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**The IAFOR Journal of Literature and Librarianship**  
**Volume 3 – Issue 1 – Winter 2014**

Edited by Richard Donovan



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**Bill Ashcroft** is a renowned critic and theorist, founding exponent of post-colonial theory, and co-author of *The Empire Writes Back*, the first text to offer a systematic examination of the field of postcolonial studies. He is author and co-author of sixteen books and over 160 articles and chapters, variously translated into six languages, and he is on the editorial boards of ten international journals. Representative works include *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*; *Postcolonial Studies: the Key Concepts*; *Edward Said*; *Post-Colonial*

*Transformation, On Post-Colonial Futures and Caliban's Voice*. He holds an Australian Professorial Fellowship at the University of NSW working on the project "Future Thinking: Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures."

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### **Editor**

Richard Donovan lectures at Doshisha University, Kyoto, Japan, teaching in the Faculty of Global and Regional Studies. He also works as a translator between Japanese and English at Kyoto City Hall. He obtained a PhD in literary translation studies at Victoria University of Wellington in 2012. The title of his thesis was *Dances with Words: Issues in the Translation of Japanese Literature into English*. His other areas of interest include Japanese media subculture and environmental technology.



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## Introduction to the Issue

The theme of the 4th Asian Conference on Literature and Librarianship (LibrAsia) held in April 2014 in Osaka was ‘Individual, Community & Society: Conflict, Resolution & Synergy’. We are lucky enough to feature two of the keynote speakers from this conference in this issue of the *IAFOR Journal of Literature and Librarianship*. Both distinguished scholars with decades of experience and definitive contributions in their individual fields, they are similarly engaged in bringing some of the burning issues of our times—in this case, the place of arts and literature in a complex and conflicted world—to the academic forefront. At the same time, I have the opportunity to introduce to an international reading audience two up-and-coming academics who demonstrate with the vibrancy of their research that the next generation is ready to carry the torch of scholarship forward.

First Prof. Suzuki addresses the vexed question of how to read the literature of another country or culture, and whether, indeed, this is possible. The implications for international and intercultural communication become evident in this wide-ranging paper, which is at once personal and universal. In particular, with reference to various world literatures and critics, Suzuki provides a nuanced challenge to the largely unquestioned predominance of the Western literary paradigm.

Also questioning paradigms of dominance, particularly in terms of colonialism, Prof. Ashcroft looks at the artistic expression of resistance and how such cultural commentary can not only construe, but help construct, a future beyond conflict. He analyses a range of indigenous ‘revolutionary’ pieces—artwork from Australia and both images and poetry from Palestine—whose vibrant reproduction in this issue provides an arresting counterpoint to Ashcroft’s compelling prose.

Our third and fourth contributors also have things in common: in fact, a great deal. They are both young, female Polish researchers interested in the portrayal of particular subjects in Japanese literature and already accomplished in their academic pursuits, both, as they are, currently under the auspices of PhD programmes.

Broma-Smenda's research area is classical Japanese literature, and here she focuses on the famous Heian-era female poet Ono no Komachi, not exploring her poetry, but rather considering the wider societal question of how the real woman was fictionalised in various literary genres, and to what ends.

Bogdańska, on the other hand, bringing to bear comparative literary analysis, is concerned with the portrayal of death itself in post-WWII works by Japanese and Polish novelists, providing insights into their slightly disparate aestheticisations of wartime atrocities and thereby comparing and contrasting the cultures and philosophies underlying them.

This issue, then, brings together varied research by established and aspiring academics. Linking all the papers, however, is a great sense of enthusiasm and engagement with literature and the arts, and, most importantly, a conviction of the great relevance of such mediums to the everyday struggles of humanity. The feeling in reading the four papers is inescapable: that the arts can be transformative not only for individual readers and viewers, but for societies, and humanity, as a whole.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Prof. Myles Chilton at Nihon University for his assistance in the initial stages of production, as well as the eminent scholars around the world who provided such helpful feedback in their peer reviews.

**Richard Donovan**      **donovanrichardn@hotmail.com**

Editor, *IAFOR Journal of Literature and Librarianship*, November 2014

## **How Should We Read Literature from a Certain Area from the Viewpoints of Other Language-speaking Areas?<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

The concept of “world literature” can be viewed as insisting on returning to reading a text without the mechanical use of literary theory. This means, as Zhang Longxi notes, referring to Kermode, “tak[ing] whatever theoretical help you fancy, but follow[ing] your nose” (Zhang 2010, 7; Kermode 2004, 85)<sup>2</sup> and reading literature through multidimensional interpretations. If I can regard the reading of a text put in the framework of literary theory as a kind of paternalistic and dogmatic “check-up,” then I will label the alternative, reading literature in a kind of follow-your-nose way, Rogerian empathy—the understanding of the “voice” of a text from its internal framework of references. However, this raises a simple question: How should we read literature from a certain area from the viewpoints of other language-speaking areas? “The deconstruction,” Paul de Man says, “constituted the text in the first place” (1979, 17), but if so, meanings of sentences are defined on the basis of a reader’s socio-cultural background—such as traditions, ways of thinking, and laws—and emotion. A person’s reading of literature in another language might always result in misreading in a sense. However, we cannot simply call it misreading, because “I feel, therefore I am.” From a neurological perspective, intelligence and emotion are united. Intelligence and feeling link to the faculty of reason, and emotion has a critical role in enhancing one’s faculties. As brain

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<sup>1</sup> This study was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 25370672. This paper is based on the manuscript

<sup>2</sup> The page number in Zhang comes from the Japanese translation.

scientist Antonio R. Damasio mentions, “Emotion, feeling and biological regulation all play a role in human reasoning” (2005, 8). In our global society, we should empathize with and understand voices, or *interpretations*, in the world, and discuss them together on a world scale in order to cross-culturally understand each other and promote peace.

*Keywords:* world literature, comparative literature, literary theory, cross-cultural



## 1. Introduction

Currently, as scholars of world literature, such as Zhang Longxi, Haun Saussy, and David Damrosch, insist, critics should not just put a framework of literary theory onto a literary text and make a rigid distinction between a good text and a bad text, or an oppressive and a non-oppressive one. First, we should read a text, and then, if there is some problem we cannot overlook, we should use theory. Otherwise, we do not need to read or think or have our own viewpoints: We just blindly follow a theoretical hegemony.

Still, how can we read literature from the viewpoint of another language-speaking area? Also, what is the significance of such an act? In this paper, I develop my current answer to the questions by referring to readings and studies of English and Japanese literature for Japanese readers, which I hope can be applied to the cases of readers in other areas.

To this end, let me start by referring to Miyazaki Yoshizō, a famous Japanese scholar of literature in English. He says in the conclusion of his book *The Pacific War and Anglicists*:

In my mind, academic research has to do with a scholar's own way of life. I want to be who I am in my life. As long as one is who one is, naturally one's own viewpoint will be born. I say that the mind without one's own viewpoint is in a preceding stage of thinking. So is the mind of the author of *The History of British Literature*. (1999, 145)<sup>3</sup>

*The History of British Literature* was written by Saitō Takeshi, who is known as a pioneer of academic research on literature in English in Japan. The reason for Saitō's being in a "preceding stage of thinking," according to Miyazaki, is that "the methods used in research on British literature in Japan were clearly different before and after the publication of the book in the sense that Saitō used the same methods in his book as British scholars did" (ibid., 42–3). This means that Saitō simply imported the methods used in the United Kingdom. From

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<sup>3</sup> All the quotations from Japanese books including Miyazaki's are translated by the author.

Miyazaki's viewpoint, Saitō merely imitated British scholars, and hence, he and his book are in a preceding stage of thinking. Miyazaki thinks that at the core of academic research on literature in English, there should be an individual way of thinking and behaving born from the tensions between oneself and a situation that one is put in—for instance, the particular region of Japan, the times of war, or individual experiences one goes through. Miyazaki continues,

[i]f a scholar cleanly cuts off himself or herself from the world, closing his or her eyes to tensions in the world, thinking “This is this, that is that,” he or she will lose himself or herself as a whole, split off. As a familiar case, a scholar who has lost him- or herself faithfully attends to the introduction of research in foreign countries, or to stretch the point, is led by a general trend, without stopping and thinking. (Ibid., 143)

Yoshio Nakano, another famous Japanese scholar of English literature, asserts that when one is who one is, “no matter what the government authorities and the society say, he or she never loses himself or herself, or anything” (ibid., 102). This means, of course, not completely cutting oneself off from the world, but fighting against conformism. He wrote this during World War II under very unusual circumstances. English teachers and scholars of literature in English were branded as public enemies who taught the language and literature of hostile countries. In order for scholars to maintain their integrity under the scrutiny and urging of government authorities and the world, says Miyazaki, individual thinking power is critical (ibid., 120).

There are no thought police or days when people are frightened about aerial bombing in contemporary Japan. However, Japanese government authorities and society are insistent, intoning “Practical English! A good TOEIC score! Abandon literature!” or, more subtly, “Do not interpret literature. With a brand-new western literary theory, censor the representation of a text or analyze the mechanism of the text!” In such a situation, Miyazaki, Nakano, and

Fukuhara would still say that a scholar should “not lose himself or herself” and “has his or her own viewpoint,” which “has to do with his or her own way of life” (ibid., 145).

However, here a question arises about reading literature. When the Japanese—who live their lives immersed in a Japanese socio-cultural background, social reality, ways of thinking, habits, traditions, religion, language, and so on—read English literature or literature based on other socio-cultural backgrounds, how can they do so while “not losing oneself” and “having one’s own viewpoint,” which “has to do with one’s own way of life”? If people immersed in a Japanese socio-cultural setting read English literature by aligning their “eyes” with those of people living in English-speaking countries, then does it not mean “cleanly cutting off oneself from the world” and “thinking ‘This is this, that is that’”? On the other hand, if Japanese readers read English literature without any assimilation to the perspectives of English-speaking countries, their reading might always result in misreading. If Japanese readers did assume the perspectives of English-speaking countries, however, their study of English literature would be reduced to orientalism. At what point do Japanese perspectives and ways of life chime with the reading of English literature? In short, the question is quite simple: what should we do when we read literature in a language from the perspectives of other languages and their cultures, and what is the significance of this act?

## **2. The Japanese Literary World and Western Centricism<sup>4</sup>**

Now, let me confirm that Japanese literature and concepts of literature in Japan have been strongly influenced by the West, and that western thought has been on the horizon of writing,

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<sup>4</sup> For convenience, I will use the term *the West* repeatedly, but *the West* means areas and people that have economic and political power in the international world: in other words, a kind of hegemony. As a result, *the West* means here Europe and America. When I use the phrases “literature in English” or “English literature,” they mean literature written in English-speaking areas, such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

reading, and interpretation of literature since the Meiji era (1868–1912).

Modern Japanese novels originated with the importation of western novels, and with the prevalence of these translated versions in Japanese, the Japanese modern novel also established its position.<sup>5</sup> According to Hirata Yumi, the circulation figures of translated western novels and those of Japanese modern novels increased in tandem. On the other hand, those of Japanese traditional fiction—taking the form of a “factual story” that described an incident, especially a juicy story such as adultery—decreased.<sup>6</sup> A major reason is that intellectuals and newspapers insisted on revolutionizing fiction in Japan after the importation of western novels. Additionally, newspaper writers strove for “improvement” in their readers and emphasized the “benefit” of reading western novels, including those of Charles Dickens, which “can abolish evils in this world” (*Eiri Asano Shinbun*, Jan. 10, 1884. Hirata 1996, 176–7). Another newspaper, *The Yomiuri Shinbun*, echoes this insistence with the following:

Recently, we read a few Western novels. All of the authors of the novels are genuine scholars who represent their countries; they have high scholastic abilities. Hence, their novels are totally different from our novels in their contents and qualities. Western novels are philosophically fruitful, but our novels are not. The reason lies in the difference of scholastic abilities of the authors. (Nov. 9, 1884. Hirata 1996, 177)

Thus, translated western novels became popular in Japan because of their emphasis on scholarship and philosophy. With their popularity, Japanese authors, readers, and critics also started thinking seriously about scholarship and philosophy in literature. Following the view of Franco Moretti, who has a bird’s-eye view of literature in the world with reference to Immanuel Wallerstein’s World-Systems Theory and Frederic Jameson’s law of literary

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<sup>5</sup> With regard to the material in the succeeding paragraphs, see Suzuki 2013, “Cross-Cultural Reading of Doll-Love Novels in Japan and the West,” 110.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the chart in Hirata 1996, 179.

evolution, it can be said that Japanese literature and concepts of literature have been developed as a compromise between the local styles of peripheral countries and the metropolitan culture of core countries in Europe (Moretti 2000, 54).<sup>7</sup>

Since then, the scholarly emphasis on western literature has remained unchanged. After World War II, scholars in Japan, primarily those of western literature, have written numerous literary surveys. Japanese literature has always been dismissed by conventional literary standards, especially in English, with critics citing its shortcomings and calling it “less advanced” and “wonky” (Satō 2005, 43–4).

Had Japanese literature and its reading been developed with an emphasis on the aspect of philosophy under the influence of western literature, Susan Sontag’s insistence in her book *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* to cease the interpretation of philosophy and thought in a text could have liberated Japanese and Japanese literature from western standards of literature. Sontag’s opinion was, however, connected to post-structuralism, and the situation produced literary theory where literary works came to be called literary texts, and the dynamics and representation in the text started being evaluated, with denial of the very acts of reading and interpretation.

What we should pay attention to is that what we now call “literary theory” was mainly born in western countries. Whether Japanese use literary theory or not, the study of literature in Japan has been based on western concepts of literature. It is not by accident that literary theory was linked to post-structuralism. Tracing back the history of western literary theory, we will arrive at the literary perspectives of Plato and Aristotle: namely, mimesis. As Jacques

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<sup>7</sup> Still, in my mind, such a view is Euro-centric. Jameson’s “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” is its prime example. In addition, the influence of literature does not move in a single direction. We cannot decide which areas comprise metropolitan and peripheral cultures. In fact, in France, or what Moretti calls “metropolitan” culture, the Impressionist school, post-impressionism, and Pablo Picasso were strongly influenced by Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints and *shunga* pornographic paintings. Picasso drew his inspiration from African art as well, and had an impact on American authors such as John Dos Passos.

Derrida used literature in his study of the general theory of language, he focused on the issue of mimesis in the world of language. However, the view that the basic question in literature stems from mimesis is itself a western perspective. There is no such perspective, at least, in China, as Ming Dong Gu points out (2006, 3–4), and neither does it hold in Japan. Additionally, it would be strange for literary theory to be synonymous with western literary theory. Literary theory has been developed in China, as well, for a long time. As long as we think of it as reasonable to examine Japanese literature using western literary theory, it is also logical that we examine western literature using Chinese literary theory. In addition, both before and after the westernization of Japan, Japan has represented itself in Chinese characters.<sup>8</sup> Japan is a hybrid area between the West and China, and hence Japanese literature should be analyzed by western and Chinese literary theories, equally. As far as I know, however, nobody has argued for Japanese literary texts in such a way. Furthermore, I have not read any fruitful and serious comparative discussion on western and Chinese literary theories by Japanese scholars. If, without such discussion, Japanese literature is examined just with western literary theory, it follows that a prejudice holds that western literary theory is a universal tool, a prejudice without any discussion of whether western literary theory is much more progressive than Chinese, or a firm conviction that Japan is a western country. However, this amounts to orientalism.<sup>9</sup>

Is it the case, then, that we can read literature in English only using western literary theory,

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<sup>8</sup> Some say that *hiragana*, Japanese syllabary characters and one of three scripts used in Japan, was created by the Japanese around the end of the 8th century, but some *hiragana* can be recognized on the cover of *Dàbàotiē*, allegedly written by Wang Xizhi in the 4th century. Hence it is doubtful that *hiragana* was created by the Japanese. It is true that Japan adopted much from China: calligraphy, the tea ceremony, martial arts, drama, music, instruments, annual events, law, religion, certain habits, and other things that many people see as Japanese traditions.

<sup>9</sup> Scholars recently have been noting concrete problems born from the results of western literary theory being used for non-western literature. See Damrosch (ed.) 2003, *Teaching World Literature*, and Suzuki 2013, “Cross-Cultural Reading of Doll-Love Novels in Japan and the West.”

literature in Chinese only with Chinese literary theory, literature in Japanese only with Japanese literary theory, and so on? In order to consider this matter, I shall start by addressing several issues related to applying (western) literary theory to literature.

### **3. Theoretical Suppression**

In Japan, when western literary theory became popular, there was much criticism that no matter who discusses a literary text, their viewpoints resemble each other too much. People opposed to the theory seemed to support Miyazaki's view that "a scholar should 'not lose himself or herself' and 'has his or her own viewpoint' which 'has to do with his or her own way of life'." Certainly, it sometimes happens that someone reaches the same conclusion as others. The criticism was not directed to the same conclusion itself, but to the point that the scholars make rigid distinctions between a good and a bad text just by employing a theory created by another scholar and not reading and discussing the text well from their own perspective. Moreover, such scholars insist that only such theoretical analyses are correct. In other words, the criticism was directed at the notion that only some types of thoughts can dominate in the academic world. This criticism reflects the framework of reference of Zhang Longxi, a leading scholar of world literature. Zhang opposes the supremacy of politics in criticism of literature, in contrast to John Guillory's insistence that a literary work is a cultural work and that "our new cultural critic" talks about or engages in "progressive politics," where "the encounter with a cultural work becomes an occasion for confirming or contesting the belief systems expressed in the work" (Zhang 2010, 5; Kermode 2004, 67), and Frederic Jameson's argument that "*ideological analysis*" (emphasis in Zhang) is "the appropriate designation for the critical 'method' specific to Marxism" and "political interpretation" is not just one interpretive method among many, but "the absolute horizon of all reading and all

interpretation” (Zhang 2010, 6; Jameson 1981, 12, 17). Drawing on his own experience during the Cultural Revolution, Zhang points out that in times of the supremacy of politics, a literary work “is useful insofar as it can be seen as a document that houses certain ‘belief systems’” (ibid., 6). In times such as these, the work of *litterateurs* is to “endorse or condemn in a political interpretation,” and a literary text “can ... express ‘belief systems’ that are either with us, or against us” (ibid., 5–6). Literary works such as texts that only can express political belief systems are approbated, and then free and intellectual activities disappear (ibid., 6). This was not only true at the time of the Cultural Revolution in China, however. Zhang was echoing a sentiment of George Orwell’s during the “political season” in Europe in the 1930s. Mentioning the similarities between Communists and Catholics, Orwell states:

The Catholic and the Communist are alike in assuming that an opponent cannot be both honest and intelligent. Each of them tacitly claims that “the truth” has already been revealed, and that the heretic, if he is not simply a fool, is secretly aware of “the truth” and merely resists it out of selfish motives. In Communist literature, the attack on intellectual liberty is usually masked by oratory about “petty-bourgeois individualism,” “the illusions of nineteenth-century liberalism,” etc., and backed up by words of abuse such as “romantic” and “sentimental,” which, since they do not have any agreed meaning, are difficult to answer. ... [T]he Communist party is itself aiming at the establishment of the classless society.... But meanwhile, the real point has been dodged. Freedom of intellect means the freedom to report what one has seen, heard, and felt, and not to be obliged to fabricate imaginary facts and feelings. (1961, 312)

The point to keep in mind is that Orwell and Zhang do not take a hostile view toward politics itself, nor toward Marxism or Catholicism. Rather, what they criticize lies in that in the beginning there is the truth, and reading from the truth, as if it were self-evident, makes too sharp a distinction within a literary text between “this side” and “the other side” in politics and deprives readers of free, intellectual activities.<sup>10</sup> As Paul de Man noted, if “[t]he

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<sup>10</sup> See: Suzuki 2012, “In the Times of Supremacy of Politics.”



deconstruction ... constituted the text in the first place” (1979, 17), it means that intelligent freedom to decide on a meaning must be guaranteed in order to avoid aporia, where the meaning is not defined. Even if so, as J. Hillis Miller cautioned in his book *The Ethics of Reading*, reading requires readers’ all-the-more-responsible responses to a text as an ethic for freedom, but not carefree interpretation (1987).

