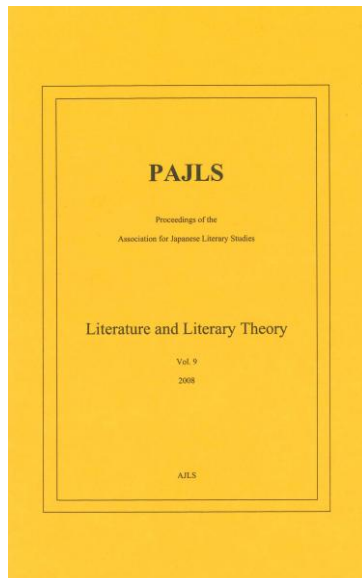


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*Proceedings of the Association for Japanese  
Literary Studies* 9 (2008): 141–151.



*PAJLS* 9:  
*Literature and Literary Theory*.  
Ed. Atsuko Ueda and Richard Okada.

## Narrating Hokkaidō: Kunikida Doppo and A New Vision of Literature

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Celebrated associations notwithstanding, Kunikida Doppo's encounter with Hokkaidō was a brief one—lasting not even ten days.<sup>1</sup> In the fall of 1895, Doppo went to Hokkaidō to select a plot of land, on which to settle with his future wife, Sasaki Nobuko. This plan never materialized. However, the trip seems to have made a lasting impression on Doppo and, years later, provided inspiration for “Gyūniku to bareisho” (Beef and Potatoes) and “Sorachigawa no kishibe” (The Bank of Sorachi River), the two narratives that I would like to discuss.<sup>2</sup> “Sorachigawa no kishibe” has been consecrated as “the original source of northern lyricism” (*hoppō no ririshizumu no gensen*) and “the prelude to Hokkaidō literature” (Hokkaidō *bungaku no zensōkyoku*).<sup>3</sup> What does the latter proper noun-adjective “Hokkaidō” signify? This is a complex question, a thoughtful answer to which would require a genealogical tracing through the critical discourse in which it gained its semantic stability. Suffice it to say, that for my purposes here, this proper noun-adjective cannot simply mean “representing” Hokkaidō, a phrase with its own need for qualification. One clear proof at hand is the fact that it had to be “Sorachigawa no kishibe” rather than “Gyūniku to bareisho” with which “Hokkaidō literature commenced,” despite the fact that the latter was published first, even while both are considered constituents of the pseudo-subgenre. One conventional argument for this differential and question-begging positioning lies in the equally conventional association of Hokkaidō with nature and the belief that the pseudo-autobiographical narrative of “Sorachigawa no kishibe” laid out the “essence (*honshitsu*) of Hokkaidō's nature.”<sup>4</sup> In contrast, “Gyūniku to bareisho,” while it makes frequent references to the island, neither is set in nor concerns the locale. What makes “Gyūniku to bareisho” a significant precedent of what was to become, only belatedly, “Hokkaidō literature” is perhaps found elsewhere: it puts forward a compelling epistemological landscape of a stratum of youth, adoringly anointed “*seinen*,” which will be further discussed below. All said, “Gyūniku to bareisho” is still cited, however facilely, as one of the Meiji literary works that stands out in “Hokkaidō literature.”<sup>5</sup> What is perhaps most important to note here is that the category of “Hokkaidō literature” is founded, at least in part, on this destabilizing positioning of the two narratives. Taking into account of this originary suspension, my present discussion sets out with a premise that these two narratives are joined in a chiasmic continuity, whereby Okamoto's ontological quest, the telos of “Gyūniku to bareisho,” emerges with clear contours against

<sup>1</sup> In a representative work on Hokkaidō and literature, Kihara Naohiko cites Wada Kingo as positioning Kunikida Doppo's “northern lyricism” as a literary historical event that inaugurated and suggested future possibilities for “Hokkaidō literature.” Kihara extends Wada's argument. Kihara Naohiko, *Hokkaidō bungakushi: Meiji hen* (Sapporo: Hokkaidō shinbunsha, 1975), 9.

<sup>2</sup> “Gyūniku to bareisho” was first published in *Kotenchi* in November 1901; “Sorachigawa no kishibe” in the November and December issues of *Seinenkai* in 1902.

<sup>3</sup> Kihara, *Hokkaidō bungakushi*, 90.

<sup>4</sup> Kihara, *Hokkaidō bungakushi*, 90.

