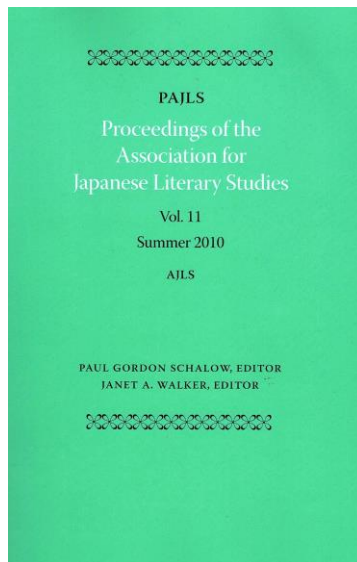


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Yoriko’s ‘Don Quixote’s Debate’”

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# A Literary Assault on Neo-Liberalism

## Shōno Yoriko's "Don Quixote's Debate"

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In April 1998 Shōno Yoriko 笙野 頼子 (1956–), a contemporary Japanese writer and the recent recipient of Japan's top prize for non-commercial literature, was outraged when she read the article "Junbungaku tōzakaruru kitai heisoku jōkyō ga hyōgen no kiki wo maneku" 純文学遠ざかる期待閉塞情況が表現の危機を招く (Fading Expectations for Pure Literature—Insular Conditions Beckon a Crisis of Representation)<sup>1</sup> on the pages of the *Yomiuri Shinbun* 読売新聞, one of Japan's most widely read newspapers. While Shōno, whose recent writings might best be termed "fantastic criticism" or "critical fantasy,"<sup>2</sup> vehemently disagreed with the points of view expressed in the article, her anger was directed at the fact that the *Yomiuri Shinbun* was participating in what she terms "pure literature bashing" and actively generating the anti-pure literature sentiment that it was reporting upon.<sup>3</sup> Though printed in the "bungei nōto" 文芸ノート (Notes on Art and Literature) column, a potentially safe space for non-revenue-generating creative work, the article was roundly critical of literature that "was hard to understand," had "no story line," and, furthermore, did not sell. From former literary prize judges who said they did not want to "waste the remaining time they had left" reading works that they no longer derived any pleasure from, to popular writers who were not able to follow

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<sup>1</sup>Ukai, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>With her 1995 publication of *Taiyō no miko* 太陽の巫女 (Shamaness of the Sun) Shōno introduced an exploration of the power shifts within the history of Japanese mythology which she continues to weave into much of her writing through the present. Her fiction often merges historiographic analysis with explicit criticism of contemporary socio-economic dynamics, making much of her work a hybrid of criticism and fantastic fiction. With the exception of her 1994 Akutagawa Prize-winning *Taimu surippu konbinaato* タイムスリップコンビナート (The Time-Slip Complex) Shōno's writing, to my knowledge, has not been translated into English. All translations here are my own.

<sup>3</sup>See Champagne, pp. 22-27 for an analysis of such circular logic, in which the increasing proliferation of organs of mass media heightens rather than lessens ideological homogeneity. Champagne, a close colleague of the French sociologist and anti-globalization activist Pierre Bourdieu, whom Shōno frequently references, argues that media often create "public issues" by focusing their attention on the interests of the "journalistic-political field."

a word and could only ask “What the hell is this?,” none of the parties quoted had a single positive thing to say about the role of serious literature. The literary journal *Bungeishunjū* 文芸春秋 had sponsored Japan’s two most well-recognized literary prizes—the Akutagawa-shō 芥川賞 (Akutagawa Prize) for pure literature and the Naoki-shō 直木賞 (Naoki Prize) for popular literature—since 1935, but in some quarters of the publishing world the lack of sales and the perceived insularity of pure literature were contributing to the sentiment that the two prizes could best be collapsed into one.<sup>4</sup> “The number of people troubled by that would be very few indeed,” the writer of the above-mentioned column, Ukai Tetsuo 鵜飼哲夫, opined, “if there were no longer any distinction between popular and serious literature and the separate prizes were to become one.” Given the sentiment behind collapsing the two prizes, the potentially consolidated prize would almost certainly be dominated by high-grossing commercial literature.

Even before articulating his support for the removal of an award that provided structural support for serious literature—in the form of media publicity, re-printing, prize money, and bookstore showcasing<sup>5</sup>—the very position of Ukai Tetsuo, the Yomiuri reporter, was already symptomatic of the greater shift away from valuing the contributions of serious literature: he was a non-expert in the field in charge of a dwindling “arts and literature” section in the Yomiuri Newspaper, which took up less than half the space than it had a decade earlier.<sup>6</sup> The casual assignment of an editor with little interest in non-commercial literature to the arts and literature section of the newspaper meant that the millions of Yomiuri subscribers were being subtly pushed away from serious literature even before they might decide for themselves that they were not interested.<sup>7</sup> Keenly aware of the mass media’s ability to reach such great numbers and concerned about the collusion between the mass media and the increasingly profit-driven publishing industry, Shōno committed herself to launching a public debate about the merits of maintaining a place for serious literature within the literary establishment. She titled her campaign “Don Kihote no ronsō” ドンキホテの論争 (The Don Quixote Debate).

Although she had won the Akutagawa Prize for her novella *Taimu suripu kanbi-natto* [The Time-Slip Complex] in 1994 and had been garnering increasingly more critical attention, Shōno was unsuccessful in drumming up any parties interested

<sup>4</sup>In 1998, Hanamura Mangetsu 花村萬月, an “entertainment” writer, won the Akutagawa Prize and a pure literature writer, Kurumatani Chōkitsu 車谷長吉, won the Naoki Prize. These events led to an increased sentiment that the distinction between pure and serious literature was no longer necessary.

<sup>5</sup>The works selected for the Akutagawa Prize are re-printed in the journal *Bungeishunjū*, along with critical reviews and statements from the literary judges. Press conferences and bookstore advertising also ensure prize-winners a certain degree of public attention.

<sup>6</sup>Shōno observes that the reduced allocation of space for arts and literature is not particular to the Yomiuri Shinbun but has been a general trend in Japanese newspapers since the early 1990s. See Shōno 1999a, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup>The Yomiuri Shinbun has a circulation of ten million copies and a readership of twenty six million, making it the most widely read morning newspaper in the world (<http://adv.yomiuri.co.jp>).

in publicly debating this particular issue. The failure to find fertile ground upon which to launch a debate, however, only intensified Shōno's critique, and it is precisely the forces that produced this failure, as well as the resulting currents in Shōno's analysis, that I hope to trace here. What I find to be illuminated by Shōno's literary and critical campaign are the hazy connections between the economic practices of subjecting all forms of cultural production to the same profit-generating requirements and the incapacity to perceive mature female creativity and sexuality. In the course of the "Don Quixote Debate" Shōno encounters editors and critics whose disdain for serious literature is coupled with a seemingly disconnected history of having either worked in the niche-industry of *loli-kon manga* ロリコン—マンガ (Lolita-themed manga), edited "young girl" magazines that encourage their teen-aged readers to present themselves as pre-teens, or wrongly accused a woman writer of having affixed her name to her husband's work.<sup>8</sup> Taking the expansion of market-based logic to more and more sectors of life to be my operating definition of neo-liberalism, I argue that Shōno's polemical fiction encourages us to ask questions about the "common sense" that neo-liberalism promotes.<sup>9</sup> To phrase it somewhat rhetorically, how does neo-liberalism feel? What sensory experiences does it privilege and what sort of physical relations does it engender? While financial policies that promote capital fluidity might seem detached from inter-personal relations, how do such priorities affect productions of the bodily images through which we understand ourselves and others?

In my reading, Shōno's polemical fiction imagines ways of shrinking the distance between universally transferable principles and individual sentient experience. I am certainly not alone in reading Shōno's work this way—the 2007 special issue of *Gendaishisō* 現代思想 (*Review of Contemporary Thought*) "Shōno Yoriko: Neoliberalizumu wo koeru sōzōryoku" 笹野 頼子 ネオリバラルイズムを超える想像力 (Shōno Yoriko: The Imagination to Overcome Neo-Liberalism) gathers together activists and academics from a wide range of disciplines who find her writing to provide both an incisive critique of neo-liberalism and productive ways

<sup>8</sup> Each of these instances involving, respectively, Ōtsuka Eiji 大塚 英志, the subculture critic; Ishizaki Hideyuki 石崎英幸, editor of the short-lived *Kōdansha* magazine *X+ ekusutasu*, *X+* エクスタス (*X+* Ecstasy); and Yamagata Hirō 山形治生, the writer who was found guilty and fined by the Tokyo courts, is discussed in greater detail below.

<sup>9</sup> For my purposes here, neo-liberalism can initially also be understood as the priority of global capital fluidity, and the belief that government support within any sector of the economy is a barrier to such fluidity. Most primers on neo-liberalism, from David Harvey's well-read *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism* to Shiraiishi Yoshiharu 白石嘉治 and Ōno Hideshi's 大野英志 more Japan-specific *Neo-ribe gendai seikatsu: hihan josetsu* ネオリバ現代生活: 批判序説 (The Contemporary Neo-Liberal Lifestyle: A Critical Introduction), identify free trade, capital fluidity, and a small but militarily powerful government as the political-economic underpinnings of neo-liberalism. Both of the above books locate the theoretical beginnings of neo-liberalism in the 1970s with the University of Chicago's School of Economics, and its practical beginnings in the Reagan-Thatcher alliance of the 1980s. Pinochet's Chile is widely understood as the first large-scale application of a transnational, or globalizing, neo-liberalism in which foreign military and economic aid was tied to domestic policies of privatization and de-nationalizing.

of envisioning resistance to it. What I attempt here is a more comprehensive introduction of her literary project—especially to English readers—and a schematization that highlights the importance of visceral thought in her resistance against a single-value system.