Of course, there has not been an innocent moment without literary theory, including New Criticism and formalism. In addition, certainly, a theory gives us fresh eyes. However, if a certain theory created by another person is simply blindly accepted as absolutely correct and good practice of that theory is praised, this would be equivalent to worshipping the theory, as pointed out by Japanese scholar Mishima Ken’ichi, since such an attitude is exactly like devotion to a religion (2006, 4–5). This view is based on the assumption that a theory is neutral and universal. In addition, as Ueno Chizuko, a leading Japanese scholar on feminism, argues, “Theory is a tool, and a tool is something we use. But we should not be used by theory, and hence, when a theory does not correspond successfully to a reality, it is not the reality but the theory that we should adjust or change” (2005, 324). All theories—not only theories of literature but also theories of education, psychology, and other fields—have merits and shortcomings in principle. As long as a theory has its merits, we cannot deny the theory itself. As Ueno says, “Any theories were, have been, and will be created by the efforts of people who have a motivational condition to need them” (ibid., 318–9).

On the other hand, as long as any theory has shortcomings in principle, it cannot be good for everything. For example, Walter Benn Michaels points out that postmodern theory, which takes notice of identity, criticizes oppressive definitions of the agency of “I,” the reader, in society, where everybody should have a right to achieve self-actualization without any oppression, but it overlooks the problem of poverty because the poor are not victims of

oppressed cultural identity but rather of capitalism (2004, 180–1). From a similar perspective, Miura Reiichi also argues that postcolonialism, trauma theory, and Queer theory contribute to neo-liberalism and oppress the working class (2013, 124). Theories, as Heidee Kruger argues, cannot be transferred to different contexts as if they were neutral “instruments” that can simply be “applied” to a given object of study, regardless of whether this object of study is part of the same temporal, spatial, and cultural configurations as the theory or whether it is instead far removed in time or space from the original context of that theory (Kruger 2012, 93). It is natural logic that theory is also generated with the various background features of each area. As Ueno says, “Any theory is born in a socio-historic context” (2005, 34). If a theory is mechanically imposed on a literary text in the world as a framework, it becomes a kind of dogma, and the reader tends to easily overlook various things, or alienate the text. Edward Said also made the following observation:

It is the critic’s job to provide resistance to theory, to open it up toward historical reality, toward society, toward human needs and interests, to point up those concrete instances drawn from everyday reality that lie outside or just beyond the interpretive area necessarily designated in advance and thereafter circumscribed by every theory. (1983, 242)

What Said and others request is not so difficult. They insist that we should first listen to the real “voice.” We should not analyze or judge others from some theoretical framework, but listen to their “voices” and analyze them from their internal framework of reference or from the perspective of their own logic, emotion, socio-cultural background, and so on, multi-dimensionally. When I say “let’s listen to the ‘voice’ in a literary text,” some might insist that the “voice” in a literary text is just a fiction and hence it is not worth listening to. Still, in my mind, a literary text is nonfiction in a sense, while mass media, such as newspapers and television, is fiction. If someone is brutally honest to the media, the media

edits, bashes, or ignores what that person says, or sometimes even suppresses him or her. When what one really feels and thinks is written as a fiction and read in a private space, it can be communicated to others.<sup>11</sup> Such a *fiction* includes bias and ideology, of course, but the voice of the fiction is nonfiction.<sup>12</sup> Otherwise, for example, there is even a possibility that the voices of suppressed females and minorities, which appear in various literary texts of various eras and countries, would not yet have been heard. Reading literature is not to learn something lofty, noble, or elegant, but to address matters touching the Earth.

Certainly, we cannot deny that literature is a system supporting a nation. It is needless to recapitulate British literature's use in governing India, or that Japanese traditional thirty-one-syllabled verse is rooted in the annual New Year's poetry reading held by the Japanese emperor. However, if the poetry is regarded just as "a product of the system supporting a nation" (Murai 1999, 66) and as something whose voice is unworthy of close listening, the voice of Japan's poor in the poem "Dialogue on Poverty" edited by Hiedanoarei in the 8th century, for example, would be politically ignored.

As another example, Henry Miller was strongly attacked in feminist criticism. Indeed, we can point out that his descriptions of female characters are malicious, but if we simply make a theoretical judgment on Miller's text, we will overlook an important point: Almost all of the protagonists in Miller's texts are poor. They oppose capitalism and do not care about identity. In other words, they are indifferent to wealth or class. They oppose the fetishism of capitalism and hate to identify themselves with something because they believe that identity is an essential part of capitalism and commodity fetishism (Marx), and feel happy to consider

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Wright 1988, *Theology and Literature*. Wright argues that literature is the most powerful means to describe the actual world.

<sup>12</sup> In this point, I agree with Beauvoir's argument on literature. See Moi's comments on Simone de Beauvoir in Moi 2009, "What Can Literature Do?"

themselves a “non-identity” (Adorno).<sup>13</sup> Miller’s literary texts tend to be considered unorthodox in American literature, in part because the protagonists are unconcerned about wealth or class. They diverge from the protagonists in *The Great Gatsby*, *Sister Carrie*, *American Tragedy*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and so forth. Gatsby and the others are obsessed with class and identity.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, the “voice” in a literary text has a socio-cultural background. Thus, if we use others’ perspectives as a framework of reference for a text, we will suppress the “voice.” For instance, Patricia Meyer Spacks, who analyzes much literature in English, insists that writing a story and a diary with correct and detailed dates stems from the intention to free oneself from boredom (1995). Spacks’s opinion may be correct, because it is a result of her listening to many voices in literary texts in English. The blind acceptance of such a view would misinterpret Chinese texts, however. Chinese culture has a traditional tendency to see a person in a historical context, and thus writes histories with detailed dates of events to describe that person. Moreover, Donald Keene argued that diaries as literature are peculiar to Japan (2003, 73).<sup>15</sup>

It is hence important to read a text, listen to the “voice” there, and interpret it from multidimensional viewpoints, such as culture, tradition, language, law, social reality, way of thinking, and region. On the other hand, when we say western literature, the West itself is varied and cannot be identified; hence, we need to think of a literary text along with its local background. Literary theory is not a neutral or universal tool. It sometimes overlooks or distorts “voice,” which reveals a true problem: What “voice” has been overlooked or distorted

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Suzuki 2010, “Understanding Henry Miller’s Literary Text as ‘the Poor’s’.”

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Suzuki 2011, “Putting Identity into the Gap between the Rich and the Poor.”

<sup>15</sup> For another example, see Suzuki 2013, “Cross-Cultural Reading of Doll-Love Novels in Japan and the West.”

by theory? Let us consider this now by returning to reading literary texts themselves.

In fact, if we do not read a literary text or listen to the voice in the text, but rather censor the representation in the text and make too sharp a distinction between “good” and “bad,” then it means that we contribute to paternalism, contrary to the insistence of some literary theories. As for the significance of reading literature, Cristina Bruns calls it an interactive change of the agency of “I” the reader from the viewpoint of Gestalt psychology on the basis of Winnicott’s theory (2011, 26–36). Rather, however, when we confirm the goal of a reading of literature from multidimensional viewpoints, it reminds us of criticism of Freudian psychoanalysts by American psychologist and educator Carl Rogers, who levels two critiques against them: One is their dogmatization of Freudian theory, and the other is, consequently, their tendency to try to understand a patient within the framework of the theory.

Rogers, who valued clinical practice more than theory, thought “blind adoration of theory could lead to the distortion of the reality of a patient by adjusting this reality to the theory without any review of the problems in its theoretical disadvantages in principle” (Kuwamura 2010, 15). Rogers hence insisted on listening to the patient’s voice and empathizing with the patient from the perspective of his or her own feelings and logic—in other words, from his or her internal framework of reference. By doing so, one can understand the facts of the patient’s suffering, instead of judging mental condition by imposing a theoretical framework. At the same time, “Rogers did not want anybody to dogmatize his own counseling theory in the same way as the Freudian theory; he believed his own theory has some problems in principle and some points that could be misunderstood by others, and hence it should continue being improved” (ibid., 15).

According to Teresa Kuwamura, a scholar of humanistic English education, Rogerian hearkening to others’ voice—empathic understanding of others—and its practice have a social

meaning of counter-argument to traditional authority, or authoritarian paternalism of secular Protestantism (ibid., 264). “Paternalism,” Kuwamura continues,

is a protective stance for others: On a benevolent basis, someone intervenes in a situation that a person cannot handle for himself or herself, in the same way parents approach their child. The reason why paternalism is sometimes criticized is that it authoritatively appropriates a right of self-decision. ... Against authoritative paternalism and for a democratic society, Rogers insisted on sharing authority and making an individual decision autonomously and proactively. (Ibid., 264)

In order to practice this, Rogers emphasized empathic understanding of others’ internal framework of reference.

Evaluation of others’ “voice” from the perspective of a dogmatized theory is itself a structure of paternalistic society. On the other hand, listening to others’ “voice” and empathizing and understanding the voice from others’ internal framework of reference reflects opposition to paternalism. Estimation of others’ “voice,” or literary texts with a dogmatized theory, hence contributes to the strengthening of the paternalistic structure of a society and that of the academic world. If critics follow an authoritative theory just because it is considered authoritative, without imposing any of their own viewpoints or thoughts, it follows that what they practice reinforces paternalism. Miyazaki asserted that reading and studying literature by “not losing oneself” and “having one’s own viewpoint,” which “has to do with one’s own way of life” or individual reading of literature as current world literature suggests, is a Rogerian hearkening to others’ voice and for democracy in academia. Naturally, readers sometimes face a literary text in which they do not feel anything. But this is a phenomenon from reading a text with readers’ own “nose,” as Zhang says, referring to Frank Kermode:

“My present answer to the question how to be a critic is one I borrowed long ago from William Empson: take whatever theoretical help you fancy, but follow your nose,” says Kermode. The analogy is to wine

connoisseurship—“Not everybody has a nose in this sense—there is an enological analogy—and in either case, if you do not have one, you should seek some other form of employment”. (2010, 7)

#### **4. Is It Possible to Read Western Literature from a Japanese Perspective?**

However, if we read literature in other areas, following our noses, how should we handle misreading? If we seek correct reading, does it not follow that only Japanese can correctly read Japanese literature, only Chinese can correctly read Chinese literature, and only English native speakers can correctly read English literature?

Regarding this question, Miyazaki argues the following:

In my mind, an effort to pursue academic research on literature in English is an effort to yield a research which passes for authentic British scholarship, and naturally Japaneseness in the research is destined for elimination. Of course, academic research goes beyond national borders: it possesses properties in essence to take that direction. The reason for this is that the job done by a researcher who is enthusiastic about his or her own work moves in a direction in which its national border finally disappears. (1999, 46)

However, is what Miyazaki claims possible in a literal sense? Miyazaki recommends that Japanese critics should make their Japaneseness disappear from their reading of literature. What Miyazaki finally concludes is the paradox that the Japanese can study literature in English when they become native English speakers, and thus only an English speaker can read literature in English.

Why must literature in English be read only from the perspectives of English-speaking cultures? Is it meaningless for the Japanese to read literature in English from their own perspectives? Is it possible for the Japanese to become English-speaking westerners? Is it really possible to make the “Japaneseness in their research” disappear and ensure their “own work moves in a direction in which its national border finally disappears”?

People in Japan tend to regard everything in this world as having life like they do. They

celebrate the girls' festival on March 3rd and the boys' festival on May 5th, and return to their hometowns during a period called *Obon* to visit their ancestral graves. They even perceive themselves to be living in this world with the souls of the dead. In the Japanese psyche, the border between living organisms and inorganic substances is ambiguous.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, they issue residence certifications to *manga* or animated characters as if to humans,<sup>17</sup> and even hold funerals for dolls, figures, needles, and so on.<sup>18</sup> In addition, they tend to consider themselves simply part of nature, rather than as having dominion over the Earth and all its creatures; they do not have a disposition to accept that reason was specially gifted to human beings, as Descartes and other western philosophers insist (Kida 2010, 45). Additionally, Japanese Buddhism is a philosophy based on the idea that everything, even each plant, *is* Buddha. No matter when and in what area the Japanese read literature, they must unconsciously do so with an attendant Japaneseness.

Nonetheless, if, as Miyazaki insists, Japanese scholars should “get rid of Japaneseness in their research” and that their “own work moves in a direction in which its national border finally disappears,” then the Japanese must abandon their own language. The Japanese sense of language and the configuration of the Japanese language are very idiosyncratic. They do not care so much about the connection between Chinese characters and pronunciation. The most important point for the Japanese is the image. For example, the name of one of my

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<sup>16</sup> This is a kind of animism. Jean Piaget regarded animism as a tendency of the infant mind, but this is also a Euro-centric viewpoint.

<sup>17</sup> Note that some animals living in Japan also have residence certifications.

<sup>18</sup> Through the funeral rite for needles, the Japanese express their appreciation when discarding them, because in their minds the needles helped and supported them. Some Japanese simply discard needles and other objects, but they are looked down upon. In Japan, traditionally speaking, a kind and warm person not only cherishes people but also appreciates every creature and thing. Funeral rites for a doll stem from the Japanese belief that discarding a doll without a rite or any feeling of appreciation may cause the doll to curse them. See Suzuki 2013, “Cross-Cultural Reading of Doll-Love Novels in Japan and the West,” 113–7.



friends is “陽.” Japanese dictionaries say that it means “the Sun” and “bright,” and that it must be pronounced “yō” or “hi.” However, the pronunciation of his name is “kiyoshi.” Nobody can read it so. The pronunciation “kiyoshi” usually reminds Japanese of the Chinese character “清,” meaning “clean” or “cool.” I asked his parents why they chose such a strange combination of Chinese characters and pronunciation. They replied that they wanted him to become a bright person like the Sun, who always laughs. If he simply always laughs, however, he will look stupid. That is why they decided on the combination of the Chinese character “陽” and pronunciation of “kiyoshi,” which is associated with “clean” and “cool.” The Japanese language often employs such double images.

Japanese words evoke various meanings and images that are not easy to decode. Additionally, the Japanese prefer images to consistency in pronunciation and characters. Such a culture and a sense of language has to influence the Japanese way of thinking. Indeed, according to Jacques Lacan, the agency of “I” is structured by *le symbolique*. In addition, as brain scientist Antonio R. Damasio asserts, “Emotion, feeling and biological regulation all play a role in human reasoning” (2005, 8). Humankind can feel something and thus think of it, and can think of something and thus feel it, and they express it in language; I feel, therefore I am. J. Hillis Miller, in his book *The Ethics of Reading*, also considered “sensibility” as an obligatory requirement for the criticism of literature in the times of groundlessness of episteme.

Regarding sensibility, some feelings do not transcend national borders and times, but some do. We can hence share feelings with others in this world. When we read a poem about a beloved person’s death (for example, Edger Allan Poe’s “Annabel Lee”), it evokes sadness, not laughter. This is why literature transcends national borders: We can share problems. Goethe was impressed by a Chinese novel, and he left us his famous compound word,

Weltliteratur, “world literature,” even though he might not have responded to the novel in the same way as a Chinese reader, because the translation from Chinese to German could not fully capture the original form. Nonetheless, it is wrong to say that only readers completely integrated into the society where a literary text was born can feel, understand, and share anything in the text.

Let me take another example. I have read *The Great Gatsby* with students from China, Korea, the U.S., and Japan. American students read the novel as a story of the American dream or one of the oppressed identity of the female gender. Japanese students read the novel as a story of pure love. On the other hand, Chinese and Korean students criticize the novel for its portrayal of illicit love and say that they could not accept the novel. The Chinese and Korean students are strongly shaped by Confucian thought; for them, *Gatsby* is a story of ethics. The Japanese students, who live in a society where Confucian thought is not as influential as before, take notice of Gatsby’s single-minded passion for Daisy. The Americans, who value self-actualization in a capitalistic world, pay attention to class identity and liberation from gender oppression. One cannot say which is right and which is not. As David Damrosch relates, “when a text goes beyond a national border, the text itself transforms” (2003, 281). However, there are opportunities for a text to transcend borders without any transformation. All of the students, despite having developed their discussion about the text from multidimensional viewpoints, empathize with Gatsby’s loss of love and criticize those who benefited from Gatsby but failed to attend his funeral.

Incidentally, the argument that I have been developing does not deny Walter Benn Michaels’ criticism: “When differences in interpretation are both explained and defended by reference to the differences between readers, the very idea of an interpretive dispute disappears” (2004, 116). My point affirms supporting the interpretation of authors’ intentions,

along the lines of what Michaels endorses: “If you think that differences in belief cannot be described as differences in identity, you must also think that texts mean what their authors intend” (ibid., 10–1). Naturally, even if we neither defend readers’ standpoints nor tolerate any variation in interpretations, none of the readings of literature will ever come to only one conclusion, as Michaels also admits. Rather, Michaels advocates that, rather than ascribing the differences in interpretation to the reader’s identity, we should develop arguments on the basis of the differences. Otherwise, we are only saying, “This is your story and this is my story, but they do not affect each other.” This will mean a failure in mutual understanding.

In conclusion, we should cultivate differences in interpretation as a world-wide discussion, with empathy and understanding of the text’s and readers’ internal framework of reference. To my mind, Michaels’s insistence on complete denial of the reader’s identity is only intended for readers in English-speaking areas who read literature in English. But if we fail to accept any differences in readers’ socio-cultural backgrounds, non-English speakers’ readings of literature in English will always be a misreading in a sense.

The point is that there is no such law that literature in English must be read only from the perspective of English-speaking cultures. This does not mean that I recommend that Japanese or Asian readers should avoid western perspectives. Nor do I mean that Japanese readers should ignore the social reality, laws, culture, or regional characteristics of the West and always follow the thinking unique to Japan. However, even if we defend not readers’ experience but their intelligence and interpretation, readers feel something before interpreting a text from their own socio-cultural perspectives, and hence it is unrealistic to defend the opinion that reading literature in English can only be correctly done from the perspective of English-speaking cultures. The Japanese can read a literary text in English because they can respond emotionally to it from their own socio-cultural background, even if they cannot

completely assimilate a western reader's perspective. Feeling something in a text precedes thinking about it. Readers from every part of the world may respond similarly or differently. Regarding the latter, if someone says that a particular reading is a misreading or close to subjectivity, he or she should give up his or her native language and culture, first of all, and adopt the language and culture of the area where the text they read was born. This is a matter of bravery rather than realism; and if the person cannot commit to such bravery, he or she cannot assert misreading or subjectivity in a certain reading.

Does this mean there are no misreadings? From the viewpoint of Derrida, all readings are misreadings, and hence the significance of interpretation and reading itself must be discarded, though such a logic itself is a misreading of Derrida's theory (cf. Miller 1987, Chapter 1). As noted earlier, "[t]he deconstruction [...] constituted the text in the first place" (de Man 1979, 17), and metaphorical thinking such as metonymy decides the meaning of a text. If so, a text is based on differences between readers' socio-cultural backgrounds and individual emotions as well as those among humankind in general. In this sense, misreading must be regarded not as an opportunity for readers to separate themselves from the text but as one of the differences in readings that contribute to international understanding among the people of the world. Of course, it is not enough for readers to read literature only according to their feelings. Intelligence requires, as argued by Yamauchi Shirō, in his fascinating study of philosophy as the history of misreading, "feeling a little bit strange about Japanese scholars studying philosophy in Japan, because philosophy is the ideology for the formation of western culture" (2013, 15).

## **5. Global Response to the "Voice" of Literature**

Now, let me take an example of a Japanese critic writing on the standard of western

intelligence, from a review of Tsutsui Masaaki's *Seeking a True Self*. The book develops the discussion that American novels after World War II describe states of mind, such as loss of self, seeking of self, and self-actualization, and that their fundamental theme is human existence, which is fused into the life of the universe and thus never dies, since it is unified with it. For his discussion, Tsutsui employed transpersonal psychology, but Japanese scholars dismissed his book as irrational because of his commitment to mystical experiences in Buddhism.

What we should take notice of is that such criticism is based on western epistemology, or Freudian theory and rationalism. Sigmund Freud dismissed Buddhism's mystical experiences as "primary narcissism" (Tanaka 2010, 222). For Freud, Buddhism's mysticism is synonymous with the state of a baby's mind just before the cutting of the psychological umbilical cord. It thus indicates immaturity. Some Japanese scholars have noted similarities between Freudian theory and Buddhism, but as long as Freudian theory disregards the legitimacy of Buddhism's mystical experiences, a large gap remains between them.