<sup>5</sup> Kihara, *Hokkaidō bungakushi*, 96. For a more recent discussion, see Onishi Yasumitsu, “Meiji bungaku ni okeru Hokkaidō no hyōshō—Kunikida Doppo ‘Gyūniku to bareisho’ ron,” *Kirisutokyō bungei*, vol. 18 (December, 2001), 5.

Hokkaidō as represented in “Sorachigawa no kishibe,” and vice versa, a continuity that continually reveals itself in marks of laceration. Reading them onto each other, I propose to throw light on the semantic structure that sustains this particular continuity and, ultimately, the idea of “Hokkaidō” thereby constituted.

### Death/Debt/Ontology

As with any powerful representation, the two loci of meaning in Doppo’s narratives, i.e. Okamoto’s ontological quest and Hokkaidō as a landscape laden with a specific semantic onus, are constituted through the double movement of ideation, which is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. In the case of “Gyūniku to bareisho,” what makes this signifying process particularly intriguing is the fact that the elements to be excluded in the process of ideation are mundanely exposed. In other words, they are clearly present under erasure inside the narrative. My concern here is to examine how felicitously, and perhaps not so felicitously, these elements are erased in the making of ideas and the attending effects of that erasure.

“Gyūniku to bareisho” has been read, rather unreflectively, as the protagonist Okamoto’s and, by extension, Doppo’s struggle to transcend the binaries of ideal versus reality, which are allegorically shifted onto potato versus beef in the narrative. Some critics have judged this struggle to have ended in an inevitable frustration and others valorized the struggle as an ontological quest, regardless of its apparent outcome.<sup>6</sup> In an attempt to displace this voluntarist and moralistic reading, I would like to draw attention to the mechanism through which the idea of this quest is constituted in the first place.

On the surface, “Gyūniku to bareisho” gestures towards a non-position. That is to say, Okamoto’s ontological quest takes the form of transcending the time and space intelligible in mundane life, which he characterizes as “custom” (*kasutomu*). The result is the usual tandem of ontology and frustration in high relief, which apparently defines the entire narrative. The threadbare debate on the attainability of such a quest is beside the point here. Let us pursue instead the ways in which the idea becomes intelligible. The narrative is structured to allow Kamimura’s story to completely unfold, thereby objectifying his past as a romantic young man with a passion for what Hokkaidō stood for; i.e., the land of freedom (*jiyū no tenchi*), and his ironic present status as an employee of a mining company in Hokkaidō. This rather cheerfully performed self-mockery on the part of Kamimura is mirrored in those around him as a trajectory from naïve youth to realistic adulthood, which prepares the ground, from which Okamoto will launch his transcendental philosophy. Transcendental it is, not for such an eye-catching term as universe (*uchū*), but for Okamoto’s pronounced effort to reject the familiar, which renders his ontological project stillborn. It would not take a cynic to propose that what is implicitly celebrated here is Okamoto’s unbridled indulgence in his ideal, something that all the others in the room admit to having abandoned long ago, rather than any form of philosophy. In this sense, the entire narrative is a commemorative tribute to, rather than exigent exposition on, Okamoto’s worldview. Put differently, there is nostalgia *already* in the valorizing narrative act, a temporal schism to be noted in my discussion of *seinen* below. In any case, Okamoto presents a rather

<sup>6</sup> Besides Onishi’s, the following studies also take the latter position: Seki Hajime, “Aironii no kisei—Kunikida Doppo ‘Gyūniku to bareisho’ ron,” *Gakushūin daigaku bungakubu kenkyū nenpō* vol. 38 (March 1991), 40-60; Yatō Naoya, “Kunikida Doppo ‘Gyūniku to bareisho’ ron,” *Kirisutokyō bungei*, vol. 18 (December 2001), 17-29; Wada Yoshiki, “Kunikida Doppo ‘Gyūniku to bareisho’ ron,” *Kaishaku*, vol. 46 (2000), 11-17.

unremarkable “transcendentality,” for it gains its intelligibility through the simplistic dichotomy of potato-ism versus beef-ism that Kamimura’s allegorized personal history represents.

More importantly, however, a whole other set of elements gives fundamental shape to the ontological quest in the making. They take the form of surreptitious supplements, thereby managing to maintain their presence under erasure, i.e. stories incidental to the total narrative, meaningful insofar as they are positioned towards its grand teleology. These supplements are juxtaposed on the death of Oei, the girl (*shōjo/musume*) that Okamoto once loved.

