are left alone. For them, "time won't move a step without grown-up's orders" (91). Despite the adults' condescending attitude toward them, the boys are deeply enmeshed in a relationship of dependency

on adults, so much so that they discover they do not know how to function once they are left alone.

Thus there remains a certain level of trust on the part of children toward adults—a belief that, in spite of whatever differences they might have, the adults are responsible for looking after their safety and well-being. When the reformatory warden leaves the boys in the care of the villagers, there is the expectation that, if the boys obey the villagers, then they will be given food and shelter. Even though the villagers use harsh words and treat them callously, the boys depend on these strangers to provide them with a basic level of care. But the limited safety and protection that the boys feel is shattered in an instant when the adults they believed would take care of them abandon them. The reformatory boys are awoken on their second night in the village by the sounds of the peasants' exodus. As a few of the boys secretly trail the villagers, they come to realize that they have no intention of taking the boys with them. The protagonist, being one of the eldest and the leader of the group, understands that the villagers have fled because they fear the plague. Trying to keep the rest of the group from panicking, he keeps this knowledge to himself. When some of the boys try to escape, they discover the blockade of the only route in and out of the village. One of the boys suggests escaping by climbing the other side of the mountain, but the protagonist tells him that they will only be stopped by hostile villagers on the other side. The protagonist knows that the

blocking of the trolley track was a 'symbol'. It showed the concentrated hostility of the farmers in the numerous villages surrounding the valley hamlet where we were sealed up, that thick obstinate wall which we could never penetrate. It was clearly impossible for us to confront it and force our way through it (80).

The boys are cut off, symbolically and literally, in a remote mountain prison where a deadly plague is running rampant with no means of resisting or fighting back, so they must acquiesce to their imprisonment if they are to have a chance of survival.

The adults' authority and control over the fate of the boys suggests their connection to the wartime military government. The villagers in *Nip the Buds* capture, torture, and even kill military deserters, acts which demonstrate their patriotic allegiance—and correlation—to their nation's military. Even though the villagers are not soldiers, the narrator describes how the madness of wartime had seeped into even the farthest reaches of the mountains:

It was a time of killing. Like a long deluge, the war sent its mass insanity flooding into the convolutions of people's feelings, into every last recess of their bodies, into the forests, the streets and into the sky (26).

In such a time of madness, killing and death, the boys become imprisoned not only by the villagers who have fled the plague but also by the war-crazed peasants in villages all over the mountainside. With no way to defend themselves, the boys must submit to their abandonment and imprisonment.

The children's initial reaction to their betrayal is one of confusion. They are puzzled by the adults' actions and, because they are only children, they cannot understand why the adults would abandon them and imprison them intentionally. Except for the protagonist of Ōe's novel, who knows that the reason the villagers have fled and left the boys behind is because they fear the plague, and another older boy who suspects this, the majority of the reformatory boys can only guess as to why the villagers would leave them behind. The morning after the exodus, the boys' confusion manifests itself in their actions as they wander aimlessly around the deserted village streets:

We were weighed down with anxiety, but we walked silently in twos and threes, keeping each other company on the frost-covered village road and, when we bumped into other comrades coming down with disgruntled expressions, we exchanged silent smiles and signaled to each other by whistling, moved by a strange sense of bubbling incongruity. . . . And without a supervisor there was nothing for us to do. We didn't know what to do. So, slowly and doggedly, we walked up and down the road (73-4).

What is even more perplexing to the boys is the villagers' deliberate blocking of the only path out of the village. When they discover the villagers' blockade, an exchange among the boys illustrates their confusion—and anger—over their mistreatment.

"That bunch do disgusting things", said Minami, in a voice shrill with anger. "They're going to pick off anyone trying to cross the bridge. Disgusting, isn't it?"

"Why? Why will they shoot?" asked my brother, his eyes full of tears. His voice was quavering childishly. "Pick us off. . .?"

"We aren't even their enemies", said another of the group tearfully, prompted by my brother's agitation. "We're not their enemies" (78-9).

The young boy's perceptive comment that they are not the villagers' enemies reaffirms the sense of hostility the narrator portrays in the adults' act of building the blockade and demonstrates once again the

villagers' indifference to the boys' welfare. In their state of confusion, the boys' exasperation over their situation prevents them from resisting or taking action against their captors. In such a state, the boys can only wander the streets of the village in silence.

The boys in Ōe's novel also initially deny the fact that they have been abandoned by the villagers with no way to take care of themselves. Rather than attempt to escape, an act that would represent active resistance against their abandonment and imprisonment, the boys break into the villagers' houses and search for hidden food left behind. But this "petty thieving" as they call it is simply a meaningless action to fill the empty time and space left in the wake of the fleeing villagers. The protagonist says of their thieving,

We persisted in it because we had nothing else to do. But that guilty, slipshod labour did not hold enough conviction to keep going. The houses were small, and the goods were shoddy. And they didn't arouse our curiosity even for a moment (83).

The boys' apathetic response to abandonment reflects their refusal to acknowledge their dire circumstances or their betrayal.

After the children's early feelings of confusion and denial diminish, and with no means of effectively resisting their fate, they begin to find ways to cope. For some, this means indulging in their relative freedom and finding ways to express themselves that had been unavailable to them when they had been living under adult supervision. For others, this means forging friendships or developing solidarity with the other abandoned children. The reformatory boys eventually find numerous ways to fill the endless time they have on their hands. They bury their dead comrade and a dead village woman; make friends with a Korean boy, a village girl left behind, and with the runaway soldier hiding out in the Korean encampment; go hunting for birds; and have a feast and festival after the successful hunt. After having spent so much time obeying the orders of adults, the boys revel in this adult-free world, claiming the village as their own. The boys live in the abandoned houses, bury the dead, and perform the necessary ritual after the hunt. Rather than engage in complete lawlessness, as one might expect of a group of juvenile delinquents, the boys cope with their situation by joining together in solidarity and forming their own functional community.

Despite these moments of happiness and safety, violence and death return to destroy the fleeting moments of pleasure that the children have created during their period of abandonment and imprisonment.

For the boys, their peaceful village life is first interrupted when the local girl dies from the plague, and the boys, fearful of contagion, kill the dog that the protagonist's younger brother had befriended because they are convinced that he is the source of the girl's fatal infection. This turns the peaceful village into a site of death, murder, and pestilence once again. The younger brother runs away from the village sobbing over the loss of his dog, and panic over the spreading plague seizes all the boys. The realization quickly sets in that they are only abandoned children with no way to escape the plague:

The plague spread during the night, showing its brutal strength, defeating and overwhelming us abandoned children.... My comrades stayed deep inside their houses and didn't venture out.... None of us had yet contracted the plague, but since it would attack furiously without warning like a blow from a strong arm, we waited for it inside the dark houses.... Sobs and shouts of rage resounded emptily everywhere in the village (159).

But the threat of the plague is lifted when the adults return the next day and, although the villagers treat the boys contemptuously, round them up and lock them in a warehouse, the boys feel relieved that the villagers have come back to save them from the plague.

The boys soon realize, however, that the villagers have not come to rescue them, but have returned to see if the boys have survived the outbreak. The occasion of their return thus changes from an experience of salvation to one that ushers in anger and humiliation. As the boys peer through the cracks in the warehouse boards, they see the villagers digging up and burning the corpses the children had buried. The narrator says of this act,

It was a kind of ritual to compel us to acknowledge that every being in the village, including corpses, even corpses that had been buried, was back under the control of the adults (167).

This act frustrates the boys because it was they who had struggled to survive after the villagers left them for dead. "It was us who had looked after the empty village for the last five days; we even had the festival for the hunt; and they shut us up. They're really fucking about" (167). As if the first betrayal by the adults were not enough to anger the boys, this second betrayal brings tears of indignation to their eyes:

We had possessed and controlled the village, I thought, suddenly smitten by trembling. We had not been cut off in the village, we had occupied it.

We had yielded up our dominion to the grown-ups without resistance, and in the end we were shut up in the shed. We'd been fooled, really fooled (167).

Moreover, the villagers accuse the boys of acting recklessly while they were away and threaten to report them to the authorities. But the villagers make the boys an offer: they will let the matter drop in exchange for the boys' silence about their abandonment. Incredulous, the protagonist shouts at the village headman, "We won't be conned. We won't be duped and deceived by you. *You* shouldn't fool with us" (181). For his refusal to submit to the orders of the adults, the protagonist is beaten with one of the villagers' bamboo spears, and the other boys are given a choice: either accept the authority of the villagers or suffer the same punishment. The boys, hungry, fatigued, and scared of the villagers' brutality, one by one quietly submit to the headman's demands. The one exception is the protagonist, who refuses to give in to the adults' scheme, leaving the villagers no choice but to lead him out of the village where he breaks free and runs off into the dark forest to escape the violence of the villagers chasing after him. Such an ending, however, leaves the protagonist's future unclear. Will he be able to outrun the villagers who pursue him? By leaving the ending ambiguous, Ōe seems to be suggesting that there are no easy solutions in Japan's postwar.

