

Symposium Report

Date and Time: 11:30 am to 16:15 pm, Saturday, January 11th, 2020

Place: Sophia University, Yotsuya Campus

Title: Crossing Over to the Other Side – Perspectives on Postwar and Contemporary Japanese Art and Literature

Title of each presentation, presenter's name & affiliation

1. Munia Hweidi, Sophia University, PhD candidate, *A Lyrical History of a Multi-layered Reality*

2. Valentia Giammaria, Sophia University, PhD student 2nd year, *The Inner Side: Murakami Haruki and the Post-Modern Self*

3. Ji Hye Han, Sophia University, PhD student 2nd year, *“Skin of the Nation:” Tomatsu Shomei and Postwar Japan*

4. Kanako Tajima, Sophia University alumna, *“Americanized” Japanese Female Body in “Cut Piece”*

Title of keynote speech, speaker's name & affiliation

“Ecocriticism and Japanese Literature Studies: A Speculative Turn” Dr.Christine Marran, University of Minnesota

Summary of the symposium (aim of the symposium, summary of each presentation, comments by discussants, and result of the symposium etc.)

The aim of the symposium was to organize a discussion on the Other Side of reality—the unseen and unheard, the hidden side—in postwar Japan, found in the expressions of the following artists and writers: Ishimure Michiko (1927-2018), Tomatsu Shomei (1930-2012), Yoko Ono (1933~), and Murakami Haruki (1949~).

Dr. Christine Marran opened her keynote speech by saying that she would like to take this symposium as an opportunity to think about the material reality in postwar Japan and how it influenced the way writers of postwar Japan wrote and the way the readers read their works. Her talk mostly focused on a different model of thinking about interpretation of literature. Dr. Marran took Ishimura Michiko's works on Minamata as an example of what she calls "obligate storytelling", which she defines as a writing that addresses the condition of the world that refuses humanistic writing traditions with a particular focus on the relationship of the "more than human world". Dr. Marran then discussed the turn towards the fantastic in the postwar era and proposed the question of how to read such literature and interpret films approaching the same issue. She mentioned how in the act of creation there is a crossing over to the creative and that in turn crosses over to the self. Dr. Marran continued by giving an overview of how the more than human world, otherwise known as landscape, is produced in order to produce the self. She largely discussed how in this approach mimesis makes the more than human world real through the creative process. Dr. Marran also discussed how speculative realism might allow the audience to address agency in literature and art beyond the formulation of mimesis. In this case there is an acceptance of the environmental landscape and its relation to the self and its resistance to substitution, allegory, and symbolism. She concluded that the job of the reader is to think of and wrangle the strategies that allow them to put these issues into question in relation to postwar Japanese literature, art, and literary criticism.

In her presentation, Valentina Giammaria explored Murakami Haruki's latest novel *Killing Commendatore* (2017) and its peculiar narrative based on the continuous interactions between the main character's "inner side" or "inner self", namely, the conscious and unconscious part of his soul, and the "other side", which corresponds to both the physical and the metaphysical worlds. She started by introducing Murakami Haruki's narrative in *Killing Commendatore*, explaining the central role of the main character and his quasi-god-like abilities of shaping the other side by the means of his conscious/unconscious. Then she focused on the concept of *idea*, a crucial one in *Killing Commendatore*, and demonstrated how Murakami's *ideas* become the bedrock whereupon the other world can finally take form. Lastly, she engaged in a discourse on post-modernity, paying particular attention to its relation with the novel and the abovementioned concepts. What does post-modern self mean? What are the post-modern self main problematics and how does he cope with them? How does the post-modern self consider himself in relation to the *other*? What is the meaning of the *other* for the post-modern self? Professor Angela Yiu offered her comments. She pointed out "double structure ("a narrative based on the continuous interactions between the main character's "inner side" or "inner self", namely, the conscious