In narrativizing his ontological quest, which he titles “unusual wish” (*fushigina negai*), in a manner of personal History, marked by linearity and purpose, Okamoto foregrounds his love affair with Oei. He begins by saying, “I know this is rather abrupt. But I ought to start about here if I’m going to tell you what my unusual wish is. That young woman was really beautiful.”<sup>7</sup> By the end of his love story, Oei dies and Okamoto awakens to his “unusual wish,” which is to be “surprised” at the mysteries of the universe (*fushiginaru uchū*). Okamoto further concretizes his wish in the form of a question that he wishes to but is unable to ask from his heart, i.e. “What am I?” which is written out in English in the original text. The most remarkable irony of Okamoto’s narrative is that none other than Oei is tormented by a similarly ontologically motivated question. Indeed, Okamoto clearly recalls the moment that precipitated his love (*rabi*) for her: it is precisely when she uttered, “I don’t know why I am living in a world like this” (160). He does not pursue the meaning of this utterance, either then or now. Instead, Okamoto cites Oei’s utterance and turns it around, in effect, to silence her into death, a death without an explanation, without a history. He incurs a debt that will sustain his narrative of ontology through an indefinite default, for which there is only a dead debtor to resent him.

Death and debt loom large for another female figure in Okamoto’s narrative. It is an unknown young woman, whose body he discovers hanging from a tree. He experiences a premonition of Oei’s death at this sight. As it turned out, Okamoto informs his listeners, the young woman killed herself after being left pregnant by a soldier, who then returned to his hometown/country. Neither Okamoto nor any of the listeners contemplates the story, which must have appeared on the gossip pages of newspapers, with words that surely and often collaborated and conspired to feed public imagination during the Meiji years: soldier, pregnant, country, and suicide (*heishi, kaitai, kuni, and jisatsu*). “Country” perhaps is a double-entendre? Premonition or not, Oei indeed dies but Okamoto provides no further details. The lack of any explanation about Oei’s death produces an effect whereby her body overlaps with the unknown young woman’s and we are left to speculate if Oei could have killed herself. None of the listeners asks further questions. It seems as if they are on a run from the ghosts of the women as well as their shared debts. They owed their youthful poetry to the love of (in both senses) women and owe their present successes to the death of love, and the women with it. It only makes sense that women appear only within their narratives, framed, sanitized, and exorcized, by the homosocial setting. Okamoto savors the telling of his narrative and the listeners are eager to arrive at his unusual wish, which seeks to finalize the erasure of women and forgetting of debts.

In contrast with the ghostly figures of the two girls (*shōjo/musume*), Oei’s mother is fully in her blood and flesh, manifesting an old enemy of the new generation of youth represented in

<sup>7</sup> This and following translations are taken from Leon Zolbrod trans., “Meat and Potatoes (Gyūniku to bareisho)” in J. Thomas Rimer and Van C. Gessel, eds., *From Restoration to Occupation, 1868-1945, The Columbia Anthology of Japanese Literature*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 160. I made minor changes when necessary to highlight the aspects under discussion. Hereafter, references to this work will be made parenthetically in the text.

“Gyūniku to bareisho;” i.e., worldly concerns epitomized by the familiar idiom, *risshin shusse* (success and advancement). It is by no accident that she strongly recalls Osei’s mother in Futabatei Shimei’s *Ukigumo* (Floating Clouds, 1887-89), a forerunner of the narrative of a young man’s sense of a desensitizing and demoralizing world. However, what Oei’s mother and Osei’s mother stand for does not agitate Okamoto and his listeners as it did Bunzō in *Ukigumo*.<sup>8</sup> Although Okamoto’s generation also pursues worldly successes, as supposedly exemplified by the abandonment of “potato-ism,” their language of success has outgrown the constraints of *risshin shusse*, through love, literature, and Christianity among other things. The temporal and epistemological lapse between Bunzō’s psychological world and the narrative present of “Gyūniku to bareisho” manifests itself as this margin of imperturbability. For this reason, Oei/love and Oei’s mother/*risshin shusse* are mutually exclusive, even while mutually reinforcing, vis-à-vis the epistemological landscape that Okamoto represents. Similarly, Okamoto’s love for Oei and Bunzō’s love for Osei are worlds apart. In this context, Oei’s mother is perhaps more dead than the two young women, which makes it possible for Okamoto to render her an object of caricature rather than anxiety. Only with the creation of a language that would contain the specter, will the object of anxiety die a complete death, or almost.