The body, in Shōno's imaginary, is envisioned as a receptor of values capable of both experiencing humiliation and of resisting homogenization. In her dystopic *Suishōnaiseido* 水晶内制度 (The World of the Crystals, 2003) for example, the goods industry of video games, *manga* and figurines that grows out of the Lolita-complex relies upon real data from warm-blooded girls, which includes such specifics as “the grain of skin, the tint of the complexion, bodily temperature, and x-rays of internal organs” (p. 211). It is important, the reader is told, that at some level the consumer of *loli-kon* goods be assured that a particular individual experiences their privacy being compromised (p. 213). This potentially painful receptivity, however, is also what enables the experience of multiple sensibilities; the impending cooptation of the fictional religious group, the Mitako, is predicted by the narrator in *Dai-Nihon Ontako no meiwaku-shi* ダイニッホン オンタコの迷惑史 (*Great Japan: The Troublesome History of the Ontako*, 2006) when she observes that the Mitako have lost their powers of *gongen* 権現—the spiritual embodiment of their avatar or values (p. 19). In Shōno's critical framework, *kyokushi* 極私 (the hyper-personal)—an idiosyncratic combination of the Chinese characters for “extreme” and “I”—always partakes of the corporeal and exists in tension with the seemingly limitless transferability of capital. But the hyper-personal, rather than being a point of static or reactive locality, is defined by the lived experience of an individual—and always unique—body; it is in a constant state of change, experiencing multiple systems of value at the same time, and radically open to its environment. While the human body is open to diverse value systems at the same time, Shōno's polemics clarify the ways in which neo-liberalism is a distinctly single-value system.<sup>10</sup> The target of Shōno's critique is specifically neo-liberalism rather than capitalism, because while neo-liberalism is clearly a form of capitalism, neo-liberalism marks the unprecedented expansion of market principles to all areas of life. The way in which this expansion of the market principle is globalized is exemplified by the current guidelines for the new signatories to the General Agreement on Taxes and Tariffs (GATT), which state that nations must commit to working towards making all cultural institutions, such as zoos, arboretums and libraries, free of state subsidy.<sup>11</sup>

The silences and the pressures that Shōno met with in the course of her campaign to support serious literature sharpened her critique of the market-place's incursion into the intellectual world. The three strands of analysis that I identify in the resulting framework all involve a single value which threatens to blot out

<sup>10</sup>See Bourdieu, pp. 17–18. In Pierre Bourdieu's analysis neo-liberalism brings about the erosion of autonomous zones with operating logics different than that of the marketplace, such as literature or science. With the unprecedented expansion of market-based principles, an “abdication of politics” occurs and money becomes the sole arbiter of value.

<sup>11</sup>Bourdieu, p. 58.

differing valuations and perceptive capacities within their respective spheres: the Lolita complex (*loli-kon*) as the structuring dynamic of sexual relations, a western sense of self predicated on monotheism as the universal form of subjectivity, and the growing acceptance of neo-liberal economics as the common-sensical formula for allocating resources. This tripartite matrix of somewhat unlikely bedfellows exemplifies the hyper-personal nature of Shōno's project: it is both a critique that brings to the fore perceptive capacities in the process of becoming obsolete, and a model for the development of the reader's own individual and equally hyper-personal critique. Naming her campaign after Don Quixote, a passionate fighter who holds nothing back as he is ridiculed by the world around him and who sees enemies where there are only windmills, Shōno recognizes the potentially excessive individuality of her critique. "I am Don Quixote," she announces; "I am a small-town player in this big field, I don't think about the future, and I am fat."<sup>12</sup> In this call-to-arms for the struggle to preserve a space for pure literature, the centripetal forces of Shōno's thinking all appear—her interest in the local, her full-fledged reckless passion, and her insistence on articulating the body-images implicit in our thinking.

The intent "to make visible what has been made invisible" that Shōno explicitly announces in *Kompira* 金比羅 (Kompira 2004) a novel about the untangling of competing strands within Japan's foundational myths—can also be seen in her dedication to a public debate on pure literature. If the reduction of print space, the hiring of non-specialists, highly selective quoting, and the removal of structural support in the form of a specific literary award, were necessary in order for the mass media to convince the public that pure literature was no longer relevant or necessary, then a struggle was certainly taking place. Shōno was committed to recording that struggle and to preventing those events from being seen as the "inevitable" turns of "common sense." Certainly, the above-cited actions could be inversely interpreted as the media following, as opposed to creating, public opinion. What Shōno's struggle makes clear, however, is that when seeking to establish the desired level of homogeneity, the media exerted significant pressure. Shōno has claimed that, on at least two occasions, journalists who framed their articles with the assumption that the irrelevance of pure literature was a foregone conclusion, have contacted her to say that the articles did not reflect their opinion, which was actually much closer to hers, but that they did not feel they had the freedom to print that.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Shōno 1999a, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup>One of these incidents involved the above-mentioned journalist Ukai Tetsuo, in events that transpired before the printing of the above-cited "Fading Expectations for Pure Literature." The second incident involved a reporter who covered a literary talk between the popular writer Takamaru Kaoru 高村 薫 and Shōno Yoriko. This reporter chose to write the article from the perspective of the popular writer whose "cops and crime" novel *Maakusu no yama* マークスの山 (Mark's Mountains) won the 1993 Naoki Prize. See "Shōsetsu kara kiete yuku shakai ningen kigoka danpenka susumi nankai ni" 小説から消えて行く社会人間記語化断片化進み難解に [Fragmentation Continues and Human Communication Disappears from Difficult-to-Read Novels]. Afterwards, according to Shōno, the reporter contacted her and promised to write a future article from a pure literature perspective. See Shōno, 1999b p. 51.

Shōno's anti-social behavior is well known, and is certainly a plausible factor in her stalled debate. Her acerbic tone and her willingness to name names makes Shōno a far more caustic and directly confrontational critic than the average literary writer. In her critique of a literary discussion in which three popular Naoki Prize-winning writers were gathered together by the literary journal *Bungeishunjō* to discuss the state of the Akutagawa Prize, for example, Shōno uses the term "monkey" in a pejorative sense no fewer than three times on the first page. First, she titles the article "Saru ni mo wakaru ka Akutagawa-shō?" 猿にもわかるか、芥川賞? (Wouldn't even a Monkey Understand the Akutagawa Prize? 1998). Then, she likens the format of the discussion to that of a "monkey mountain," a not uncommon type of theme park in Japan where monkeys are collected and live in faux-nature for the amusement of on-lookers. Lastly, she calls the event a "monkey-show" and wonders why the administrators of the Naoki Prize are not angered by their awardees' poor conduct. She also refers to students of the internationally acclaimed literary theorist Karatani Kōjin 柄谷行人 as "Karatani's Puppies," and to her arch-nemesis, the *manga* editor and subculture critic Ōtsuka Eiji 大塚 英志 as "a louse on the loincloth of pure literature." When Ōtsuka and his fellow discussants conclude that they "can no longer see a place for literature"<sup>14</sup> Shōno implies that their gender might play a role in their blithe dismissal of pure literature and retorts, in writing: "Before you invest in glasses, just ask a woman."<sup>15</sup>

The well-springs that produce her acerbic tone, however, are likely responsible for the doggedness of her research and the tenacity of her vision. Aware of the limits of her own socialization, Shōno frequently refers to herself as *hikkikomori* 引きこもり, or *tojikomori* 閉じこもり, and the article announcing her selection for the Akutagawa Prize in the weekly arts and literature magazine *Shūkan Bunshun* 週刊文春 was titled "Akutagawa-shō sakka Shōno Yoriko san wa 'tojikomori sedai' no kishu" 芥川賞作家笹野寄り子さんは '閉じこもり世代' の旗手 (The new Akutagawa Prize-Winner Shōno Yoriko is the Flag-Bearer of the Shut-in Generation, 1994). Saitō Tamaki 斎藤, the psychologist who coined the now popular term "*hikkikomori*" to describe people who, for psychological reasons, are unable to leave their homes, places the rather reclusive Shōno on a broad spectrum of "*hikkikomori*-ness."<sup>16</sup> Saitō has particularly high expectations for the power of Shōno's vision. In his professional experience, Saitō has found that while women comprise but a small minority of *hikkikomori*, they are the ones that are hardest to cure because,

<sup>14</sup> Ōtsuka Eiji 大塚 英志 and Watanabe Naomi 渡辺直己, 2002, pp. 138–64.

<sup>15</sup> See Shōno, 2004b, p. 244. Here Shōno contends that the gendered conventions in which writing fiction, as opposed to criticism, is seen as the more appropriate activity for female writers, play a role in the lack of response to her critiques. She notes that other women writers, Kanai Mieko 金井美恵子 (b. 1947) and Yū Miri 柳 美里 (b. 1968), in particular have also tried to spark debates with male writers, to no avail, while even writers such as Shimada Masahiko 島田 雅彦 (b. 1961) lament the fact that the *bundan* 文壇 (literary establishment) no longer serves the role of debating and critiquing cultural trends.

<sup>16</sup> Saitō, p. 246.

once they have severed social ties, they are generally far more willing than their male counterparts to give up the promise of an ideal, or idealized sexual partner. He hypothesizes therefore that women have more potential to become “true *hikkikomori*.” “It isn’t yet clear what is made visible from a true *hikkikomori*’s position,” Saitō continues, “but I have no doubt that Shōno Yoriko will forge new circuits of thinking in her battle as she pushes the connections between feminism and *hikkikomori*.”<sup>17</sup> Saitō is not alone in contending that Shōno’s particular remove from society affords her a valuable perspective; in the special 2007 issue of the highly regarded *Gendaishisō* journal dedicated to Shōno’s vision there is a general consensus that the period in which her work failed to receive critical attention overlapped with the period in which most intellectuals were still unconcerned about the rising tide of neo-liberalism already at work in Japan.<sup>18</sup>

### Shōno Yoriko’s Unilateral “Pure Literature Debate”

That which is unorthodox or heretical has the power to walk in rays of illuminating light. . . . What is pure literature? It is the struggle to protect private worlds of language, and the will to push writing forward. It is the freedom to allow multiple value systems.—Shōno, Yoriko, *Bunshi no mori* 文士の森 (Forest of the Writers, 2005)

The maiden article of Shōno’s campaign to maintain support for what she conflictedly termed “pure literature” foretold of the torrent of criticism she was to produce. Titled “Mie-ken no hito ga okoru toki” 三重県の人が怒るとき [When Someone from Mie gets Angry, 1998] the article concludes with a request to publish more of her writings on the topic. After stating that she was not writing in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* due to the “extraordinary limits” that reporter U (in this first article Shōno refrained from using Ukai Tetsuo’s name and instead referred to him as “reporter U”) wanted to place upon her writing, Shōno beseeches the readers: “I have a hundred more pages about all of this—Won’t you find someplace to carry it?” Despite finding no interlocutors, Shōno does manage to publish her prolific writing. Self-titling her one-sided debate “Don Quixote’s Debate,” Shōno generates enough articles to fill two volumes of criticism each containing over 400 pages: *Don Kihote no ronsō* ドン・キホーテの「論争」 (The Don Quixote Debate, 1999) and *Tettei kōsen! Bunshi no mori* 徹底抗戦! 分士の森 (Fight to the End! Forest of the Writers, 2005).