Fukasaku's Ultra-Violent Allegory

Fukasaku's film *Battle Royale* is set in an unspecified future when students all over Japan are boycotting school and attacking their teachers. The authorities, afraid of the youths, pass the Battle Royale Act, according to which one class is randomly selected each year to be brought to an isolated island to exterminate each other until there is only one survivor. The film focuses on this year's class, a group of ninth grade middle school students who are on a bus bound for what they think will be their yearly school trip. After they are gassed and wake up in a deserted school building with metal collars around their necks, they are greeted by their former seventh grade teacher, who informs them of their selection as the participants in this year's Battle Royale and explains the rules of the 'game'. The students will receive a bag containing food, water, a map of the island, and a random weapon. They

have three days to kill each other off, after which time the game will end with the explosion of the metal collars around their necks if there is no 'winner'. The students are at first confused, and then incredulous, until their teacher kills two of the students to demonstrate the violent authenticity of his words. The students receive their bags and file one by one out of the building. Some students embrace the lawlessness of the game and begin to kill immediately, convinced that doing so is the only way to survive. But the majority of the students refuse to obey the rules and cling together in small groups for survival. Death is never far away, however, as those who take the game seriously continue to prey on those who refuse to play the game and suspicion over who can be trusted results in additional killing. The film's three heroes manage to survive until the end when they confront their former teacher and kill him. After one of the group dies from his injuries, the film ends with the two remaining students, now wanted for murder, running through the streets back home in Japan to escape their persecutors.

As in *Nip the Buds*, issues of trust are also fundamental to the narrative of *Battle Royale*. The film opens with expositional text that describes how the nation is on the verge of collapse as the unemployment rate hits 15% while 800,000 students boycott school and youth crime continues to rise. Because the authorities have lost confidence and fear the youth, they have enacted the New Millennium Educational Reform Act, a.k.a. the Battle Royale Act, which presumably is intended to frighten the youth of Japan into submission. Kitano-sensei, the students' former seventh grade teacher and Battle Royale 'instructor', represents the adults who not only distrust the children but also hold them in considerable contempt. When Kitano-sensei, who left school after having his leg slashed by one of his students, is asked why they are doing this, he replies angrily, "It's your own damned fault. You guys mock grown-ups. Go ahead and mock us, but don't forget, life is a game. So fight for survival and see if you're worth it". This exchange is brief, but significant, because it demonstrates the authorities' contemptuous attitude toward the youth of the day. And Kitano-sensei's choice of the word 'game' (*geemu*) reveals how the adults view the Battle Royale: the students' lives are of no consequence. Like the adults in Ōe's novel, the adults of the Battle Royale millennium regard the youth of Japan as sub-human: the metal collars around the students' necks equate them to animals that need to be leashed and under control. Therefore, they are no better than beasts and their lives are just as expendable.

The students likewise show a substantial amount of distrust toward adults, as the high number of students boycotting school illustrates, and this is especially true for the main character of the film, Nanahara Shūya, whose mother left when he was in fourth grade and whose father killed himself on his first day of junior high. Thus, Nanahara is betrayed and abandoned by adults early in his young life before he reaches the deserted island that becomes the site of further betrayal and abuse. Nanahara has a poignant moment in the film when he is asked what he will do after he survives the Battle Royale. He replies,

I don't know. I've never really trusted grown-ups. My dad and my mom ran off or died because they felt like it. But I'll keep fighting, even though I don't know how, until I become a respectable adult (*chanto shita otona*).

Nanahara's young life has been filled with disappointment with the adults in his life, yet his disillusionment is such that he will not easily submit to the commands of other adults who attempt to mold him into an untrustworthy adult like his mother and father. His objective is to resist the authority of undependable adults. Despite his intentions, however, Nanahara betrays his weakness when he admits that he does not know how to become a "respectable adult". At the beginning of the film, when the audience is being introduced to his life on his own, he admits that he has "no clue what to do and no one to show" him either. Ultimately, for Nanahara, his classmates, and the reformatory boys of Ōe's novel, there is no choice but to rely on and trust adults; as children, they are still in dependent positions with no effective means of resisting authority.

And that authority is constantly on display in the film. In *Battle Royale* it is the government which imprisons the children and forces them to play the game. The students are under the constant surveillance of Kitano-sensei and the multitude of soldiers who have accompanied him to the island. Kitano-sensei, as their Battle Royale 'instructor', wields his authority over the students with cold-hearted resolve. Kitano-sensei clearly exhibits his authority when he informs the students that they should not mock adults because adults have survived the game of life so far, and thus they have the power to force the youth to fight for their lives. After throwing a knife into a student's forehead because she whispered to a friend while he was talking, Kitano-sensei casually strolls over to the body and apologizes because it is against the rules for him to kill any student. But there is no one there to enforce that

rule, and no one to protect the students. The class's current teacher, who opposed the choice of their class for the Battle Royale, is killed and his bloody corpse is wheeled into the classroom on a gurney in another display of Kitano-sensei's absolute control. Even his arrival on the island demonstrates his power: when the helicopter carrying Kitano-sensei lands, the brilliant search lights of the helicopter blind the students who are watching from the classroom window—a physical demonstration of adult power. But when the students try to escape the classroom after Kitano-sensei kills the first student, the soldiers forcefully restrain the others by firing warning shots at their feet and into the air. In fact, the presence of the military in the film unmistakably links the narrative to the War. With their machine guns, military vehicles, and sophisticated surveillance equipment, the soldiers display the authority of the government to 'conscript' students and force them into a bloody fight for survival.

Similar to the boys' experience in the village in *Nip the Buds*, the students' initial trust of adults in *Battle Royale* is ultimately betrayed. The safety the students feel on a school-sponsored trip is shattered when they are drugged and taken to a remote deserted island—and the metal collars come to serve as a symbolic 'fence' to keep the students imprisoned on the island. The imposed time limit to the 'game' also ensures that the students will participate in it: they must either take part or die. At first, the students are confused by their situation. Waking up in a strange, deserted school building with metal collars around their necks and being informed of their selection to participate in this year's Battle Royale leads only to incredulity, until one of their classmates is violently attacked and killed by Kitano-sensei. Fukasaku cleverly captures this early state of chaos cinematically: as the students' escape is blocked by the soldiers' gunfire, a rapid succession of short takes focuses on the scrambling feet of the students who are running to the corners of the room to avoid the shots. This is followed by a tracking shot that circles around the motionless and smirking figure of Kitano-sensei as the students scatter around him. After Kitano-sensei activates another student's collar that explodes and kills him, the students begin to understand the terrifying reality of their plight. However, their confusion and disorientation (and the soldiers' guns) initially keep them from questioning or resisting. As the students are called one by one to receive their bag of supplies and file out of the school into the night to begin the 'game', the majority of the students simply comply with the adults' orders because they

are overwhelmed by their unbelievable circumstances and the show of force.

Confusion gives way to denial for some of the students, however, as they refuse to accept the betrayal of the adults. One student, when her name is called and she is tossed a duffel bag, throws the bag roughly at Kitano, her scowling face displaying her anger and her actions demonstrating her refusal to play the 'game'. Other students refuse to take part as well. On the first day, two female students stand on top of a hill and, using a megaphone to attract everyone's attention, entreat their classmates not to kill one another. They cry, "We'll figure this out together". Not everyone shares their sentiments, however, and the two girls are gunned down not long after their announcement attracts the attention of one of the students who is playing the 'game' for real. But many other students also refuse to comply. A group of girls hides in a lighthouse where they hope to stay alive for at least the next three days. And the two main characters of the film, Nanahara and Nakagawa, only resort to killing as a means of self-defense.

Despite the frightening situation with which the students in *Battle Royale* are confronted, some of them are able to find ways to handle the psychological trauma of betrayal. Some students experience a sense of freedom and empowerment in their newfound opportunity to kill with impunity. Mitsuko is among the first students to spill her classmates' blood, and her expression clearly shows the pleasure she derives from each successful kill. In a revealing flashback scene, the audience discovers that Mitsuko's mother pimped her daughter out for money at a very young age. Therefore Mitsuko, who suffered the ultimate betrayal at the hands of a parent, seizes the opportunity to take revenge for the injustices she has suffered by displacing her animus onto others. Before killing a female classmate, she says: "What's wrong with killing? Everyone's got their reasons". Later, addressing the dead bodies of the students she has just slain, she states: "Nobody'll rescue you. That's just life". When Mitsuko is finally killed, however, her voiceover lets the audience know her true motivation for killing: "I just didn't want to be a loser anymore". Her words demonstrate how the 'game' empowered her and provided her with a chance to gain the advantage that she felt she never had in the 'real world'.

Ironically, Mitsuko is taken out by Kiriya, the student with the most kills after Mitsuko. Kiriya voluntarily signed up for the Battle Royale for reasons unknown to the audience. We can surmise from

his appearance and his actions in the film, however, that his motivation, too, is empowerment. Kiriya never speaks a word throughout the entire film but ferociously kills student after student with silent efficiency and expertise. His black uniform stands in stark contrast to the beige uniforms of the other students, and his intense stare and wild hair suggest a ruthlessness that none of the other students exhibit. For him the Battle Royale is not a 'game' but a competition to prove that he is the strongest and, in Kitano-sensei's words, that he is worthy of competing in the game of life with adults.

By contrast, the majority of students find solace in banding together with friends in an attempt to protect themselves and to avoid the violence the adult world has imposed on them. The two main characters in the film come together immediately after leaving the school building after receiving their duffels. They hope that by joining forces they can somehow survive the next three days. They later team up with Kawada, who played and survived the game two years earlier and whose considerable offensive and defensive skills keep the three of them alive until the end. A small group of boys also hides out in a building, hoping that friendship can help them find a way off the island. Although they are the only group that actively tries to resist the authorities by hacking into the control room's computer, they too are eventually all killed. Nevertheless, during these brief moments of solidarity and friendship, the students are able to overcome the hopelessness and despair of their circumstances.