Thus, all women are dead, more or less, in Okamoto’s narrative. Kondō, a self-proclaimed trenchant realist, shares an unspoken bond with Okamoto, a rare martyr of idealism. It is implied that his bitter experience with love led him to gain both ontological depth and a misogynist view of women—perhaps it is more accurate to say that the two attributes stand in for each other. It is through his perspective that the reader is called upon to view Okamoto’s struggle. This narrative intention is evident in the last scene. After the long story about his love and unusual wish, Okamoto suddenly changes his tone and says, as if in self-derision, “I say that I want to be surprised, but I guess I really don’t mean it,” at which “[everybody] was laughing and now Okamoto joined in the laughter. But Kondō caught an expression of deep anguish on Okamoto’s face” (167).

Kondō’s vitriolic language invites laughs from the others. However, the aforementioned perspectival hierarchy signals that there is more to the façade of this language. The manner in which Kondō is introduced in the narrative dictates that he commend perspectival authority and narrative intention. He is “a tall, sinister-looking man named Kondō who had been drinking quietly alone. He had said nothing, not even when Okamoto first entered the room” (156). The punctuation of this and other similar signals insist on Kondō’s remove from the vacuous crowd on the one hand, and an unspoken bond with Okamoto on the other; the latter despite the apparent differences in their views of ideal versus reality. The question for us should be, what explains this bond? I would like to call attention to one possible answer: They are the two in the room who profess to have experienced love and possess that which the narrative endorses as ontology. Through the figures of Okamoto and Kondō, a nexus between love/women and ontology becomes constituted.

It then should come as no surprise that Kondō’s view of the other sex is summed up in his ontology, which exerts a different level of authenticity owing to its performist and exhibitionist language of ridicule. He declares that women cannot possibly practice “potato-ism” and congratulates Okamoto on Oei’s death. He further declares,

<sup>8</sup> I am thinking of Kimura Naoe’s definition of *seinen* as a “mode of subjecthood” (*shutai no arikata*), with a historicity specific to mid-Meiji decades. Kimura Naoe, “*Seinen*” no *tanjō*: *Meiji Nihon ni okeru seijiteki jissen no tenkan* (Tokyo: Shin’yōsha, 1998); see especially chapters 4 and 5.

You hardly ever hear of a woman tiring of life. Young girls sometimes show signs of it but that is just an abnormality arising from their thirst for love. . . . [They] finally tire of love and surely there is nothing more difficult to deal with than a woman who is tired of love. I said earlier that this is hateful but it's rather to be pitied. Men are different, for they often tire of life itself, and if, at this juncture, they encounter love, they find in it a way out. That's why they throw their whole heart into the fire of love. In cases like this love becomes synonymous with life for men. (163)

Here Kondō manages to make references, without naming them, to all three women appearing in Okamoto's narrative and mark them, above all, as ontologically frivolous. Okamoto is receptive to Kondo's theory when he says "Kondō is right in that I am a man who found a way out of my boredom with life through love" (164).

Kondō's ability to make a spectacle of himself as a victim of love inversely signals a kind of ontological maturity and appeals to the grand narrative of coming of age. Considering the readership of texts such as those under examination here, this appeal is significant. The fact that Kondō's perspective closes the entire narrative further advances this narrative intention. Considered thus, Kondō's seemingly idiosyncratic and farcical view of the world, which is intimately connected with that of women, ought to be reckoned as far more textually significant than conventionally recognized. Thus, the female figures disappear into their literal and figurative death amidst the drunken laughter occasioned by Kondo's misogyny and Okamoto's ontology.

By positioning Kondō, rather than Okamoto, at the apex of the perspectival hierarchy, the text performs something sinister, an aspect that few critics have recognized. Through the figure of Kondō, the fissures running through Okamoto's ontology are concealed and the female sex becomes an object of nostalgia at best and a liability for the male ontology at worst. Put differently, Kondō's perspectival privilege translates into a textual valorization of the inevitability of the erasure of women, which is in a mutually *engendering* relationship with the male ontological aspiration. The unexpected, and for that reason often ignored, inversion performed in the figure of Kondō presents a worldview that is much more problematic than a simple struggle over the dichotomy of ideal versus reality.

Thus, Okamoto's ontology has become constituted through the erasure of the women who are the very characters of His-story. Hokkaidō as an ontological landscape is a construct of the same generative mechanism of erasure. Our next narrative is demonstrative of some of the ways in which Hokkaidō becomes reinvented as a locale par excellence to accommodate Okamoto and his fellow young men to authenticate their ontology.