Invoking Cervante’s novel in the naming of her debate emphasizes the ways in which popular literature and “pure literature” exist in relationship with one another; *Don Quixote* is a classic that has spawned much popular cultural production but how many consumers of that popular culture have actually read the epic-novel

<sup>17</sup>Saitō, p. 250.

<sup>18</sup>Satō Izumi, pp. 110–21.



*Don Quixote* itself? Although Shōno actively chose the term “pure literature” to designate the type of literature she was striving to protect, she does not argue that pure literature should exist at the expense of other types of literature. Most often categorized as a science fiction writer, Shōno continues to feel that there are possibilities and stimulations available in popular literature that are not available in serious literature. By no means does Shōno—a fan of horror *manga* for over thirty years and an avid reader of crime novels<sup>19</sup>—advocate the supremacy of pure literature over popular literature. Her struggle is fundamentally an anti-totalitarian one, on the literary level. She wants literature that asks difficult questions and demands a certain type of attention span to be able to co-exist and cross-fertilize with a wide array of other literatures. “At its core, pure literature is both responsible and free,” she writes; “it respects and protects the diversity of form and thought.”<sup>20</sup>

Measuring cultural value through quantity of sales—which is how Shōno defines one of her key terms *uri-age bungaku* 売上げ文学 (for-profit literature)—is a practice that exemplifies the hegemony of a single value-system. It is an approach to cultural production that ignores the history of what Bourdieu refers to as “autonomous fields of culture”—fields which obey laws proper to themselves, and that are at odds with the laws of the surrounding world, especially at the economic level.<sup>21</sup> While the neo-liberal discourse of freedom and liberalizing may make it seem as though force would not need to be used in convincing the public of its obvious benefits and appeal, Shōno frequently found herself bumping up against the strong-arm of the mass media. Within the course of her campaign to preserve a space for serious literature, she had her galleys leaked to a potential debate opponent, was told to tone down her criticism and then subsequently asked to leave the literary journal *Gunzō* 群像—and had at least two arts columns reporters privately apologize to her for taking quotes out of context, citing the pressure on them to present the “popular vs. pure literature” debate in a way that favors popular literature. It may be doubtful that a nefarious conspiracy is afoot, but it is probable that the increasing spread of market principles creates a vortex in which the above-cited practices and pressures make sense within their own circular logic. Within this logic Shōno is constantly pitted against “the people.” In an analysis that brings to mind Antonio Gramsci’s concepts of “common sense” and “good sense,” Shōno questions the accuracy of calling something that is vast, like market principles, necessarily “public.” “Instead of being seen as an individual’s pursuit of profit,” she notes, “the power of consumption and the unknowable workings of the economy get called the ‘will of the people.’”<sup>22</sup> In Gramsci’s framework

<sup>19</sup>Shōno, 1999a, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup>Shōno, 1999a, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup>Bourdieu, pp. 66–67. The autonomous fields of culture that Bourdieu identifies are the scientific, the artistic, and the literary. He takes care to point out that the etymological meaning of the word “autonomous” is “proper to itself.”

<sup>22</sup>Shōno 2006a, p. 221.

common sense is akin to Shōno's "will of the people": both are characterized by uncritical and fragmentary thought that often cloaks a support of the status quo. "Good sense" is dialectically connected to common sense, in that it engages common sense in a process of reflection.<sup>23</sup> Striving to understand the terms of a circular logic in which one is caught is precisely the type of situation in which serious literature and its protection of "diversity of thought and form" might be able to provide some needed perspective and produce "good sense."

The question remains, however, as to why Shōno chooses to designate the cultural form she is trying to protect with the now staid and elitist-sounding name "pure literature," when youthful irreverence, immediate gratification, and popular comprehension are the positive attributes of the current that she is working against? The answers are multifold and incomplete. Firstly, she would not define herself as working against any specific value, but rather against the dominance of that value. Nonetheless, the particularly neo-liberal values she is rallying against do boast of the potential to overturn inefficient and un-democratic practices by ignoring established systems of privilege and subjecting all literature, equally, to the will of the marketplace. The several-generations-old notion of "pure literature" seems a likely candidate for a practice in need of such liberalizing and re-vamping. Indeed, in the 1961–1962 "Changing Nature of Pure Literature" debate that was sparked by Hirano Ken's 平野謙 (1907–1978) reflections on the role of literary journals in the fifteen years after the war, one commentator calls the protection of pure literature the literary establishment's peculiar form of nationalism.<sup>24</sup> But Shōno's project is clearly not one of maintaining an elitist or fossilized institution of high-brow literature—her own Akutagawa Prize-winning *Time-Slip Complex* was keenly influenced by *manga* and fantasy, and she has noted on several occasions that, had the judges on the selection committee been any older she would likely not have received the award. Indeed, when she first met the editor of *Gunzō*, after winning that journal's new writer's award, she emphasized how steeped she was in *manga* and science fiction and said: "I do not really see myself as a pure literature writer."<sup>25</sup> Eighteen years later, with full awareness that the popular image of pure literature writers was "that they were non-computer-using, kimono-clad superior people,"<sup>26</sup> Shōno searches for an appropriate term and, in the absence of any better-fitting one, opts for the historically strong resonance of "pure literature," despite its anachronistic ring.

On one level, "pure literature" is an unapologetic championing of entrenched literary idealism and therefore a direct provocation against the practitioners of "for-profit literature" or those "measuring cultural value through quantity of sales." While one marketing trend of the 1990s was to label serious literature "j-bungaku" (j-literature), hoping to borrow from the popularity and youthfulness

<sup>23</sup> Gramsci, p. 221.

<sup>24</sup> Komatsu Hirō 網待避劣, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> Shōno, 1999a, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Shōno 1999a, p. 78.

of the music industry's "j-pop" and soccer's "J-League," and package it in attractive and catchy covers, Shōno tactics are far more combative.<sup>27</sup> Using the banner of "pure literature," she is setting herself up as an easy target and opening herself up to accusations of insularity, privilege, and irrelevance. To a certain extent, Shōno is picking a fight. As she struggles against the imperialism of the marketplace, where the logic of profit margins is so manifestly clear that other logics can often appear hazy in comparison, the opportunity for a public argument would at least provide a forum in which different value systems could be articulated. Determined to prevent the complete conflation of market principles with common sense writ large, for example, Shōno often resists importing market-oriented English words into Japanese—a practice which, she feels, makes words seem oddly meaningful.<sup>28</sup> She instead intentionally coins corresponding new terms in Japanese, creating what she terms words with "*mi mo futa mo nai*" 身も蓋も無い (words with neither contents nor containers).<sup>29</sup> This practice defamiliarizes language that might otherwise instantly appear "normal," and provides an opportunity to explain the logic implicitly at work in the words. "Marketing," for example, instead of "ma-ke-chi-n-gu becomes 売り上げ方文学ろん *uri-age-kata-bungaku-ron*—literally, "the way of selling literature for profit." In order for such strategies to be effective, however, Shōno needs a venue in which to deploy them.

So, provocation to a fight is one rationale for choosing the term "pure literature." Another, and more complex, way in which the term functions is as a historical agent of fusion. Interestingly, Shōno's concept of intellectual and spiritual fusion is not explicitly developed until well after she launches "Don Quixote's Debate." Growing out of her increasing interest in Japan's history of merging relatively localized and nativistic cosmologies (collectively referred to as Shintō 神道) with a more universal, and imported, Buddhism, Shōno's notion of fusion is one that extends far back in history and refuses a separation between intellectual, spiritual, and economic drives. In *Konpira*, a narrator bearing strong similarities to Shōno herself realizes, at the age of forty, that she is actually an incarnation of the protector of the sea, the alligator-like deity Konpira, and that she has been alive for over 400 years. The difference in perspective this provides, both in terms of historical longevity and privileged sensibilities, creates a very different daily consciousness for the narrator. In both *Konpira* and its separately published introduction, "Hangyaku suru eien no gongen tamashii: Konpira bungakuron josetsu" 反逆する永遠の権現魂：金比羅文学論序説 (The Eternally Treasonous Spirit of Embodiment: An Introduction to *Konpira* Literature, 2005) the fusion of differing systems of thinking and

<sup>27</sup>When one of Shōno's works, *Haha no hatten* 母の発展 [The Development of my Mother], was published in a "j-bungaku" series by Kawade shobōshinsha in 1996, she insisted that the words "pure literature" appear on the book cover as well.

<sup>28</sup>Shōno 1999a, p. 47.

<sup>29</sup>*Mi mo futa mo nai* is a favored expression of Shōno's—a literal translation would be "neither contents nor lids." Other foreign-loan marketing words include *puromoshon* (promotion) and *makechingu gyaru* (marketing girl).

feeling requires a corporeal presence. The fusion that Shōno theorizes in her fiction is one that forces, or allows, the sensation of place, historical time, and personal embodiment to merge together in a temporary zone of intensity. Shōno defines it as constitutively treasonous, and one way of understanding this treasonous quality is that the fusion is always hybrid, with a hybrid-ity that reaches beyond any one single historical framework (i.e., modernity) and therefore necessarily shoots that framework through with difference. This difference is not fully reducible to rational discourse because it has a charge in a constantly changing and unique body. While the term “pure literature” may lack the bodily component of the fusion that Shōno later theorizes, it partakes of several key components: the co-existence of differing systems of value, the inextricability of culture and economic production, and a broadened historical framework. As a precursor to the embodied fusion that Shōno later develops, her invoking of the notion of pure literature seeks to both provoke an emotional response and to keep a fuller range of historical value systems alive.