Despite these momentary respites, the 'game' forces the students to become each others' enemies, and feelings of distrust, once leveled at the adults, become a necessity for them if they want to stay alive. Even their closest friends are not above suspicion, as evidenced by the group of girls hiding out in the lighthouse. When one of them keels over after eating poisoned food intended for Nanahara, doubt about their friends' loyalty drives the girls to shoot one another to death. The only one to escape the shooting rampage is the girl who poisoned the food, and when she realizes what she has done, she throws herself off the lighthouse onto the jagged rocks below. Through the mechanism of the 'game', the adults are able to displace student anger and mistrust onto one another, forcing the youths into wiping themselves out.

The 'game' successfully kills off all but three of the students. In the end, in contrast to Oe's novel, here it is the children who return to confront the adults. Kawada, having hacked into the computer system

and stolen data, allows Nanahara and Nakagawa to survive, and the three return to the command headquarters where only Kitano-sensei remains. When the latter threatens Nakagawa with a gun, Nanahara shoots him because he had sworn to protect her. As Kitano lies prostrate on the floor, all three students remove their now defunct metal collars and toss them at Kitano's body as a final act of defiance. The three then escape the island on a boat, but Kawada dies on board as a result of his injuries.

However, even though Nanahara and Nakagawa have survived the Battle Royale and killed the authority figure who had imprisoned them on the island, they are still not safe, just as the protagonist from Ōe's novel is still imperiled as he runs from the blood-thirsty villagers chasing him. An intertitle informs the audience that, after the events on the island, the two are wanted for murder, and the movie ends with a scene of them walking through the streets of a city. A voiceover by Nanahara explains how Nakagawa went home to bid farewell to her sleeping parents and get the knife that had been used to slash Kitano-sensei two years earlier. He says,

Each of us has a weapon now. Even if the time comes to use them again, it'll never be an easy choice. But we've got no choice but to keep moving forward. No matter how far, run for all you're worth.

At this point, the word "Run!" (*hashire*) appears on a black screen. But to where can these children run? What does the future hold in store for them? Clearly, there is no easy answer. Just as Ōe's protagonist had fled blindly into the dark forest, so the two survivors from Fukasaku's film run aimlessly into the city streets, pursued by the adults whom they have dared to defy.

Conclusion

The conspicuous parallels in the narratives of these two texts, in addition to their explicit and implicit connections to wartime Japan, are reminiscent of the shared experience of young adults and children during the War. Their exposure to the violence and brutality of war, and to what Ōe describes in his novel as a time of "mass insanity", reached into the farthest corners of the nation so that no citizen—no matter what his/her age—could escape its horror. Children witnessed death, destruction, and corruption all around them, and such trau-

matic experiences are bound to leave indelible imprints, as they did on director Fukasaku Kinji. Even after over fifty years, the image of collecting and burying the corpses of the other young people who were conscripted to work with him in the factory is one that he will never forget, and in his film he wanted to “revitalize that sense of fear” that accompanied the violence of war and impart to the youth of today the experience through which he “learned the meaning of death and war” (Fukasaku 2001). Ōe, as well, by setting his novel during the War, connects the boys’ experiences *in extremis* to the larger experience of the Asia Pacific War. The hardships the boys had to endure—the hunger, fatigue, and disease—reflect the hardships of the majority of Japanese people during the War. Thus the boys come to symbolize the Japanese people who suffered through the privation of the protracted conflict, and the villagers symbolize the Japanese government which demanded that its citizens sacrifice themselves for a war that they were promised they would win. In both texts, the betrayal of the adults signifies the betrayal of the wartime government which continued to assure the people that their sacrifices would be worthwhile, even when defeat was imminent. The brutality the children suffered signifies the suffering of the Japanese people as they endeavored to support a lost cause because they placed their trust in their leaders.

Ultimately, both texts present harsh critiques of the egoism and degeneracy of those in positions of power and authority who exposed the people to pervasive, indiscriminate violence, suffering, and death. They also serve as valuable reminders for the Japanese—and the youth in particular—that, if they fail to properly learn the terrible lessons of the War, then they will be in danger of suffering another outbreak of “mass insanity”. The postwar tendency to suppress/repress memories of the war is a topic taken up by Yoshikuni Igarashi in his study, *Bodies of Memory*, where he argues that postwar narratives more often than not “erased” the trauma of war as a mechanism to cope with debilitating losses and maintain a sense of “continuity that masked the historical disjunction of defeat” (Igarashi 2000: 12). Igarashi argues that

postwar Japan has naturalized the absence and silence of the past by erasing its own struggle to deal with its memories.... However, the actual process of forgetting the loss was not an easy one: it involved a constant struggle to render the memories of war into a benign, nostalgic form. However, Japanese society eventually managed to conceal the postwar struggle to forget. When the historical process of forgetting

itself became erased, the experiences and loss in war were buried within postwar society (*ibid.*: 10).

As he attempts to trace the origins of this process of forgetting, Igarashi insists that “[i]n order to remember the past, this process of forgetting has to be brought to consciousness” (*ibid.*). Although speaking from a late twentieth century point of view, Igarashi’s argument is applicable to postwar narratives beginning in 1945 and continuing to the present day, encompassing both Ōe’s and Fukusaku’s endeavors to represent their traumatic experiences—because both the novel and the film endeavor to (re)constitute ‘lost’ war memories in an effort to better understand Japan’s postwar and contemporary situation.

Ōe condemns the tendency to erase and/or repress the events of the past at the end of his novel when the villagers return to reclaim their village. When the village headman advises the boys to forget the events of the past few days, the narrator scoffs at the idea:

The villagers had begun to convince themselves that the ‘incident’ was already over and had become a legend, a fable of a past natural disaster. But right now we were trying to live the ‘incident’ in the present. We would be dragged into it, our feet entangled, and would have to go on struggling (177).

Fukasaku’s film, by virtue of his desire to portray his traumatic wartime experiences to the younger generation, also demonstrates the importance of remembering the war. Nanahara and Nakagawa survived the ‘game’ by defying the adults’ rules, and they must pay for that resistance by running from the same authority that had initially forced them to kill. But there is also hope in this final scene: the children move forward ‘armed’ with the knowledge of the adults’ willingness to deceive, betray, abandon, and sacrifice the youths who depend on them in the interests of their own survival. Perhaps the future to which the characters run at the end of these texts is a future in which the traumatic realities of the War are not forgotten or repressed but acknowledged as potent reminders of a brutal time in Japanese history. Transmuting their painful childhood experiences into aesthetic works, Ōe and Fukusaku use images of violence and brutality to constitute and work through the ‘forgotten’ traumas of the Asia Pacific War and to warn contemporary readers and viewers about the ongoing dangers of future outbreaks of madness.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONTESTING TRAUMATIC WAR NARRATIVES: *SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO AND MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM*

William Ashbaugh

Introduction

For postwar Japanese, no national trauma can compete with the Asia Pacific War. Following the master narrative that holds that unscrupulous militarists forced them into a poorly conceived war of aggression that culminated in the horrific firebombing of most Japanese cities and the first use of atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, many Japanese not only eagerly embraced pacifism and the anti-nuclear movement, but also the notion that Japan itself was the primary victim of the conflict (Dower 1993: 10, 27; 1996: 120–37). This is not surprising when the immediate aftermath of defeat is taken into consideration: sixty-six major cities heavily bombed, three million dead, nine million homeless, three million civilians stranded overseas, and three and a half million soldiers and sailors needing to be repatriated (Dower 1999: 45–9, 119, 179, 562). The loss of loved ones, the extensive damage to the home front, unconditional surrender and foreign Occupation—the first in Japan’s long history—combined to create a sense of collective victimhood which was only strengthened by the conservative politics which came to the forefront after the official return of sovereignty in 1952 (Shimazu 2003: 106, 115). Catastrophic events such as the atomic blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, happening just days before surrender in August 1945, functioned to obscure awareness of the atrocities that Japan’s war machine had perpetrated throughout Asia and the Pacific (Dower 1996: 123). During the long postwar period, prominent popular culture artists who had gone through the war as children sought to represent and make sense of the carnage and destruction of the past in manga and anime (Napier 2005).

Anime scholar Susan J. Napier suggests that science fiction anime provides important insights into historical memory and contemporary identity through its “distinctive narrative and visual aesthetic” (Napier 2001: 4, 8, 10–2, 17). And since image can help constitute shocking realities where language often fails, moving images and the narratives behind them represent an effective means of working over and working through the traumatic past (Davis 2001: 208–9). Japanese comics expert Frederik Schodt notes, however, that with the exception of manga explicitly depicting the horrors of the atomic bomb, Japanese illustrators have approached representation of the War “gingerly”, if at all. Schodt goes on to observe that only one major manga magazine is devoted solely to war, and that Japanese publishers have shied away from all but a few nationalistic military manga (Schodt 1999: 115–9; 1983: 73–6). Yet of the four graphic narratives printed as examples at the back of his seminal book about Japanese comics, *Manga! Manga!*, Schodt singles out one of them, Matsumoto Leiji’s¹ war story “Ghost Warrior”, as the most “Japanese” (Schodt 1983: 188). Social scientist Eldad Nakar argues that, far from reflecting victim consciousness or avoiding the War, many Japanese artists have created “triumphant memories” emphasizing Japanese victories rather than defeats (Nakar 2003: 57–76).