On the other hand, transpersonal psychology was influenced by eastern thought, and criticizes western rationalism. Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, who established humanistic psychology, which is based on transpersonal psychology, view Buddhism positively. Other psychologists, including William James, Carl Jung, Karen Horney, and Erich Fromm, also view Buddhism favorably (Tanaka 2010, 223–5). They affirm mystical experiences in Buddhism, which Freud dismissed as primary narcissism, as supreme experiences (Tanaka 2010, 225). However, Jacques Lacan endorsed a "Return to Freud," and his theory became as popular as a scientific one. At the time when psychoanalysis returned to Freudian theory, it became anti-Buddhism or anti-East. Some critics in Japan note the similarity between Lacan's theory and Buddhism, but since Lacan prefers the Freudian theory, which dismisses both the

state of mind Buddhism affirms and its mystical experiences, their view is problematic.

In Japan, psychologists insisted before that the Oedipus complex was not applicable to the Japanese, favoring instead the Ajase complex, or feelings of guilt towards one's mother. Some Japanese critics have even articulated a difficulty in understanding Lacan's theory. On the other hand, Japanese tend to be comfortable with the theories of Maslow, Rogers, Jung, and Fromm. The reason is that theories of psychoanalysis divorced from Freud affirm the state of mind that Buddhism affirms. Murakami Haruki's fiction is also sometimes read from the perspective of Jungian theory. Of course, we cannot say that Freud's and Lacan's theories are wrong. Their theories are, however, oriented toward western cultures to the extent that they fail to accept the state of mind Buddhism affirms. The dominant state of mind seems to equate to primary narcissism for westerners; on the other hand, it seems to be the best state for those living in a Buddhist culture, and Japanese readers can easily evoke the latter when reading literary texts. As long as an English literary text is born in the West, it is appropriate to employ the psychoanalytic theory of Freud and Lacan to interpret it. Maslow, Rogers, Jung, and Fromm are, however, also products of western cultures, and hence employing their theories in reading literature in English is also relevant. Further, when a Japanese reader approaches a literary work while "not losing oneself," it is not unnatural that this reader hear a "voice" containing Buddhist elements.

One may still want to dismiss Buddhist mysticism as irrational; however, the idea that being rational is always right is western-centric. The idea of the "rational" itself is a western epistemology. As Alfred W. Crosby notes, western epistemology is characterized by breaking down an object perceived as a continuous phenomenon into elements and units, and then describing them in the form of a quantitative model based on measurement of "ration" (amount). Division into quanta and the possibility of measurement by "ratio" form the basis

of western epistemology, and being “rational” is highly valued.

From this perspective, it would be too hasty to conclude that Tsutsui’s argument is irrational. Western culture, including rationalism, was criticized in the U.S. after World War II, especially within the counter-culture, New Age, and anti-war movements. Assuming a literary text reflects the time in which it is born, American literature after World War II must echo the “voices” in movements running counter to western culture. No matter how irrational some American literary texts appear, they simply can be said to contain non-western elements as long as rationalism forms the basis of western epistemology, as referred to in Crosby. Furthermore, we cannot simply deny Tsutsui’s work because of his perspective from Buddhist mystic experiences. His work can be said to historicize American literature after World War II. From this perspective, if we seek standards for reading and interpreting literature in English only through the ways of thinking of English-speaking cultures, we will misread literary texts.

Now it is important to read a text with one’s own “nose,” and then, as necessary, criticize the oppression of the agency of “I” in a text, and discuss interpretations and criticisms on a world-wide scale, as Michaels suggests, to overcome problems in theoretical reading. For example, many westerners and information sources assert that *The Great Gatsby* is a story about the American dream. We should note, however, that such a reading and definition is born in a context in which nobody critically thinks about what American capitalism itself is. We should accept the readings of cultures under the socialist systems and other socio-cultural backgrounds, especially in a globalized world, for, as Legendre and Nancy note, globalization is global westernization, and the West’s occupation of the world expropriates the means of counter-argument in such a world (Legendre 2004, 16–22; Nancy 2007, 34).

Therefore, we do not have to think that the western way of thinking is the absolute

horizon of all reading and interpretation of literature in English. We should read a literary text from each perspective and then fashion an overview of readings from around the world. Each reader in China, Korea, the U.S.A., the U.K., Australia, France, Brazil, Russia, India, and all other regions reads a literary text following his or her own nose, interprets it from multidimensional viewpoints, and discusses it with others, listening to others from his or her internal framework of references. In doing so, readers hold a global discussion to cross-culturally understand both literary texts and each other, and, I hope, to promote peace as long as the study of humanities should contribute to peace in the world.



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## **Conflict and Transformation**

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### **Abstract**

The Twentieth Century was the most violent in history and prepared the way for the conflict with which this century has already been marked. Conflict comes in various forms but ultimately it is about power: a struggle for power or a struggle between the powerful and the powerless. The argument of this paper is that art and literature, far more than the language of politics, have the capacity to speak to power by speaking beyond it. They do this first by transformation. Resistance, as we see from the example of postcolonial literature, is most effective when it is transformative—when it takes the language of power and makes it work in the service of the powerless. But in addition, literature, through its capacity to imagine a different world, has a utopian function that conceives a world beyond conflict. This paper will focus on the phenomenon of utopian possibility, to show the function of art and literature in transforming power and imagining the future.

*Keywords:* postcolonialism, resistance art and literature, revolution, utopia

*The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.*

*(Martin Luther King)*

*“I’m a pessimist in the sense that we are approaching dangerous times. But I’m an optimist for exactly the same reason. Pessimism means things are getting messy. Optimism means these are precisely the times when change is possible.”*

*(Slavov Zizek, The Guardian 15 June 2012).*

The twentieth century was the most violent in history and prepared the way for the conflict with which this century has already been marked. Conflict comes in various forms but it is always about power: a struggle for power or a struggle between the powerful and the powerless. Edward Said’s famous phrase ‘speaking truth to power’ addresses the second form but raises the question of whether power will listen. What language, what form of words, what discourse can speak to power? How or where is it heard? Indeed, conflict begins with the refusal to listen. My claim here is that art and literature have the capacity to speak to power by speaking beyond it. Resistance—as we can see from the example of postcolonial literatures—is most effective when it is transformative: when it takes the language of power and makes it work in the service of the powerless. Perhaps more importantly, literature, through its capacity to imagine a different world, has a utopian function that conceives a world beyond conflict. This paper will explore these ideas in two very different examples of Indigenous art: the Aboriginal painter Lin Onus and the Palestinian artist, photographer and filmmaker Larissa Sansour.

It is fanciful to think that literature will change the world. But while art and literature will not win wars, they can imagine the future. There is a well-worn phrase that encapsulates two avenues of resistance in anti-colonial struggle—“The Book or the Barricade?”—contrasting the very different effects of literary writing and political conflict. But while the capacity of literature to intervene in the operation of power might seem limited, there is a very deep and important connection between creativity and revolution. Despite the surge in various forms of fundamentalist violence and the tragically ill-conceived war in Iraq, the early years of this century have been marked by the rise of democratic revolution, conflict inspired by ordinary hope. The insistent struggle for democracy has not resulted in notable success. Whether in the



Arab Spring or the Orange revolution in the Ukraine, the process appears similar: the people mass in protest, regime-sanctioned thugs fight back but lose their nerve; the world applauds the collapse of the regime and offers to help build a democracy; the lack of democratic institutions leads to a regime as bad as the first, if the country doesn't get invaded or infiltrated by a more powerful neighbour, as in the Ukraine. This is a sobering narrative, many Springs turning to Winters, but the good news is that the revolution continues.

Creativity is important to oppressed peoples because its function is to inspire hope: hope for change, hope for freedom, hope for the future. This may not be its goal or its purpose—it may have nothing to do with the subject of the creative work—but it *functions* this way because it affirms that another world is possible. As Mahmoud Darwish says in “State of Siege”:

Here, on the slopes facing the sunset  
 And the cannon-mouth of time,  
 Near orchards stripped of their shadows,  
 We do what prisoners do;  
 We do what the unemployed do  
 We cultivate hope.<sup>1</sup>

The creative cultural product is unmatched in its ability to cultivate hope because creativity itself is the act of ‘stepping beyond’. As Salman Rushdie puts it: “this ... is how newness enters the world” (1992, 395).

But while the creative work shows the possibility of a different world, it might not be hopeful or optimistic. Yet both utopia and dystopia share a common goal, that of critiquing the present, as Paul Ricoeur maintains when he says “All utopias finally come to grips with the problem of authority” (1986, 298). While the general tenor of utopia is that it is allied to hope, the critical feature of utopian thinking is not that it imagines perfection—a eutopia—but that it speaks to the present from a position that exists *nowhere*. Again, Paul Ricoeur:

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<sup>1</sup> The English translation of “State of Siege” can be found online at <http://www.festivaldepoesiademedellin.org/en/Diario/04.html>. All references are to this page unless otherwise noted.

May we not say then that the imagination itself—through the utopian function—has a constitutive role in helping us rethink the nature of our social life? Is not utopia—this leap outside—the way in which we radically rethink what is family, what is consumption, what is authority, what is religion, and so on? Does not the fantasy of an alternative society and its exteriorization ‘nowhere’ work as one of the most formidable contestations of what is? (Ibid, 16)

The fact that utopia exists ‘nowhere’ is crucial in this function of rethinking, because the fantasy of an alternative society ‘nowhere’ is one of the most formidable contestations of what is (Ibid, 17). Nowhere is the only place from which ideology can be critiqued, because ideology itself is impossible to escape. This position nowhere, and thus potentially outside ideology, is crucial to art and literature.

Nevertheless, by speaking of a different world, art and literature summon forth the hope for a *better* world. We might object that hope is not victory, and indeed the great irony of utopianism is that it would seem that all achieved utopias quickly become dystopias. This fact underlies the considerable disparagement of utopias in the twentieth century, from which the failed utopia of neo-liberal capitalism still rules our world. But without hope we cannot live. In the colonial context the pre-independence utopias of soon-to-be-liberated post-colonial nations provided a very clear focus for anti-colonial activism, but this appeared to come to an abrupt halt once the goal of that activism was reached and the sombre realities of post-independence political life began to be felt. We can no doubt see evidence of this same process in the Arab Spring. The consequences of revolution may never be quite those that we hope for, the democracy not quite the utopia we had expected. Nevertheless, the utopianism of the creative spirit continues unabated.

In his inaugural lecture in Tübingen in 1961 entitled “Can Hope be Disappointed?” Ernst Bloch’s answer was that even a well-founded hope can be disappointed: otherwise it would not be hope. In fact, hope never guarantees anything. It can only be daring and must point to possibilities that will in part depend on chance for their fulfilment. Hope can be frustrated and thwarted, but out of that frustration and disappointment it can learn to estimate the opposition. Hope can learn through damaging experiences, but it can never be driven off course. ‘Revolution’ has two meanings: it is not simply a revolt but a revolving, a spiral into the future. Seeing this, we can understand that the belief in the future doesn’t stop with revolution: it remains part of the continuous spiraling of hope. Even if democracy comes, and hope, at least for some, has still been disappointed, creative work continues to spiral into the future, continues the revolution. That movement into the future must first be a movement of

the imagination.

Art and literature have a particular facility for projecting into the future. For Bloch, whose magisterial *The Principle of Hope* defined the utopian as fundamental to human life, literature has a significant utopian function because its *raison d'être* is the imaging of a different world—what he calls its *Vorschein* or ‘anticipatory illumination’. Of course not all creative works are utopian, or even necessarily optimistic, but the anticipatory illumination is the revelation of the “possibilities for rearranging social and political relations to produce *Heimat*,” Bloch’s word for the *home* that we have all sensed but have never experienced or known. “It is *Heimat* as utopia ... that determines the truth content of a work of art.” (Zipes 1988, xxxiii). *Heimat* may lie in the *future*, but the promise of *Heimat* transforms the present. *Heimat* suggests but is not synonymous with the nation or the democratic state, which may be the object of revolution. As the home we have sensed but never experienced, it remains a constant beacon for the spirit of liberation even after the goals of revolution appear to have been achieved.

But there is another way in which creative acts gesture toward the future. For, as cultural theorist Tony Bennett points out, if ‘production’ is completed only with ‘consumption’, then so far as literary texts are concerned, their production is never completed. They are endlessly *re-produced*, endlessly remade with different political consequences and effects (Bennett 1979, 136). But this is surely not only the case for literary works alone. Whenever the creative work is engaged, it is reproduced in the context of another person, place and time. Thus despite Bruno Latour’s assertion, in contrasting the created work with critique, that “[i]t is all about immanence” (2010, 181), it is on the contrary, because it is never finished, all about *imminence*. The created work remains alive and constantly on the threshold of a transformed state of being. In this way created works always offer an imminent rearrangement of social and political relations in ways that critique the present.

### **Resistance as Transformation**

This linking of creativity and hope in *Heimat* may serve to reconstitute our understanding of resistance, to think of resistance as transformation, or at least as incomplete without transformation, because hope projects it beyond conflict. In the words of Darwish again:

To resist means—to be confident of the health of your heart,  
And of your balls. To be confident of your incurable malady,  
The malady of hope. (“State of Siege”, 2002)

Clearly, creativity is deeply involved in political resistance through resistance literature. The concept of resistance literature (*mugāwamah*) was first applied in a description of Palestinian literature in 1966 by the Palestinian writer and critic Ghassan Kanafani in his study *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948–1966* (1987). He insists on the integral relationship between armed resistance and culture, particularly through resistance literature. But in the fifty years since Kanafani wrote, and particularly with the emergence of postcolonial studies, it has become very clear that resistance is much more subtle than mere oppositionality. Colonial encounters involved a transformative resistance in which dominant technologies were appropriated for the purposes of self-representation.

The way in which political oppression works is to lock the oppressed into a myth of binary opposition. But this is precisely where music, art and literature demonstrate their power: the aesthetic takes us beyond resistance into the realm of possibility: indeed, aesthetic works dare to imagine the *impossible*. In the postcolonial context the most powerful means of overcoming the stalemate of resistance rhetoric was the transformation of the genres and discourses of the colonial powers in order to conceive a liberated future and to speak to the widest-possible audience. There is perhaps no more striking demonstration of the power of colonized people to transform the discourses designed to oppress them than the culture which developed in the Caribbean. African slaves were unable to transport their culture or their languages with them to the plantations in any coherent way. Members of the same language group were placed with strangers on plantations either through the exigencies of the system or to prevent conspiracy. The resulting heterogeneity limited what could be shared culturally. Yet Afro-modernity took on a form generated from this heterogeneity, a dynamism adapted to the physical and social conditions with which they had to deal. In this process, both the various slave and non-slave populations absorbed aspects of the various African heritages. What developed was a culture of such creative adaptation that its transformative capacities were able to resist absorption into the dominant culture.

## Lin Onus

Joseph Leo Koerner claims that “by nature, violence completes itself in imagery” (2009, 42). To look is to some extent to violate. But postcolonial writers and artists, working from the in-between space of hybridization, grapple with the reality of violence and at the same time with the challenges of identity formation, and with questions of place, nation and history. Rather than completion, they envision renewal out of conflict, doing what Bhabha calls ‘borderline work’, where conditions of displacement and disjunction have the potential to rewrite boundaries and borders, to reconceive the future in order to re-imagine the meaning of human community. This process deploys a radically transformed sense of the relation between memory and the future:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, re-figuring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. (Bhabha 1994, 10)

This production of newness in the borderline in-between space is demonstrated powerfully by Aboriginal painter Lin Onus. His work addresses several prominent issues, including the dominance of colonial representation, the importance of place and the significance of Aboriginal history. But the key feature of his art is its insurgent hybridizing dynamic. One of the most important strategies of postcolonial transformation is the control of self-representation, and the issue of representation is absolutely central to Onus’ work, a prime example of this being found in the painting *Twice Upon a Time* (1992):



*Twice Upon a Time* (1992), 182 x 182 cm. © Lin Onus Estate/Licensed by Viscopy, 2013.

The key feature of the painter's particular form of transformative resistance is a 'meta-representational' strategy. His representations, and particularly his representations of place, are about the *process* of representation itself. His 'seeing' of place is always an investigation of seeing, or at least a disruption of our seeing to uncover that ideology to which it is giving form. This is precisely what makes his hybridity transformative: it is multi-dimensional, operating as a constant field of interrogation. In order to take control of representation he reveals the extent to which the conventions of seeing have been naturalized.



*Twice Upon a Time* actually mimics a painting by H.J. Johnstone called *Evening Shadows, Backwater of the Murray South Australia* (1880).



***Evening Shadows, Backwater of the Murray South Australia***, H.J. Johnstone (1880).

© Art Gallery of South Australia.

*Twice Upon a Time* ‘writes back’ to Johnstone in a mimicry so tranquil that it seems to lack the ‘menace’ Bhabha saw central to colonial mimicry, reproducing too lovingly the conventions of colonial representation. But the meta-representational aspect of the painting provides the ‘menace’ of disruption and subversiveness. It is a critique of colonial inscription and the policies of removal and injustice that accompanied the dominance of representation.

The painting is a palimpsest in which the visual reproduction is laid over another representation of the surface of geometrically carved trees. The painting represents the contest between the power of Western ocularcentrism and the inscription of Aboriginal art upon the surface of the text of place, including the inscription on the body. The single strand of barbed wire signifies the further inscription of colonial occupation, the bounding and fencing of place as property. The fence, being barbed wire, carries the connotation of more than enclosure. It is

also a signifier of imprisonment. Unlike Johnstone's painting, *Twice Upon a Time* is uninhabited, dismantling the apparently bucolic appearance of the image with a suggestion of a sinister history. The palimpsest of the painting inscribes not only a spatial history, but also a gradation of modes of representation, modes of seeing and being in place.

The process of responding to, writing back to, H.J. Johnstone in *Twice Upon a Time* duplicates the aesthetic strategy of Onus's work. The paintings establish themselves clearly in terms of a Western aesthetic, producing an affective response that draws the viewer into a place from which the political message of meta-representation can take full effect. This is particularly evident in the painting *Barmah Forest*.



*Barmah Forest* (1994), 183 x 244 cm. © Lin Onus Estate / Licensed by Viscopy, 2013.

From 1986 until his death in 1996, Onus made sixteen “spiritual pilgrimages” to Arnhem Land. These journeys enabled him to fill his in-between space, the space of the contemporary Aboriginal painter, with a diverse array of techniques and a diverse array of points of view



that underlie his genius for dismantling the processes of seeing.

Introduced to his own ancestral site at the Barmah Forest, Onus engages the place with the full force of his transformative and meta-representational vision. The painting is a strikingly simple subversion of the landscape techniques on which the painting itself capitalizes. Seeing itself as it is represented in the painting is a jigsaw puzzle that can be too-easily disrupted by the removal of a couple of pieces. Significantly the pieces themselves *do not fit*, suggesting that the jigsaw of visual representation is a tenuous and provisional one that overlays other forms of seeing. But the striking thing about this very large painting is the ease with which it employs a Western aesthetic while at the same moment undercutting the ocularcentrism of Western representation.

Onus engages in a transformative aesthetic that acknowledges conflict yet subtly reconfigures it by appropriating dominant art forms. One particular source of conflict is the discourse of Western history. Since there is no way of existing outside history, Lin Onus interpolates history with a characteristic mixture of humour and rage.