and unconscious part of his soul, and the “other side”, which corresponds to both the physical and the metaphysical worlds”) in Valentina’s study was very appealing because it was so neat, and it resonated with all the neat parallelism structured into Murakami’s story. Then Professor Yiu offered a few questions regarding how in framing of this narrative in postmodern criticism, isn’t the structure and content of the story too neat and stable? Can the binary identified in the reading be problematized? Is Murakami really postmodern? Or is he in the end more of a structuralist? Professor Yiu further commented by pointing out that this is not the first time that Murakami relied on the pre-modern to create the post-modern. Relating to this, she asked whether Murakami’s postmodern was born of the premodern in the Japanese tradition, since the premodern rejects a single, stable reality and embraces the concept of a world that embodies multiple temporal, spatial, and narrative dimensions. If so, how is Murakami’s postmodern different from the premodern? What are the other elements featured in Murakami’s postmodern narrative? Next, in regards to Valentina’s idea of a subjectivity, Professor Yiu encouraged her to problematize the postmodern and the postmodern subjectivity in depicting or creating an external reality, especially with regards to history, which Murakami refers often in this story and other stories. Also she posed some questions relating to this aspect of Valentina’s presentation: You used the term quasi-god to describe the narrator, but does that also suggest the danger for a subjectivity endowed with such ability or status to manipulate or distort reality to fit a new type of grand narrative? By extension, what is Murakami’s approach to history (something that cannot and should not simply be confined to a single subjectivity)? Lastly, she noted how the ending of the story seems to be an acknowledgement of social and economic reality as we know it—a broken marriage mended, the birth of a child (hope and happiness), and the artist returned to being a professional portrait painter to earn a living. She asked if Valentina could comment on Murakami’s decision to follow the conventional closure? Is this an acknowledgement of the “grand scheme of things” that postmodern fiction supposedly rejects, and if so, does the closure problematize your claim that this is a postmodern novel? Following is Valentina’s Q&A session summary: why do you define the main character as a quasi-god? What does the main character create in order to be considered a quasi-god? Why is the post-modern self considered a quasi-god? How does the landscape influence the narration?

In Munia Hweidi’s presentation, she discussed Ishimure Michiko’s *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow: Our Minamata Disease* as testimony of the history of the Minamata protest movement during the postwar era. She set out by discussing the context of *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow* and background information on Ishimure Michiko. Munia explained that *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow* can be seen based on Ishimura’s experience of witnessing the devastating aftereffects of the Chisso Company’s pollution of the Shiranui Sea. However, she noted that *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow* can also be read as an ecocritical work that makes use of various modes of storytelling to depict a human story of suffering, perseverance and hope in the middle of a tragedy caused and made even more complicated by politics and industrialism. Then she discussed genre and structure style of Michiko’s *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow*. Lastly, she mentioned characters and setting of the work. She concluded with saying that the novel could be seen as a rebuttal against those charts, statistics, and mechanical repetitions by showing the ‘human being’ and all that the individual entails, from soul and family, to tradition and culture and providing a storytelling of their existence. Munia stated that storytelling of Minamata is a global one in the current face of rapid

environmental change and calls for drastic responses in the face of global environmental disasters. After the presentation, Professor Yiu offered her comments. She said that though Munia discussed thoroughly the art of fiction and storytelling in her paper, she felt there was one major question that begs more head-on treatment; that is, why do we need fiction and storytelling in addressing what appears to be a collection of environmental, political, and social issues? Won't storytelling, and especially the subject view of a poet and artist, be an obstacle in the human attempt to a rational understanding of the issues involved? This is a question that ecocriticism must ask. Also, she said that what Ishimure explores most intensely in her work is the meaning of suffering. She also pointed out that the language of storytelling is particularly important because Ishimure is not simply writing about the environment as an activist. What Ishimure addresses in her storytelling has to do with ethics, morality, justice, lost traditions, and aesthetics, and the literary language is especially adept in such inquiries. She told Munia that her strength in this presentation and in all her work is a great commitment and sensitivity to details and close reading. She urged her to meditate on the larger meaning to produce a scholarly work that addresses the issues on a broad and deep philosophical level and as well as a detailed philological level. In responding to Professor Yiu's comments Munia gave a summary of Spencer Holst's short story *The Zebra Storyteller* as an example of the importance of storytelling as it gives storytelling the role of history, caution, and teachings. The importance of looking at the environment lies in the current state of the world as a cautionary tale and a look at hope and suffering and attempting to reconcile this with our reality. Munia was then asked during the Q&A whether she noticed any details within the novel to show the shifts between the characters and narratives in addition to being asked of her opinion on how Murakami's writing defers over Ishimure's in terms of the relationship with the environment. She responded that on a on a visual level, even without being able to read the language, just looking at how Ishimure Michiko structures the work, just flipping through the pages she takes advantage of the writing systems of katakana, hiragana, and kanji to distinguish and create visual friction in terms of flow. There is also a sharp shift in dialect and language from the start language of the medical reports to the lyrics and language of the Minamata dialect as a form of friction and resistance in preserving the Minamata dialect. As for how Ishimure approached nature, in her narratives nature revolves around itself, and also revolves around the people. Nature is allowed to exist as a separate entity; however, Murakami's works revolve around the Boku or Watashi character and the existence of nature is polarized by and magnetized to the central character.