What is telling about Schodt’s characterization of Matsumoto’s work as “most Japanese” is that Matsumoto is not only widely regarded as one of the reigning manga and animation artists working in the science fiction field, but an artist who is also well known for his nationalistic outlook. Matsumoto played a key role in the creation of *Uchū senkan Yamato* (Space Battleship Yamato, 1977), which is a fine example of Nakar’s “triumphant memories”. Matsumoto’s later works—*Captain Harlock*, *Galaxy Express 999*, and *Yamato* sequels being the most popular—gradually developed from individual stories into a coherent universe of interlinked narratives (Matsumoto 1997: 150–8). This interconnectedness enables Matsumoto to revisit war, victimhood and the indiscriminate use of power whenever he so chooses in his manga or anime.² From the perspective of trauma studies, it can

¹ Matsumoto prefers Leiji, although his given name is Akira.

² Matsumoto only has the rights to the designs from the *Yamato* anime (sometime translated as *Space Cruiser Yamato*); the original producer has the rights to the story without access to the character and mechanical designs.

be argued that Matsumoto has been repeatedly and endlessly working over and re-enacting his idealized vision of the War. In so doing, he has been far more concerned with the affective and ideological dimensions of war and defeat than with working through and learning from the traumatic realities of the past (Caruth 1996: 1, 11; LaCapra 2001: 21–4, 45).

This paper examines two of the most popular Japanese science fiction anime films—*Yamato*, heavily influenced visually and in conception and tone by Matsumoto, and *Kidō senshi Gandamu I* (Mobile Suit Gundam I, 1981), created by Tomino Yoshiyuki—to show how these two ideologically charged narratives allegorically refigure the War. Both films are condensations of television programs that originally appealed to males, particularly those in elementary school through high school: *Yamato* is one movie created out of twenty-six episodes, and *Gundam*, three movies drawn from forty-three episodes. Both works engage key postwar Japanese master narratives, thereby contributing to the constitution of conflicting collective memories of the War (Fujitani et al. 2000: 16). While *Yamato* adheres to the position that Japan was the unique victim of horrific American firebombing and nuclear attacks on its cities and people, *Gundam* castigates Japanese imperialism and militarism and advocates pacifism. And while *Yamato* glorifies the military and the men who fought and died for Japan in terms consonant with contemporary right-wing nationalism, *Gundam* exposes and critiques three pivotal postwar ‘myths’: Japan as primary claimant to victimhood, the “nobility of failure”, and the nature of wartime Japanese nationalism/militarism.

Historian, Carol Gluck, points out that the postwar national myths of Japan as primary victim and the “nobility of failure” are part of the “contested terrain” of Japanese history and public memory (Gluck 1993: 64–95). *Yamato* and *Gundam* battle over this very terrain. The chief creators of these anime went through the war as children and were influenced by domestic and international events taking place during the process of production in the early 1970s and the late-1970s/early 1980s respectively. Following a discussion of the enormous popularity of these two monumental works of Japanese popular culture, we will turn to these important personal and contextual matters. Thereafter, the essay will proceed to examine how the films are best understood and appreciated as conflicting allegorical representations of the War.

Cultural Significance

Japan's science fiction animation hit, *Space Battleship Yamato*, was originally broadcast as a twenty-six episode television series. It premiered to low ratings on October 6, 1974, and finished its run on March 30, 1975. Increased viewership in reruns and sales of its soundtrack led to the series being condensed into a 130-minute-long movie released theatrically on August 6, 1977—the anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The work's success resulted in four movie sequels (animated by Toei Studios), two television sequels (animated by Academy Productions, the same company that produced the first television series and the first movie), and an original video series set far in the future featuring another ship called *Yamato* that only ran for three of seven planned episodes due to the bankruptcy of the producer, West Cape Corporation. Matsumoto played a vital role in all but the ill-fated video series. Sometimes the movie sequels had to undergo major continuity changes—the *Yamato* itself is a suicide-attacker in two films and the captain who dies in the first movie comes back to life to pilot the *Yamato* on a fatal mission in the last movie. In addition, three other characters sacrifice themselves to destroy earth's enemies in a spectacular kamikaze-like explosion, elements that reflect Matsumoto's political and ideological orientation. The various television series were translated into English starting in 1979, modified slightly to tone down the strident Japanese nationalism, and shown in syndication on American television until 2006 as *Star Blazers*. For his Japanese audience, Matsumoto drew a two-comic adaptation of the *Yamato* story in 2000–01, and he was working on yet another in 2009. And on August 1, 2008, Japanese copyright holders of the franchise—formerly antagonistic—announced a deal allowing *Yamato* to 'sail' again for its 35th anniversary in December 2009, this time without Matsumoto's input ("Space Cruiser Yamato", 2008).

While the *Yamato* franchise enjoyed great success in sequels and merchandising, nothing in Japanese science fiction fandom—with the possible exception of *Godzilla*—can compete with the overwhelming nature of the *Gundam* phenomena. On April 7, 2009, Japan celebrated the 30th anniversary of the first animated *Gundam* program, which included an eighteen-meter-high 'life-sized' statue of the eponymous mobile suit placed in Tokyo's Shiokaze Park throughout the summer ("Picture of the Day" 2009), and the announcement of two future *Gundam* anime projects. The *Gundam* animated science fiction franchise

has proven to be a cross media juggernaut for its co-owner Bandai, the fourth largest toy manufacturer in the world. Now comprised of nine different ‘universes’, twelve different television series, twenty-four animated movies, eleven original straight-to-video (OVA) series, one live-action movie, a myriad of model and toy kits, games, video games, posters, costumes, ephemera, and comics, *Gundam* merchandise made up twenty percent of Bandai’s unprecedented sales in 2003. In 2004, the Bandai Namco Group made 42.8 billion yen from *Gundam* merchandise alone (Uranaka 2004); in 2006 *Gundam*-related profits grew to 54.5 billion yen (c. \$500 million) (“Gundam Crisis” 2007). In fact, Bandai’s model kits helped create the boom in interest that made the franchise popular in reruns, allowed the show and its sequels or parallel universes to become science fiction institutions, and enabled Bandai to purchase the animation company responsible for the original show. Already by 2000, Bandai had released seven hundred different model kits, and total worldwide sales amounted to 350 million models (Chin 2000: 114–5).

Gundam’s global merchandising empire began modestly. The animated program first premiered on television as *Mobile Suit Gundam* on April 7, 1979, and played until January 26, 1980. To avoid confusion from sequels, spin-offs, and parallel universes, fans and manufacturers alike often refer to the original forty-three episode television series³ and three movie compilations as “First Gundam”, “One-Year War”, or “Universal Century 0079”, for the order aired, the events depicted, and the fictional year of the story’s events, respectively. After early cancellation, *Gundam*’s popularity grew in reruns and model sales until out of the series—and no doubt part of its continued popularity—came the three animated films written and directed by Tomino Yoshiyuki that combine the best of the fourteen hours of television animation with some new footage: the 137 minute *Kidō Senshi Gandamu I* (Mobile Suit Gundam I), which premiered on March 14, 1981; the 134 minute *Kidō senshi Gandamu II: Ai senshi-hen* (Mobile Suit Gundam II: Soldiers of Sorrow), which opened on July 11, 1981; and the 141 minute *Kidō senshi Gandamu III: Meguriai uchū sora-hen* (Mobile Suit Gundam III: Encounters in Space), which premiered on

³ Only forty-two episodes made it in translation to the United States, because key creator, director, and scriptwriter Tomino Yoshiyuki decided that, in retrospect, he didn’t like one episode about orphans stuck on an island.

March 13, 1982.⁴ The films altered the chronology of the television series by reordering some events, eliminating a number of strange mobile suits and removing some images of the mistreatment of civilians. The newer, higher quality anime, however, clarified some ambiguities in the series resulting from the push to finish the story early (originally Tomino planned fifty-two episodes for the show). The three *Gundam* movies have become beloved popular classics.

Yamato and *Gundam* have much in common besides their origins in the 1970s as television programs, their recovery from low viewership through reruns, and the ways they serve as war allegories. Both are also credited with helping push other Japanese creators into making more ‘realistic’ science fiction anime. And although *Gundam* fandom world-wide has eclipsed its rival many times over, *Yamato* is said to have initiated the anime fan movement both in Japan (Patten 2004: 23–32) and, after the title change to *Star Blazers*, in the United States (McKevitt 2007). Even today, both works still make the lists for best animated programs ever made. In September 2006, Japan’s Media Arts Top One Hundred Anime—part of a festival created by Japan’s Agency for Cultural Affairs to promote manga, anime, video games, and computer-generated movies—placed *Yamato* at number thirty-five and the original *Gundam* in fourth place (both movies were shown at the festival) (“Japanese Agency” 2007). When the Japanese film magazine *CUT* used its December 2006 issue to list the 30 Greatest Anime Films of all time, the *Gundam* movie trilogy was ranked second and *Yamato* eighth (“30 Greatest” 2006). And both animated films still make news, from the release of expensive merchandise to coincide with the various anniversaries of the television series, movies and an announcement of a new animation for *Yamato*,⁵ to stories focusing on the cultural

⁴ This analysis focuses on *Gundam I* (one-third of the TV storyline) and the first *Yamato* film (full series).