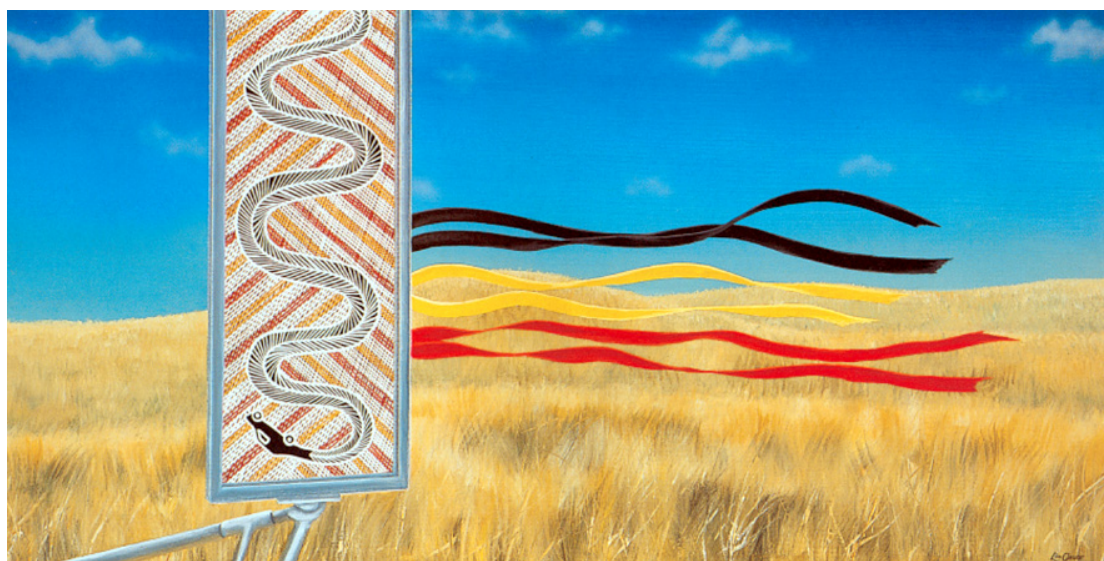


*And on the Eighth Day* (1992), 182 x 145 cm.

© Lin Onus Estate / Licensed by Viscopy, 2013.

In *And on the Eighth Day* (1992) we find two winged Valkyries flying Botticelli-like into what is obviously an Australian landscape, carrying the toxic effects of colonization: sheep, whose cloven hoofs tore up the land; barbed wire, used to fence pastoral properties' land and keep trespassers out; the gun, used to decimate Aboriginal populations; the Bible symbolizing cultural colonization; and in a typically humorous note, a toilet cleanser, the 'toilet duck' which becomes a sacred object held aloft by the angels winging across the painting. The picture of these winged female Valkyries on the eighth day of creation is an extremely anti-imperialist painting prompted by Onus's reaction to the Republican debate and the sight of bumper stickers saying "Keep our flag forever".<sup>2</sup> It is neither the flag of Aboriginal people nor the flag of most Australians, a point that emphasizes the complexity of postcolonial discourse in a settler colony. The painting is a luminous parody of invasion.

The interpenetration of place and history is also a feature of Onus's *Road to Redfern* (1988). This painting captures a similarly utopian vision that may be seen prominently in all postcolonial literature, one that can be called 'remembering the future'.



*Road to Redfern* (1988), 60 x 120 cm. © Lin Onus Estate/Licensed by Viscopy, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> The referendum held in 2001 on whether Australia should become a republic led to a robust and acrimonious debate in Australian political life. Although a majority favoured a republic in the period leading up to the vote, the Yes case was defeated because it advocated an appointed rather than elected President. The issue of the flag on which the Union Jack has prominent place was associated with this debate and demonstrated Australia's tenacious colonial status, one vigorously opposed by Aboriginal people.

In the rear-vision mirror of the truck, which flies the colours of the Aboriginal flag, on the way to Redfern is the image of the rainbow serpent, demonstrating the ways in which the past infuses the present to produce a hopeful future. *The Road to Redfern* is a dialectical image, which captures the unity of past and future in a mobile present. The past is apprehended in terms of the future and vice versa. It offers an image that is both a vision of the past and a utopian assurance of the future of Aboriginal identity. The painting is crucially framed by the title: the road to Redfern is the road towards a Sydney suburb that has been the centre of urban Aboriginal resistance, a modern urban sacred site. Redfern Park was the location of Prime Minister Paul Keating's historic acceptance of white responsibility for Aboriginal dispossession, an acceptance that was denied by the subsequent conservative government of John Howard. The rainbow serpent in the rear-view mirror is the sustaining metaphor for the continuation of the past in the present. The fact that the head of the serpent is a truck is a cunning metaphor for the persistence of Aboriginal identity in modernity and the importance of mobility and transformation. The image is dialectical because it resists closure.

Onus captures here the key feature of any hopeful vision of the future. The valuing of the mythic past in the Aboriginal imagination is not only an attempt to disrupt the dominance of history, but also to re-conceive a place in the present, a place transformed by the infusion of this past. This is an infusion that lies at the core of the 'bricolage' of Onus's painting. The present is the crucial site of the continual motion by which the new comes into being. In such transformative conceptions of utopian hope the future is always a possibility emerging from the past. For those societies contesting the dominance of colonial discourse, the radically new is always embedded in and transformed by the past. This is why the connection between the rainbow serpent in the rear-vision mirror and the future of Aboriginal sovereignty symbolized by Redfern are so significant. For Onus the road to the future is powered by hope.

### **Remembering the Future**

Postcolonial literatures continually affirm this sense of the future in the past, what Edouard Glissant calls a "prophetic vision of the past" (1989, 64), and bring us back to our understanding of revolution as a revolving or spiralling into the future as well as a revolt against the failures of the past. In the words of Darwish:

I believe that the unwavering commitment to resistance and defence is not some sort of nostalgia, but the saturation of the present and future with the past, without which neither present nor future will come to be. (Interview, Banipal, Spring 1999)

The present is the crucial site of the continual motion by which the New comes into being. In such transformative conceptions of utopian hope, what Ernst Bloch calls the In-Front-Of-Us is always a possibility emerging from the past, not as nostalgia but as renewal (1986, 4, 158). In traditional post-colonial societies the radically New is always embedded in and transformed by the past. For those Caribbean writers and artists working in the borderland of language, race, and identity, the past is the constant sign of the future. One of the most common, and popular, examples of this is the limbo dance, a performance of slave history, which re-enacts the crossing of the Middle Passage in a continual reminder of memory, survival and cultural resurrection. As Kamau Brathwaite puts it:

Limbo

Limbo like me

Long dark deck and the water surrounding me

Long dark deck and the silence is over me

(1969, 35)

The dancer goes under the limbo stick in an almost impossible bodily position, emulating the subjection of the slave body in the journey across the Atlantic but rising triumphant on the other side. The performance of memory is a constant reminder of a future horizon, a ‘return’ that performs each time the ‘rising’ of the slave body into a future marked not only by survival but also by renewal, hybridity, and hope.

So past, present and future are conjoined in the creative work in a radical transformation of the reality of slave exile. The descendants of the slave labour of sugar plantations have developed a culture that draws its ontological energy from the very fact of displacement, of homelessness, heterogeneity and syncreticity. This is not opposition but transformation, yet its relation to time is exactly the same as that on which revolution depends, because the revolt is also a revolving, an evolution in which past, present and future are conjoined and mutually enforcing. Friedrich Kummel sees this relation between past, present and future as a feature of all human life, so that “the openness of future and past is, in other words, the vital condition

for the conduct of man's life and all his actions" (1968, 50). We make the past our own by bringing it into a free and positive relation with the present: "The natural discrepancy of future and past constitutes a productive tension, which forms the real medium for new action and new mediation" (ibid, 50). In other words the tension of revolution is rendered productive by its location in a spiralling compression of time.

The contingency of the past disrupts the apparent polarity between past and future. For Ernst Bloch this disruption is absolutely necessary to understand the nature of the relationship between being and possibility. He asserts that for Plato 'Beingness' is 'Beenness', and he admonishes Hegel because "What Has Been overwhelms what is approaching ... the categories Future, Front, Novum" (1986, 8). The problem with the concept of Being in Hegel was that it overwhelmed *becoming*—obstructing the category of the future. It is only when the static concept of being is dispensed with that the real dimension of hope opens (ibid, 18). The core of Bloch's ontology is that 'Beingness' is 'Not-Yet-Becomeness':

Thus the Not-Yet-Conscious in man belongs completely to the Not-Yet-Become, Not-Yet-Brought-Out, Manifested-Out in the world. ... From the anticipatory, therefore, knowledge is to be gained on the basis of an ontology of the Not-Yet. (Ibid, 13)

While utopias exist in the future, utopianism, anticipatory consciousness, is heavily invested in the present.

A very clear example of this can be found in the strategic use of a postcard called *Visit Palestine*, designed in 1936 by Franz Kraus.





*Visit Palestine*, Franz Kraus (1936).

This operates as an iconic point of connection between past, present and future. The postcard identifies Palestine as a destination—an actual identifiable place in the world before the Nakba—and out of the reality of the country as a destination emerges the utopian concept of destiny. The postcard operates as a hinge between past, present and future by becoming a palimpsest. The past is present in Amer Shomali's *Visit*, in which the wall testifies to the attempt by the state of Israel not just to incarcerate the Palestinians but to wall off the past.



*Visit Palestine*, Amer Shamali (2010).

### **Time, Utopia and Utopianism**

We think of time as either flowing or enduring. Although the present may be seen as a continuous stream of prospections becoming retrospections, the sense that the past has gone and the future is coming separates what may be called the three phases of time: past, present and future. Kummel proposes that the apparent conflict between time as succession and time as duration in philosophy comes about because we forget that time has no reality apart from the medium of human experience and thought (1968, 31). “No single and final definition of time is possible ... since such a concept is always conditioned by man’s understanding of it.” (Ibid, 31.) Or as Mahmoud Darwish puts it, “Time is a river / blurred by the tears we gaze through.”

Kummel makes the point that duration without succession would lose all temporal characteristics:

If something is to abide, endure, then its past may never be simply ‘past’, but must in some way also remain ‘present’; by the same token its future must already somehow be contained in its present. (1968, 35)

The importance of a perception of time in which past, present and future are conjoined or layered rather than separate and lost to each other is that it refutes one of the most trenchant

critiques of utopia—its static nature. The assumption is that although utopias lie in the future, representations of them, particularly those in the transcendental utopian tradition, suggest that they cannot progress. Indeed, for Bloch there is a very important difference between utopias and utopianism. His insistence on the centrality of the utopian to human consciousness, and the magisterial way in which *The Principle of Hope* outlines the operation of *utopianism* as a fundamental feature of human life, perhaps explains his central importance to utopian theory:

Primarily, everybody lives in the future, because they strive.... Function and content of hope are experienced continuously, and in times of rising societies [revolutions] they have been continuously activated and extended. (Bloch 1986, 4)

Bloch urges us to grasp the three dimensions of human temporality: he offers us a dialectical analysis of the *past* which illuminates the *present* and can direct us to a better *future*. This reformulation of time privileges the ongoing function of concrete over abstract utopias. Bloch makes a distinction between ‘abstract utopia’, or wishful thinking that is merely fantastic, and ‘concrete utopia’, the outcome of wishful thinking passed into wilful action. Bloch’s major premise is the energizing of the present with the anticipation of what is to come. This is what Mahmoud Darwish sees as the *saturation* of the present and future in the past.

What the *Visit Palestine* postcard series reveals is that *Heimat* is not Paradise. *Heimat* is the luminous possibility of the present, and in this respect it is far from static, but a dynamic horizon of everyday living. Freedom, like consciousness, can never exist in the abstract; it must be realised in the terms ‘freedom from’ and ‘freedom to’. But even further than this, freedom can only exist in the act of struggle against coercion: ‘freedom to’ may only be realised in the struggle of ‘freedom from’ domination and the transformation of power. In Palestine, the utopian impulse revolves around the reality of a place—but the utopian is enacted in the engagement with power. The vision of utopia is located in the act of transformation of coercive power, a certain kind of *praxis* rather than a specific mode of representation.

### **Creativity and the Palestinian Revolution**

What we find in Palestinian art and literature is a ‘grounded’ rather than transcendental utopia. It is grounded because it is located in the present as a transformative vision of the future. It is



dynamic because it cannot avoid the reality of time as succession, yet the duration of the struggle connects past and future as aspects of the continuing present. Palestine cannot avoid the linking of utopianism and place. But this is not a vague utopia in the future: it is a utopianism in which past, present and future are laminated.

In the same vein, Laurence Davis contends that critics and defenders of utopia alike “have tended to conceive of utopia primarily as a transcendent and fixed ‘ought’ opposed to the ‘is’ of political reality and the ‘was’ of social history,” but “it may also be understood as an empirically grounded and open-ended feature of the ‘real world’ of history and politics representing the hopes and dreams of those consigned to its margins” (2012, 127).

Grounded utopias both emerge organically out of, and contribute to the further development of, historical movements for grassroots change. As a result, they are emphatically not fantasized visions of perfection to be imposed upon an imperfect world, but an integral feature of that world representing the hopes and dreams of those consigned to its margins. (Ibid, 136–7)

The key to grounded utopias, as integral to the real world, and particularly to the drive for change, transformation and revolution in the colonial context, is the question of representation, because, as the history of colonial domination demonstrates, the most powerful form of oppression is not military control or the carceral function of the state, but the control of representation. This is the point at which wishful thinking transfers into wilful action. In Marxist thinking the power of ideology is its ability to convince the oppressed that the interests of the powerful are the interests of all. In the case of Palestine it is the power to convince the world that the desperately oppressed and downtrodden civilian population is a collection of dangerous fanatics.

Palestine may be the site of struggle but it is not the site of victory. Just as the state of Israel took shape in the capitals of Europe, just as the representation of Palestinians takes place in the Western media, so the site of transformation is the imperial centre—in this case the US. And it is not the US government but American public opinion. This is the lesson taught by post-colonial writers, that the secret of self-representation is the capture of the audience: the appropriation of English, the interpolation of the dominant discourse and the transformation of that discourse and the site of power itself. If liberation lies in self-representation, then the battlefield is nowhere near Israel—its forward lines are on American television. Just as the most powerful perpetuation of Orientalism has been in the ‘coverage’ of Islam in the western media, so the most strategic site for transforming the

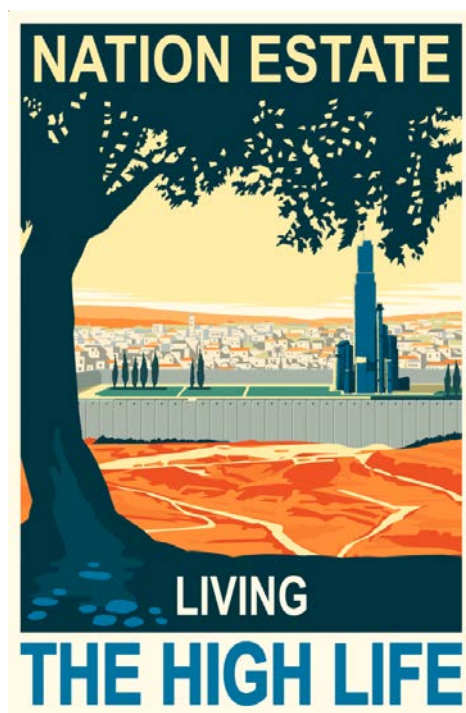
representation of the Middle East in general and the Palestinians in particular is that same media, that same audience. That this has not occurred has become tragically obvious as the US continues to support the Israeli army and its horrific attacks on Palestinian people in Gaza, while Hamas appears unable or unwilling to extricate itself from the image of violent opposition in which it has been cast.

If the path of transformation means to take hold of representation, the purpose for doing this in the Palestinian case is to avoid the images of victimhood and tragedy that work paradoxically to produce stereotypes (and to avoid military responses that lead to the slaughter of Palestinians). In Sydney a Palestinian film festival has been occurring annually since 2008. The organizers have tried to clear a space for a representation beyond stereotype by keeping it non-political—impossible in the Palestinian situation, but an important attempt to get beyond stereotype. Politics lies within every act of creation, but overt politicizing can lead to the entrenchment of the images of victimhood. The film festival has presented Palestine as a rich creative culture—one that existed despite the bombs, despite the unrelenting Israeli campaign of despair—in short, the sign of a national culture.

### **Larissa Sansour and *Nation Estate***

However, there is a form of utopia that not only operates from a conjoining of past, present and future, but in doing so avoids the conception of utopia as an ahistorical abstraction that is either hopelessly impractical or dangerously idealistic, or both, a position argued most forcefully by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*. This is Palestinian artist Larissa Sansour's photo project called *Nation Estate*, first introduced as another version of Fritz Kraus's postcard, which also becomes the key to future hope.

Playing on the British use of the term 'estate' for tower-block housing, Sansour depicts a virtual Palestinian homeland in the form of a skyscraper dwarfing the 'real' Palestine outside. The nation state reduced to a building has simply become the 'Nation Estate'—a single block of forced migrants. Its subtitle, 'Living the High Life', expands on the irony.



*Nation Estate*, Larissa Sansour (2011).

© Larissa Sansour, with permission.

Crucially, from our perspective *Nation Estate* plays on the idea of place that remains critical to any colonized perception of the future. But it is a conception of place that operates within a layered conception of time in which past, present and future conjoin as the essential feature of revolutionary hope. Her re-working of the Fritz Kraus postcard displays what Edouard Glissant calls a *prophetic vision of the past*. In doing this, Sansour's utopia avoids the trap of transcendental abstraction or hopeless impracticality that might come from being quarantined in the future.

*Nation Estate* consists of a number of photos of different floors of a single building representing Palestine. The lobby indicates various floors with no distinction between Israel and Palestine:



**‘Lobby’, *Nation Estate*, Larissa Sansour (2012).**

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Watering an olive tree on another floor is an activity that can be carried out anywhere in this single nation state:



**‘Olive Tree’, *Nation Estate*, Larissa Sansour (2012).**

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While Jerusalem is simply one floor of the building among others rather than the focus of ongoing conflict:



**‘Jerusalem’, *Nation Estate*, Larissa Sansour (2012).**

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The utopian function of this series is to ground the possibility of a single state in an imaginative space beyond conflict, something that the opponents of her work did not realize.

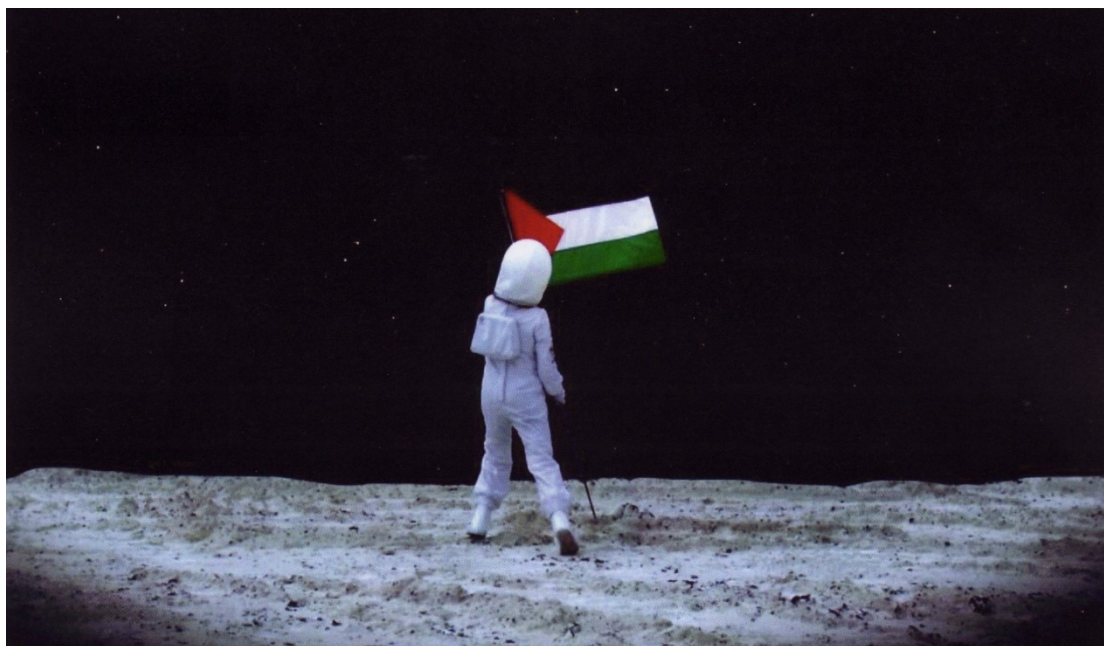
The reaction to this humorous depiction of the nation state was unexpected controversy. After they were shortlisted for the prestigious Musée de l'Elysée art prize in Switzerland, the major sponsor, Lacoste, requested that the works be removed from the competition for being “too pro-Palestinian”. After the ensuing international scandal the Museum cancelled the prize and broke off partnership with Lacoste. Political censorship is always a good indicator of the effectiveness of a work, and it is most interesting that the political implications of an upbeat and humorous utopianism were seen by the sponsors of the Musée de l'Elysée art prize to be so dangerous.