In Ji Hye Han's presentation, she talked about the theme of postwar Japan through Tomatsu Shomei, who is one of the significant photographers of the postwar period Japan. The discussion mainly focused on Tomatsu's best-known series, the *Occupation* series. She set out her talk with some significant background information on the allied occupation of Japan and postwar Japanese photography in relation to Tomatsu's oeuvre. She then explored Tomatsu's engagement with the U.S.- Japan relationship which heavily influenced his portrayal of the postwar reality. Also, the presenter discussed how the photographer further expanded on the topic of Occupation and the theme of national identity during his later years. She concluded that though Tomatsu's answer to the question of Japan's national identity may

be only partial, his *Occupation Series* still remains invaluable in that they address some of the most pivotal issues surrounding the postwar Japan. In his delineation of postwar Japan through which Tomatsu shows how Japan had been much struggling with the shadows of the postwar, the photographer seems to ask whether the postwar in Japan is truly over. As for the feedback, Professor Michio Hayashi gave her his views at first. He pointed out that though much of what Ji Hye discussed is already largely studied by many scholars, her take on Tomatsu's interest in national identity issue is intriguing. Also, he asked how Tomatsu's previous works could be connected to Tomatsu's *Occupation Series*. Ji Hye explained that in both his previous works and his *Occupation Series*, Tomatsu pay attention to the other side of reality (i.e., the unseen and unheard, the hidden side). A following question from the audience was on the issue of race in Tomatsu's oeuvre. Ji Hye answered that it is one of the aspects that she is also interested in. She mentioned that there is one Japanese scholar who treated Filipino GIs in Tomatsu's photographs, but she said that she needs to investigate more into this topic. Also, another student asked a question on Tomatsu's works on Okinawans. The presenter answered that in her opinion the photographer's works on Okinawan seems to be related to stereotypes to a certain extent. Professor Hayashi and Professor Noriko Murai, however, suggested that it may necessarily be so.

Kanako Tajima's presentation was on Yoko Ono's performance work, *Cut Piece*, which was performed in Kyoto, Tokyo, New York, and London from 1964 to 1966. In this work, Ono sat on stage and asked the audience to cut her clothes with a pair of scissors placed in front of her. Tajima problematized the past (feminist) readings of this work by pointing out that many have dichotomized the relationship between the audience and the artist as the aggressive male audience against Ono's vulnerable and passive female body. However, this type of scholarship had neglected how the meaning of Ono's body fluctuated within different socio-political, cultural, and temporal contexts, depending on the locations of the performances. Thus, Tajima argued that Ono, having spent more than a decade in the U.S, appeared as an "Americanized" Japanese female artist for the performances in Japan in 1964 and explored how her body appeared during the period of the postwar Americanization of Japanese society. Tajima mainly discussed the postwar cultural phenomenon of *yōsai* culture (Western-dressmaking culture) among Japanese women and how the act of "cutting of clothes" could be interpreted in connection to the *yōsai* culture, as the act of *art-making*. The commentator Professor Hayashi first suggested Tajima to further explore the variety of images of the "Americanized" Japanese female body in the 1960s, mentioning "*miyuki-zoku*" as an example. In the Q&A session, Prof. Murai noted Ono's request to the audience to cut her clothes might have been a consciously ironic statement against the *yōsai* culture that was popular among Japanese women.

This symposium, which was an occasion to have lively discussions on the other side of postwar reality in Japan, received many positive feedbacks from the participants, audiences, and the faculties and staff who helped with organizing this event.