⁵ For the thirtieth anniversary in 2007, Bandai released a 1/350th scale model of the space battleship. It measured two and a half feet long (76.6 cm), weighed over fifteen pounds (6.9 kg), lighted up, and made the required sounds from the anime, all for 45,000 yen (c. \$420) (“Yamato Scale Model” 2007). In February 2008, more *Yamato* merchandise became available: the first television series, including a smaller model of the ship, came out on HD-DVD for \$270 (44,100 yen); and for the true anime (and beverage) connoisseur, there is a bottle of fine red wine and wine glass, both with the etched image of antagonist Lord Desler prominently displayed, and a reproduction of the medal with which he rewarded his best general in the film, all for \$125 (13,650 yen) (“Space Cruiser Yamato”).

influence of *Gundam*.⁶ Finally, in a stunning news item that shows the adult fan-base of *Gundam*, Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries had to reprimand six of its employees for adding to Wikipedia while at work, with one fan making or changing over two hundred *Gundam* entries ("Ministry Officials" 2007).

In terms of plot, both *Yamato* and *Gundam* also have significant similarities. Both stories begin in the midst of horrible future wars. The main protagonists spend the majority of their time on a single ship, with some crew members engaging in periodic battles using smaller craft. For the most part, the characters on these vessels are young and replete with the emotionalism, excitement, and romance associated with youth (even more so for *Gundam*, in which a nineteen year-old is the eldest surviving officer). The only exceptions are three characters on the *Yamato*: its skipper, engineer, and doctor are all comfortably middle-aged, although they often give control of the ship or a single mission to the youthful crew. In fact, the original creative mind behind *Yamato*, Nishizaki Yoshinobu, initially envisioned a space drama with young people searching for a planet within a hollowed-out asteroid to show how humans can think and dream their way out of catastrophe, a sort of space-age *Lord of the Flies* ("*Space Battleship Yamato* Movie Program" (1977)). But how do these two influential anime allegorically refight the War and what do they tell contemporary and future generations of viewers about the conflict? Examining the backgrounds of the primary creators and the historical contexts for the production of their films will prepare us to address such questions.

The Artists

At this juncture, a roll-call of the people who created *Yamato* is in order. Although Nishizaki's name appears in the credits as the creator, the real credit for the story and style of the film should go in

⁶ *Gundam* has inspired engineers in the auto industry who designed Nissan's 2008 GT-R sports car ("Nissan Redesigns" 2007) and engineers in the military involved in designing weaponry (Japan's Ministry of Defense 2007). A recent article computed the cost of building a life-sized *Gundam* mobile suit at 79,521 billion yen (approximately \$725 million), excluding labor, special alloys, and flying capability ("Building a *Gundam*" 2008). *Gundam* even figures in television commercials: the voice tracks for two speeches from the original films were re-edited to advertise noodle soup ("*Gundam Sells Noodles*" 2007).

part to director Masuda Toshio and, even more so, to the production designer/art director Matsumoto (although the latter had to file a lawsuit to take legal credit for his influence on the television series and film) (“Battles on Copyrights” 2007).⁷ Director Masuda—born October 5, 1927, in Kobe and thus still a teenager during the War—made a name for himself by directing the Japanese segments of *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970) after Kurosawa Akira quit the project. In addition to directing the *Yamato* sequels, Masuda also directed the live-action Pacific War drama *Zerosen moyo* (Zero Fighter Burns, 1984) and the Russo-Japanese War epic *Nihonkai daikaisen: Umi yukaba* (Big Battle of the Japan Sea: If We Go to Sea, 1983). With reference to *Yamato*, Masuda explained that animation could produce “inspirational realism” (“*Yamato* Movie Program”).

Matsumoto first made his name in manga by producing a popular tale of a student struggling to pass his college entrance exams. After this, he moved straight into war comics. Matsumoto’s first anime was the *Yamato* television series. In it, as previously mentioned, he refights the War and glorifies militarism, as he does in many of his other works, from comics in the *Senjō manga* series (Battlefield Comics, 1973–78) in which German and Japanese warplanes are conspicuous, to the anime *Waga seishun no Arukadia* (My Youth in Arcadia, 1982), a science fiction film that depicts fighter pilots through flashbacks (Napier 2005). Matsumoto’s interest in attack planes can be traced back to his childhood. Matsumoto was born on January 25, 1938, in Kurume, Fukuoka prefecture. He grew up in northern Kyūshū, close to the military bases there and on nearby Honshū from which *tokkōtai* (‘Special Attack Forces’ such as kamikaze) sortied during the Battle of Okinawa and not far from where the I.J.N. *Yamato* embarked on its final journey. Equally influential would have been the indiscriminate firebombing of nearby Fukuoka after his seventh birthday, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

One of Matsumoto’s manga (later animated) tells the story of a kamikaze pilot who failed to hit an enemy vessel. He is given a second chance, and he succeeds just as the captain of an American carrier is informed of the successful atomic bombing of Hiroshima (Gor-

⁷ Matsumoto did not win control of the copyright, however (“Battles on Copyrights” 2007). Care must be exercised when evaluating Matsumoto’s claims: he once said *Gundam* and Princess Leia of *Star Wars* fame were his creations (“Gundam and Star Wars Inspired by Leiji Matsumoto’s Work?” 2007).

don 2008). The fact that so many of Matsumoto's works focus on the Pacific War, World War II in general, or science fiction allegories of the Asia Pacific War (working on at least nine *Yamato* projects and other similar creations) suggests his fixation on the traumatic events of the belligerent past.

Just as Matsumoto was surely affected in his youth by his home front experience, so too was Tomino. Tomino was born November 5, 1941, in Odawara, Kanagawa Prefecture. Living in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area during the war no doubt influenced him in his boyhood, and he must have come into contact with American servicemen soon after the Occupation began. Odawara was the last Japanese city to be bombed during the war. As the recording of the emperor's voice announcing unconditional surrender was being broadcast on the radio, the bombers that had just devastated Odawara were beginning to return to their assorted air bases (Gandamu-mono 2002).

By 1979, Tomino had directed or produced five popular science fiction anime. Given the popularity of his work, he realized that he was free to create almost any story he wanted, as long as the Gundam mobile suits appeared in each episode to keep his sponsor, a toy company, happy. Tomino was determined to expose the war thoroughly, starting with Japanese aggression in Manchuria in 1931. This places his views on the war in accord with those of Japanese historian Ienaga Saburō and American historian Waldo Heinrichs (Ienaga 1978; and Heinrichs 1988). As will be discussed below, along with others in the progressive minority, Tomino did not allow conservative attempts to reshape history and memory to go unchallenged. In fact, he responded by creating anime that enabled his audiences to confront symbolically, work through and come to terms with the traumatic realities of the War (LaCapra 2001: 48–57, 65). Although unwilling in interviews to discuss the meaning or message of his work (he wanted his viewers to figure these things out for themselves), he did reveal recently that in the 1970s and 1980s, he “packed his frustrations” (most likely political) into his works (“Interview” 2009). Evidence that Tomino felt he had succeeded in representing the traumas and ideologies of the Asia Pacific War can be found in the fact that none of his sequels to the *Gundam* universe has the air of the War about them; nor do other anime he has created since 1982. In fact, *Mobile Suit Zeta Gundam*, his first sequel, shows the horrible lengths to which a superpower will go to suppress popular protest.

Socio-political Contexts

By the time pre-planning for the 1974 *Yamato* television series began, the leftist fervor of the 1960s—from demonstrations against the renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty in 1960 to college student uprisings and protests over the Vietnam War—was being replaced by a rightist political upsurge. Evidence of this can be seen in the relative ambivalence over the renewal of the Mutual Security Treaty in 1970. While the shocking ritual suicide performed by rightwing nationalist writer Mishima Yukio (Goodman 1996: 216–7) failed to bring about his hoped-for coup or revival of the imperial system (Hicks 1997: 31–3), his death did herald the re-emergence of gangs of nationalist toughs (as in the 1930s), and racketeers began to work covertly to help the Liberal Democratic Party and other rightwing causes through violent acts and money-laundering (Szymkowiak and Steinhoff 1995: 275–6). Other controversies arose because of the actions of right-wing government officials. For example, Japanese prime ministers began paying their respects at Yasukuni Shrine for the War Dead on August 15, 1975, the anniversary of Emperor Hirohito's declaration of unconditional surrender. In addition, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party continued its efforts to make the shrine a government-run, as opposed to a private-run, institution (Seraphim 2006: 24, 226, 230, 239–44).

During this reactionary period, the Japanese government was also involved in a series of lawsuits initiated by Ienaga Saburō over state control of the contents of his history textbooks. The Ministry of Education sought to downplay Japan's wartime atrocities and emphasize the U.S. bombing of Japanese civilians during the war (Hicks 1997: 114–5). As the court battles raged on, a museum glorifying the 'noble sacrifices' of kamikaze pilots opened in 1975 (Jeans 2005: 164–6). Major actions taken by the United States and events taking place in the world community also turned Japanese attention to international issues. Among the former were the Nixon shocks: opening U.S. relations with the People's Republic of China, returning Okinawa, placing surcharges on all imports into the United States, and floating the dollar on new international monetary exchanges (Hicks 1997: 38, 41; Seraphim 2006: 5, 22, 211). The Arab oil embargo and increased oil prices also forced Japanese industry to change course, and temporarily slowed the enormous economic growth patterns of the 1960s.