The project's depiction of a single high-rise nation clearly meets the requirements of a grounded utopia—challenging dominant conceptions of reality, and “opening a utopian space for thinking, feeling, debating and cultivating the possibility of historically rooted (and thus historically contingent) alternative social relations” (Davis 2012, 136–7). I would contend that, although whimsical, Larissa Sansour's utopia offers a possible picture of the Palestinian world, “representing the hopes and dreams of those consigned to its margins,” grounded in the reality of the erosion of Palestine as a place. Whether in the lobby, watering an olive tree or getting out of the lift at level 3, Jerusalem, *Nation Estate* is a grounded utopia because it is the utopia of the single state.

Ironically the impossibility of a single state becomes more possible with each Israeli settlement. When there is no land left for Palestinians, there will be no option but to incorporate Palestinians. Sansour's urban utopia, the vertical state, is the metaphor for a different, but possible, way of inhabiting Palestine.

We can test the grounded nature of *Nation Estate* by comparing it to another of Sansour's pieces: the short film called *Space Exodus*, which shows a Palestinian female astronaut planting a Palestinian flag on the moon.





*Space Exodus*, Larissa Sansour. © Larissa Sansour, with permission.

This is not ‘grounded’, in the way that *Nation Estate* is grounded in the reality of Palestinian dispossession and renewal of the past, yet neither is it utopia. *Space Exodus* is a representation of what appears to be the impossible. But it demonstrates precisely how the utopianism of art and literature work. By the very act of representing the impossible, the work clears a space for the imagination. It may be improbable, but the very production of the film contests its impossibility.

The creative works we see here are not involved in conflict in the way we normally expect revolution to occur, or in the way, for instance, Kanafani sees resistance literature operating. But they are revolutionary in their capacity to collapse time, to fuse past, present and future into the image that spirals into the future. There are different forms of revolution but all must reject the stereotype of victimhood. These works are transformative in their disruption of stereotype, their rejection of fear, their undercutting of expectation. Ultimately they demonstrate the utopian power of art and literature because they affirm that a different world is possible. Creative works confirm a fundamental truth of revolution: that no future is achieved unless it is first imagined.

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**How to Create a Legend?**  
**An Analysis of Constructed Representations of Ono no Komachi**  
**in Japanese Medieval Literature**

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**Abstract**

Although the historical figure known to us as Ono no Komachi (ca. 825–ca. 900) is considered to have been a famous and talented female court poet of the Heian Period in Japan, not much is known about her actual life. As a literary figure, however, her fame extended way beyond her own lifetime. Over the centuries she has continued to be an object of legendarization processes. Many literary works pictured her not only as a beautiful and skilled poet but also as *femme fatale*, courtesan, or Buddhist devotee. However, I believe that whom we currently call “Ono no Komachi” should be considered a literary construct significant for Japanese literature rather than a historical figure.

This paper analyzes representations of Ono no Komachi in Japanese medieval literature (*nō* drama plays, and *otogizōshi* secular tales), since I believe that the process of “creating” such legends has its origin in the specificity of the Japanese medieval period (12–16th centuries). Thus, the aim of this paper is to address the questions as to why this female poet was subject to legendarization processes and how various stages of those processes are responsible for the popularization of Ono no Komachi's historical image.

*Keywords:* Ono no Komachi, legendarization, classical Japanese literature

## 1. Introduction

The historical figure known to us as Ono no Komachi (ca. 825–ca. 900) was a court poet of the Heian period (8–12th centuries),<sup>3</sup> who is frequently defined as a great example of female excellence in the area of poetry (Katagiri 1991, 122). Even today she remains one of the most legendary figures of classical Japanese literature and is pictured in many literary works. Her real name remains unknown: “Komachi” is a nickname—a court name (*nyōbō na*).<sup>4</sup> Ono no Komachi seems to have been a historically insignificant woman, because there is not the briefest mention of her in any of the historical records of her time. Possibly, young Ono no Komachi was sent to the capital Heian Kyō (present-day Kyoto), where she served at Emperor Ninmyō’s court.<sup>5</sup> There she was recognized to be a talented poet, and was renowned for her unusual beauty. Indeed, her poetic talent is one of the features attributed to the historical Ono no Komachi that appears credible. She is one of the *rokkasen*—the six best *waka*<sup>6</sup> poets of the early Heian period,<sup>7</sup> who were defined as such by Ki no Tsurayuki (ca. 872–945)<sup>8</sup> in the Japanese preface (*kanajo*) to the first Japanese imperial poetic anthology, the *Kokin wakashū* (Collection of Japanese Poems of Ancient and Modern Times, 905). There are currently about 100 poems attributed to Ono no Komachi, but it is believed that she specialized in love poetry expressing a variety of human emotions. Unsurprisingly, her poetry

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<sup>3</sup> The Heian period is named after the capital city of Heian Kyō (Kyoto). The Heian period is considered to be the peak of the Japanese imperial court and aristocratic culture, noted for its art (especially poetry and literature). Although the imperial house seemed to be very powerful, the real political power was in the hands of the Fujiwara clan, an influential aristocratic family who had intermarried with the imperial family.

<sup>4</sup> In 1926 Sakurai Shū (1885–1942) suggested that Komachi’s real name could be Ono no Yoshiko (dates unknown). Ono no Yoshiko appears in the ninth-century chronicle *Shoku nihon kōki* (Continued Late Chronicles of Japan, 869) as one of Emperor Ninmyō’s (r. 833–850) consorts. Tsunoda Bun’ei argues that Ono no Komachi and Ono no Yoshiko are the same person (1970, 66–71).

<sup>5</sup> According to the traditional order of succession, Emperor Ninmyō (810–850) was the 54th emperor of Japan.

<sup>6</sup> *Waka* is one of the most representative types of poetry in classical Japanese literature. In contrast to *kanshi* poetry (written in classical Chinese), *waka* poetry was composed in Japanese. The term *waka* encompassed a number of differing forms, principally *tanka* (short poem), *chōka* (long poem), *sedōka* (head-repeated poem) and *bussokusekika* (Buddha’s-footprint stone poem) (Hayashi and Andō 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Ono no Komachi is the only woman among the *rokkasen* poets. The other poets are: Ariwara no Narihira (825–880), Ōtomo no Kuronushi (d. 923), Kisen Hōshi (d. 909?), Sōjō Henjō (816–890) and Fun’ya no Yasuhide (d. 885) (*Britannica* 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Ki no Tsurayuki was a poet and courtier in the Heian period. Under the order of Emperor Daigo (r. 897–930), he was one of four poets chosen to compile the *Kokin wakashū* anthology (Yasuda 1975, 59–64).

is often interpreted as deeply subjective, passionate and complex (Carter 1991, 84). Her love poetry may have contributed to the flowering of legends and tales presenting her as an amorous woman.

Since little is known about her actual life, Ono no Komachi the historical figure, whose dates of birth and death are uncertain, had very little in common with the legendary Komachi that appears in numerous literary works of many periods. Probably shortly after Komachi's death, stories about her life were being filled with various imaginative guesses. As a result, her fame extended way beyond her own lifetime.<sup>9</sup> The image of Ono no Komachi has lived and grown through centuries of Japanese literature.

In many literary works she is depicted not only as beautiful and skilled poet, but also as old beggar, as in the Buddhist *kanbun* (Sino-Japanese prose) work entitled *Tamatsukuri Komachishi sōsuisho* (The Rise and Fall of Komachi from Tamatsukuri, ca. 11th–12th century); *femme fatale*—as in *nō* plays; courtesan (*yūjo*);<sup>10</sup> or Buddhist devotee—as in the medieval secular tales *otogizōshi*.<sup>11</sup> Stories about Ono no Komachi have continued to be told, with variations, until the present day. She appeared in the Edo period's *ukiyo-e* paintings. Her legend inspired famous Japanese modern novelists such as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892–1927), Enchi Fumiko (1905–1986) and Mishima Yukio (1925–1970). Stories of Komachi are even recorded in pop culture: in *manga* comics, *anime* movies and musicals. Thus, in this paper I will demonstrate that literary representations of that poet are great examples of legendarization processes, and that whom we currently call “Ono no Komachi” should be considered a literary construct significant for Japanese literature rather than a historical figure.

Also in this paper I would like to analyze representations of “Ono no Komachi” in some examples of Japanese literature, by asking why this female poet was selected as an object of

<sup>9</sup> In fact, Ono no Komachi is not the only legendary poet in the Japanese canon. Others include: Kakinomoto no Hitomaro (662–710), Semimaru (dates unknown), Ariwara no Narihira, Izumi Shikibu (ca. 970–ca. 1030) and Murasaki Shikibu (ca. 978–c. 1014 or 1025). See Anne Commons's work on Hitomaro (2009), Susan Matisoff's research on Semimaru's legend (2006) or R. Keller Kimbrough's work about reconfiguration of Izumi Shikibu in medieval Japan (2008) for examples.

<sup>10</sup> *Yūjo* or *asobi* were terms used to describe the various groups of courtesan-entertainers plying their trades in the cities, harbors, and highway inns of Kamakura and Muromachi Japan. It seems that in the medieval period the meaning of the term *yūjo* was closer to “wandering entertainer” than to “prostitute,” indicating female singers, dancers, storytellers and puppeteers (Kimbrough 2008, 62).

<sup>11</sup> The term *otogizōshi* refers to a group of short secular stories written primarily from the Muromachi period (1392–1573) till the beginning of the Edo period (1600–1867) (Hayashi and Andō 2008).

the legendarization processes. What purpose did such legendarization serve? Here it ought to be emphasized that my analysis is not an attempt to establish any “truth” about her life. According to Joshua Mostow, such literary works were always designed for specific purposes and often for specific individuals. Thus, it is impossible to identify authors’ intent, since the reception and production of literature is influenced by specific historical forces (1996, 10–11). Moreover, the aim of this paper is to address the question as to what factors influenced the creation of legends about Ono no Komachi (her passionate and witty poetry? Beauty? Alleged love affairs with courtiers?) and what possible reasons exist for the popularization of “Ono no Komachi” in the Japanese culture and literature of various historical periods.

## 2. Methodology—Legendarization Processes

The central thesis of this study is that Ono no Komachi is a great example of a constructed image that underwent numerous processes of legendarization over the centuries. Taking into consideration research in Japan and the West on legendarization and mythmaking processes in Japanese literature,<sup>12</sup> three types of legendarization processes can be distinguished: medievalization, marginalization and fictionalization.

Barbara Ruch describes medievalization as the process of legendarization undertaken according to and due to certain notions of characteristics of the Japanese medieval period,<sup>13</sup> comprising popularization of the literature and culture of the Heian period among lower social classes, the idea of *mappō*,<sup>14</sup> and generally the strong influence of Buddhism (1977, 279–309). In other words, in the medieval period, those from lower classes (merchants, craftsmen, peasants, etc.) “learnt” about culture and people from earlier periods through newly evolved

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Nishiki Hitoshi’s work on the origin of Ono no Komachi’s legend (2004); Hamanaka Osamu’s research on legendarization through presenting female characters as goddesses or Bodhisattvas (2011); Tsunoda Bunei’s attempt to reconstruct Ono no Komachi’s life (1970); Katagiri Yōichi’s work on *Ise shū* (Ise Collection, date unknown) focusing on its fictive aspects (1985); Barbara Ruch’s article about the creation of Japanese national literature in medieval times (1977); Terry Kawashima’s publication about the process of marginalization from the late 10th to the early 13th century (2001); and Robert N. Huey’s article dealing with the medievalization process in poetry (1990).

<sup>13</sup> The Kamakura period (1183–1333) marks the beginning of the so-called medieval period in Japan. It is a 400-year span from the fall of the Taira clan in 1185 to the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, when Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) unified the country under his control. The three main historical divisions of the medieval period are the Kamakura period, the Northern and Southern Courts period (1336–1392), and the Muromachi period. It was the time in Japan’s history when the warrior society came to the fore (Shirane 2007, 567).

<sup>14</sup> The age in which Buddha’s law will degenerate.

literary genres such as *setsuwa* (didactic tales), *otogizōshi* (secular tales) and *nō* dramas. Probably some extra information, involving supernatural elements, was added to the stories about famous poets of the Heian period to attract the attention of the audience. The historical figures gain new characteristics, which are mostly unconnected to their possible biographies. The stories about medievalized characters usually center on some repeatable themes. For Ono no Komachi, the stories tend to focus on the idea of impermanence and worldliness (*mujō*), the consequences of karma, and the prospect of women's enlightenment.

Another important process is marginalization. Terry Kawashima defines “margin” as an unstable and negotiable result of textual effects generated by authors and compilers who display a desire to promote certain ideas at the expense of the targets of marginalization (2001, 3). This means that a margin is created by the centers of power to identify the excluded (the “marginal”) and then remove the excluded element from the center. Yamaguchi Masao explains that the excluded elements are often what the center fears the most, since they are believed to hold a certain amount of power (ibid., 7). Moreover, Kawashima underlines that gender is a crucial factor in the process of marginalization (ibid., 13); thus, specific kinds of women (*yūjo*, for example) or elements connected with femininity (menstrual blood, women's bodies) are often constructed as marginal. For example, it was a regular Buddhist practice to use women's bodies as symbols of *mujō*, such as in the *kusōshi* scrolls (nine pictures of death) presenting the decomposition of a corpse. At first, the body which was presented on the scrolls was of indeterminate gender. Later, it turned out to be a body of a beautiful woman, as Buddhism considered a female body to be impure (marginal), and scrolls were used to discourage in Buddhist monks sexual desire and attachment to the lust of the world.

The third process is fictionalization, which is a “creation” or “re-creation” of the life and the representation of a poetry or prose author, since we in fact possess very little verifiable information on the real life of the author. One of the most spectacular examples of such tampering is *Ise monogatari* (The Ise Stories, 10th century),<sup>15</sup> in which poems by different poets help to create a fictive life of Ariwara no Narihira (Okada 1991, 119–123). Finally in

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<sup>15</sup> *Ise monogatari* is an *uta monogatari* (collection of *waka* poems and associated narratives) dating from the early Heian period. Authorship remains unknown. It relates 125 episodes involving 209 poems with narratives. The nameless main character is presumed to be modeled on Ariwara no Narihira (*Zen'yaku kogo jiten* 2011). Ariwara no Narihira was a *waka* poet active during the Heian period. He was linked to the imperial family by both maternal and paternal lineage. He is considered to be a *beau homme* in Japanese culture, famous for his numerous love affairs (Hayashi and Andō 2008).

my study, I apply deconstructionist reading practices to demonstrate the difference between the historical figure and literary construct of Ono no Komachi. Deconstruction analysis originated in the works of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004). It is a way of analyzing texts in order to dismantle binary oppositions, which allows the revelation of texts' fundamental undecidability (Bertens 2008, 102).

In this paper I would like to focus on medieval literary works, since I believe that the process of “creating” such legends has its origin in the specificity of the Japanese medieval period. Thus, in this study I analyze the duality of the image of the heroine in the *kanbun* text entitled *Tamatsukuri Komachishi sōsuisho* and examples of *nō* dramas and *otogizōshi* where Ono no Komachi appears as protagonist.

### 3. The First Stage of Legendarization: *Tamatsukuri Komachishi sōsuisho*

*Tamatsukuri Komachishi sōsuisho* (hereafter *Tamatsukuri*) is a work composed of a preface written in *kanbun* and a main text, which is a poem written in Chinese (*kanshi*). *Tamatsukuri* is usually dated in the late Heian period; however, the oldest manuscript is dated to 1219 (Tochio 2009, 12). The authorship was attributed to the monk Kūkai (774–835), the founder of the Shingon Sect.<sup>16</sup> Nowadays this attribution is heavily questioned and mostly rejected (Komine 1995, 47). But there is no doubt that the author could have been a Buddhist monk, because the Buddhist influence is obvious. The whole text is permeated by Pure Land (*jōdo*) ideology and the paradigm of the Four Sufferings (*shiku*). Even the double-narrative structure is a reference to the literary tradition of the Buddhist sutras, where the prose component is supplemented by verses that reiterate and poetically summarize the prose passage. Chinese influence also can be noted in *Tamatsukuri*, especially references to Bai Juyi's (772–846)<sup>17</sup> poems *Qin zhong yin* (Poems Composed at Qin Zhong, ca. 810)<sup>18</sup> and *Chang hen ge* (Song of

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<sup>16</sup> Kūkai is known posthumously as Kōbō Daishi (The Grand Master Who Propagated Buddhist Teaching) (*Britannica* 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Bai Juyi (in Japanese: Haku Kyōi) was a Chinese poet of the Tang dynasty (618–907). His literary works were widely read and highly regarded in Heian Japan. He was also influential in the development of Japanese literature (*Britannica* 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Bai Juyi composed ten poems describing the sadness of the populace in the capital Chang'an (Lin 2012, 54).



Everlasting Sorrow, 806) (Tochio 2009, 12).<sup>19</sup> The central figure of the text is an old female beggar. In the preface, she tells the story of her life to a wandering monk (the narrator) she has met. After hearing her history, he retells the woman's tale in verse, which forms the main text.

It seems very likely that *Tamatsukuri* played a significant role in the legendarization process of Ono no Komachi. The name "Komachi" appears only in the title of the work, and never in the text itself. However, late-Heian and early-medieval texts identified the protagonist from *Tamatsukuri* with the figure of Ono no Komachi in her old age.<sup>20</sup> *Tamatsukuri* is a very challenging work, written in difficult language and full of references to Buddhism and Chinese poetry, thus I will not attempt to analyze the whole text here.<sup>21</sup> I would like to focus mainly on the duality of the heroine's image. The contrast between her youth and her old age is a characteristic of the Ono no Komachi legend. This motif is repeated in most of her later representations.

The prose introduction and poem present a marginalized woman. She tells the story of her life, beginning with being born into a wealthy family. She was extremely beautiful, and a lot of men fell in love with her. She did not choose any of them as her husband. With the passing of time she lost her family and financial support, along with her beauty. Her reputation was destroyed, the suitors stopped visiting her, and finally she turned into a fallen woman, marrying a hunter and bearing a son. But she had been living in such poverty that her child died. (Marriage and a son appear only in the poem version of her story.) Alone and homeless she realizes the evanescence of life (neither beauty, nor wealth, nor anything else can last forever) and she starts thinking about becoming a nun. Her arrogance is a cause of her decline.

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<sup>19</sup> *Chang hen ge* is a long narrative poem that tells the story of Yang Guifei (in Japanese: Yōkihi; 719–756), the beloved consort of Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756) of the Tang dynasty (*Britannica* 2011).

<sup>20</sup> E.g. *Hōbutsushū* (Collection of Treasures, ca. 1179) and *Jikkinshō* (A Miscellany of Ten Maxims, ca. 1252). The poetry treatise to *Kokin wakashū* entitled *Gyokuden shinpi* (Treatise of Secret Treasure) states that Kōbō Daishi predicted Komachi's old age of pain as a karmic punishment, which moved him to write *Tamatsukuri* (Komine 1995, 47).

<sup>21</sup> See Kawashima 2001, 123–174, and Ryu 1999, 191–240, or Tochio's annotations (2009) for an extended analysis of *Tamatsukuri*.

I am a child of an entertainer's household, I am from a wealthy and prosperous family. When I was at my peak, my arrogance was extreme; now that I have fallen, my sorrows are deep. (Kawashima 2001, 307)

She herself points to the reason for her miserable state. Even though the woman draws a moral conclusion from her past behavior, I would rather agree with Kawashima's opinion that she is portrayed as a victim of family ambition and misfortune (ibid., 134), as we can read:

Thus the children of the emperor and courtiers fought day and night to propose marriage to me; the rich and noble guests all competed to set a wedding date. Despite these wishes, my parents did not permit them, and my brothers would not hear of it. Their only ambition was to make me an empress, and they had no intention of letting me be a wife of an ordinary family. (Ibid., 309)

Her parents rejected marriage proposals to fulfill their plan of their daughter becoming the Empress. But after their death, their daughter became impoverished, because there was nobody to support her.

