“Nomadic Writers of Japan: Tawada Yōko and Mizumura Minae”

Reiko Tachibana

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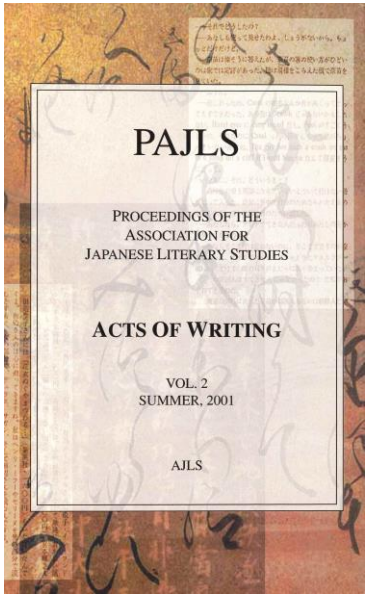

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NOMADIC WRITERS OF JAPAN: TAWADA YÔKO AND MIZUMURA MINAE

REIKO TACHIBANA

Globalization, in economic, political, or cultural terms, continues to be an important phenomenon at the dawn of the new millennium. The new internationalism embodied in globalization is inducing a worldwide blossoming of postcolonial and multi-ethnic literatures. Although associated with the history of Anglo-American imperialism, the global use of the English language has caused literature in English to become part of the "world" literature of the millennium. As Naoki Sakai has pointed out, the English language thus ironically demonstrates "an element of heterogeneity where a nation and a language do not correspond to each other at all."[1] In England, for instance, transnational writers such as Salman Rushdie, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Buchi Emecheta, whose stories often take place in their native lands (India, Japan, and Nigeria, respectively), have become representative of the new literature written in English. Ishiguro, who was born in Japan in 1954, moved to England at the age of five and started writing fiction after graduating from universities in England in the late 1970s. In an interview with Ôe Kenzaburô (大江健三郎) during his first visit to Japan in 1989 after a thirty-year absence, Ishiguro refers to himself as a "homeless" writer who has no obvious "social role" because he is neither "a very English Englishman" nor a "very Japanese Japanese," so he writes his stories in an "international way."[2]

While the earlier so-called exiled writers, such as Vladimir Nabokov and Milan Kundera, needed to write their stories in their adopted languages, contemporary transnational writers' decisions about language choice are extremely significant. The hegemony of the English language is obvious throughout the world, and those who write in

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[1] Sakai, 20.

[2] Ishiguro and Ôe, 11.

English have a great advantage in communicating directly with international readers. Despite the limited audience, some authors consciously choose what may be considered "regional" or "peripheral" languages to create their imaginary worlds. The Japanese writers Tawada Yôko (多和田葉子, b. 1960) and Mizumura Minae (水村美苗, b. ca. 1952) are good examples. Born and raised in Japan, Tawada went to Germany in 1982 at the age of twenty-two, right after graduating from a university in Tokyo (majoring in Russian literature), to work for a book trading company. She later studied German literature at a university in Hamburg and started writing fiction in two regional languages—German and her native Japanese—in the late 1980s. Similar to Ishiguro, Mizumura was taken to the U.S. in the mid-1960s by her parents at the age of twelve, studied for a Ph.D. in French literature at Yale, returned to Japan after more than twenty years' absence, and started publishing fiction in Japanese in 1990.

Here, I will compare Tawada's and Mizumura's choice of language (Japanese and German) and their attempt to produce a "new" literary text in terms of linguistic experiments and subject matter, as these reflect the socio-historical relationship between Japan and the West, with a focus on the U.S. and Germany. Such an examination will clarify the significance of transnationalism as a cultural and literary site of meaning. Tawada's and Mizumura's multi-linguistic voices and cultural vision not only create heterogeneity in Japanese literature, but also cause us to reexamine the ethnocentric ideologies that persist in this so-called multicultural world.

In Germany today, among many nomadic writers,[3] Tawada is the one and only writer from Japan. Her first work, published in 1987, was originally written in Japanese. The book, entitled *Nur da wo du bist da ist nichts/anata no irutokoro dake nani mo nai* (あなたのいるとこ

[3] Categorized as *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, *Ausländerliteratur*, or *Migrantenliteratur*, literature by non-Germans was largely ignored by mainstream historians and critics of German literature until the beginning of the 1980s. However, the number of transnational writers has greatly increased in the last fifteen years, especially since the reunification in 1990, and their revitalization of literature in Germany cannot be ignored. The majority of these writers are from Eastern Europe, but some are from Turkey, Italy, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, among other countries.