Domestically, Japanese movies and television programs about the war, lacking the normal pacifist cast, became more prevalent toward

the end of the 1960s (Shimazu 2003: 106, 112). Every August from 1967–71 for movies (Shimazu 2003: 113), and constantly for television programs, Japanese were presented with war stories, mostly about Japanese suffering, timed to coincide with the important anniversaries of August 6th (Hiroshima), August 9th (Nagasaki), and August 15th (Seaton 2007: 107). Thus, it should come as no surprise that *Yamato* opened in theaters on August 6, 1977.

During the production of *Gundam*, the Japanese government renewed its efforts to control the content of history textbooks, had “Kimigayo” legally designated as the national anthem, and made the rising sun flag the official symbol of state, all in the face of considerable progressive outrage (Nozaki and Inokuchi 2000: 112). The Ienaga textbook lawsuits dragged on with no end in sight (Hicks 1997: 115–6; Nozaki and Inokuchi 2000: 114–6). In the spring of 1979, word leaked out that in October of the preceding year, priests at Yasukuni Shrine had secretly enshrined the spirits of fourteen convicted Class A war criminals. The prime minister did not want to wait until August to pay his respects at the Shrine, and instead made his visit that April. Protests over this official visit forced the government to provide bodyguards to protect him from an enraged minority (Seraphim 2006: 227). All of this was happening just as the *Gundam* television series was being broadcast. And during the next two years—the period Tomino worked to turn the first twelve episodes of the *Gundam* television series into a movie—conservatives in the Ministry of Education attempted to downplay Japanese war crimes. About this time, it was reported that Japanese textbooks had been revised so that the “invasion” of China was described as an “advance”, and estimates of the number of Chinese killed during the ‘Rape of Nanjing’ were drastically reduced. Influential politicians increasingly emerged as apologists for the war (Ienaga 1994: 126). A prominent cabinet member publicly claimed that Japanese operations in Asia were part of a defensive war against the British and Americans, and the Prime Minister refused to characterize Japanese actions as “aggressive” (Gluck 1993: 65, 70–84, 94).

Story and Allegory: Yamato

In Yamato’s sprawling tale, the Earth has been under attack by the planet Gamilon for almost a century. Gamilas’ asteroid bombs, which are both destructive and filled with radiation, have destroyed the

surface of Earth and evaporated its oceans, forcing all human life into newly-built underground cities. In the year 2199, even the protection of the Earth's crust is doomed to break down in one year as the radiation seeps deeper and deeper into the ground. Humans fare no better in space battles in their solar system. Only a few space ships have survived unscathed the long years of fighting with the technologically superior Gamilas.

Out of desperation, humanity secretly retrofitted the sunken hulk of the I.J.N. *Yamato*, which had been lying peacefully on the bottom of the dried-up ocean, into a space battleship armed with laser cannons and guided missile racks. The original plan was to make it a Noah's Ark travelling at 99% the speed of light to find a new world for humanity. Yet providence, in the form of the queen of planet Iscandar, intervened. Iscandar invented two devices to give to the humans, the most important of which was the "Cosmo Cleaner D", sometimes referred to as "Cosmic DNA". This device, when built, would be capable of eliminating radiation and restoring the Earth. But it is too big for Iscandar's ships to deliver: thus, it awaits 148,000 light years away in the Large Magellanic Cloud outside Earth's galaxy.

Queen Stasha's second gift not only makes this journey possible in the year remaining to humanity, but also gives humans a weapon stronger than anything deployed by the Gamilas thus far: the Wave Motion Engine attached to a Wave Motion Gun. The Wave Motion equipment is quickly fitted onto the *Yamato*, which now looks like its old battleship self on top attached to a submarine equipped with a hole in the bow to fire the experimental Wave Motion Gun below (Figure 1). The Wave Motion Engine can warp the ship over great distances, equivalent to many thousand times the speed of light; and without combat or unforeseen circumstances, humans calculate that the ship should arrive after five months of these daily warps. The modified *Yamato* takes off just in time to avoid destruction by the Gamilas, and battles the forces of Gamilon throughout its long journey.⁸

The crew and their Earth-bound leadership are not aware, however, just how dangerous this journey will be. It turns out that the reason Gamilon launched its attack in the first place is that its own volcanic planet is dying, and for its people to survive it needs to find another

⁸ For the television version of these, and later, events, see Nishizaki 1983.

world high in radiation. Lord Desler, their dictator, is determined to make the Earth over in Gamilon's image. Secondly, the crew does not discover an important fact until they reach the Magellanic Cloud after many adventures and near-misses: Iscandar and Gamilon are in the same solar system, rotating around each other as they orbit their common star. So the *Yamato* must fight ever more powerful enemies as it crosses the galaxy and gets closer to Iscandar/Gamilon in Solar System X.

Combat occurs nearly constantly in the movie as the *Yamato* warps through the earth's solar system, out to the stars, and even beyond the Milky Way galaxy. The first real test occurs when the ship is drawn into the gravity well of Jupiter. It crash lands into a theretofore unknown floating jungle continent being used as a secret Gamilon military base. The crew manages to fix the ship, and then destroy not only the base but the continent itself by using the Wave Motion Gun for the first time. Besides disabling the engines for a time after firing, the Gun destroys forever the jungle continent, as well as their Gamilon adversaries. In the future, the crew, afraid of its awesome, indiscriminate power, vows to only use the Gun in life-or-death circumstances.

The *Yamato's* adventures continue out of the solar system, out of the galaxy, and into the Larger Magellanic Cloud galaxy. Sometimes the ship escapes attack or a clever trap with the Wave Motion Engine or the Wave Motion Gun. At other times, pilots leave the ship to engage in space fighter combat. Some members of the crew leave the ship to engage in sabotage and carry out other missions vital to the safety of the *Yamato*. And at times the youngsters on board are forced to take command since the doctor periodically forces the captain into bed-rest so that he can recover from his old war wounds and radiation poisoning. (In fact, the captain purportedly dies during the return journey to Earth).

Drawing parallels between *Yamato* and the War is relatively easy, and a number of commentators have already done so (Scheib 1993; Leong 1998; Schodt 1999: 32; Patten 2004: 224, 250, 272, 281, 287; and Napier 2005). In the *Yamato* story, as in the propaganda of Japanese militarists in the 1930s and 1940s, there is a logical and righteous reason for war: national (or global, in the case of the anime) survival is at stake. Gamilon's radiation bombs resemble American firebombs and atomic bombs, Gamilon flesh is blue and thus that of another race, and they have superior technology as did their American counterparts.

In contrast, the humans living on the Earth are Japanese (all the characters on the *Yamato* have Japanese names) who are destined to win, their primary weapon being the resurrected battleship *Yamato* (a poetic name closely associated with ancient Japan itself).

The *Yamato* movie also stresses the value of the Japanese quality described as the “nobility of failure” (Morris 1975). Japanese storytellers have a long history of venerating military men who face great odds only to go down in defeat. In one such famous story, twelfth-century warrior Minamoto no Yoshitsune found himself afoul of his brother and fled northward, only to be defeated by superior enemy forces. He, his wife, and child were ordered to commit ritual suicide. In 1877, Saigō Takamori led a samurai army to glorious defeat against a force of rifle-bearing conscripted farmers for the honor of his class. The ideal of self-sacrifice for one’s leader is also enshrined in the story of the forty-seven masterless samurai: known in Japan as *Chūshingura*, these loyal men achieved revenge against the lord who brought dishonor and death to their master, and then committed ritual suicide by disembowlement (*seppuku*). During the War, Japanese were indoctrinated to believe that it was honorable to die for the emperor, the ‘divine wind’ or *kamikaze* ‘Special Attack Forces’ being the most well-known examples (Morris 1975: xxi, 67–105, 217–334).⁹

The *Yamato* film opens with a variation on this “nobility of failure” ideology. One of the main character’s brothers turns his missile ship around to attack a much larger Gamilon force so that his superior officer can escape. This officer subsequently becomes the skipper of the secret weapon *Yamato*.¹⁰ As the rebuilt *Yamato* first takes off from its ‘permanent’ resting place, the scene cuts to 1945, and shows in detail the historic launch of the I.J.N. *Yamato*, heading south to fight the Americans at Okinawa without the benefit of air cover. Heroic music plays as the narrator explains, “All aboard knew there was no return”.

⁹ Interestingly, both branches of the Japanese military owed loyalty directly to the emperor and not the state. In the 1930s into the 1940s, this also meant that the military could force its policies on the civilian government by claiming them to be the will of the emperor (Hayashi and Coox 1959: 1–29, 192).

¹⁰ Everyone dies except for the leader who made the decision. He becomes a repatriated prisoner-of-war in an unconscious state, saved by Queen Stasha. In the many *Yamato* television and movie sequels, the ship and/or crew are often destroyed or killed, only to achieve victory in the end. However, the next time a television show or movie with *Yamato* is released, nothing is wrong with the ship and oftentimes dead characters return from the grave to fight anew.

American dive bombers and torpedo bombers—from eleven American aircraft carriers—quickly and relentlessly attack, and the ship sinks. The space-going *Yamato*, armed not only with laser cannons, missile arrays, and Iscandar's secret weapon, but also with "Space Zero" fighters, avoids destruction several times in what appear to be one-way suicide missions. It even succeeds against three Gamilon battle carriers and one super-carrier armed with space-age versions of torpedo planes and dive bombers. This space battle is animated similarly to the historical battle shown early in the movie, except that there are seven fewer adversaries and the *Yamato* emerges victorious.