### **Seinen (Youth)**

In "Gyūniku to bareisho" Hokkaidō is imagined as a thoroughly domesticated space where a New England-style home is a centerpiece. Kamimura illustrates this imagination when he describes his youthful dream of settling down on the island as follows:

Now, there in the very middle of the fields is a house. It's crudely built, but anyone can see it's American style, a copy of a New England colonial. . . . I was in a quandary about how many windows to put in. . . . A small brook with clear,

running water would curve out from the right side of the shelter belt and flow past the house. Ducks with purple wings and geese with pure white backs would float in the brook, over which a bridge made of a plank three inches thick would be suspended. I wondered whether to attach a railing to the bridge but finally decided not to—it's more *natural* that way. (156, emphasis added)

The specific semantic environment, in which “natural” takes its denotative value, must be taken into account for other *significant* terms, Hokkaidō foremost. In fact, nature and Hokkaidō are intimately conjoined as I will further discuss below.

In “Sorachigawa no kishibe,” on the contrary, Hokkaidō becomes a no-man’s land, which would nonetheless admit a few selected men. In a sense, it is a rarified version of the Hokkaidō in the “potato-ist” imagination. The first-person narrator/protagonist repeatedly describes his journey as one into forbidding (*osoroshiki; reigen naru*) nature, thus voicing this new imagination. In the midst of this awesome nature, the Okamoto-esque ontology is endowed with a landscape in which to bring the universe and a man face to face. Putting aside the question of what relationship is assumed among man, nature, and the universe, I will argue that the narrative structure thoroughly undermines the purported journey to a solitary encounter with nature. The irony is that the protagonist’s journey into the “prehistoric” (*genshi no*) nature unfolds as a pursuit of a prefectural official. Significantly, “prefectural” (*dōchō no*) is part of a larger grid which provides the necessary conditions for the protagonist’s journey. Let me note a minor fact: It was with the installation of the first island-wide prefectural governor, Iwamura Michitoshi, in 1886 and his activism for the transfer of capital and human resources to Hokkaidō through the privatization of the overall management of the settlement that the influx of youth such as the protagonist, and Kamimura above, became possible.<sup>9</sup>

This larger historical circumstance, which defined the chain of (nation) state-capitalism-colonies, is made even more unambiguous when the narrator introduces terms of national territory in situating Hokkaidō. However, the certainties marked by these signposts of the nation-state soon ambiguate as Hokkaidō itself uncomfortably straddles the boundary between the “main/real/essential land” (*hondo*) and the presumed category of “peripheral/unreal/supplementary land.” Note the syntactical ambiguity in the following:

For someone such as I who grew up in the Chūgoku region, densely populated even for the mainland of our country, and who was accustomed to seeing landscapes whose mountains and fields had been flattened by human hands, even the plains of Tōhoku would stir in me feelings of return toward nature. How then could my heart not jump at the sight of Hokkaidō? Though Sapporo is the Tokyo of Hokkaidō, the landscape, spread out before me as far as the eye could see, nearly put me under a spell and whisked me away.<sup>10</sup>

First, there is a noticeable distancing from what is silently posited as the essence of the national territory, carried out by way of crescendoing foreignness punctuated by even for the mainland of our (beloved) country,” “even the plains of Tōhoku,” and “[how] then . . . at the

<sup>9</sup> Onishi, “Meiji bungaku ni okeru Hokkaidō no hyōshō,” 6.

<sup>10</sup> Kunikida Doppo, “Sorachigawa no kishibe” in Kunikida Doppo, *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Gakushū kenkyūsha, 1964), 9. All translations of this text are mine. Hereafter, references to this work will be made parenthetically in the text.

sight of Hokkaidō.” This outbound movement, however, does not end in creating or reaching an outside, beyond a national territorial boundary, but rather continues toward vanishing points of the boundary. In other words, “the main/real/essential land of our (beloved) country” neither includes nor excludes Tōhoku and, especially, Hokkaidō but rather suspends them as the very vanishing points.

In “Gyūniku to bareisho,” Oei’s figure manages to be plainly exposed, precisely because of the narrative confidence in its supplemental status, even as her figure renders a boundary/alterity essential for the constitution of Okamoto’s ontology. In “Sorachigawa no kishibe,” on the other hand, Hokkaidō, in its ontological ambiguity, leaves its trace hovering over the syntax of this definitive passage. The syntax lives on as slippage, haunting the word-meaning-narrative intention of “*wagakuni*” and “*hondo*.” The deceptive simile of “Sapporo is Hokkaido’s Tokyo” is an attempt to pass over this ambiguity vis-à-vis “*wagakuni hondo*.” Are we to acquiesce to a parallel between Japan and Hokkaidō here? This is precisely a question to be forgotten through the simile. It should be obvious by now that the “prehistoric woods” become meaningful in the protagonist’s horizon of possibilities insofar as they have first been surrendered to the government and its attending apparatus. Obliviously, however, the protagonist has his own view of and agenda for Hokkaidō’s nature.