Besides presenting a marginalized female figure, *Tamatsukuri* can also stand as an example of the fictionalization process, since soon after the work appeared, it was established that it represents (recreates) the old age of Ono no Komachi. I consider *Tamatsukuri* a didactic work intended to warn unmarried woman. The heroine, or, it is better to say, her family, arrogantly refused the marriage proposals of her many suitors. As a result, she grew old and ended her life in solitude. The image of an aged, miserable Komachi wandering outside the capital has its origin in the *Tamatsukuri*. This work created the enduring image of Ono no Komachi as beauty turned old beggar. Nevertheless, it ought to be emphasized that the female beggar in *Tamatsukuri* is not Ono no Komachi. The didactic story depicted in the text differs a lot from the common perception of her life.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. Making a *Femme Fatale*: Ono no Komachi in Nō Plays

Sarah M. Strong points out that the nō version of a particular famous character is often the one that has mattered most over the centuries, supplying the defining characteristics and preoccupations by which that character has been understood and known (1994, 391). Certainly, Ono no Komachi is a great example of one such famous character. In fact, she became the protagonist of five nō plays: *Sotoba Komachi* (Komachi at the Gravepost, 14th

<sup>22</sup> See Tsunoda 1976, 63–82, or Katagiri 1991, 122–157, for their attempts to reconstruct the poet's actual life. Moreover, the poetic skills of the protagonist are not mentioned anywhere in *Tamatsukuri*.

century), *Sekidera Komachi* (Komachi at Sekidera, ca. 15th century), *Ōmu Komachi* (Komachi's Parrot-Answer Poem, ca. 14th–16th century), *Sōshi Arai Komachi* (Komachi Clears Her Name, ca. 14th–15th century) and *Kayoi Komachi* (The Nightly Courting of Komachi, 14th century),<sup>23</sup> which fashioned her not only as a talented poet and beautiful lady-in-waiting, but also as one who behaves haughtily towards suitors and suffers the later consequences.

As aforementioned, *Tamatsukuri* is the first example of the legendarization process of Komachi's image. I believe that *nō* plays are the second important stage in the creation of Komachi's representation. I would like to examine two plays entitled *Sotoba Komachi* and *Kayoi Komachi*, which, in my opinion, popularized the *femme fatale*-like image of Ono no Komachi.

The theme which is characteristic of both plays is the well-known Hundred-Nights Tale (*momo yo gayoi*) or the Making the Edge of the Carriage Bench Tale (*shiji no hashigaki*). The plot of the tale depicts the story of a young man named Fukakusa no Shōshō, who falls in love with Ono no Komachi. When he confesses his feelings, she asks him to come for a hundred nights and sleep on a carriage bench in the garden. At dawn he should make a mark on the edge of the bench. Even amid windy, rainy or snowy weather, Fukakusa comes every night. Unfortunately, on the last night he dies on his way to Ono no Komachi's residence. The Hundred-Nights Tale was popularized by *nō* plays during medieval times in Japan. Kan'ami Kiyotsugu (1333–1384),<sup>24</sup> the author of *Sotoba Komachi* and *Kayoi Komachi*, created Ono no Komachi as an irresistibly beautiful, but cold-hearted, lady who skillfully deludes her suitor. However, in both plays, Ono no Komachi is also an old beggar looking for a way to gain salvation. The *nō* theater's rather negative presentation of Ono no Komachi in the Hundred-Nights Tale became the basis for other numerous tales about her and another reason for her legendarization.

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<sup>23</sup> I will discuss the plot of *Sotoba Komachi* and *Kayoi Komachi* later in this paragraph. *Sekidera Komachi* by Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443) tells the story of old Ono no Komachi, living in great poverty. On the evening of the Tanabata Festival she is visited by the abbot of Sekidera Temple, who comes to talk with her about poetry. *Ōmu Komachi*, also by Zeami Motokiyo, depicts Komachi as an old poet living in Sekidera Temple. She receives a poem sent to her by Emperor Yōzei. *Sōshi Arai Komachi* (author unknown) presents Komachi not as a *femme fatale* but the winner of an imperial poetry contest (*uta awase*).

<sup>24</sup> Kan'ami Kiyotsugu was a *nō* actor and author. He was also a founder of the Kanze school of *nō* (*Britannica* 2011).

The play *Sotoba Komachi* is traditionally classified as a fourth-category or miscellaneous play (*zō mono*) and performed as an old-woman play (*rōjo mono*) (*Britannica* 2011). The play tells the story of two priests from Mt. Kōya who meet an old beggar woman on their way to the capital. She is resting on a tree stump, not realizing that it is an ancient *stupa*.<sup>25</sup> One of the priests rebukes her, and they start discussing Buddhist doctrine. Impressed by her knowledge of religion, the priests ask the old woman to reveal her name. It turns out that they are talking with Ono no Komachi—a renowned poet of the court. During conversation, Komachi starts to reminisce about how beautiful, talented and haughty she had been in the past. In a fit of madness, she imagines that she is Fukakusa no Shōshō, a suitor whom she had rejected in her youth. In the end, Komachi returns to normal and salvation is promised to her.

*Kayoi Komachi* is also an example of a miscellaneous play, but is defined as a *mugen nō* play because it deals with ghosts (*Britannica* 2011). The play features a priest during his meditation training in a mountain village. He is visited daily by a woman bringing him food. The woman reveals that she is the ghost of Ono no Komachi, and the priest decides to go to pray for her. But when the priest goes to hold a memorial service for Komachi, suddenly the vengeful spirit of Fukakusa no Shōshō appears. He forbids the priest to pray for Komachi. The priest asks two ghosts to show him the circumstances in which Fukakusa was visiting Ono no Komachi for one hundred nights. Finally, Komachi and Fukakusa are able to attain salvation together.

*Sotoba Komachi* and *Kayoi Komachi* are filled with Buddhist ideology and are probably the most overtly Buddhist among all Komachi *nō* plays.<sup>26</sup> It seems that in both, Ono no Komachi's life is subsumed to the purposes of Buddhist doctrine. The events of her life reflect the concept of Four Sufferings (*shiku*): birth, old age, sickness and death. She experiences physical and mental suffering and pain in her life, especially the inevitable woes of illness, aging and death. In *Sotoba Komachi*, Ono no Komachi is an old female beggar, so ashamed of who she became that she is hiding from the eyes of the people.

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<sup>25</sup> The stupa is a spiritual symbol manifesting the Buddha Vairocana and the cosmological belief in the Mahayana. *Māhāyāna*, lit. "Great Vehicle," is one of the three main extant branches of Buddhism referring to the path of the Bodhisattva seeking complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings (Terasaki 1984, 180).

<sup>26</sup> One of the main functions of *nō* troupes was to propagate Buddhism and raise funds for the temples or shrines. At the early stages of the development of *nō* theater, many professional theatrical groups were closely affiliated with powerful Buddhist temples (Terasaki 1984, 155).

**KOMACHI:** But now I am grown loathsome even to sluts,  
 Poor girls of the people, and they and all men  
 Turn scornful from me.  
 Unhappy months and days pile up their score;  
 I am old; old by a hundred years.  
 In the City I fear men's eyes[.]  
 (Waley 1976, 88)

Komachi's degradation in her old age symbolizes the idea of *mujō*—impermanence. In her youth she was a beautiful and highly intellectual poet, but time changed her into a decrepit old beggar. As mentioned, women's bodies were often used as symbols of *mujō*, presenting the idea that even the most beautiful woman can become repulsive in her old age. Moreover, this tendency can be also determined as a part of the marginalization of old women's sexuality. According to Fujiwara no Akihira (d. 1066), an old woman should rid herself of sexual desires, take Buddhist vows and become a nun (Kawashima 2011, 148). However, in *Sotoba Komachi* it is clear that Komachi's painful old age is a karmic punishment for her being cruel and cold towards her suitors.

**KOMACHI (while being possessed by Fukakusa):** No, no.... Komachi was very beautiful.  
 Many letters came to her, many messages—  
 Thick as raindrops out of a black summer sky.  
 But she sent no answer, not even an empty word.  
 And now in punishment she has grown old:  
 She has lived a hundred years[.]  
 (Waley 1976, 96)

In *Kayoi Komachi*, she is a ghost, but even after death she is not released from suffering. When the mystery woman finally introduces herself as the ghost of Ono no Komachi, the priest recollects a story about a skull reciting the poem:

**MONK:** The woman who was here did not say that her name was Ono-no-Komachi but simply said she was an old woman living near Ichiharano, where silver grasses grow, and then disappeared. Wait. That reminds me of something. When a person tries to go through Ichiharano, from behind a bush of silver grass, a poem is heard as such. “Alas, blowing autumn wind hurts my eyes. I no longer reveal myself as Ono-no-Komachi because silver grasses are growing from the eye-pits of my skull.” This is the poem Ono-no-Komachi composed. So, I am certain that that lady must be the phantom of Ono-no-Komachi. I shall go straight to Ichiharano and pray for consoling her soul. (Kayoi-Komachi 2008, 4; errors sic passim: translator unknown)

The skull legend (*komachi dokuro tan*), along with the *momo yo gayoi* tale, is another example of the well-known stories about Ono no Komachi, which turns up in various different versions in medieval literature.<sup>27</sup> Mainly the skull legend presents Komachi as a poem-composing skull left in the middle of a field and calling attention to the pain in her eye socket from a growth of pampas grass (Kawashima 2011, 177). This story appears another attempt to marginalize the figure of Komachi. She is nothing more than skull and bones. Moreover, her past transgressions disrupt her peace even after death. In the skull story, a passerby (usually a man) hears her complaints and after following the voice reciting the poem he discovers a skull. After removing the grass, he gives the skull a burial. In *Kayoi Komachi*, there is a priest who decides to pray for the consolation of Komachi’s soul.

The structure of both plays is hence quite similar: a priest comes to a certain place and meets a stranger. During conversation the stranger introduces herself as Ono no Komachi. It turns out that she needs the help of the priest to attain salvation and finish her earthly sufferings. Terasaki notes that the priest and Komachi form an opposing pair. The priest represents the element of the sacred, while Ono no Komachi is the profane (1984, 163). Unfortunately, Komachi is not allowed to gain enlightenment easily. The angry spirit (*onryō*) of Fukakusa no Shōshō appears. In *Sotoba Komachi*, he possesses Komachi, which is also a Buddhist conceit, since it was believed that those who suffered violent deaths became vengeful spirits able to possess the offender (Terasaki 1984, 156–157). In the second play, the ghost of Fukakusa forbids the priest to pray for his ex-lover’s soul. Finally, in both plays, after reenacting the past events, Komachi is released from her earthly sufferings by the righteousness of Buddha. The reenactment of one hundred nightly visits is Komachi’s act of *sange*—she can confess her sins and express repentance.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> See Kawashima 2011, 175–215, for an analysis of different versions of the skull legend.

<sup>28</sup> *Sange* (or *zange*) is a Buddhist practice of revealing past transgression before the Buddha or other person(s) and expressing regret for that transgression (Strong 2001, 80–81).

**RECITERS:** At that moment, a thought briefly comes to his mind that even if it is served in a beautiful cup like one made of moonlight, he should observe the Buddha's rule prohibiting drinking alcohol. Thanks to this brief thought, General [Fukakusa no Shōshō] gains the opportunity that leads to enlightenment. He is now able to atone for his various past wrong deeds. Finally, Ono-no-Komachi and General Fukakusa become Buddhas together. They become enlightened together. (Kayoi-Komachi 2008, 11)

However, in *Sotoba Komachi*, salvation is only promised to Ono no Komachi, as she decides to devote herself and her “heart flower”—her poetic talent<sup>29</sup>—to the path of Buddha.

**CHORUS** (*Speaking for KOMACHI, who is now no longer possessed by Shōshō's spirit*):

Was it his spirit that possessed me,  
 Was it his anger that broke my wits?  
 If this be so, let me pray for the life hereafter,  
 Where alone is comfort;  
 Piling high the sand  
 Till I be burnished as gold.  
 See, I offer my flower [her heart flower] to Buddha,  
 I hold it in both hands.  
 Oh may He lead me into the Path of Truth,  
 Into the Path of Truth.  
 (Waley 1976, 98)

Furthermore, the number one hundred in the Hundred-Nights Tale is also significant. As Terasaki explains, Ono no Komachi is an old woman of nearly one hundred who has been suffering for many years because of her cruel and arrogant behavior in her youth. The number ninety-nine symbolizes the approach, while one hundred represents the achievement: for Fukakusa, it is the fulfillment of his promise to Komachi; for Komachi, it is the final enlightenment (Terasaki 1984, 180–181). In addition to presenting important Buddhist principles such as *mujō* and the karmic consequences of transgression, *Sotoba Komachi* and

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<sup>29</sup> Most of *Sotoba Komachi*'s translators and experts agree that “heart flower” (*kokoro no hana*) is a synonym for poetry or poetic talent, which is a reference to the *kanajo* preface to the *Kokin wakashū*, where Ki no Tsurayuki describes Japanese poetry as something that “has the human heart as seed.”

*Kayoi Komachi* show that literally everybody has an equal opportunity to achieve enlightenment: even the “fallen” Ono no Komachi. Nevertheless, the significance of the Buddhist influence should not be overestimated. Besides being made extremely aged and decrepit, Ono no Komachi is also portrayed as a lady of intellectual power. Her intellect remains sharp and she is brilliant in discussion about Buddhist doctrine, as well as displaying a wide knowledge of *waka* poetry. In *Sotoba Komachi*, when the priest rebukes Komachi for sitting on the stupa, she begins to question his doctrine. In the long disputation between Komachi and the priest, she upholds the concept of non-dualism, while the priest defends the doctrines of the Shingon Sect. Komachi contradicts him on every point, expressing the belief that everybody has an equal opportunity to achieve salvation.<sup>30</sup> She ends the discussion by reciting a poem:

**KOMACHI:** I now emboldened

Recite a riddle, a jesting song.

“Were I in Heaven

The Stupa were an ill seat;

But here, in the world without,

What harm is done?”

**CHORUS:** The priests would have rebuked her;

But they have found their match.

(Waley 1976, 93)

The riddle depends on the word “stupa.” In Japanese the word for stupa is *sotoba* (卒塔婆). However, *sotoba* written in different characters (外場) means “outside,” or “without,” and it is with this connotation that it is used in the poem. Komachi is saying that since she is outside of the Western Paradise (“in the world without” in Waley’s translation), she is not offending the Buddha by sitting on the stupa. Her composition of a riddle or a joking poem (*tawabure*) is proof of her poetic talent and knowledge, since two *tawabure* poems are said to be the father and the mother of poetry in the *kanajo* preface (Murphy 2011, 38).

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<sup>30</sup> See Waley 1976, 89–93.



Finally, I believe that in these plays, Ono no Komachi is presented as a real *femme fatale*, whose charms bond her lovers in irresistible desire, leading them into deadly situations. As was mentioned at the beginning of this section, *Sotoba Komachi* and *Kayoi Komachi* popularized the Hundred-Nights Tale. However, the *momo yo gayoi* tale appears in early medieval works. Fujiwara Kiyosuke (1104–1177) in his work *Ōgishō* (The Secret Teachings) cites the story of one hundred nights based on the earlier, little-known work of poetic criticism entitled *Utarongi* (Poetic Discourse) attributed to Fujiwara Kintō (1056–1128). The plot of the story centers on an unnamed man courting a beautiful woman who wants to test his feelings by requesting him to visit her residence for one hundred nights in succession, and make a mark on a carriage bench in the garden. The last night, he cannot fulfill the woman's request, because one of his parents suddenly dies. In another version of this story, he becomes ill and dies. What is more, the woman feels sad when her lover-to-be does not appear, and she makes the final mark herself (or composes a poem expressing her feelings).<sup>31</sup> However, the woman from the tale is not identified as Ono no Komachi. It seems that the author of the *nō* plays was the first to link Komachi with the Hundred-Nights Tale, depicting her as a cruel and cold-hearted lady. The story received a new framework, becoming a didactic work that raises the issues of the evanescence of life, karma, and the opportunity to achieve salvation, the role of female poetry fashioning the image of Ono no Komachi in a rather negative way, which highly influenced her later reconfigurations.

### 5. A Fallen Lady Able to Enter the Path of Buddha: Reception of Ono no Komachi in *otogizōshi*

The *nō* plays popularized some attributes for which Ono no Komachi has been known: (1) poetic talent, (2) being an extremely beautiful lady-in-waiting, (3) an amorous nature, (4) haughty behavior toward suitors and (5) an old age of suffering and ostracization. In particular, her image in medieval literary works is often exaggerated. Another example of medieval literature where Ono no Komachi appears as the protagonist is the secular tales *otogizōshi*. Actually, there are four *otogizōshi* stories about Komachi.<sup>32</sup> Here I would like to

<sup>31</sup> See Strong 1994, 401–412, for an analysis of the origins of the Hundred-Nights Tale.

<sup>32</sup> *Komachi sōshi* (The story of Komachi) is the main subject of this paragraph. *Komachi Uta Arasoi* (Komachi's Poetry Disputes) comprises three short episodes presented in three different *nō* plays: the first episode about

focus on the *otogizōshi* entitled *Komachi sōshi*, which is the most studied of the medieval Komachi stories (Teele 1993, 39). What distinguishes this tale from the others is that it is not influenced by *nō*.

*Komachi sōshi* represents the standard story of flourishing and decline, of a beautiful young woman who becomes an old and suffering wanderer looking for Buddhist enlightenment. At the beginning, the text introduces the past of the courtesan named Ono no Komachi (*komachi to iu irogonomi no yūjo ari*),<sup>33</sup> her beauty and attractiveness to men, her talent as a poet and her service at court. The text emphasizes how many letters young Komachi received from suitors.<sup>34</sup> Then the action advances, and we find Komachi in her old age living in poverty and loneliness in her house in Ono. Suddenly, she is visited by Ariwara no Narihira. His visit is not only an opportunity to reminisce about the past, but also to express repentance for her transgression (her haughty distance from the suitors). Since Narihira plays a priestly role (Strong 1991, 83), his arrival allows Komachi to begin her *sange*, revealing her sins before him. He urges her to forget the past and to concentrate instead upon Buddha Amida's Pure Land of Western Paradise. Finally, the religious awakening of Ono no Komachi occurs and Narihira disappears. Then she starts wandering around villages and finally expires on a grass field called Tamatsukuri no Ono.

It is obvious that *Komachi sōshi* is an example of a didactic work used by Buddhist evangelists to present possible ways to attain salvation to the lower-class audience. Michele Marra observes that the Japanese middle ages witnessed an explosion of legends of famous female poets of the Heian period (1993, 58). Since female sexuality is often used as a tool to win men's attention (Goodwin 2007, 117), Heian female poets are portrayed in several ways in secular tales. One such representation constructed by Buddhist mythmaking is as courtesans (*yūjo*) obsessed by love and passion. Izumi Shikibu is also considered to be a

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Komachi's victory in the poetry contest known from *Sōshi Arai Komachi*, the second focused on poetry exchange between an old Komachi and the Emperor, which is a reference to *Ōmu Komachi*, and finally the third, presenting religious discussion between Komachi and a Buddhist monk, based on *Sotoba Komachi*. *Komachi monogatari* (The tale of Komachi) combines motifs from the Hundred-Nights Tale, Komachi's skull tale, *Sotoba Komachi* and *Sekidera Komachi*. The fourth tale entitled *Kamigawari Komachi* (Komachi speaks for the Goddess) depicts the story of a young poet who receives teachings about the way of poetry from an old Komachi living outside the capital. In this tale references to the *momo yo gayoi* tale, the skull tale, *Tamatsukuri* and *nō* plays can also be traced.

<sup>33</sup> Ichiko 2010, 87. This sentence can be translated as: "There was an amorous courtesan named Komachi."