Shōno's *The Time-Slip Complex* features a dreamscape telephone call with an unnamed tuna, and her published dialogue with fellow writer Matstuura Rieko is labeled *Futari onna no janku-tokku* 二人女のジャンクーターク (Two women's junk-talk).<sup>30</sup> When such a writer advocates the high-brow category of “pure literature” her re-iteration necessarily jostles the term itself. While the term *junbungaku* 純文学 (pure literature) has often revolved around a confessional and lyrical quality, as typified by Shiga Naoya's “I-novel”s, it has always been a contested category whose shifting definitions might sometimes seem to exclude some of the most canonical works of Japanese literature.<sup>31</sup> Shōno's idiosyncratic reference is directed at a supple network of ideas, not a hard monolithic fact. And as she cuts her own path through this network of future mergings and possibilities, one of the currents she taps into is that of literature being taken seriously as a vehicle of social criticism and public debate.

### A Hyper-Personal Framework of Neo-Liberalism

Shōno's personal investment in maintaining a space for serious literature is significant. After winning *Gunzō's* prize for new writers in 1982, she wrote for literary journals throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s, without seeing a single book of her own in print.<sup>32</sup> By the mid-1990s Shōno's work began to receive more attention,

<sup>30</sup> Shōno and Matsuuura, book jacket.

<sup>31</sup> As Edward Seidensticker points out, Murasaki Shikibu's sometimes lurid *Tales of Genji* fits less well into established definitions of *jun-bungaku* than does Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book*, and Tani-zaki Jun'ichirō's complicated plots distance him from some of the confessional definitions of *jun-bungaku* despite his prominent position in the Japanese literary canon. Seidensticker, “The ‘Pure’ and the ‘In-Between’ in Modern Japanese Theories of the Novel,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (1966), pp. 174–86.

<sup>32</sup> In the Japanese literary establishment individual books of non-commercial literature generally follow at least partial publication in literary journals. A writer could therefore have many stories published without seeing a book go to print.

and several of her full-length novels were published.<sup>33</sup> Having finally reached a critical audience after so many years of feeling overlooked, Shōno was not eager to see her hard-fought publishing power eroded by an increase in survival-of-the-fittest marketplace competition. But Shōno's personal interest should not diminish the value of her critique. Indeed, the spiritual concept of *onnen* 怨念 (personal grudge or resentment) is a strong motif in, and energy-source for, Shōno's writing. Typically, *onnen* is the resentment felt by a deceased person which prevents them from being fully released from the living world and often has them haunting the place in which they were done wrong.<sup>34</sup> The clarity of motive that comes from the investment of an individual located in a specific place and time is a welcome occurrence within Shōno's conceptual framework. Both *onnen* and *mokusatsu* 黙殺—a strong word for “indifference,” which is composed of the characters for “silence” and “murder”—figure prominently in Shōno's understanding of socio-political relations. Her attacks on the literary world are often targeted at specific individuals and, as noted above, her vitriol often surpasses what would be considered proper critical etiquette. Distrusting the gross terms of cost-benefits analysis and fearing the mass media's ability to create and perpetuate generalizations, Shōno values a tenacious voice with personal or local claims. While Shōno's writing has often featured a fictional narrator whose characteristics and perspective significantly overlap with the historical Shōno Yoriko herself, her recent writings have self-consciously poised her own doggedly local and resistant voice as an antidote to neo-liberalism's encroachment into the collective imaginary of contemporary Japan. Shōno's lonely struggle against profit-based literature is part of her larger battle against the eradication of multiple value systems and the establishment of money as the medium through which all value must be determined. In contrast to the possibility of a globally enforced economic system, Shōno defines her sensibility as “hyper-personal” and devotes her attention to the intricacies of individual, local, and forgotten histories.

Shōno's “hyper-personal” is positioned in opposition to neo-liberalism's principle of capital fluidity and global applicability, and the unique anti-neo-liberal framework that she has constructed reflects this respect for the peculiarly personal in several ways. Within the Japanese context the privatization of previously

<sup>33</sup> While the reasons for this dramatic shift in her reception remain somewhat unclear, Shōno herself attributes it to the bursting of the economic bubble: “During the bubble years almost all experimental literature was banished from the bookstores and relegated to the libraries” (Shōno, 1999a, p. 78). The surge in economic affluence, she reasons, distracted people from issues of structural change and the narrowing possibilities for cultural expression. Some critics have attributed the delay in Shōno's reception to her uncanny prescience: “Not many of us in Japan were as quick to perceive the changes that Shōno was so scathingly critical of,” writes Satō Izumi in the *Gendaishisō* special edition on Shōno. See Satō, p. III.

<sup>34</sup> *Onnen* might be familiar to U.S. moviegoers from the American re-makes of *The Ring* and the much less successful *The Grudge*, starring Naomi Watts and Sarah Michelle Gellar, respectively. Both movies feature a child that was killed who haunts the place in which they were killed. The original title of *The Grudge*, *Juon* 呪怨, contains the “on” (怨) of *onnen* 怨念.

national industries—the railroad system, the postal services, and public universities, in particular<sup>35</sup>—and a major shift in *shin-jidai no nihonteki keiei* 新時代の日本の経営 (new-era Japanese management practices), which prioritizes flexibility and has re-organized broad swathes of the workforce into “non-permanent worker” categories, stand out as examples of neo-liberal practice.<sup>36</sup> Shōno’s particular framework hones in on the rhetoric of freedom and anti-authoritarianism swirling around and in-between these gross policy changes. What makes her challenge peculiarly personal is the inclusion of the *loli-kon* industry, which sells the image of young girls as simultaneously sexy and innocent in a large variety of media, as well as the specifically literary mobilization of the western “self” in her understanding of Japanese neo-liberalism. She frames both literary critics who focus predominantly on the modernization of the Meiji Era and consumers of *loli-kon* as advocates of single-value systems who can provide little resistance to neo-liberal changes. Shōno depicts this idea in images of bodily-birthing in a scene from *The Troublesome History of Japan’s Ontako* in which gullible people are immersed in an aquarium-like vessel filled with amniotic fluid. Their necks soon sprout tentacles that can only wriggle in response to numerical figures, *loli*-language, and the vocabulary of western philosophy (p. 43). Thereafter, the converted have no sense of history and can only comprehend the world through these inter-connected neo-liberal forces on the rise.

### *Kyokushi Neo-Liberal Pillar #1: Loli-kon*

*Loli-kon* is a term derived from the English “Lolita Complex” and can denote either the phenomenon of older men desiring and objectifying adolescent and

<sup>35</sup>One of Prime Minister Koizumi’s major commitments was to privatizing the very large and capital-heavy postal ministry, and the Diet—after having first been dissolved when the bill was first voted down—passed a ten-year plan to privatize the postal ministry in 2005. Considered to be one of the world’s largest banks, with over 3 trillion dollars in secure and low-interest personal savings accounts, Japan’s postal savings have long been the target of, particularly American, pressure to make their funds internationally accessible. The savings had been used to purchase low-interest government bonds which were then used to finance what most critics—from the left and the right—see as the at best inefficient, and at worst corrupt, development projects of “pork-barrel” politics. While the restructuring of the postal savings currently underway grants access to a far wider (and international) array of financial investors, critics of the reform are concerned that certain connections to government bonds and the above practices will remain intact.

<sup>36</sup>In 1995 the *Nihon keiei-sha dantai renmei (nikeiren)* 日本経営者団体連盟 (Union of Japanese Management) announced the *shin-jidai no nihonteki keiei* 新時代の日本の経営 (Japanese-style management) for the “new era”; labor was divided into three groups, only one of which was long-term securely employed. This announcement clarified the concept of labor as a commodity for which “flexibility” was a high premium. While “re-structuring” had already been causing a steady loss of employment for middle-aged long-term workers since the late 1980s, now the youngest category of labor was faced with a 20% chance of temporary employment and a 10% chance of unemployment. This new management practice was announced in 1995, a year when the profits of the top-tier businesses surpassed those of the bubble’s peak. See Shiraiishi and Ōno, pp. 33–34.

pre-adolescent girls, or the desiring men themselves.<sup>37</sup> The term bears specific connections to, though is not limited by, popular consumer culture, or “subculture,” and the sexy images of girls found within *anime*, *manga*, and the world of *figyua* フィギュア—(figurines).<sup>38</sup> While there is variance in the definition of *loli-kon* most definitions accept the premise that *loli-kon* applies to a specialized “subculture” with a relatively limited audience. Shōno, however, effectively jettisons the “sub” of “subculture”; her creative-criticism implies that modern Japanese culture as a whole is steeped in *loli-kon* and that because of this the public understanding of female creative and sexual potential is stunted at the stage of about twelve years old. Shōno’s particular resistance against this arrested development often takes the fictional form of a self-avowedly *busu* ブス (ugly) and frequently maligned mature female character, usually with a large degree of biographical overlap with Shōno herself,<sup>39</sup> or the depiction of Japan as a nation that is economically dependent upon the “*loli-kon* goods” industry and in which the typical male is a *loli-kon*.

Shōno applies this latter approach in her 2003 novel *The World of the Crystals*, which is set in a country of only women. The impetus to begin writing *The World of the Crystals*, Shōno claims, came from the desire to “see what it would look like if women were really seen as human beings.” What emerges is a dystopia in which the women’s only world—Uramizumo<sup>40</sup>—is fundamentally a colony of Japan located in the contaminated land of Ibaraki.<sup>41</sup> Despite the careful crafting of a domestic society that imposes no barriers upon women, the economic structure

<sup>37</sup> Understandings of why *loli-kon* has become such a prominent niche culture are quite diverse. Some see it as a response by men against the strengthening of their wives’ domestic control of purse-strings in the postwar era. For such a point of view see Buruma, 57–63. A slightly different interpretation is that *loli-kon* is a man’s way of opting out of being taken care of and controlled. For such a perspective, see Lebra, p. 63.