As for the enemy, the Gamilas look human, apart from the fact that those residing outside of our solar system sport blue skin: the space war, like the War, is fundamentally a race war (Dower 1986: *passim*). According to the narrator, for almost a hundred years Gamilas have bombed Earth with radiation-laden asteroid bombs. When these bombs reach Earth and explode, they display the familiar mushroom cloud of an atomic bomb (Figure 2). And just as Japanese civilians were subjected to indiscriminate bombing in 1945, so too are the Earthlings. And in the same way that the Allies destroyed the Japanese navy by 1945, Gamilas have crushed Earth's defensive forces by 2199. Thus are the Earthlings unjustly victimized by aggressive 'alien' attacks.

A key change that *Yamato* effects is in its artistic (re)imag(in)ing of the war: the Japanese-named crew manning a former Japanese battleship ultimately succeed in defeating the ruthless bombers who unfairly attack Earth. The Earth (Japan) survives its prolonged victimization to vanquish its powerful but over-confident adversary; although not without regrets. Here the creators (especially Matsumoto) combine two postwar ideologies: one so pervasive that most Japanese define themselves as pacifist—i.e., Japan as victim; and the other, popular among right-wing nationalist groups seeking to remove Article IX of the Constitution (the clause renouncing war as a sovereign right of state): Japan must again become a 'normal' country capable of protecting itself.

With the modernized *Yamato*, humans have a chance to survive. But what began as a voyage of discovery in search of peaceful aid that would restore the Earth ends as a battle for supremacy. As previously noted, Iscandar is located in the same solar system as Gamilon. Lord Desler uses magnetic technology to force the *Yamato* to crash into the acid sea beneath Gamilon's outer planetary crust. Just when the

human crew seems to be gaining the upper hand against the sulfuric acid, Desler bombards the *Yamato* from the surface-crust above the acid sea. These bombs and missiles prove to be ineffective in stopping the humans, but they do destroy Gamilon headquarters. First, Desler watches his soldiers die, as his palace/headquarters is decimated by the explosions of his own weapons. Finally, a wall collapses on him, ending the fight.¹¹

Instead of cheering their victory, however, the crew of the *Yamato* become mournful and philosophical:

Wherever there is a winner there is also a loser. What happens to those who are defeated? Don't those who are defeated also have the right to life? I've never thought of that until this day. It makes me sad and angry.... Victory tastes like ashes!

The heroic youths on board the *Yamato* subsequently travel to the next planet. There, they succeed in their quest, recovering the Cosmo Cleaner D from Iscandar, a planet on which only the queen survives, before embarking on a mostly uneventful trip back 148,000 light years to save the Earth. Yet, after witnessing the destruction of Gamilon, the crew feel depressed over the damage their victory necessitated; indiscriminate bombing by the Gamilas almost destroyed the Earth and then ended up destroying what was left of Gamilon itself. It might seem as if the remorse displayed by the *Yamato* crew avoids the triumphant nature of many Japanese manga and anime depictions of the War. Yet this, too, can be used to promote nationalism and propagate the view that the Japanese, by virtue of their deeper, more intimate understanding of mass destruction, deserve to have a full-fledged military once again. Even if this message is lost on some viewers, they will at least be exposed to the “nobility of failure”, see Japan depicted as primary victim and witness the evil and stupidity of indiscriminate bombing, thereby internalizing elements integral to the neo-nationalist subtext. And because *Gundam* followed *Yamato* on television after five years and in movies after three, it is quite plausible that the work of its chief creator, Tomino, is his response to such artistic representations of conservative ideology and propaganda.

¹¹ Desler appears to die from the collapse of his headquarters; this is very different from the television series, where he remains as a threat. He also makes a comeback in some of the sequels (Nishizaki 1983, vol. 5).

Story and Allegory: Gundam

The original *Gundam* narrative involves a war fought on Earth and in its orbit. The backdrop of this war is accessible through references in the animation itself, illustrations in different books and animation magazines, and explanations in Tomino's later novelization. The events before September 0079 in the novel are considered to be canonical by Bandai (Simmons 2004: 11). Earth had become too polluted and overpopulated, so humankind moved into space to live in colonies, either on the moon, or orbiting the earth from different Lagrange points, stable areas where an object can balance between the sun's, earth's and moon's gravities. These events ushered in the Universal Century calendar. By U.C. 0050, nine of a total of eleven billion humans were living in space colonies, grouped together in 'sides' around a Lagrange point or on the moon. Leaders of the two billion who remained behind governed the Earth Federation that continued to control the planet and the space colonies.

In 0068, Degwin Sodo Zabi gained control of the cluster of colonies organized as Side 3. As dictator, he renamed it the Principality of Zeon after the charismatic leader Zeon Zum Deikun, whom he secretly murdered. Zabi sought greater power, but masked his secret plans behind the ideals of Deikun: leave the earth to regenerate without human interference and grant independence to all of the people in the space colonies. But no amount of propaganda could conceal his real intentions once he springs into action. On January 3, 0079, Zeon declares war on the Earth and launches a surprise attack against Federation space forces and fellow colonists alike using chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. When these measures fail to achieve victory, Zeon hurls a colony onto the earth, causing a brief 'nuclear winter' there. Before the end of the first month of fighting, half of humanity is dead. Leaders of the warring groups eventually reach an agreement forbidding the use of "colony drops" and other weapons of mass destruction. When the Federation refuses to surrender, however, Zeon invades the Earth, capturing the seas and half the land with the technological advantage of mobile suits, giant sixty-foot-tall fighting robots. The Federation then begins a crash course aimed at building mobile suits of its own.

Gundam opens with events of September 18, 0079, after an eight-month stalemate and the Federation's successful creation of prototype mobile suits far more powerful than those produced by Zeon.

Fifteen- to twenty-year-old recruits and civilians are now thrust into the war. Aboard the state-of-the-art spaceship *White Base*, the survivors of a Zeon attack become the inexperienced crew that quickly learns through trial and error, eventually returning to Earth while constantly holding off deadly Zeon forces anxious to destroy them or capture their advanced technology. They are also desperate to relocate the civilian refugees rescued from Side 7 who are still on board their warship. The teenagers survive because young people living in outer space are slowly changing, becoming “newtypes”—people with precognition, telepathy, telekinesis, and other supernatural abilities. But they cannot yet control their new powers well. The movie ends just after Gihren Zabi delivers a Hitlerian-style speech as the *White Base* continues its journey through the clouds across central Asia.

Just what is it about *Gundam* that struck such a deep chord in Japanese people and others around the globe? One element long noted by fans, commentators, and scholars is the ‘realistic’ use of a mainstay in Japanese animation of the 1970s (and through to today for that matter): the giant robot. Instead of indestructible giant robots controlled remotely by young boys protecting the Earth from foes such as giant monsters, the giant robots in *Gundam* are sixty-foot-tall machines of war controlled by an operator (much like today’s tanks or airplanes) who battles other human opponents manipulating similar mobile suits (Schodt 1988: 86–7; and Schodt 1999: 245–6).

Other commentators have sought to recognize *Gundam* as something more than a popular giant robot anime that created the sub-genre of “realistic robot animation” (Wright 2002: 5, 10). Scholars and fans hypothesize that the military violence depicted in the work and the readily available background setting show the creators’ pacifist response to the horrors of war (Harris 2002; Vernal 1995: 56–84). Two analysts claim that *Gundam* promotes militarism (although their arguments fail to hold up to the textual evidence), arguing that the movie is a standard-bearer for the necessity of Japan’s Self-Defense Force (Koulikov 2004) or an attack on the aforementioned Article IX of the Constitution (Chandler 2002). Finally, animation critic Charles Solomon (Solomon n.d.) and one of the *Gundam* manga creators, Kondo Kazuhisa, see the work as championing a pro-environment message (Kondo 2001: 2, 238).

While design, ‘realism’, politics, and environmentalism certainly factor into the popularity of *Gundam*, another element also plays an

important role: like *Yamato*, *Gundam* is a war allegory. *Gundam*, in its television and movie forms, represents creator/director Tomino's counter-narrative to *Yamato*'s valorizing of the military and propagation of the master narratives of 'noble failure' and national victimhood. *Gundam* does advocate pacifism, but that is not all. Before moving on to compare and contrast *Gundam* and *Yamato* in these regards, however, let us briefly address the question of the extent to which the former actually is 'about' the War.

In *Gundam*, war is represented in all its brutal violence and destructiveness, the most powerful weapons being mobile suits rather than jet planes or tanks. The Zeons, associated with the Axis powers, are clearly the villains. Although aggrieved by their lack of access to natural resources and true independence, they attack first in horrific fashion, causing the deaths of half of humanity. The Federation, whose population outnumbers that of Zeon many times over, suffers this humiliating surprise attack, relies on inferior equipment until technological advances enable the development of superior weaponry, and wins the war by mass production. The parallels to the Americans in the Pacific War should be obvious. The Earth Federation also controls almost all strategic resources and refuses legitimate calls for independence, although it does grant limited autonomy. The Axis powers often complained in the 1930s that the United States, Great Britain, and France, through their extensive empires or informal imperialism, treated younger nations created toward the end of the nineteenth century—Italy, Germany, and Japan—unfairly by blocking them from markets and denying them important raw materials gained from these colonies.