Most notably, he dichotomizes nature’s force that is desolate, lonesome, cold and forbidding, on the one hand, and human powerlessness represented by love (*ai*), emotions (*jōninjō*), and warmth, on the other (9-10). To further concretize this dichotomy, the narrator employs an overtly gendered language. He declares, “When a man (*danshi*) establishes his intention, pursues his ideal and searches for the land of freedom in the forest, he ought not to be unmanly (*memeshiku*)” (14).

There are two places where women appear in the narrative. First, an innkeeper’s wife impresses him with her untainted provincial accent (*inaka namari o sono mama*) and genuine (*kokorokara*) affability (15). It is her accent, rather than words, and her human warmth that he notices.<sup>11</sup> Next, the narrator witnesses a “realm of pleasure” (*kanrakukyō*) in a corner of the “high mountains and deep valleys” (*shinzan yūkoku*). On a late night walk, away from human habitation (*jinka o hanare*), he stumbles upon a row house from which rises raucous music and laughter. Here human warmth turns into animalistic heat and the narrative language is indulgently anti-modern.

“Drink! Sing! Kill! Strike!” Guffawing, shouting, cursing, cheering, yelling . . . the lines of the sensuous song simply rend the heart. The moaning strain of the *shamisen* suddenly turns into a violent wind, and then comes down as spring rain. Look closely, for revelry contains an air of menace, and the air of menace holds tears of blood. Is crying not laughing? Is laughing not crying? Is rage not song? Is song not really rage? Ah, how vain this life is! (18-19)

There is a rhythm in the descriptive language, reminiscent of the *gesaku* style, whereby laughs, yells, and cheers give unkempt shape to the scene of pleasure. The characters in it are miners and prostitutes who appear to the protagonist as demons (*oni*) and devils (*yasha*). He sums up the story of these unknown migrants in one ordered phrase: “They have drifted (*nagareochite*) into this valley, which used to be home to bears and wolves until just a few years ago, and they stagnate here, seethe here and sink here (*kokoni yodomi, kokoni gekishi, kokoni shizumi*).” By

<sup>11</sup> The innkeeper, on the contrary, is given a large textual space to tell his history, which I will not discuss here.



way of this linguistic feat, stunningly uncharacteristic of the rest of the narrative, the narrator manages to turn the Ainu, the invisible residents of the island, into bears and wolves and the colonies from the “*wagakuni hondo*” into a mass of water that will become absorbed into Hokkaidō’s valleys, leaving the landscape empty of humanity.

The figures in the passage are literally made into figures that would furnish a different, or bygone, epistemology. Their anachronism provides a benign alterity in the same way that Oei’s mother did for Okamoto. To drive this point home, the narrator invests in a term that sustains the protagonist’s sense of coherent self, *seinen*. The commencement of the narrative neatly follows the order of “our (beloved) country” (*wagakuni*) to “prefectural office” (*dochō*) to “(literary) youth” (*seinen*), to trace the epistemological landscape of the mid-Meiji youth. Without detailing here the shifting praxis of “political” versus “literary,” which provided relief to their will to power, suffice it to say that Doppo’s narrative, perhaps despite itself, positions *seinen* within the vertical structure of nation-state-youth.<sup>12</sup>

The protagonist-narrator takes on a third-person voice to observe himself as “a *seinen* who is quietly sitting in one corner with his pale face buried in his overcoat” amidst passengers, who are having impassioned conversations concerning “produce, forests, lands and ways to snatch gold from the limitless resources.” He continues self-indulgently,

He has never given thought to the question of how to live in society. He has only and always anguished over the question of how to entrust this life to this universe (*tenchikan*). Therefore, he could not help observing his fellow passengers as if they had come from a different world, while feeling that there was an unbridgeable valley between them. (10)

### Stroll

Some of the specificity of *seinen* as a cultural identity that “Gyūniku to bareisho” and “Sorachigawa no kishibe” collaborate and conspire to advocate can perhaps be best grasped through the trope of a stroll or *sanpo*. It is noteworthy that the word, *sanpo*, appears rather strategically in both narratives. Kamimura recalls that he conjured up his imaginary American-style house in Hokkaidō “on [his] way home from a walk (*sanpo*) to Nyakuō Temple” (156). Okamoto experiences a premonition of Oei’s death as he “sought out the lonely spots . . . and walked aimlessly about (*burabura aruki*)” (161). Defining life in Hokkaidō as “life in the forests and mountains,” Okamoto associates Hokkaidō with “walks in the suburbs” (*kōgai o sanpo*) (165). Oei’s death as a supplement to Okamoto’s ontological quest and Hokkaidō as a *tabula rasa* are both actively imagined on leisurely walks.