<sup>38</sup> The ways in which *loli-kon* invokes consumption, rather than prolonged interaction is exemplified by the mid-1990s peak of *enjakōsai*—paid dating performed by mainly teenage girls—which further emblazoned the sailor-derived high school girl’s uniform as a symbol of budding and purchasable sexuality within the public eye. For more on 1990s teen-aged prostitution see Miyadai Shinji 宮台 真司, pp. 123–66.

<sup>39</sup> Shōno claims that her decision to buy a house—the purchase of which spurred the reflections that led to the writing of *Kompira*—was born of the need to accommodate the adult cats that she found abandoned in her apartment complex’s garbage once they were no longer cute nor exchangeable for money. Here she implies a homology between *loli-kon* and the logic that led to the abandonment of the grown cats.

<sup>40</sup> The country name “Uramizumo” references a historic region of Japan, Izumo, that was powerful prior to the consolidation of the Japanese archipelago that began with the Yamato clan’s rise to power. Books of mythology that eventually became canonical—namely the *Kojiki* 古事記 and *Nihon-shoki* 日本書紀—downplay the historic position of Izumo, but accounts—regional *fudo-ki* 風土記—that challenge such genealogies also exist. The “ura” of Uramizumo means beyond, so the female-country in *Suishōseinaidō* references a mythical place that could exist in a space before the current accepted history of Japanese origination was consolidated. “Ura,” however, could also refer to the country/colony’s position as the abjected underside of the old country, “Japan.”

<sup>41</sup> Japan’s worst nuclear accident took place at Tokaimura 東海村 nuclear power plant in Ibaraki 茨城 prefecture in September 1999. 119 people were exposed to neutron radiation doses and two workers died.

of Uramizumo reflects an ineradicable self-contamination and hopelessness; Uramizumo's economic livelihood is based upon its role as Japan's supplier of both nuclear power and the biographical data upon which to base *loli-kon* goods and images. Apparently, the production of *loli-kon* goods had come under harsh international criticism, and Japan officially ceased all production itself and therefore could not engage in collection of critical data upon which to base the images. The data that the young girls of Uramizumo send out to help Japan's industry through a loophole is very detailed; "They aren't just generic questions of weight, height, and preferred foods, but detailed images of the grain of skin, the tint of complexion, the bodily temperature, blood-work, x-rays of internal organs . . ."42 Characters assembled from this data are then deployed in games that are played—the narrator is careful to specify—not by the true kindergarten-lover perverts, but by the general public. For the narrator, the special term "*loli-kon*" is but a red herring used to distract attention away from the general reality of "love" in Japan. "In Japan," she explains, "*loli-kon* is used to justify the average male's twisted fantasy of love and sexual discrimination."<sup>43</sup>

This particular scene, in which the narrator elaborates upon Japan as a *loli-kon* state, takes place at the graduation ceremony of the most elite school in Uramizumo. During their first year of school each class is assigned a male *loli-kon* from the stockyard where the only men in Uramizumo are kept—these men are mostly *loli-kon* convicts sent over from Japan. The class observes, interrogates, and experiments with their very own *loli-kon* specimen throughout all of their years of schooling, and their graduation ceremony is comprised of the presentation of that research. Immediately before the ceremony the girls, and only the girls, decide what to do with the man now that he is no longer suitable for further research. In this scene the girls decide to execute him in a multi-media spectacle that begins with his body being swaddled in baby clothes and pushed around in a baby carriage and ends with their eating red ice-cream cones purportedly not dyed with his heart's blood.<sup>44</sup> The male *loli-kon* is himself infantilized and then symbolically cannibalized, as the potential young female victims eat the very food—ice cream cones—that are conventionally used in *loli-kon* manga to entice them. This remapping of *loli-kon* symbols might slake a thirst for revenge were it not looked upon with such disdain by the writer-narrator, who is saddened to see such haughty young girls here in Uramizumo, and who, looking back upon the girl's from a temporal distance can "only think of the words 'sturdy' and 'man-nish.'" "If this nuclear-plant colony were really strong enough to rise up in revolt,"

<sup>42</sup> Shōno 2003, p. 211.

<sup>43</sup> Shōno 2003, p. 217.

<sup>44</sup> When the *loli-kon* is killed it is imperative that the girls themselves push the appropriate buttons and pull the appropriate switches—there is not supposed to be any distance between their decision and their action. This physical immediacy is an important element of Shōno's embodied poetics.



the narrator reflects, “these ‘special exports’ wouldn’t be necessary. But because it is so unstable, this, apparently, is all Uramizumo can manage.”<sup>45</sup> She realizes “that most Japanese men would find the women of Uramizumo stupid” and that their colony is being tolerated only because Uramizumo is willing to give Japan what it wants: freedom from the perception of environmental and moral contamination. Not only has no external recognition been demanded for the righteousness of Uramizumo’s mission, but no real change has occurred in the *loli-kon* power dynamic between the “old country” and the colony. Indeed, the lack of change is exemplified by the narrator’s awareness of the fact that when Uramizumo is mentioned at all in the Japanese press, it is on the pages of the lurid “sports papers.” Seen from this perspective, Uramizumo is but one new incarnation of *loli-kon*; an infantilized and sexualized entire country of women.

Excerpted from a much longer and more complicated narrative in which a female writer from Japan is taken to Uramizumo, possibly against her will, in order to write its founding myth, the above scene captures the key elements of Shōno’s *loli-kon* critique; *loli-kon* is a structural power relationship that produces vast amounts of anger and resentment, and not even the most anonymous of images exist outside an economy of actual warm-blooded living beings. As part of an international commodities market, *loli-kon* is also communicable and difficult to eradicate.

Complicated, or concealed, economic transactions and the inertia of resignation—as in the case of the willing consent given by the girls themselves to sell their own data—make effective action exceedingly difficult (Shōno is particularly fond of the joke that, in the neo-liberal paradigm, it is really hard to know just who stole your cow). Though the fury that surfaces in the violent execution of the *loli-kon* is ineffectual in terms of immediately changing the political economy of Uramizumo, it is at least palpable and therefore not forgotten. Felt by those who are ignored or commodified, *onnen* is an invaluable resource for combating the silencing that accompanies the consolidation of power.

### Hyper-Personal Neo-Liberal Pillar #2: For-Profit Literature

Shōno’s critique of neo-liberalism is intensely personal not only because of the originality with which she delineates its borders, but also because of her line of attack, which relentlessly follows some rather unexpected suspects. In the case of her arch-nemesis Ōtsuka Eiji, a former editor of a *loli-kon manga* and current cultural critic,<sup>46</sup> Shōno’s own resentment propelled her furiously forward from a rebuttal of his views, to criticism of the editor who allowed those views to be

<sup>45</sup>Shōno, 2003, p. 223.

<sup>46</sup>Ōtsuka has published numerous books on the topics of *otaku* and *sabukarucha* (subculture) His notion of “narrative consumption” plays a key role in the formulation of Azuma Hiroki’s notion of “database consumption.” See Azuma, pp. 20–25.

published in *Gunzō*, to an argument with that editor that ended with Shōno herself being asked to cease writing for *Gunzō*. Combining a marketplace analysis of literature with a self-proclaimed *otaku* love of *loli-kon* figures, Ōtsuka is certainly not the most unlikely of Shōno's suspects. Particularly alarming to Shōno is the way that Ōtsuka applies the same criteria for success to literature that he does to *loli-kon manga* or subculture novels, despite his self-confessed lack of background in literature. In terms of his lack of expertise and his comparatively easy access to mass media, Ōtsuka stands in the same position as the above-mentioned reporter U. They are both players in the mass media which, as they become more omnipresent, require less expertise.

In a 2002 literary discussion for *Gunzō*'s regular column "Kotoba no genzai" 言葉の現在 (The Current State of Words, March 2002) Ōtsuka, then a relative literary new-comer to the literary world from the world of *manga*, demanded literature that sells, and revolved his critique around bottom-line sales figures. Literary journals, the maintenance of which was a necessary criterion for Bourdieu's "autonomous zones," were the target of his attack. "For years," Ōtsuka claimed, "literary journals have not been enjoying an audience of more than three hundred readers—and even those three hundred readers only partially read the journals." If a sub-culture book is expected to be purchased by 100,000 readers at the very least, Ōtsuka reasoned, why should a literary journal with such a small readership be allowed to continue at all? "The likes of literary magazines such as *Gunzō* and *Subaru* すばる," Ōtsuka argued, "are really no more than family journals financed by the dregs left over from the high-selling sub-culture magazines such as 'Janpu' and 'Magajin.'" In June of the same year Ōtsuka further elaborated his theory of literature, again in *Gunzō*, in "Furyō no saiken toshite no bungaku" 不良の債権としての文学 (Literature's Bad Credit, 2002).

Ōtsuka's accounts drew a detailed rebuttal from Shōno. Since he provided no statistical sources, she asks, did he just throw out a figure that "felt" right to him? (He later wrote that he had probably been too lenient in his estimation.<sup>47</sup>) While doubting the accuracy of Ōtsuka's projections Shōno also takes issue with the idea that numbers—even were they to be carefully arrived at—can determine whether a book has been "read." This is an important point for the overall critique of neo-liberalism that Shōno puts forth, because the lived experience of reading a book, unique and intense to varying degrees for various readers, is not something that can be readily translated onto an accounts ledger. Is a book read intently and producing a rich experience for a small number of readers more "read," one might ask, than a book read by many with less intellectual or sensory impact?

Shōno was also irritated and impatient with Ōtsuka's repeated use of the term "literature's bad credit." She carefully points out the false analogy that he is drawing between poor financial planning and subsidized art and culture. "Bad credit occurs," Shōno explains, "when a loan is not properly repaid or a sale does not

<sup>47</sup>Shōno, 2005c, p. 312.

follow through with what it had promised.” However, the literary journal *Gunzō*, which Ōtsuka uses as the most glaring example of bad credit, never failed to meet its original profit projections.<sup>48</sup> Belonging to the Kodansha publishing empire, *Gunzō* was set up to be subsidized by other Kodansha assets and run as a not-for-profit literary journal. *Gunzō* was actually established in order to preserve a space for pure literature within the changing publishing industry of the early postwar years, when socio-economic changes were generating a greater demand for *chūkan Shōsetsu* 中間証書説 (popular or “middle-brow” novels). Thus, Shōno argues, the element of failure or fraud that is suggested by the term “bad credit” does not pertain to *Gunzō*’s original financial structuring. Shōno demands to know why *Gunzō*’s editor at that time, Ishizaka Hideyuki 石崎英幸, would allow such sloppy accounting, knowing full well that by sheer dint of their being published his made-up statistics and false parallels would gain credibility.