ろだけ何もない) consists of a short story and nineteen poems, and is arranged, as the title suggests, with Tawada's Japanese version and a German translation side by side. The visual contrast—the vertical writing in Japanese, "falling from top to bottom like rain"[4]—and the horizontal writing in German produce a powerful imaginary gap (*mizo*) or space, reflecting that in which Tawada lives.

Three years later, in 1990, she began to publish fiction written in German and won literary prizes in Germany, including the Lessing prize in 1992 and the Chamisso prize in 1996.[5] Tawada's fame extends to her native land as well. Her works written in Japanese have received literary prizes there, including the Gunzô Prize for New Writers in 1991 for "Kakato o nakushite" (かかとを失くして, "Missing Heels")[6] and the Akutagawa Prize in 1993 for "Inumuko iri" (犬婿入り, "The Bridegroom was a Dog," which along with "Missing Heels" was translated into German in 1994 and into English in 1998).

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[4] Tawada, *Nur da wo du bist da ist nichts*, 124-25.

[5] Established in 1985, this annual prize is given for 'literary works written in German by non-native speakers or translated immediately into German in connection with the creative process" (Suhr, 74) and through "outsiders' eyes" (Tawada and Karatani, 129). The prize is named after the famous eighteenth-century author and forerunner of transnational writers, Adelvert von Chamisso (1781-1838). Born in France, Chamisso immigrated with his family to Germany at the age of twelve—coincidentally the same age Mizumura began living in the U.S. in the mid 1960s—became a Prussian officer, and then became an author writing in German. His most famous work, *Peter Schlemihl's wundersame Geschichte* (1814, *Peter Schlemihl's Strange Story*), presents a protagonist who loses his shadows, which implies the social alienation of both the protagonist and the author. In an interview with Tawada, the Japanese author Muroi Hiromitsu (室井宏光) mentions the similarity of the protagonists in Tawada's "Missing Heels" and Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl*—losing heels and shadow, respectively. Peter Schlemihl's lost shadow also is reminiscient of the protagonist in Murakami Haruki (村上春樹)'s *Sekai no owari to hâdo boirudo wandârando* (世界の終わりとハードボイルドワンダーランド, 1985).

[6] As a member of the Gunzô Prize for New Writers committee, Karatani Kôjin (柄谷行人) highly praised Tawada's story as a fantastic yet realistic story of immigrants or refugees. See Karatani.

Tawada's short story, "Missing Heels" (1991), is described by Margaret Mitsutani, who has translated the story into English, as "a new kind of fantasy, playful yet vaguely sinister, laced with her own brand of humor."[7] It also fits Masao Miyoshi's term, the "playful sophistication" of postmodernity.[8] This fantastic story demonstrates a mixture of realistic and unrealistic worlds through which the protagonist describes her six-day marriage. Crossing an "invisible" border, the protagonist comes to a town in a foreign land as "an official mail-order bride" (*shorui kekkon* [書類結婚]), where she experiences a culture and language different from her own heritage. The protagonist's fear of the unknown is accelerated by children who laugh at her and by the comments of a man passing by: "No use trying to hide that sort of thing."[9] She of course does not know what "that sort of thing" is. She finally finds the house where her husband lives. He hides in a dark room never showing himself (except in her dreams) even while she lives there. She only hears his footsteps and senses his constant gaze. Every morning she finds tea and a daily allowance on the bedside table (the amount increases every day). As part of her marriage contract, she goes to school to learn the customs of the town.

The story starts with the protagonist's "stumbling" experience as soon as she arrives at a train station in that town. She observes that everything—the platform, floor, and ceiling of the station—seems slanted, and everybody is "stumbling forward" (66) as they walk. It is the reaction of her body in unfamiliar circumstances that actually causes her to feel that she is "stumbling," but she believes the town itself is slanted. The title of the story, "Missing Heels" or "Kakato o nakushite," itself is a metaphor for those who, living in foreign lands, lose their heels—their roots—and feel like they are "floating," alienated from the societies in which they try to make their homes.[10] This image of the

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[7] From the dustcover of *The Bridegroom Was a Dog.*

[8] Miyoshi 1989, 151.

[9] Tawada, "Missing Heels," in *The Bridegroom Was a Dog*, 68. All references to "Missing Heels" refer to this edition.

Other coincidentally overlaps the image of foreigners in the closed nation (*sakoku* [鎖国]) of Tokugawa Japan (1600-1868), in which the Dutch were the only foreigners allowed to live in a secluded area, Dejima, a small artificial island in Nagasaki harbor. People believed that these foreigners wore shoes rather than the Japanese-style *geta* or *zori* (like beach sandals—toes and heels are visible) to hide their missing heels.