<sup>34</sup> A total number of 44 letters is mentioned (Strong 1991, 83).

famous female court poet. She is well known for her relationships with men, especially for her affair with Prince Atsumichi (987–1007), which is described in her alleged diary entitled *Izumi Shikibu nikki* (Diary of Izumi Shikibu, ca. 1007). In the *otogizōshi* tale *Izumi Shikibu* she is also represented as *yūjo*. According to the tale, a courtesan named Izumi Shikibu decided to abandon her new-born baby boy. Time passes and Izumi Shikibu's beautiful appearance awakes great passion in a young monk named Dōmei. Finally, it turns out that he is Izumi's abandoned son. This discovery is so shocking for Izumi Shikibu that she decides to leave the world of human passions by entering the Tendai temple on Mt. Shosha (Ichiko 2005, 131–139).<sup>35</sup>

Both Ono no Komachi and Izumi Shikibu became objects of the medievalization process; their “lives” were translated into Buddhist tales and identified as *yūjo*. Their nature is a cause of their decline. Ono no Komachi's wholesale rejection of her suitors marginalizes her from the capital—she lives a life of isolation. The passionate behavior of Izumi Shikibu brings her pain. As fallen ladies they have only one solution: devote themselves to Buddhist teachings. Then, they will be cleansed of their impurities and will be able to obtain the mercy of Buddha Amida.

Then Narihira said, “Don't long so for the past. Just as meeting is the beginning of separation, so birth is the beginning of death. In this world that is just the spray of water, what more is there to say? Forget all that you have just said, throw away your longings, and pray ‘Let me be drawn to the holy world of the western paradise.’ Get rid of your suffering, and help those you know and care for.”

Finally opening up her heart, Komachi said, “Ah, what wonderful words! How grateful I am for these words of guidance, signposts along the road of confusion as I wander between life and death. Really, really thinking about it, women do indeed have deep-rooted delusion. I shall put my reliance in you, as in Kannon, and in Jizō.”

Hearing her say this, Narihira said, “The Buddha will show you his compassionate mercy as you pursue the Road of Truth.”  
(Teele 1993, 48)

The moral of such stories is again quite clear: If Ono no Komachi and Izumi Shikibu with their past transgressions and extremely amorous nature could attain salvation and be reborn in the Pure Land, anybody can enter the path of Buddha. It seems that Buddhist propagandists, trying to draw the attention of the common people, created such stories utilizing famous Heian poets as heroines to be comprehensible for the converts.

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<sup>35</sup> This story completely distorts Izumi Shikibu's biography. There are no historical records confirming that she even bore a son, let alone had a love affair with him.

Finally, while Ono no Komachi's earlier coolness destroyed her reputation, she is not the only lady at court who kept her suitors at a distance. Lady Ise (?875–?938), who was a highly regarded *waka* poet of her time (Okada 1991, 13),<sup>36</sup> consistently refused the advances of men interested in her. Lady Ise is also known from *Ise shū*—her personal collection of narrativized poems (re)presenting, perhaps, a vision of her court life.<sup>37</sup> The reception to Lady Ise's resistance is rather positive: she is even rewarded for such behavior, becoming the mother of Emperor Uda's son.<sup>38</sup> This contrasts strongly with Ono no Komachi's old age of loneliness and suffering.

Both ladies are often compared in regard to their poetry; they are even called “the twin jewels of poetry.”<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the figure of Lady Ise is not surrounded with as many legends as Ono no Komachi. It may be argued that one of the reasons is the fact that Lady Ise was known as a composer of formal (public) poetry, in contrast with Komachi's fame for her informal (private) poetry. A second difference was political status—Lady Ise was deeply befriended by Empress Atsuko, as well as being devoted to her duties in the Empress's service.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, she is believed to have attracted the attention of the Emperor in giving birth to their son. Undoubtedly, the love poetry of Ono no Komachi crucially influenced the development of her image. But I believe that medievalization and marginalization processes played a significant role in transforming her into a Japanese *femme fatale*.

## 6. Conclusions

Representations of Ono no Komachi in Japanese literature are created according to

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<sup>36</sup> The *Kokin wakashū* anthology contains twenty-two of her poems, the largest number for a woman. She also took part as the sole woman in the one of the most important poetry contests, “The Poetry Contest of the Empress During the Kamyō Era” (*kamyō no ontoki kisai no miya uta uwase*) in 893 (Okada 1991, 116). Thus it can be concluded that Lady Ise's poetic mastery was appreciated during her lifetime.

<sup>37</sup> In 888, Lady Ise entered the court of Empress Atsuko (872–907), consort of Emperor Uda (r. 887–897).

<sup>38</sup> There are no historical data supporting the existence of this child. In the text of *Ise shū*, we read that the little prince died at the age of five.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Miner, Odagiri and Morell 1985, 169.

<sup>40</sup> Ladies-in-waiting played an important role as go-betweens, forwarding messages between male aristocrats and the Empress by presenting their issues before her. Thus, for the aristocrats it was really important that the ladies they chose should be favored (Broma 2008, 67–68). I suppose that the friendship between Lady Ise and Empress Atsuko could be a reason why two brothers from the Fujiwara clan were interested in engaging in a relationship with Lady Ise.

legendarization processes. In this paper, I have emphasized how the processes of medievalization, marginalization and fictionalization influenced the reception of this female poet. By analyzing the *kanbun* work *Tamatsukuri*, the two *nō* theatre plays *Sotoba Komachi* and *Kayoi Komachi*, and the secular medieval tale *Komachi sōshi*, I have demonstrated that the real life of the historical figure known to us as Ono no Komachi was not the source for those literary works. Rather one can conclude that poetry attributed to her and literary works where she appears as protagonist are often treated as bases for the (re)construction of her life. But the legendarization processes manipulated the creation of her image to achieve certain ends, such as Buddhist cautionary propaganda directed at women. As a result, legendarization processes reconfigured her representations differently in various types of Japanese literature, allowing the possibility of multiple interpretations: a talented poet, a beautiful lady exchanging poems with men at the court, an old wanderer, a courtesan.

I believe that the factors which influenced her legendarization are as follows. She was a stereotypical lady from the Heian period considered to be a daughter of a provincial governor for the middle-class aristocracy (*zuryō*) sent to the capital to serve at the Emperor's court. I would argue that *Tamatsukuri* presents the story of a stereotypical young woman whose parents want her to become the Empress. Her excellent poetry probably was primarily responsible for the image of the amorous and beautiful lady involved in many love affairs with courtiers. However, there are two more important factors influencing her legend. Firstly, the fact that almost nothing is known about her life allows conjecturers to fill her story with a lot of imaginative histories. Secondly, there is the motif of Komachi versed in Buddhism. The consequence of these two factors is the construction of the enduring “before/after” image of Ono no Komachi as a beauty who turned into an old wanderer devoted to Buddhism. Finally, representations of Ono no Komachi created due to legendarization processes in the medieval era became so strong that they have survived until modern times. Her representation as a beautiful and talented poet is still encountered today, and she reappears as a heroine in works of Japanese popular culture like *manga*, *anime* and musicals. Her legend may have overshadowed her life, but it has also ensured her immortality.

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## **Terrible Beauty: Aesthetics of Death in Polish and Japanese War Literature**

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### **Abstract**

War narration is inseparably linked to the image of death, which is a very sensitive issue. This paper shows how in two different cultures writers have attempted to turn death into something good, heroic and even beautiful. I am concerned with how death in wartime can arouse an aesthetic response. In discussing the representation of death in the war literature of Poland and Japan, the long-standing question of aesthetic attitudes to the traumatic experience of war in the twentieth century is raised. This paper draws on texts related to the Second World War in Europe and in the Asia-Pacific region.

*Keywords:* death, war literature, comparative literature, aestheticization

## Introduction

There is a Latin maxim—*inter arma silent Musae* (“amidst [the sound of] arms the Muses fall silent”). For contemporary application it would quite possibly have to be complemented by a question mark. The large corpus of literary works to which great world wars have given birth confirms that the question mark is not improper. The twentieth century was the bloodiest in human history and, at the same time, one of the most fertile periods in literature. The world faced the most destructive conflicts in history, such as World War I and World War II, which caused the deaths of millions of men, women and children. Death had never been closer—war became more than a distant and romantic episode; on the contrary, it became daily life. Personal grief and the loss of an individual became lost in a mass bereavement. Certain authors, in Japan, Poland and elsewhere, initiated a response to this overwhelming cruelty and depersonalized death, turning their thoughts and experiences into a variety of literary forms: poetry, drama, memoirs and especially prose (both fiction and non-fiction) based on the events of twentieth-century conflicts. The theme of wartime death became the *leitmotif* of the epoch.

In their introduction to the collection of essays *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future*, Jakob Lothe, Susan Rubin Suleiman and James Phelan claim that “the narratives that endure, and that have the greatest chance of transmitting the story to the future generations, all possess a significant aesthetic dimension” (2012, 2). Nonetheless, throughout the twentieth century, literary critics excluded war narratives from the canon of literature to which aesthetic qualities are assigned, invoking Theodor Adorno’s famous notion that “poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (1981). What made fictional depiction of war controversial in the years following wartime experiences was the risk of dehumanization and destruction becoming normalized and justified.

The research questions of this paper are inspired by a recent acceleration of aesthetics scholarship within contemporary study of war literature. Scholars such as Mark Godfrey and Brett Kaplan call for investigation of various aesthetic strategies that render the Holocaust experience into some kind of beautiful piece of artwork.<sup>1</sup> This approach sets the broad area of the study, important for in-depth reflection. In summary, my deliberations will focus on

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<sup>1</sup> See: B.A. Kaplan (2007), *Unwanted Beauty: Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation*, University of Illinois Press; and M. Godfrey, *Abstraction and the Holocaust*, Yale University Press.

finding beauty within death on the battlefield and in portrayals of dying after the Second World War.

The appropriate methodological approach would require stepping beyond the traditional boundaries of literary studies and expanding them to contain the comparative and the anthropological contexts. The subject of the analysis is culturally different artistic traditions. I have collated various texts to analyze how their authors created meanings in relation to war death.<sup>2</sup> The following study identifies aesthetically oriented elements of these works and examines how battlefield death has been changed into something beautiful. The peculiar parallels between concentration-camp-related fiction and A-bomb *hibakusha* narratives have already been discussed in scholarly writings;<sup>3</sup> however, a parallel between Polish and Japanese war literature has never been drawn. This paper has such a focus, in an attempt to prove that, despite different historical and cultural circumstances as well as various traditions, there are “common places” in approaching the issue of an aesthetic response to war.

### **Aesthetic Attitudes toward Death in War**

From this starting point arises the question: *How has death in war become the subject of an aesthetic experience?* (Ossowski 1973.) The mutual relationship between death and dying, on the one hand, and aesthetics has often been very ambivalent. Death as such is considered to be a traumatic and frightful experience. In this respect, aesthetics almost always deals with the nature of art, beauty, and harmony. So how have these two apparently incompatible concepts, i.e., beauty/harmony and ugliness/chaos, come together? In his famous treaty on aesthetics, entitled *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, the philosopher Edmund Burke states:

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<sup>2</sup> While considering the large body of literature on war and its aftermath, I was very selective about my choice of relevant examples. For the present purpose, I have decided to rely on four novels. They are: *In a Demolished House* (W rozwalonym domu, 1946) by Jan Dobraczynski; *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (Pożegnanie z Marią, 1959) by Tadeusz Borowski; *Summer Flowers* (Natsu no hana, 1947) by Hara Tamiki and *Grave of the Fireflies* (Hotaru no haka, 1967) by Nosaka Akiyuki. I believe that such juxtaposition of post-war writings can offer some insight into the aesthetic aspects of wartime death and dying.

<sup>3</sup> Significant work in this field was a Ph.D. thesis entitled *Critical Comparative Approaches to Testimonial Literature Emergent from the Holocaust and the Atomic Bombings*, written by Gwyneth Bodger (2008, University of Sheffield). In contrast, this present article focuses exclusively on the aesthetic dimension of death in Polish and Japanese literature.

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (1764, 58–59)

In this way aesthetics circumscribes more than only a beauty, having also the capacity to arouse feeling. Wartime death has indeed become a subject of aesthetic consideration, and notions of the portrayal of death are readily explored in contemporary literature. Our understanding of death aesthetics needs to be preceded by a brief recognition of the cult around battlefield death, occurring, as it turns out, from the earliest beginnings of society. Around the world in different eras, death has been glorified by the context and circumstances in which it occurred (Bartov 2000, 15). This has been strongly correlated with the appearance and development of the culturally valorized concept of a “good death,” which evolved as a response to minimize the fatality of death (Bloch and Parry 1982). But interestingly, while the notion has been defined variously in different cultures and societies throughout history, death occurring on the battlefield has always been particularly “glorified and given a great position of honor in society” (Moore and Williamson 2003, 6).

However, a kind of paradox can be observed. The concept of a “good death” is rather broad, but most often it is characterized by a combination of familial fondness, preparation for transition, old age and, to some extent, a painless passing. At the same time, therefore, a sudden death far from home represented a “profound threat to the most fundamental assumptions about the correct way to die” (Faust 2002, 494). But what is exceptionable in peacetime becomes acceptable within the conditions of war, and vice versa. For example, an ideal deathbed is something shockingly abnormal in a time of war. Take the following passage from *To Outwit God*, based on the experiences of Marek Edelman, the last surviving leader of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising: “[W]e laughed a lot about the whole thing, ... how Mikołaj was dying in such a bizarre way, you know, lying between clean sheets, in bed” (Krall 1985, 214).

War-related deaths are denied a peaceful transition to the hereafter, and thereby the ideal of a way to die. Nevertheless, and paradoxically, violent and sudden death has been transformed into an appropriate death—an aesthetic attitude toward battlefield death has developed. This accords with views expressed by the seventh-century-B.C. Spartan poet Tyrtaeus that “it is a beautiful thing for a man to fall in the front line and die fighting for the

country” (cited in Robinson 2006, 14). It is worth noting that from the earliest times there has been a clear distinction between those who died on the battlefield and those who died of other causes. This separation serves a different set of functions, and it thus seems crucial to describe the factors that have contributed to the appearance and development of the battlefield death cult.

Scholars believe this mysterious potency of the battlefield death comes with a voluntary submission to the danger of death (Moore and Williamson 2003). As they explain, participation in war allows one to confront death immediately and, what is more important, intentionally. In popular beliefs, warriors risking their own lives were meant to show their “superhuman status” and power over death. The ancient Greeks placed great importance in the belief that a mortal man could secure immortality for himself by “entering into close contact during his life with the powers of death” (Farnell 1921).

The process of transforming death into something beautiful can be viewed as a response to traumatic events. In particular, the tendency to aestheticize, it is believed, allows us to reduce *angor animi*, or the fear of death (Kuczok 2006, 38). Also, through the frequent portrayal of death, the public becomes used to its presence. Understanding the macabre nature of war requires its familiarization. Artists learned to overcome loss and to use images of death to make a painful history become a subtle and moving experience.

Any discussion on the roots of the aesthetic attitude toward death should also take into account political and ideological factors. Aesthetics was in fact a convenient instrument for propaganda and a type of exhortation to war. A change in public attitudes toward war takes place at the level of ideology, which includes a set of ideas reflecting the social needs and aspirations of an individual group (Barker 2005, 78). In addition, ideology is perceived as a kind of tool for controlling other groups. Wartime governments have to convince the public that war is right. Therefore, a positive image of the battlefield death was created for political purposes. This helped society accept the reality of war.

The process of transforming something awful into something beautiful is called “aestheticization” (Featherstone 1997; Welsch 1999). In a sense, this aesthetically oriented response to the battlefield death is, without a doubt, at least in part the result of a social phenomenon like the cult of wartime death, which is buried deep in ancient times. It is understandable that this cultural heritage still influences the way representation of wartime

death resonates in literature.

Indeed, the aesthetic attitude has accompanied the creation of militaristic ideals in both cultures, developing throughout the centuries of warfare. Accordingly, perhaps one of the greatest similarities is a translation of military ideals into the aesthetic discourse on death. In Poland, war has been strongly idealized in Romanticism, constituting an opposition to the harsh realities of Polish political life. The nineteenth century was a period of political turmoil: From 1795 to 1918, Poland did not exist as an independent state, and its territory was divided among the three neighboring empires of Russia, Prussia and Austria. This turned out to be a decisive factor in shaping Polish soldiers' patriotism, and, consequently, heroic glorification of battlefield death. After 1939 many writers alluded to the traditional ideals of soldiers who stand firm in their faith in God and serve their fatherland with honor till the end of their lives. The military ethos "God, Honor, Fatherland"—the motto of the Polish Army—can be seen as a main structuring element of death in their texts.

Throughout Japan's history, aesthetics has always been strongly embodied in the Samurai phenomenon and sudden violent death on the battlefield. *Bushidō*, the way of the warrior, was the martial and spiritual code the Samurai lived by. According to David A. Dilworth, it involved "absolute loyalty to one's lord, a strong sense of personal honor, devotion to duty, and the courage, if required, to sacrifice one's life in battle or in ritual" (2006, 109). This suggests that immense importance was attached to the circumstances of death. In *Hagakure*—also known as *The Book of the Samurai*—the philosophical treaty that was compiled by Yamamoto Tsunetomo in the early eighteenth century, we can read: "The way of the Samurai is found in death. When it comes to death, there is only the quick choice of death" (2002, 17). Indeed, the ideal samurai warrior was supposed to be fearless in the face of death. Nowadays, as noted by Nitobe Inazō, *bushidō* has greatly influenced the culture and people of Japan (2013). It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that its principles were adapted also in contemporary Japanese war fiction.

There are many other factors which influence the portrayal of war death in literature, such as writers' own experiences, political life, national history and cultural traditions. But in general, it might be said that in Poland and Japan, literary masters for centuries created a relatively beautiful image regarding deaths of brave warriors occurring as a result of armed conflicts. They looked for ways to present war death as a subtle, unrealistic, and even



beautiful spectacle. This is examined by the French writer and philosopher Guy Debord, who coined the concept of the “society of spectacle.” His main idea entails that “in societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation” (Debord 2006, 33). It seems interesting to look at wartime death from an aesthetic perspective and to determine what makes it a stylized form.

### **What Makes Them Heroes?**

As has been noted, death in war is not considered a destructive force, but rather the fulfillment of a warrior’s life. In this aspect, the representation of wartime death in the majority of literary works is undeniably interwoven with the life enjoyed by the dead. This artistic creation emerges from a simplified schema across the usual duality of “us and them,” “good and evil.” In keeping with this view, the representation of dying is a category that distinguishes “our” brave soldiers who found themselves in severe conditions from enemies who are ruthless and threaten world peace. Owing to the existing connection between what is aesthetic and what is good, the glorious death of the hero on the battlefield can be perceived as beautiful.

Common representations of heroes in literature describe their personalities with adjectives that have a positive connotation for the reader. Characteristic features reserved for warriors are noteworthy for their representations of physical strength and vigor; the warrior is usually shown to be a courageous hero who is brave, fearless and tenacious. *In a Demolished House* by Jan Dobraczyński offers an at-once pathetic and heroic portrayal of the Polish scouts involved in defending the Old Town Quarter during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. The novel delivers memorable scenes of death; they include those of liaison Hanna, Lieutenant Mucha, and a young scout named Franek. Those closest to the deceased speak in praise of the dead, simply by listing the most admirable qualities—usually in a superlative form: “the best,” “the most beloved” (Dobraczyński 1983, 235). Throughout the book we observe the idealization of the fallen. For example, Lieutenant Mucha is considered to be “surly” and “eternally dissatisfied” (107). But when pronounced dead, he is presented in a more favourable light—“[i]t seems that this brave Lieutenant died” (100)—as his subordinates realize that they have lost someone very important to them.

Catholicism plays a prominent role in the lives of many Poles. Religion is found to influence perceptions of beauty, for “all things are beautiful as they are grounded in God.” Therefore, the model of an ideal wartime death seems to be defined through fighting for the faith. In *In a Demolished House*, we read: “They [Resistance fighters] who perished while fighting for a great cause do not die. All the great causes have their beginning in the heaven above. We are not divided from heaven by an unsurpassable wall. The heaven also takes part in our fight” (Dobraczynski, 1983, 120–121). Therefore, we can conclude that it is God who inspires heroic deeds in wartime.<sup>4</sup> Polish warriors are portrayed as ready to die for independence and for the rebirth of their country, even if they operate outside the law. This lofty goal entirely legitimizes the killing of enemies, because in their enemies they do not see living people: “It [a German soldier] was a walking abomination” (ibid., 205).