In “Don kihote no henshin bakudan” ドンキホーテの返信爆弾 [Don Quixote’s Return Bomb], an article whose original version was rejected by *Gunzō* and eventually published in the literary journal *Waseda Bungaku* 早稲田大学, Shōno seriously questions Ōtsuka’s motivation for extending his analysis from *manga* to literature—a medium he repeatedly claims he “doesn’t get.” Peppered with some of Shōno’s favorite terms—*funuke* 腑抜け (fool), *chaban* 茶番 (farce), and above all, *inchiki* インチキ (bogus)—the tone of “Don Quixote’s Return Bomb” is fed-up and irreverent. Shōno recounts how Ōtsuka and his discussants in “The Current State of Words” ponder the value of literature and decide to agree that they “just can’t see any.” Ōtsuka claims that he has entered the literary world to “overturn the system,” but, Shōno notes, “all he has done is said that he doesn’t get literature, and then used the literary system to get published and recognized.” She expresses concern that with the passing of time people will forget that Ōtsuka has no background in literature and will perceive him as someone who is actually qualified to make grand, and negative, judgments about literature.

Not only is Shōno’s article rejected from *Gunzō*, but she is also asked by *Gunzō*’s relatively new editor, Ishizaka, to cease her criticism of Ōtsuka. Indignantly Shōno demands to know why her voice is being censored while Ōtsuka’s articles, “at best belong on a garbage-heap or someone’s home-page,” are being published?<sup>49</sup> They seemed interesting to me,” was the response she received. Asking why she needed to stop criticizing Ōtsuka when he was the one who had just written that a copy of *Gunzō* “was worth only 20 *sen*,” Shōno was told by the same editor that it felt “unpleasant” to him. Excerpting from their interaction only two sentences, both of which begin with the relatively gruff and strongly masculine personal pronoun “ore,” Shōno highlights her own gendered exclusion from the editor’s support of Ōtsuka. In clipped sentences citing subjective and vague responses—“interesting” and “unpleasant”—the editor protects Ōtsuka from further criticism and dismisses

<sup>48</sup>Shōno, 2004b, p. 248.

<sup>49</sup>Shōno, 2005c, p. 224.

Shōno from a journal she had published in for over two decades. While Shōno references this event in several pieces of fiction and critical essays, in addition to in “Don Quixote’s Return Bomb,” the precise details of her departure from *Gunzō* are unclear. At times it seems as though she refused to acquiesce to what she perceived as an unfair demand and stopped writing as the only justifiable reaction to looming censorship.<sup>50</sup> At other times, when Shōno and other critics use the words “expelled” or “purged,”<sup>51</sup> or when the well-known playwright Kinoshita Junji stops writing for *Gunzō* in solidarity with her,<sup>52</sup> for example, it seems as though she was told to leave point-blank. Shōno did attempt to broker the terms of her own exile from *Gunzō* and she was able to write one final criticism of Ōtsuka and to say goodbye to her readers, letting them know that she would continue publishing in other literary journals.

But Shōno did not have as much control over her farewell as she had hoped. When what she assumed was to be her final piece in *Gunzō* “Onna no sakka no i nashi?” 女作家の位なし? (No Place for a Woman Writer? February, 2002) appeared she was shocked to find that an article by Ōtsuka appeared alongside it. It was clear from the information in Ōtsuka’s article, titled “Boku wa mo ‘bungaku’ wo hikiukeru koto tamerai shimasen” 僕も文学を引き受けること躊躇いしません (I will not Hesitate to Join the Literary Field, February 2002) that he had access to her galleys prior to his writing. In what Shōno likens to unfair prior knowledge of an opponent’s *shogi* (Japanese chess) move Ōtsuka is able to refer to her departure from *Gunzō* and asks her to join him in a one-to-one published literary discussion.<sup>53</sup> Ōtsuka does not include the fact that Shōno had actually been asking to engage Ōtsuka in joint dialogue for years. And so she concludes in “Don Quixote’s Return Bomb,” published in *Waseda Bungaku*, “I was right in calling him the louse on the loin-cloth of pure literature.”<sup>54</sup> Not ceding the battle altogether, Shōno directly addresses the *Gunzō*’s editor, Ichikawa, in the essay’s final paragraph and asks him to reprint “Don Quixote’s Return Bomb” on the pages of *Gunzō* where her half of the dialogue with Ōtsuka would have been printed.

### Strange Bedfellows of the “For-Profit Literature”

Shōno employs a wide range of tactics in her efforts to debunk Ōtsuka’s premise that what is worthy and relevant will sell, and what is unworthy and irrelevant

<sup>50</sup>Shōno, 2005c, p. 251.

<sup>51</sup>Satō, p. III.

<sup>52</sup>*Gendaishisō*, 38. Kinoshita Junji 木下順二 (1914–2007) is a playwright best known for his 1949 play “Yuzuru” 夕鶴 (Twilight Crane) which came under attack in the early 1980s from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which claimed that Kinoshita’s re-telling of “The Crane’s Wife” tale was anti-capitalist and should be removed from school textbooks. See *Jiyū Shinpō* 自由新報 [Freedom News], 10 June 1980.

<sup>53</sup>Ōtsuka, Eiji. “Boku wa mo ‘bungaku’ wo hikiukeru koto tamerai shimasen” [I will not hesitate to join the literary field], *Gunzō* (February 2002), pp. 212–31.

<sup>54</sup>Shōno, 2005a, p. 158.

will not.<sup>55</sup> She calls Ōtsuka personally to task with un-censored vitriol, she refuses to stay silent about the “purging” and “leaking” incidents and writes about it in several different pieces,<sup>56</sup> and she investigates the background of the editor who, at the same time that he dismissed Shōno, granted Ōtsuka so much print-space. She uncovers a striking parallel between Ōtsuka Eiji and the editor, Ishizaka: they both have come to their current sympathy for “for-sale literature” from a history of engagement in publications that feature adolescent, or pre-adolescent, girls as the height of sexual desirability. Ōtsuka began his publishing career as editor of the “*loli-kon manga*” *Burikko*, whose name refers to a type of coquetry made famous by the female entertainer Matsuda Seiko, and Ichikawa came to *Gunzō* from another Kodansha entity, *X+ ekusutasu*, a so-called *shōjo* 少女 (young girl) magazine that featured Burberry and Ralph Lauren ads.<sup>57</sup> According to Shōno, during Ishizaka’s tenure, the short-lived magazine *X+ ekusutasu* [*X+ Ecstasy*] targeted a younger and younger audience until it became a magazine for elementary school girls, with very young models and much *kamatoto* 蒲魚 (feigned innocence). When Shōno asks the reason for having instituted these changes, Ishizaka responds that sales was the main factor and that money issues are never far from an editor’s mind.<sup>58</sup>

The next-to-last issue of *X+ ekusutasu* features an article titled “Yōchien ni kaerō—Back to the Kindergarten” (Let’s Return to Kindergarten), with a picture of young teen-age girls on a wistful journey back to their apparently idyllic kindergarten days. What is striking here is the attempt to get young girls, only eleven or twelve themselves, to believe in their own earlier innocence as a desirable quality.<sup>59</sup> A similar process is at work in a series of pictures of a four- or five-year-old Caucasian girl in a swimsuit—the pictures are off-centered and blurry like those in an unprofessional family album. The sensuality of the little girl is that of a gleeful, and partially wet, un-self-conscious toddler, and the placement of the series in between pages of fashion and love advice to be consumed by young girls makes it clear that this is a look that they are being encouraged to replicate.<sup>60</sup>

In an interview in *Waseda Bungaku* Ishizaka states that *X+ ekusutasu* was created to be a space where girls could be free to enjoy their girlhood, but Shōno generally sees this support of “girl power” or “*shōjo* feminism” as a wily way of getting around

<sup>55</sup> Bourdieu attacks the same premise; “How could one not see that the logic of profit, particularly short-term profit, is the very negation of culture, which presupposes investment for no financial return or for uncertain and often posthumous returns?” See Bourdieu, p. 70.

<sup>56</sup> As well as in the non-fiction essays mentioned above, Shōno brings these events up in her fiction. See, for example her “Nankai-sugi karuku nagashite ne busu no isakai onna yo” 難解すぎるく流してね、ブスの静い女よ (Just Ignore this Too-Difficult-to-Read Quarrelsome Woman Writer), pp. 104–33.

<sup>57</sup> The magazine’s title is written both to approximate the English word “ecstasy” and as the symbol X, with the symbol “+” (pronounced “tasu” in Japanese). Burberry scarves and, to a lesser extent, the Ralph Lauren brand, signify sophistication in young women’s fashion in Japan, and over the past few decades have been worn by younger and younger girls.

<sup>58</sup> See Shōno, 2004b, p. 246.

<sup>59</sup> See “Yōchien ni kaerō—Back to the Kindergarten!” pp. 14–17.

<sup>60</sup> *X+ ekusutasu* 4 (2002), pp. 23–24.

dealing with mature women. When Ōtsuka was asked by Japan's premier feminist academic, Ueno Chizuko 上野千鶴子, for a contribution to a pop-culture anthology, Shōno recalls, he promised her an article that would celebrate the methods of *shōjo* over the *erai obaasan* (older women who think highly of themselves).<sup>61</sup> Adult males, such as Ōtsuka and Ishizaka, Shōno contends, should not fool anyone into thinking they are championing women's liberation while they preserve, if not strengthen, the image of innocent girlhood as the apex of both female sexuality and power.