Similarly, “Sorachigawa no kishibe” utilizes the trope of *sanpo* to naturalize the protagonist’s philosophizing. It is during his walk (*sanpo ni dete miru to*) that he unexpectedly finds himself near the realm of pleasure where he encounters a vile scene of humanity and confirms his ontological remove from the rest of the Japanese on the island (18). Once again, the protagonist goes out for a walk (*sanpo subeku*) to come face to face with the marvel of Hokkaidō’s “primeval nature” (*genshi no daishimrin*) (22).

*Sanpo* is a temporal and spatial metaphor, which these *seinen* claim for themselves to turn their will to power into a ritual of nature, philosophy, and literature. It continues its literary

<sup>12</sup> Kimura deals with the emergence of *seinen* in the early Meiji 20s by way of examining the shifting “political practice” (*seijiteki jissen*).

life, albeit differently, in later works such as Shimazaki Tōson's *Haru*, in which the protagonists are of the same generation as Doppo and his characters. The semiotic cluster of nature-philosophy-literature, which, as I have tried to demonstrate, felicitously incorporates Hokkaidō and girls (*shōjo/musume*) as specters, provides an ample field for further investigation, especially in connection with the so-called "Naturalist" literature, which emerged as a dominant literary phenomenon in the years following the Russo-Japanese War. Doppo is, it should be noted, conventionally honored as a forefather of this new literary consciousness.

Considered this way, it is only consequential that the representation of Hokkaidō in Doppo's two narratives does not concern the island. The critical acclaim for "Sorachigawa no kishibe" as the "origin of Hokkaidō literature," the celebratory association of Doppo and Hokkaidō, and the intransigent desire to shorthand the island with nature all ought to be rethought.

### Name

In lieu of conclusion, I would like to call attention to the name of Hokkaidō. Judith Butler once argued that "name" has a historicity, that is, "the history that has become internal to the name."<sup>13</sup> If we are to take the name as a site of the performative, the "path" or "way" embedded in the name "Hokkaidō" opens up an unforeseen possibility. It designates the island as "in-between," a space whose ontological meaning can be constituted only in crossing, arriving, and becoming. The oft-used metaphor for Hokkaidō, "the northern gate of the empire" (*teikoku no hokumon*), similarly designates Hokkaidō as a threshold. In its nominal ontology at least, Hokkaidō is possible only *in relation*.

The possibility borne in the name was given political shape as Hokkaidō was imagined first and foremost as space by Doppo and his contemporaries. In his oft-quoted line that defines the mechanism of the political unity of the nation, Homi Bhabha declares, "the difference of space returns as the Sameness of Time."<sup>14</sup> This process of turning Territory into Tradition runs the reverse course in Doppo's two narratives. That is to say, by designating the ontological status of Hokkaidō as an open or, more problematically, empty space, Doppo textually creates a position from which to resist the Sameness of Time ordered into History, which excluded many of Doppo's contemporary *seinen*. The protagonist of "Sorachigawa no kishibe" questions "Where is society? Where is 'history'?" exclaiming at the infinity of the universe, which he experiences through Hokkaidō's nature (23, emphasis in the original).

On the surface, the northern island, excluded as space, precariously meaningful in relation to the Time of the mainland (*naichihondo*) seems to return to relativize both Time/History and *naichihondo*. The new political imagined by literary youth (*bungaku seinen*) that emerged in the wake of the frustration of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement, fed precisely on this aspect of Hokkaidō. Alternatively, the state's "plantation" of colonies (*shokumin*), the History/Time-carrying agents of the nation, was contaminated from within.

<sup>13</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 36. The full passage reads, "The name has, thus, a *historicity*, what might be understood as the history which has become internal to a name, has come to constitute the contemporary meaning of a name: the sedimentation of its usages as they have become part of the very name, a sedimentation, a repetition that congeals, that gives the name its force." Emphasis in the original.

<sup>14</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 300.