Tawada's entire story thus creates floating images of fish--squid/ink fish (*Tintenfisch* in German: Tinte[n] = ink), particularly, and a squid (with ten "feet" and no heels) floating in water indeed resembles the protagonist's condition in a strange town. The squid's black ink is also playfully associated with ink/pen/writer. The protagonist has packed a fountain pen and thick notepads in her suitcase before arriving in her new town, as though she intended to record her new life. In the street, the protagonist hears children sing—"Ever see a squid try getting into bed? If you've got no heels, you don't know where to tread" (68), and the first meal the narrator is invited to eat by the owner of the stall is a plate of "white meat [probably squid] floating in a thick black sauce...like ink" (72). The narrator then helps the owner "tear off the ears of some squid" (72) for the free meal while hearing the squid scream. When she first enters the husband's eerie house, the floor creaks "like squid" (75), and when she takes a bath located in the center of the huge bathroom, she feels as if she were floating in the sea, being watched by a crowd of people "all tangled up together like squid" (107-08). She believes her (never-met) husband's occupation is either executive for an ink company or writer.

In her marginalized status (mail-order bride), the narrator experiences hegemonic culture rather than merely a different culture. She is expected to "assimilate" into society as the Other. Throughout the story, the townspeople's reaction to the "poor mail-order bride" is suspicious, annoying, spiteful, arrogant, and authoritarian. Tawada's cynical yet playful tone mocks the townspeople, especially authority figures such as teachers and a hospital doctor, who are self-centered and narrow-minded, yet have little self-assurance in an advanced society. For instance, the teacher, a woman smelling of sleeping pills, tells her that "a

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[10] See Ueno Chizuko (上野千鶴子)'s *Uwa no sora* (うわの空), 133-36.

woman like you is not only a social problem but a political problem as well" (83) and "education or the lack of it is a problem of the class, not of the individual" (90). At the same time, she hysterically accuses the narrator of being a spy "sent by the headmaster" (85). She repeatedly says, "you're thinking everything I tell you is wrong...this teacher isn't really bright, aren't you?" (85). In this manner, the townspeople stigmatize her as an "inferior sort" who marries for money only. Tawada, by this reference to infamous cases of mail-order brides from the so-called Third World who go to industrialized countries including Japan, portrays a prototype of the ethnocentric mind—intolerance of cultures and origins different from their own—and underlines exploitation of the Other, and young women in particular.

Moreover, Tawada playfully employs the Freudian concept of "lack" associated with the protagonist and interprets dreams to emphasize her "inferior" status in the town. Her husband appears every night in her dreams and each time he looks different—old and young—as if dreams reflected her sexual desires. On the fourth night, her husband turns out to be a man in "the prime of life just the right age for a husband" (109), but she, for the first time, refuses him. He becomes angry and sticks "a fountain pen in [her] ear, sending a stream of black ink sweeping through [her] eardrum" (109). The protagonist's "lack" of being (and desire for a penis, in Freud's term) is stressed by her husband's forcefully inserting the pen (penis) into her ears (vagina) and ejaculating black ink (semen).

The concept of "lack" is doubly applied to the protagonist since she lacks heels, too. On the fifth day of her marriage, finding a doctor's appointment card (she assumes that her husband made one for her), she goes to the hospital where the doctor—a big, bearded man (like Freud)—informs her that she "lacks" heels and so they need to be reconstructed in order to change her way of walking. She refuses and gets permission from the head nurse not to have an operation. On that night, instead of her husband, the nurse for whom she felt affection appears in her dream, hinting that she should face her husband. On the following morning, she follows the nurse's advice, although she senses her action will cause her marriage to be terminated. Her refusal of the doctor's order and (positive) identification with "lack" demonstrate her challenge to assimilation into society as the Other.

The end of the story will shock the reader: when a locksmith breaks open the door of the room where her husband has hidden, she finds a dead squid in the middle of the room. Why a squid? As with the insect in Kafka's "Metamorphosis," this question may be followed by the question, why NOT a squid? Tawada has provided puns on *ika*—the Japanese word for squid (イカ) and defamiliarization (異化). The squid's squeaking sound and floating image, and the dead squid at the end definitely help to create the effect of *ika* or defamiliarization, to use the Russian Formalist term. According to Shklovsky, art "defamiliarizes things that have become habitual or automatic: the technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself."[11] In short, art makes "stone stony,"[12] or in this story, "squid squiddy," and the presentation of the narrator's husband in this unfamiliar guise indeed prolongs the audience's perception. *Ika* also overlaps the image of *ika-sama*—fake or forgery—that is, the narrator's false marriage which ends by her own action and will. Tawada's "squiddy" voice playfully demonstrates the world without heels,[13] or the positive identity with "lack."