Shōno almost accidentally comes across the same dual characteristics of suspicion towards mature female creativity and support of for-profit literature in a critic at quite a far remove from her pursuit of Ōtsuka and his editor. A fellow science fiction writer, Kotani Mari 小谷真理, was suing Yamagata Hirō 山形治生 for having written, in the reference book *Orutakarucha: media wakusu* オルタカルチャーメディア—ウアクス [Alternative Culture: Media Works], that her popular and well-received fiction was actually written by her academic husband. "Kotani Mari," Yamagata Hirō wrote, "is the pen name of Tatsumi Takayuki. The real writer is a man."<sup>62</sup> Yamagata was found guilty and fined almost thirty thousand dollars by the Tokyo courts. Shōno, along with many other writers, was a public supporter of Kotani's and joined the group *Josei no Chosaku-ken wo Kangaeru kai* 女性の著作権を考える会 (The Association to Defend Female Authorship) that grew out of the case. Several years after the case had concluded, Shōno comes across the defendant's name again—this time as a passionate proponent of for-profit literature. The critic who concluded that an engaged and active female author was incapable of writing the text to which her name was affixed, turns out to also be antagonistic to literature that does not turn a good profit. In "Shōsetsu no kōyō bunseki to sono mirai wo kangaeru" 小説の効用分析とその未来を考える (Thoughts on the Benefit-Analysis of Novels and its Future, 2003), Yamagata suggests that there is a way to evaluate the financial worth of literature based on inflation, the pleasure produced by other emerging media, and the benefit derived from the particular novel at hand. Literature, he surmises, has not maintained its value when compared to the rising per-capita income and expanding technological possibilities.<sup>63</sup>

While Shōno herself does not draw an explicit connection between Yamagata, Ōtsuka, and Ishizaka, her creative-criticism begs the question of why a disdain for subsidized art and a disdain for sexually or artistically mature women share such similar conditions of possibility. *Loli-libe* ロリ—リ, a term that Shōno coined using the *loli* of *loli-kon* and the *libe* of *neo-liberaru*, demonstrates the implicit connections she makes between a certain infantilization of women and the dominance of neo-liberal values.

Certainly, neo-liberal theory and the phenomena of *loli-kon* are logically consistent in that they both share the premise that commodification can extend to vast areas of life with little relevant human cost. In contrast to the influx of

<sup>61</sup>Shōno, 2004b, p. 248.

<sup>62</sup>*Orutakarucha: media wakusu*, p. 421.

<sup>63</sup>Yamagata, p. 312.

spaces in which consumption can take place, the places from which criticism can occur are seriously eroded when politics and culture are abdicated to “the wilds of the marketplace.”<sup>64</sup> Shōno takes the minute machinations—the apologies, the banning, the leaking, the false accusation—that ultimately create consensus and “common sense” as the topic of her writing, and seeks to clarify the content, and the process, of the changes underway. But will such a complex project produce the 100,000 sales that Ōtsuka claims are expected of any subculture book?

Exemplary of the complexity with which Shōno tracks the complicated process of producing a discourse is her 2006 *Dai-nihhon ontako no meiwaku-shi*. Here, the density of word-play and allusion begins with the title and the epigraph and continues throughout the novel. The *ontako* of the title is an impossible typo of *otaku*, which can be broadly defined as a subculture of highly specialized consumer-producers of cultural products along the lines of *anime*, *manga*, and figurines. These highly specialized tastes not infrequently involve caricatured figures of young or buxom women. *Otaku* consumption and production often challenges conventional modes and their “obsessive” interests have, at times, led to the assumption of anti-social behavior.<sup>65</sup> Thus they would usually be placed at a great and contestatory distance from the elite cadre of government bureaucrats that Shōno dubs the “ontako.” Her iteration of the “counter-cultural” *otaku*, “ontako,” however, draws attention to the historical and structural parallels that Shōno perceives between these two ostensibly opposite demographics; they both have a myopic notion of how to be anti-authoritarian or “liberal,” they do not question their own investment in the *loli-kon* industry, and they have no sense whatsoever of history prior to Japan’s Meiji Restoration. Through the lens that Shōno fabricates, the overwhelming male dominance of the government ministries; the practice of employing young females as promoters, or “cheerleaders,” in otherwise predominantly male political campaigns;<sup>66</sup> and the discrepancy between the record speed with which the Diet legalized Viagra and its decades-long resistance to making the birth-control pill widely accessible,<sup>67</sup> come into focus as an understanding of

<sup>64</sup>Bourdieu, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup>For my purposes here the popular image of *otaku* as a sub-cultural and (largely) male category is relevant. The SF writer and literary critic Shimizu Yoshinori, a frequent reviewer of Shōno Yoriko’s work, posits *otaku* culture and *loli-kon* as mutually constitutive. See Shimizu, p. 130.

<sup>66</sup>*Uguisujo* 鶯子, a combination of *uguisu* (bush warbler) and *jo* (young woman), denotes paid participants in a candidate’s campaign whose job it is to ride along in the campaign car with the candidate and drum up voter support by smiling, waving and repeating set phrases. See *Kōdansha’s Dictionary of Basic Japanese Idioms*, pp. 602–3.

<sup>67</sup>In January 1999 the Japanese Minister of Health and Welfare (MHW) gave final approval for Pfizer Inc.’s Viagra, an oral therapy for erectile dysfunction. Viagra received an expedited review by the MHW and was cleared for marketing within six months. In stark contrast, the Ministry had been considering the legalization of the low-dosage birth control pill for 34 years. Approval of 16 low-hormone dosage pills came later that same year (June 1999) after several months of public criticism of the speedy manner in which Viagra was approved for use. Japan was the last United Nations member to permit the use of oral contraceptives. See “UCLA Research on Asia,” <http://www.international.ucla.edu/eas/thisweek/06-02.htm>.

gender-relations and sexuality that is plausibly shared by both elite politicians and subcultural *otaku*. *Ontako* is a crucial Shōno term for those who believe themselves to be fighting the powers-that-be despite the fact that they subscribe to the same notions of gender and sexuality as that of the ruling class. The neologism “ontako” both frames the subculture of *otaku* as mainstream, and positions elite government bureaucrats as belonging to a subculture with a particular sexual fetish.

The epigraph of *Ontako no meiwaku-shi* fastens onto one particular reading of the homophone “tako” from *ontako*, meaning “octopus.” “The generous god that promises a great catch of octopii,” begins the epigraph, “is a peerless deity.” “This god sadly appears in front of humans,” the epigraph concludes, “and this is the oracle of that sadness.”<sup>68</sup> Promises of a lucrative harvest, the epigraph implies, have not been kind to history. The suggestion of windfall material profits is made stronger by the presence of the character for octopus within the word *takohaitō* 蛸配当—a bogus dividend that shows profit where there is none. Read via these textual and extra-textual connections (*takohaitō* does not appear in the text) the epigraph can be interpreted as a warning about the havoc wreaked not by phony promises of wealth, but by promises of phony wealth. Criticism of neo-liberalism’s interest in short-term financial profit becomes apparent when one retroactively unpacks the epigraph but it seems quite unlikely that it would be gleaned from a first reading.

Reading *Ontako no meiwaku-shi* is a taxing process. But it is also one that allows the reader to encounter a palimpsest of conflicting historical “common senses” and the processes by which they change and evolve. It would be difficult to put a price tag on the “good sense” reached for in such a Gramscian project of critically engaging with chaotic and often obfuscating “common sense,” but in short-term sales it would likely be quite low. The thought and reflection generated by close readings of such now classical texts as Murasaki Shikibu’s *Tale of Genji* or James Joyce’s *Ulysses*—both of which benefited from differing but significant systems of patronage—is certainly less connected to the amount of copies sold than it is to the labor and time spent on them. The practice of *uri-age bungaku*, or for-profit literature, however, would likely do away with such subsidized art and subject all cultural production to a single system of evaluation.

<sup>68</sup>The first section of the narrative involves the erasure of a religious group named *mitako* by the political party rising to power, the *ontako*. The linguistic connection between the many-tentacled octopi of *tako*, the religious group about to be snuffed out, *mitako*, and the anti-authoritarians who have become authoritarian, *ontako* is all at the level of homonyms; different Chinese characters, or the relevant syllabary, are used for each of the words, which share no common lexicography. The sound slippage is significant because the characters for *mitako* are increasingly misread as *ontako*, which is seen by the narrator as a parasitic act endangering the existence of the *mitako*. Nuances of the word *tako* for “octopus” also shoot through the semantically dissimilar *ontako*, whose power, within the narrative, is rapidly growing. Octopi appear, for example, as creatures who have been made to wiggle their tentacles in response to pre-determined discourses (p. 43), and as examples of bounty with crippling blessings (p. i).



### Conclusion: Shōno's Praxis of Embodiment

Shōno self-consciously presents her writing as an agent of agitation. But the chances of her succeeding in her efforts to carry on experimental, historically-informed, largely non-narrative fiction that doesn't sell particularly well, are hardly promising. Recently, however, activists and academics interested in challenging the increasingly acceptable commodification of labor, land, and people, have found resonance in Shōno's particular critical perspective. The March 2007 issue of *Gendaiishisō*, discussed more below, is a striking example of how Shōno's voice is being heard despite such overwhelming odds.

The title of the dedicated issue—"Shōno Yoriko: Neoriberarizumu wo koeru sōzōryoku" 笠野頼子：ネオリベリズムを超える想像力 (The Imagination to Overcome Neo-Liberalism)—reflects an understanding of the imagination's central role in keeping the complications of history alive and producing an otherwise unobtainable clarity. Neo-liberal practices and rhetoric often blur conventional distinctions between the left and the right on the political spectrum, making them a less effective axis from which to understand the changing realities of economic globalization. The axis that Shōno introduces suggests a new possibility for understanding contemporary social change because it rotates around that which is currently occluded by the liberal-conservative binary—namely, the extent to which one sees the needs of capital as the necessary priority. Shōno's terms *sa-chiku* 左蓄 (left-beast) and *u-chiku* 右蓄 (right beast) mock the viability of a political spectrum in which one's political position remains fixed regardless of one's position on the priority of capital fluidity and accumulation.<sup>69</sup> The Narita Shrine, one of the sites of the Narita farmers' struggle against the government's decision to erect the new Tokyo-area airport on their land in the 1970s, figures large in Shōno's landscape as a place that is met with equal indifference from the right and the left. In her 2002 visit to the shrine—which led to the writing of *Ichi, ni, san, shi, kyō wo ikiyou! Narita sanbai suihei* 一、二、三、死、今日を生きよう！成田三杯崇拜 (*Let's Live Today! Narita Worship*, 1,2,3,4, 2006)—Shōno found that it was fenced in by the runway, and she noted that one of the pair of stone dogs was missing and not another soul was in sight. While it was once a locus of heated political struggle, the shrine has now been largely forgotten by all sides of the political spectrum; Shōno describes the place as "a run-down shrine that even nationalists find too difficult to get to," and the critic Shimizu Yoshinori describes it as "forgotten by history, forgotten even by the left."<sup>70</sup> Shōno, however, gained insight and clarity from her visit to Narita and the exposure it provided to the principles that arose out of the farmers' protest.