It is also easy to compare Gihren Zabi, who eclipsed his father to become the real source of power in Zeon, to Hitler. Like Hitler, Gihren consolidated his control and influence by staging lavish spectacles. He also speaks the rhetoric of racial superiority. At the end of the film, Gihren uses the combat death of his brother Garma to call for greater effort leading to 'certain victory':

All of you have lost fathers and sons to the Federation's senseless resistance! Keep this sadness and hatred alive within you! That is what Garma died to show us! If we gather this hatred we share and smash the Federal Forces then true victory will be within our grasp! And that victory will be the ultimate vindication to all of those who have died in this conflict! My people! My people, transform your grief into rage and arise! Never

forget we, the citizens of Zeon, are the chosen! We, the superior race, shall save mankind!

Significantly, the speech ends with the phrase "Sieg Zeon!" which the crowd picks up and repeats over and over. Gihren's role in the story is two-fold: he, rather than his father, holds the military power of Zeon in his hands, just as the heads of Japan's wartime army and navy made military decisions in the name of the emperor. And the associations with Hitler signal that in allegorical terms the film treats World War II as a whole.

The Nazi connection, however, does not, and should not, overshadow the important links to the Asia Pacific War. Key dates given as background information parallel those of Japan's wartime experience, and this is surely no coincidence. For example, Degwin Zabi became hereditary ruler through a coup on August 15, 0069. The date reminds the viewer of historical defeat, unconditional surrender and the start of the dramatic political and social changes of the Occupation. The One-Year War began on January 3, 0079, the same date in 1933 that Japanese troops crossed over the Great Wall from Manchuria into China proper at Shanhaikuan during the second (undeclared) Sino-Japanese War (*MS Era* 1990: 28, 72). Finally, on September 18, 0079, Zeon troops infiltrated Side 7 during a clandestine operation to find the Gundam project. This act opens the film (and the first episode of the television series), and corresponds with the date in 1931 when Japanese soldiers, pretending to be Chinese, engaged in a guerrilla operation to blow up the South Manchurian Railway. This attack, known as the 'Mukden Incident', rapidly led to the Japanese conquest of Manchuria, leading many historians to cite this date as the start of the War (Ienaga 1978). The Japanese bomb severed the railroad tracks, but the train passed over the eighteen inch gap without incident; the Zeon invaders severely damaged Side 7 but failed to destroy the Gundam. In the anime, September 18th also marks the beginning of mobile suit versus mobile suit combat, as well as the day when Side 7's teenage civilians take their place as soldier-protagonists aboard the *White Base*.

Tomino uses his science fiction movie *Gundam* to counter nationalistic, pro-war representations of the War in Japanese comics and animation, especially those produced by Matsumoto. To do so effectively, however, he must get the viewer to identify and empathize with the heroes, who in this case are the Allies. Thus, the most powerful

mobile suit—the Federation’s Gundam prototype—appears to be very Japanese; its head, shoulders, and weaponry all recall those of the traditional samurai. To further emphasize this association, the animation depicts close combat involving the Gundam machine as a series of *kendo* moves (Figure 3) (Mannering 1995: 66–7).

While the brightly colored mobile suits sell the toys and models that helped pay for the original broadcast, the heart of *Gundam* is its characters. The protagonists in the story include Amuro Rei, Kai Shiden, Hayato Kobayashi, and Mirai Yashima, all phonetically Japanese names, but arranged in Western name order in both the television show and film. (Shiden Kai was the name of an actual Japanese combat aircraft used in the War.) These characters all become core members of the *White Base* crew, and Amuro has the honor, duty, and jeopardy of piloting the powerful Gundam mobile suit. Eventually, however, it becomes clear that the Federation is not the analog for wartime Japan, but for the Allies in general, and the United States in particular.

Gundam effectively calls into question the postwar master narrative of special Japanese victimhood. While the work conveys the plight of all civilians caught up in total war, it only explicitly discusses and represents the sufferings of Federation, not Zeon, civilians (Figure 4). Although civilians play a lesser role in the movies than in the television series, there are still ample examples of the everyday difficulties and horrors faced by noncombatants. The background narrative explains how in the surprise attack Zeonic forces destroyed even fellow space colonists. Mass civilian death is replicated, albeit on a smaller scale, early in the first movie. When Zeon mobile suits enter into combat on Side 7, many of the Federation civilians who are living there die or are driven from their homes onto the *White Base* for a long trek through space back to Earth. Due to rationing, food and medical supplies are scarce, both on the *White Base* and throughout the various war zones.

Tomino also critiques the “nobility of failure”. The star of *Gundam*, fifteen year-old phenom Amuro Rei, begins as a socially awkward teen who possesses a streak of pacifism and is enamored with computers and other technological gadgets. When he becomes a Federation officer capable of piloting the Gundam to great effect, however, he begins to question his identity. At times in *Gundam*, the stress of combat provokes a violent rage, and he uses the Gundam to kill or destroy anyone or anything that moves. War leads him to sickening sorrow,

sleeplessness, and even brief catatonia. He becomes a great pilot, but as he grows as a person he comes to fight solely to protect his friends. He has no interest in heroism, unless a hero is defined as one who survives to protect those around him. Kai Shiden is even more interested in personal survival than Amuro. Kai, the pilot of the Federation mobile suit Guncannon, claims he is a coward, but when called upon he still fights for the *White Base* and crew to the best of his more limited abilities.

Interestingly, death comes to fellow crew members and allies—as well as to the main antagonists fighting for Zeon—because of meaningless heroics. The resultant mourning and anger is powerful to behold, especially considering that the film is animated rather than live-action. Such desperate, sacrificial acts change nothing for the better; they only produce profound grief. The Zeons throw their lives away easily, often in suicidal attacks aimed at destroying the *White Base* or the Gundam. Garma Zabi and Zaku pilots Gene and Crown, to name but a few, give up their lives in hopeless attempts to beat the Federation's best mobile suit. In the end, Tomino shows that true nobility lies not in pointless self-destruction/death, but in meaningful living/life.

Conclusion

In their respective anime, both Tomino and Matsumoto seek to influence 'collective memory' of the War and its legacies. As in the television program but in more streamlined fashion, *Mobile Suit Gundam I* conveys important lessons to its audience. First, it stresses that war, nationalism, and militarism should not be glorified or glamorized. Second, as we have seen, it questions and overturns the long-standing martial ideology of the "nobility of failure". Third, it recognizes the victimization of non-Japanese and Japanese civilians alike. The citizens of Zeon were indoctrinated to fight for the 'glory' of the Zabi family and the 'freedom' of all space colonists; the Japanese people were led into a catastrophic war by militaristic, power-hungry men who proclaimed that Japan could use violence to purge the corruption of the world and bring about a new world order of peace and prosperity. But war responsibility ultimately lies in the hearts and minds of those who heed the state's siren call. In contrast, Matsumoto uses the *Yamato*, proud symbol of the Imperial Navy and poetic name of ancient Japan,

as a vehicle for sustaining the myth of the “nobility of failure”, propagating the master narrative of unique Japanese victimhood, and advancing an agenda of muscular neo-nationalism.

Philip Seaton’s division of postwar Japanese views on the War into “progressives, progressive-leaning, ‘don’t knows’, conservatives, and nationalists” is useful for situating Tomino’s and Matsumoto’s conflicting ideological positions (Seaton 2007: 25). Like Tomino, the progressives argue that Japan fought a war of aggression and committed grievous crimes against humanity. The progressive-leaning group acknowledges Japanese criminality, but claims “moral equivalence” with regard to atrocities committed by its enemies (i.e. indiscriminate fire-bombing and atomic bombing). The “don’t knows” refer to those with no direct experience and little knowledge of the War. Their ‘war views’ can still be shaped by education and popular culture. This is clearly the group over which Tomino and Matsumoto vie. Conservatives defend Japanese actions during the War, honor military sacrifices, and believe that Japan was the main victim of the War. Members of this group are usually unwilling, unless evidence overwhelms them, to admit that Japan owes apologies and compensation for aggressive or illegal acts of war. Japan’s dominant Liberal Democratic Party, and by extension the government as a whole, falls within this category. The nationalists affirm Japan’s stated motives in the War, lionize the soldiers and sailors who fought and died for emperor and nation, believe in revering and restoring the imperial institution, and refuse to accept any evidence that Japanese soldiers committed war atrocities (Seaton 2007: 20–5). Matsumoto straddles the conservative and nationalist groupings, since he places military sacrifices at the heart of his work and advocates the full restoration of Japan’s armed forces, but stops short of categorically denying that the Japanese Army and Navy perpetuated war crimes.

On the ‘popular battlefield’ of contesting ideologies and interpretations of the Asia Pacific War, *Gundam* appears today to be winning its target audience. Both in Japan and abroad, it is far more popular than *Yamato*. Its popularity flows throughout East Asia, no doubt due to the more acceptable views of the War it represents. Hong Kong holds annual, well-attended *Gundam* conventions (Tsang 2003: 67–74). And in South Korea, because Bandai failed to copyright the name, *Gundam* has become, through illegal distribution of the various anime and toy/model kit piracy, a general term for animated robots (“Gundam and Giant Robots in South Korea” 2006). In the

most recent *Gundam* television series airing from 2007–09—albeit not created by Tomino—the heroes in their Gundam mobile suits confront those from any country who try to wage aggressive war. Thus, the ‘pacifism’ of *Gundam* seems to be winning in the animated science fiction battle over the ongoing reconfiguration of ‘collective memory’ of the War, both in Japan and elsewhere.

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