Living in Germany, Tawada's accomplishments as a writer in German and Japanese challenge the political concept of homogeneity in Japan and Germany. The dark histories of both countries showcase the pitfalls of such concepts: the emphasis on Aryan blood caused the Nazis to attempt to eliminate the Jews and other minorities, while the Japanese concept of a Yamato race (*Yamato minzoku* [大和民族]) as the children of the divine emperor caused the Imperial Army to colonize Korea and Taiwan, and brutally invade China and other Asian countries. Since the arrival of Commodore Perry in the mid-1850s and the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan eagerly absorbed "Western" technology and cultures,

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[11] Shklovsky, 12 (the essay is entitled "Art as Technique").

[12] *Ibid.*, 12.

[13] According to Tawada, her story was written on the (contradictory) assumption that there are no humans without heels, and yet humans can live well without heels (*Katakoto no uwagoto*, 12).

especially from Prussian Germany. Japan modeled itself after Germany in several ways: Japanese officers and intellectuals were sent to Prussia to gain an understanding of European modernization. As a result, the Meiji constitution, promulgated in 1889, drew on Prussian policy and authoritarianism. By way of an example of cultural influence, there is the case of the medical officer Mori Ôgai (森鴎外, 1862-1922), who was sent to Germany to study hygiene in 1884 at the age of twenty-two (coincidentally, Tawada went to Germany at the same age). Acquiring a passion for European literature during his four-year stay in Germany, Ôgai started writing fiction in Japanese and introduced German literature to Japanese audiences in translation. Fluent in classical Chinese, Dutch, and German, a forerunner of the multi-lingual and -cultural author, he became one of the most distinguished authors of the Meiji era (1868-1912) as well as the director of the Medical Corps, devoting himself to strengthening Imperial power.

Nearly a century later, the Japanese government still tries to reinforce the illusion that both Japan and Germany are homogeneous nations—each inhabited by one race, one language, and one culture. This "trinity" myth has led the Japanese to believe that their language is for "authentic" Japanese people only, to the exclusion of non-Japanese *gaijin* (外人). This concept of a national identity—"defined by ethnic origin and rooted in language, culture, and history"[14]—remains strong in Germany as well. However, the identification of the German state with a German heritage and language is undercut not only by the non-German minorities, especially after the reunification and the European Union (EU), but also by the fact that other authors have written in German outside Germany. Kafka is a good example,[15] and many more

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[14] Teraoka, 136.

[15] See Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, especially "What is a Minor Literature?" (16-27). They explain Kafka's works as representative of "minor literature"—written in a major language (neither a minor language nor language of formerly colonized people) from a marginalized position—with a necessarily political nature. In minor literature, Deleuze and Guattari state, the language, such as Kafka's Prague German, is "affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (16). In a sense, Tawada's works, too, belong to a minor

established authors have written from German-speaking countries, such as the Austrian Botho Strauss and the Swiss Max Frisch.

As for modern literature in Japan, until a decade ago, the writing of fiction in Japanese belonged almost exclusively to the Japanese.[16] The exceptions were "residing-in-Japan (*zainichi*) Korean"[17] writers whose descendents were forcibly brought to Japan as cheap laborers during World War II and remained there after the war, and who were born and raised in Japan. Transnational writers such as Levy Hideo (リービ英雄, b. 1950)[18] from the U.S. and David Zoppetti (b. 1962) from Switzerland, who live in Japan and currently write in Japanese, are a remarkable new phenomenon. The earlier, traditional homogeneity of Japanese literature has been shaken by this new wave of international exchange, which has tended to dissolve many familiar boundaries. In the same way, Tawada's accomplishment as a writer in both the German and Japanese languages, according to Levy, is "radical" or "revolutionary," since her writing not only breaks the illusion of homogeneity in Germany and Japan, but also demonstrates (idealistically) the potential for a writer to select language(s) without concern for borders. Tawada is indeed revolutionary

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literature in which Tawada writes in German (as well as Japanese) from a marginalized position but with strong political elements.