The principles that arose out of the farmers' struggle helped to clarify Shōno's own notion of *onnen*. Three decades after the struggle began, with the passage of time and little prospect for success, several farmers still resist their land being

<sup>69</sup>*Sa-chiku* and *u-chiku* are composed with the character for "beast," also used in a common expletive.

<sup>70</sup> Shimizu, p. 135.

taken away. The in-exchangeability of land is a significant premise of the farmers' resistance. One of the remaining farmers expresses the sentiment that value is not something that can always be abstracted from the original matter and then reproduced in other matter without qualitative differences occurring: "Farming isn't just the land and the soil, it is also the wind that blows through these fields. I can't take that with me and that is why I am not moving."<sup>71</sup> There are properties specific to one's labor—be it agricultural or cultural—which defy conversion, and when these non-convertible realities are forced into a position of conversion, they produce a resentment—in Shōno's terminology *onnen*—that takes on a presence that will not dissipate until they find their proper expression. In Shōno's analysis, the organic farming movement that grew out of the Narita farmers' struggle is an example of *onnen* that has found its own expression. Out of direct conflict and prolonged years of struggle came a politicization and heightened environmental awareness which grew into an organic farming movement that might not have developed had the farmers not needed to resist authority in the first place. In this form, resistance to commodification of land lives on. Which is not to say that everything somehow works itself out in the end, but rather that the effects of taking the land are still palpably alive in places where the present day is no longer shining the spotlight. Conduits to emotional resources from another time and a different relationship to place have not all been foreclosed.

It is in this aspect of *onnen* finding its autonomous expression that the sociologist and workers' rights advocate Kurihara Yasushi 栗原 康 finds Shōno's writing valuable. In his contribution to the *Gendaishisō* issue on Shōno, "Onnen no rōdō: toshi wo todayō 'sere-fu sera-' no hangayku ni mukete" 怨念の労働：都市を漂う'セレーフセララーの反逆にむけて (The Labor of Revenge: The Treason of the 'Self-Sellers' that Swirls around the Metropolis) Kurihara discusses the surprise he felt when he saw how little outrage the temporary systems engineers he interviewed expressed toward the employment system they work within. These workers belong to the third tier of the new Japan-style management system mentioned above, and have poor working conditions with no benefits, security, or emergency provisions. They are also routinely forced to put in overtime, for which their contracts do not allow them to be compensated. One of the interviewed workers recounted an incident in which a fellow worker collapsed and was taken to the hospital, never to be seen again. None of the project members knew his name or the company for which he worked: "When I look back on that I realize that none of us knew one another—we all worked for different companies—we would have remained indifferent no matter what took place."<sup>72</sup> Kurihara attributes the lack of anger over these conditions to the internalization of "self-responsibility" and "self-decision making" that the new employment system invokes. The "free" workers knowingly enter into

<sup>71</sup> Yanagawa Hideo, "Chikyū-teki kadai no jikken mura" to wa "hara hachibu no shisō," members2/home.com.ne.jp/jikken-mura/index.htm (accessed October 23, 2008).

<sup>72</sup> Kurihara, p. 225.

these employment conditions, which are becoming more and more common and therefore more naturalized. Kurihara appreciates Shōno's methodology of foregrounding the human cost of labor with such terms as "time-seller" for dispatch workers, and "self-seller" for dangerous work without any protection.<sup>73</sup> Borrowing from Shōno's analysis of the Narita farmers' outrage eventually taking on the form of organic farming, Kurihara does not see the temporary workers' silence as evidence that there is no outrage. Thus, Shōno's criticism encourages a channeling of attention towards forgotten or seemingly resolved acts of injustice, and counters resignation with the expectation that rebellious energy does not altogether disappear. Kurihara is therefore confident that the *onnen* of the dispatch IT workers will eventually manifest itself in a resilient and living manner. "Shōno's experiment," he concludes, "is not limited to the realm of literature, it shows a consciousness against which neo-liberalism can be opposed" (p. 226).<sup>74</sup>

Sex-work activist and researcher Mizushima Nozomi is also encouraged by Shōno's writing. In her contribution to the *Gendaishisō* special issue "Uramizumo no uraji" ウラムズモの裏地 [Uramizumo's Lining] Mizushima describes her experience of reading Shōno's *The Troublesome History of the Ontako* after having working for eight years as an AIDS educator and health-care provider for sex-workers. Interestingly, Shōno's narrator in *The Troublesome History of the Ontako* is explicitly uncomfortable with the representational possibilities when it comes to narrating the world of the "licensed quarters." Will she be able, the narrator wonders, to avoid either idealizing or victimizing those who work there, and how should she term their labor? In a move that is similar to Shōno's re-casting *furita* as "time-seller," her narrator asks: "Is 'sex-work' really a severe enough term for the conditions—the continuous lack of sleep and paltry food, amongst other things—these people endure in the course of their labor?"<sup>75</sup> Mizushima herself, in the beginning of her work in the field, intentionally used the word "sex-worker" because of the positive connections it forged with other valued labor, but after witnessing the physical vulnerability and maltreatment of the particular prostitutes she was working with she no longer felt that "sex-worker" was an adequate term. "This is quite personal for me," Mizushima recounts, "but as I was reading the novel I kept on thinking that I only realized these things after I became actively involved in the world of prostitution."<sup>76</sup>

Mizushima notes Shōno's attention to "ugly," a word which, like "prostitute," is brimming with physicality and potential humiliation. Shōno refuses to countenance the silencing of the discomfiting word "ugly," and repeatedly invokes it in

<sup>73</sup>Instead of the word *furita*, a partially German-derived word which, at least initially in the late 1980s, had the nuance of freely choosing temporary employment and an alternative life-style, Shōno suggests that the word "time-seller" might more accurately depict the situation of dispatch workers. "For dangerous work without any protection," Shōno writes, "self-seller" may be more appropriate." Shōno Yoriko, 2007, p. 16.

<sup>74</sup>Kurihara, p. 226.

<sup>75</sup>Shōno, 2006a, p. 178.

<sup>76</sup>Shōno, 2006a, p. 179.

reference to both herself and to her methodology, as in the titles *Koko nankai-sugi karuku nagashite ne busu no isakai onna yo* ここ難解すぎ軽く流してねブスの諍い女よ (Just Ignore this Too-Difficult-to-Read Quarrelsome Woman Writer, 1999) and the epilogue to *The Troublesome History of the Ontako*, “Gengo ni totte busu to wa nanni ka?” 言語に取ってブスは何か? [What is ‘ugly’ in terms of language?],<sup>77</sup> respectively. What is elided in the phrase “sex work” or made inaccessible with the bracketing off of “ugly,” is the lived experience of those either involved in such labor or implicated by the possibly hushed but still powerful word “ugly.” “I want to trace the work that words have been made to do,” Shōno writes: “I want to learn what words have been made to carry on their backs and run with.”<sup>78</sup> As noted by Kurihara and Mizushima, Shōno’s metaphorical use of the bodies of words does not preclude attention to actual bodies themselves. Her attunement to the relationships between discourse and physicality is apparent when she questions the applicability of the respectful term “sex work,” or introduces the draconian term “self-seller,” or brings the loathsome descriptor “ugly” to the fore.

What is the praxis that Shōno is modeling? An almost excessive pushing on the pressure points of key words within a discourse that seem to be ahistorical, and that, when displaced, may yield access to plural value systems. In her article “Shisha wa “kawari ni omoidashite kudasai” to yobikaketa” 死者は代わりに思い出して下さいと呼びかけた (The Dead Called Out, “Please Think of us for a Change”) Satō Izumi 佐藤 泉 describes the steps in Shōno’s writing process as follows: “Standing still as the confounding power relations whirl around, you resist the correctness that makes things invisible, you explode against the formula that ignores details.”<sup>79</sup> Shōno employs this stance of full-out rage, on a literary level, as a means of coming into direct opposition with words that “sound as though they are coming from outside of history”—words such as “freedom,” or the modern “self.”<sup>80</sup> This is also the position that Shōno occupies as she painstakingly takes the reader through the details of her highly personal struggles to debate pure literature. She uses the details, and her personal experience, to stave off the possibility of being lost beneath a generalization. In order to combat words and ideas that sound as though they would find no resonance in the human body, Shōno poses the constitutively historical experience of her own living, breathing self. The vocabulary she deploys fosters a sense of connectedness between structuring economic relations and the production of ideal bodily images. The corporeal logics at work here propel an “eternally treasonous spirit of embodiment,” with which Shōno resists the consolidating forces of history and power.

Shōno’s dogged pursuit of social rectification left undone reaches from long-forgotten righteous causes to the veneer of political-correctness, to the erosion of space for social criticism done in the name of the popular will of the marketplace.

<sup>77</sup> *The Troublesome History of the Ontako*, pp. 212–23.

<sup>78</sup> Shōno Yoriko and Machida Kō, p. 129.

<sup>79</sup> Satō, p. 117.

<sup>80</sup> Satō, p. 117.

The tenacity she allows herself creates connections between unlikely figures and ideas and in so doing she creates texture and historical depth for a discourse that might otherwise appear flat and inevitable. In her struggle against the rising tide of neo-liberalism she borrows *onnen* from a non-rational discourse of “self” and sets it screaming across the parallel zones of increased commodification, the singularly modern individual, and the world of *loli-kon*; and comes up demanding to know why, in her experience, the freedoms promised within economic liberalization curtail the possibilities of mature female expression and authority.

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