Takekoshi Sansha, for example, became passionate about the idea of life in Hokkaidō after *Kokumin shinbun* had been repeatedly banned on account of his own articles.<sup>15</sup> In an essay written in 1892, titled “Hokkai shokan” (Impressions of the Northern Seas), Sansha declares, “Those who would like to see what society was like in its *beginning* should go to Hokkaidō.”<sup>16</sup> Arishima Takeo, writing some thirty years later, testifies to a similarly alternative political possibility found in Hokkaidō. After recapitulating a series of impressions of Hokkaidō using the familiar terms of “desolate,” “free,” and “independence,” he goes on to argue that the settlers of Hokkaidō could have made some fresh contribution to typical Japanese society if there had been more freedom. However, he laments, it ended up stripped of its natural characteristics and now offers a life no different than that of *naichi*.<sup>17</sup>

Is it then fair to conclude that Doppo’s two narratives carry political force? Any affirmative answer ought to be given with caution. While Hokkaidō’s exiled status returns to reintroduce the difference of space, it is a return only as a space designated for a new Time to be constituted. In Doppo’s narratives, space has already been thoroughly co-opted into Time and, consequently, the narrative imagination is unintelligible outside the frame of modern Time, that is, History or the Time of the Nation. Significantly, both protagonists are ontologically differentiated for their capacity for writing, an act deeply implicated with modern Time. Note that Kamimura greets Okamoto by saying, “I’ve read everything you’ve written” (154). “Sorachigawa no kishibe” foregrounds this aspect with unmistakable terms when the protagonist-narrator exclaims,

The introduction by the chief of the Settlement Section prompted [the officials] to respond to my inquiries with great kindness. What was surprising is that they had already heard my name and knew me. I was unaware that my writing (*bunshō*), disorderly as it was, had gained readers (*dokusha*) in the unexpected place of Hokkaidō! (21)

Perhaps most significantly, they are both captured in their very acts of narrating their personal Histories. They must turn to Time to make sense of the newly found space. If there is any new vision for literature in these two narratives, it is one solely meaningful in the *seinen*’s epistemology.

## Bear

In “Sorachigawa no kishibe,” the protagonist is accompanied by the innkeeper’s young son to his destination, Sorachi River. The following scene is wonderfully illustrative of the difference of Hokkaidō, which the *seinen* fails either to experience or perceive:

The innkeeper’s boy told me bear stories from Sorachi River and continued eagerly with several other bear stories that he had heard and stored in his memory as a little child. As we descended a slope to an area where Kumasasa bamboo was growing thick, he paused and, leaning with his hands around the ears, said, “Do you *hear* it? The sound of the river? There, do you *hear* it? That is Sorachi

<sup>15</sup> Onishi, “Meiji bungaku ni okeru Hokkaidō no hyōshō,” 2.

<sup>16</sup> Onishi, “Meiji bungaku ni okeru Hokkaidō no hyōshō,” 2. Emphasis mine.

<sup>17</sup> Onishi, “Meiji bungaku ni okeru Hokkaidō no hyōshō,” 3.

River. We are almost there.” (I said,) “I can almost *see* it.” (He said,) “How can you see it? It’s flowing in the woods.” (20, emphasis added)

The protagonist’s visually oriented perception cannot share the “Japanese” boy’s sensual experience in the midst of the forests. If I may take the metaphor farther, there is a gulf between (novel) reading/writing and storytelling, each represented by their respective way of relating to the world.

I would like to end this discussion with a passage from Tokutomi Roka’s travelogue recording one of his sojourns in Hokkaidō. Roka incisively observes an unambiguous relation between the Japanese colonies and the Ainu. Although it is guilty of rigidity, the passage reverberates with the above scene, opening up new possibilities for boundaries of Japanese and Ainu. Hopefully, at the very least, it will gesture towards the possibility that that living in modern Time can come in different forms than those I have attempted to show in Doppo’s narratives above. Roka comes upon a group of three Ainu and contemplates,

The Ainu are looked upon as a people on its way to extinction. However, in this deep forest, they are surely masters. We, with our eyeglasses and ribbons, are after all nothing more than new intruders. . . . I thought, if bears are transformed (*ippen seba*), they would become Ainu; if the Ainu are transformed, they would become Japanese; if the Japanese are transformed, they would become devils (*akuma*). I like the Ainu. Even more, I like bears.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Tokutomi Roka, *Mimizu no tawagoto*, in Tokutomi Roka, *Roka zenshū*, vol. 9 (Tokyo: Tokutomi Roka zenshū kankōkai, 1928), 321.