Nevertheless, even though the soldiers are permitted to kill their enemies, they are not allowed to finish off allies who are mortally wounded. Under the influence of the Christian faith, a battlefield death is considered as part of God’s ultimate plan; as such, in Dobraczyński’s novel the endurance of physical pain and suffering is presented as a good thing, something that brings salvation and honor. Warsaw Uprising insurgents were resigned to death—explaining to themselves that it was the will of God (ibid., 59). Such a belief has its foundation in the tradition of Polish Messianism—the claim that Poland is a “chosen nation.” In the Second World War this mode of patriotism continued and was strongly connected with Catholic writers and their faith.<sup>5</sup> The fact that Poland was on the winning side of the war made possible the success of this principle that Polish soldiers fought with divine providence.<sup>6</sup> However, the totality of the Second World War and the mass exterminations committed during the conflict, such as the Holocaust and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, led to concerns about an idealized and oversimplified view of these atrocities.

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<sup>4</sup> Moreover, a battlefield death ensures that a warrior’s soul will be taken to Paradise. As the Polish poet Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński wrote in his famous poem, “A song of the soldiers of Westerplatte”: “When their days had been filled / and it was time to die in the summer, / They went straight to heaven in a coach-and-four, / the soldiers of Westerplatte. / They sang: Ah, ‘tis nothing / that our wounds were so painful, / for now it is sweet to walk / the heavenly fields.”

<sup>5</sup> The idea of suffering for the Polish nation was verbalized by many Polish writers. More examples can be found in Stanisław Cieślak’s article “Religiosity in Polish Literature,” published in *Values in the Polish Cultural Tradition* (2002, ed. Leon Dyczewski, Washington, DC: Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, 85–119).

<sup>6</sup> Notably, it was only a qualified victory. Although liberated from the Nazis, Poland became a Communist satellite of the U.S.S.R.

Writers dealing with the mass deaths of ordinary citizens questioned the traditional realm of “glory and sacrifice” because the majority of the dead in the conflict were noncombatants—those nameless civilians who postmortem were unknown to anyone and who were deprived of their characteristic features.

Between 1945 and 1948, Tadeusz Borowski, a concentration-camp survivor, wrote a number of stories about his experiences in Auschwitz. He turned to a broader overview of the “machinery of death” within the concentration camp and, unlike in the previous narratives discussed above, did not emphasize the heroic deeds of a protagonist facing the enemy. Instead, he wrote about a hideous existence in extremely dehumanizing conditions, and he focused on moral decline. In fact, he went even further, and blurred the distinction between victims and villains. He demonstrated that the prisoners who wanted to save their lives could be just as inhumane and anti-Semitic as their oppressors. In his story *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* the main protagonist, Tadek, a non-Jewish prisoner forced to work in the camp, tells another prisoner, “You see, my friend, you see, I don't know why, but I am furious, simply furious with these people [the Jews]—furious because I must be here because of them. I feel no pity. I am not sorry they're going to the gas chamber. Damn them all! I could throw myself at them, beat them with my fists” (40).

As Daniel Schwarz argues, Borowski's narrative reduces life to “a survival of the fittest where conventional morality gives way to the rule of the jungle” (1999, 133). From this perspective, heroes are those who have looked death in the eye. For example, in the aforementioned story Borowski recalls a beautiful blonde girl who decided that she did not want to be sent to the work camp and instead chooses to die in the gas chamber. Avoidance of a shameful life at a concentration camp is ultimately the reason for her decision to sacrifice her life. What makes her different, and thus heroic for Borowski, is her awareness of the hopelessness of her situation and her refusal to go on living within it. There is a mixture of beauty and breathless horror in her death:

Here, standing before me, is a girl, a girl with enchanting blonde hair, with beautiful breasts, wearing a little cotton blouse, a girl with a wise, mature look in her eyes. Here she stands, gazing straight into my face, waiting. And over there is the gas chamber: communal death, disgusting and ugly. And over in the other direction is the concentration camp: the shaved head, the heavy Soviet trousers in sweltering heat, the sickening, stale odour of dirty, damp female bodies, the animal hunger, the inhuman labour, and later the same gas chamber, only an even more hideous, more terrible death.... (1976, 44)

Through his heroine, Borowski presents the spirit of individualism in an impersonal universe. This connection between the concepts of fearlessness and independence gives death an idealistic appeal. Personal identity is present in the minds of many characters throughout war narratives, and death serves as an option to preserve the self in its context.<sup>7</sup> Almost paradoxically, death becomes an expression of freedom in times of enslavement. In this way, readers come closer to recognizing the humanity of those who have perished, and of those who tried to survive in an inhumane environment.

In the face of overwhelming inhumanity, it is important to seek to understand how the individual deals with extreme conditions and maintains dignity. In the case of Japan, throughout all of the violence and suffering, wartime death in *hibakusha* literature (written by atomic-bomb survivors) is associated with positive emotions generated by the experience of courage, love and friendship, rather than being associated with fear or anger. Such positive attitudes are a characteristic feature of a corpus of literary works that explore the theme of victimhood; one such work that explores these positive themes is Hara Tamiki's *Summer Flowers*. An important feature of Tamiki's book is the belief that whereas the Imperial Japan regime was responsible for many war atrocities, a sense of moral values did not collapse among the majority of the Japanese. Such a moral stance and system of strong ethics greatly helped the Japanese to overcome the harmful consequences of the atomic bombing and paved the way for them to renounce revenge.

Many Japanese authors writing of war illustrate the life of a character that is dying. Hara's portrayal is something of a case apart among the narratives under consideration, since all of her representations signal how Japanese people who survived the bombings of Hiroshima were dedicated to helping others. A good example is a story about Hara's brother saving his wife and maid; later he is described rescuing an old man from a neighboring house. This image of mutual assistance, which Hara replicates in other chapters, counterpoints the horrors of the atomic bombing. Moreover, this representation conveys an optimistic feeling of hope for rebirth after the tragedy—the point being that life must continue even under the shadow of a horrific amount of death.

Harmony with nature—an important aesthetic concept of traditional Japanese culture—

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<sup>7</sup> A similar resonance pervades *A World Apart* by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, in which the former communist Michaił Kostylew commits suicide by pouring boiling water over his body. He causes his own death more directly but still expresses an objection to the reality of his situation (Stabro 1997).

became a prominent element in Hara's narratives. This mode of Shinto thinking also plays a crucial role in *bushidō*. The point here is that the Samurai is no different from the blossom: as the traditional idiom goes, "From among flowers, the cherry blossom; from among men, the samurai." The glorious wartime death is frequently identified with the cultural icon of the cherry blossom (*sakura*). In contemporary Japanese literature, such a portrayal applies not only to soldiers, but also to civilians. As Hara narrates:

A few yards away from us, two schoolgirls lay groaning for water under a cherry tree, faces burned black.... [A] woman whose face was smoked dry joined them.... [S]he stretched out her legs listlessly, oblivious to the dying girls. (1985, 49)

In 1967 Nosaka Akiyuki published *Grave of the Fireflies*, a work that displays the tenets of *bushidō* through its portrayal of the children's father, a naval Captain. He serves as a symbol of Japanese masculinity—in Seita's photography he is presented as a man dressed in uniform revealing his male potency and status as a soldier (Nosaka 1978, 447). According to his children, he is an honorable person who will take revenge for their sorrow and suffering. Unfortunately, after Japan surrenders to the Allied Powers, Seita's father is presumed to be dead: "no news from his father a naval first lieutenant aboard a cruiser" (*ibid.*, 447). This information is not stated explicitly in the passage, of course, but it is expressed through the symbol of Japan's drowned navy and Seita's words "papa's dead too, papa's dead too" (*ibid.*, 460). This event indicates Seita and Setsuko's father's absolute loyalty to the emperor and the country. As we have seen, courage and honor lie at the very heart of Japanese culture. But this nationalistic effort and feeling of loyalty becomes nothing more than a parody when, at the end of World War II, Emperor Hirohito renounces his divinity and the archetypal tale of sacrifice and nationalism is revealed to be based on a false notion of divine intervention. After the Emperor's renunciation, a collapse of faith occurred in the Japanese sense of self-sacrifice for the emperor and for Japan itself; and this collapse of faith turned death into a futile and meaningless gesture (Orr 2001). In this context, Nosaka provides a reinterpretation of the nihilistic view of death and destiny which places particular interest not in the hero warrior, but in the young civilian victims.

This newfound attention to the plight of the civilian during wartime is particularly prominent in the literature during the period after the Second World War, which manifests in the focus on the youngest victims of the war, mostly schoolboys and schoolgirls. For example,

Nosaka's *Grave* is centered on a beautifully told story of two children from the port city of Kobe. The main characters are Seita, a fourteen-year-old boy, and his four-year-old sister Setsuko. Here again the protagonists' ages are exalted. Moreover, any attempt to act like an adult is presented negatively and leads to misery; in the story, Seita's decision to take care of his sister by himself foreshadows the beginning of their end because it symbolizes a move away from the purity and innocence of childhood into an adult world that is saturated in war. In the story, these children are unable to understand the odious nature of war and thus are unable to sustain themselves. This thematic content is undoubtedly related to the ephemeral nature of life and of worldly things in general that is so deeply embedded in Japanese culture. Yoshida Kenkō addresses this notable aesthetic feature in his 14th-century *Essays in Idleness*: "We cannot live forever in this world, why should we wait for ugliness to overtake us? The longer man lives, the more shame he endures" (1967, 8). The author convinces his readers that the death of young people allows them to retain dignity and minimize moral damage.

The death of children is widely addressed in the literature from the post-war period. Unlike in Poland, in Japan dying young is recognized as a core element of the Japanese hero. In *Summer Flowers*, as John Treat recognizes, the only individual corpse described in detail is the young Fumihiko's (1995, 148). Hara writes that "[f]luid oozed from an immense abscess on his shirtless chest. White teeth were faintly visible on the black burnt face. The fingers on the outstretched hands were stiff and turned inward. The fingernails were held like claws" (1985, 63). Despite Fumihiko's disfigurement, his was the only body in the story that could be identified. All of the other bodies described were disfigured beyond recognition; here the identification of Fumihiko's body symbolizes the special nature of his loss. The reader must confront his corpse and acknowledge without any doubt the death of a child.

In Poland, society associates death with old age, therefore any descriptions of the death of children in warfare are confronted with trepidation and unease. In such a culture where youthful death is considered abnormal, writers add the elements of adulthood to the young warriors, thereby making their death more acceptable. In the novel *In a Demolished House*, it is explained in a passage that "[d]eath makes a person an adult" (Dobraczynski 1946, 117). In the novel, children are referred to as warriors and soldiers and described with language that connotes maturity and adult agency. Once the barriers are broken down, a positive image appears.

### **Between Mass and Individual**

Having discussed the portrayal of the characters facing death and decay, I shall now broaden my analysis by considering how the act of dying in wartime is represented in the war literature. It is now widely acknowledged that the most notable and shared problem with representing death is an incapacity to “present the unrepresentable,” as it has been defined by Jean-François Lyotard (1984). Therefore, the representation of death always requires some kind of a simplification. When war death is inscribed in a narrative framework, it can be described from two perspectives: One focuses on the individual, the other on the group. Depending on the type of dying, different methods and techniques are used.

Characteristically, the representation of the protagonist’s dying moments is highly detailed. The author uses slow-motion effects (a term borrowed from films) which extend the celebration of the whole process by turning it into a fascinating ritual full of theatrical gestures. The deliberate accretion of details regarding wartime death is an attempt to construct a meaningful framework of the event. An important death scene in *In a Demolished House* involves a young scout named Krzyś who was wounded during a fight. It includes all the details about his death and the circumstances surrounding it. The author presents the pain and suffering the boy goes through in an intense and detailed way.

Later in the scene, he weakens slowly, and the author writes, “He had been overtaken now by more and more befuddled weakness. His body hung heavily from the hands of another” (ibid., 223). Time seems to pass more slowly than normal. When his last moments occur, he has the benefit of expressing sorrow for his sins and receiving the last sacrament from Father Marek. This act of confession not only brings spiritual solace, but also emphasizes the awareness of death.

In a scene from Nosaka’s *Grave of the Fireflies*, we find similar thematic content where the death scene is prolonged to emphasize a final confrontation with mortality. Yet here, Nosaka went even further, as he made the entire novel a prolongation of Seita and Setsuko’s dying. The story begins with the premise that the main characters must die, and then it follows the path to their inevitable demise, as is illustrated in the text’s opening lines: “Seita died”; “[t]he white bones were those of Seita’s younger sister Setsuko, who died on August 22 in a cave, their air-raid shelter” (Nosaka 1978, 446–447). This description creates a pervasive tone

of powerlessness from the very beginning of the text, but it also presents the fearless acceptance of one's own death in such extraordinary circumstances as war.

The emphasis on passivity and victimhood is further shown in the symbolism of the fireflies that are mentioned throughout the story. The use of fireflies is one of the few events that signifies joy, but, as the critic W. Goldberg pointed out, “they also symbolize the fires that burned Japan and the lives that were lost during the war” (2009, 42).

The night after Setsuko dies, an enormous group of fireflies appears around Seita: 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. (Nosaka 1978, 461)

Here again, a strong positive image provides a spiritual solace. Significantly, when Setsuko finally dies, the event is mirrored by a change in the weather: “The typhoon had passed by the following day, the sky, suddenly colored deeply with shades of autumn, was filled with cloudless sunshine” (ibid., 461). This beautiful representation encourages optimism and positive thoughts in readers, recalling associations of a belief in an afterlife.

The second element common to individual death scenes is the significant role of the burial scene. When liaison Hanna dies in *In a Demolished House*, her body is brought back home. Dobraczyński provides a rich description of funeral rites, including the cleansing and dressing of the deceased's body. Afterwards, the closest friends enter into a time of “bereavement,” when prayers are recited. This ritual gives time to say goodbye and to adjust to the new situation.

In a similar manner, much attention is paid to the details that follow the death of Setsuko in Nosaka's *Grave*. Firstly, Seita is sent to the crematorium and decides to prepare all cremation rites by himself. Nosaka writes, “[Seita] dug a hole on a hill overlooking Manchitani, placing Setsuko in the wicker basket, stuffing the doll, the purse, her underwear, everything, around her” (1978, 461). This is a very personal and private time for Seita. Much of the aesthetics in this scene comes from Nosaka's masterful employment of the sentimental image from “before” the bombing. Setsuko's funeral might be described as beautiful in comparison to Seita's, who “was cremated along with the corpses of 20 or 30 other homeless children” (ibid., 461), or their mother, whose dead body was sprawled alongside the furniture: “in the field below Ichio there was a hole, diameter 10 yards, where the ridge poles, pillars, doors, sliding screens of evacuated buildings were randomly piled up, the corpses on top”



(ibid., 452).

It is important to notice that among these novels, individual death is contrasted with mass dying. Repeatedly, in contrast to individual death, the image of collective murder lacks clear contours, close-ups, and characteristic details (Stabro 2002, 308). The patterns for describing mass death are those of an appalling spectacle in which the individual is pushed into the background and lost among a pile of bodies, disfigured and indistinguishable from the rest.

This type of description of mass death presents the reader with an example of the *grotesque*. Borowski undertakes the theme of communal death in the gas chamber, which he describes as “disgusting and ugly.” The first-person narrator situates the omnipresent death in a descriptive tone:

I go back inside the train; I carry out dead infants; I unload luggage. I touch corpses, but I cannot overcome the mounting, uncontrollable terror. I try to escape from the corpses, but they are everywhere: lined up on the gravel, on the cement edge of the ramp, inside the cattle cars. Babies, hideous naked women, men twisted by convulsions. (1976, 45)

The victims are usually nameless. Extreme examples of this kind of depersonalization are when people are described as “heads,” and when the camp inmates are compared to animals or insects. Borowski begins his story *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* by equating delousing with the extermination procedure in the gas chambers: “Cyclone B solution, an efficient killer of lice in clothing and of men in gas chambers” (ibid., 29). Later in the same story, the narrator says: “Now they push towards the opened door, breathing like fish cast out on the sand,” and describes dead infants being carried out from the train carriages as “chickens, holding several in each hand” (ibid., 39). Tony McKibbin comments on the existence of certain aesthetic conventions in Borowski’s prose that convey the reality of war:

[W]hat he wanted to do was make his language pragmatically survivalist and also, more strangely, horrible poetic, as if determined to produce metaphors and similes out of the camps that were new, capable of reflecting the casual terror of the experience, and one’s sense of implication in the relation to the events. This combination of paratactic simplicity, linguistic neologisms and distinctive metaphors and similes, makes Borowski’s work not ‘merely’ testament but literature. (McKibbin, 2)

The presented examples echo Wolfgang Kayser’s understanding of the grotesque as a presentation of a world turned upside down, with “human bodies reduced to puppets, marionettes, and automata, and their faces frozen into masks” (1957, 183). The human form is unnaturally distorted—such planned manipulation erases a clear distinction between reality and fiction and provides the reader with a strong aesthetic experience. This approach toward

the subject of wartime death has been developed in postwar society: The grotesque became an important component of the Polish literary world.

The Japanese writers also employ the grotesque. For example, decomposing and oddly deformed bodies occupy a predominant place. For Hara Tamiki the unnatural means “indistinguishable with respect to gender” (Norris 2000, 202). His characters often do not possess feminine or masculine features. In my opinion, however, grotesquerie is not the dominant approach. Japan’s culture is much more aesthetically oriented than the Polish one. This can be observed in Japanese works’ representations of mass death, which are not always explicit. Authors use symbolism in their accounts of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, establishing what may be called “non-existent death.” This technique relies on the power of suggestion. Indeed, this is especially true for Hara Tamiki, who describes the bomb blast and the subsequent property destruction and fallen trees.

In the view of John Treat, “it is typical of *Summer Flowers* that characters come and go with no explanation” (1995, 142). Hara has mastered his technique at the story’s end, when the reader is captivated with the dramatic understatement. In the final scene, the reader’s attention is directed toward a man called simply “N.” who is searching for his wife: “After three days and three nights of looking at the dead and injured and being sickened by them, N. went back again to the girls’ school where his wife was employed” (1985, 60). With his mission unfulfilled, we are left with a sense of emptiness and compassion. The reader shares the feelings with those who could not find their relatives.

The category of *mono no aware* (understood as “the pathos of things”) is significant here as a response to the mass death. This convention has no correspondence in Polish literary works. Hara draws attention to the terrible beauty of the scenery after the atomic bombing, and then emphasizes this image through a comparison to surreal art:

Amid the vast silvery expanse of nothingness that lay under the glaring sun, there were the roads, the river, the bridges, and the stark naked, swollen bodies. The limbs of the corpses, which seemed to have become rigid after struggling in their last agony, had a kind of haunting rhythm. In the scattered electric wires and countless wrecks there was embodied a spasmodic design in nothingness. The burnt and toppled streetcar and the horse with its huge belly on the ground gave one an impression of a world described by a Dali surrealist painting. (Ibid., 51)

This parallel gives death an emotional appeal. Amidst the presented destruction and tragic loss of life, mass death can be perceived as beautiful (Treat 1995, 139). The techniques used

by these writers allow the readers to maintain a proper distance from the presented events, so that the death becomes unreal. The less the bodies resemble human figures, the easier one can get used to their death. Also, the use of landscape aesthetics simplifies the setting in order to achieve the effect of unreality in the literary world.

### **The Question of Aesthetics**

To summarize, my analysis has aimed to prove that aesthetics has become a reaction in post-war writing. Whatever moral or intellectual doubts may appear, aestheticization in war literature seems to be unavoidable. A consideration of the set of aesthetics in both Poland and Japan is essential in analyzing the image of death in their war literatures. This article has presented to what extent command values and moral principles have inspired the aesthetic approach toward battlefield death, and how they have been implemented by twentieth-century writers. It suggests that the aesthetic experience may be achieved by integrating military prowess and martial ideals offered by ancient warriors into the literature.

In the post-war atmosphere of misery, there appears to be a need for a restoration of values. The years of World War II brought, once again, a renaissance in the traditional appreciation that was associated with the representation of heroes. If we look into the presented stories we will see roots in the ancient cults of warriors conducive to the development of a positive image of battlefield death in literary output. In this context, ideology plays a very important role in communicating certain attitudes and values which are desirable in a given society. For the civilians, the aesthetic representation of battlefield death in literature acts to protect their psyches from the impending danger of the conflict.

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