[16] If we consider the Nara era (710-794), we witness heterogeneous culture in which the writing of Japanese literature was not limited to the Japanese. This was the era in which Japan welcomed the burgeoning Chinese culture and civilization of the T'ang Dynasty (618-907). Buddhism arrived via Korea, Chinese characters were used as a writing system, while *kana* (the Japanese characters) was newly created. Poets and intellectuals from China and Korea were welcomed in the Yamato court. Yamanoue no Okura (山上憶良, 717[?]-785), for instance, who is said to be from Korea, became one of the leading poets and compilers of the *Man'yôshû* (万葉集 [*Ten Thousand Leaves*], 759), the oldest anthology of *waka* (Japanese poems) in Japan.

[17] Field, 641.

[18] He was born Ian Hideo Levy. His middle name, Hideo, is from his father's Japanese-American friend who was put in an internment camp during World War II.

in that she has accomplished what Ôgai never dreamed of—becoming a literary figure in both Japanese and German.

Another transnational writer from Japan, Mizumura Minae, would agree with Levy that Tawada is radical or revolutionary, since Mizumura herself did not think of writing in English during her twenty-year stay in the U.S. As mentioned earlier, she came to the U.S. young enough to become a "bi-lingual" but she was "obsessed" with the Japanese language, reading *Nihon kindai bungaku zenshû* (日本近代文学全集, 1926), the collected works of modern Japanese literature from the Meiji and Taishô periods, which her parents had brought from Japan. Unlike Tawada, she did not enjoy living in the gap between the "literary" world of the Japanese language and the "real" world of the English language (163), and longed to return to Japan where these two worlds—imaginary and real—became one through the medium of the Japanese language. She now admits that her obsession with the language was rooted in her (false) belief that her "Japanese-ness" could be proven only through the language. While studying at Yale, she decided to write fiction in Japanese. At that time, she asked herself, with a little regret, why she had not thought of becoming a writer in English, the "privileged" language of world literature in the 21st century. In other words, Mizumura tries to articulate in her works the meaning of writing in her "regional" language, Japanese.

Mizumura made a sensational debut as a writer. *Zoku Meian* (続明暗, 1990) is the continuation of the Meiji writer Natsume Sôseki (夏目漱石)'s incomplete novel *Meian* (明暗 [*Light and Dark*], 1916). As Tawada is aware of Ôgai as a forerunner who absorbed German literature and culture into his writings, Mizumura lost herself in the work of Meiji writers—especially Sôseki—while living in the U.S., and dreamed of becoming a writer like Sôseki. As the twenty-two-year old Ôgai was sent to Germany in 1884, the thirty-three-year old Sôseki, an English teacher, was sent to London for two years from 1900-1902. Like Ôgai, Sôseki was multi-lingual—fluent in classical Chinese and English—and his experience in London, albeit an unhappy one, and his absorption of English and Chinese literature had a profound influence on his literary career, causing him to attempt to create the "modern" narrative and theory of literature. Sôseki, along with Ôgai, became the most distinguished literary figures of the Meiji-Taishô era. Sôseki's

reputation has steadily risen, and he has become the "national" writer (*kokumin sakka* [国民作家]) of postwar Japan. In a sense, Mizumura too is "radical" since she dared to complete Sôseki's unfinished novel—a feat no writer, either male or female, had ever tried.[19] According to Mizumura, she wanted to prove herself by completing Sôseki's incomplete fiction as well as prove that a person like her, who left her native land at an early age and who had lived in a foreign country for many years, could write a novel in Japanese. As Tawada's protagonist decides to live as a positive "lack" being, Mizumura takes advantage of her "disadvantaged" gender and status—a woman and novice. Like Ishiguro, she is not "Japanese Japanese," either.

Mizumura's 1995 novel, *Shishôsetsu: From Left to Right* (私小説, *From Left to Right*), which won the Noma prize for New Writers, is also "radical," marked by "playful sophistication." *Shishôsetsu* is generally considered a genre of confessional autobiographical fiction written exclusively by male authors in Taishô Japan. In the small male-dominated literary circle, *bundan*, *shishôsetsu* is read as a "faithful" presentation of the author's own experiences, or a "self-conscious I-novel" (to use Suzuki Tomi's term).[20] Mizumura's parody of the "male" tradition of *shishôsetsu* is followed by the subtitle in English, "From Left to Right." In Tawada's first book, the vertical Japanese and horizontal German constitute a gap, while in Mizumura's story, like the subtitle, both Japanese and English (10% of the story) are written horizontally, from left to right. Mizumura's attempt at horizontal Japanese and a bilingual setting is "radical" since Japanese books are traditionally almost always written vertically, from top to bottom, and monolingual. In Mizumura's story, although English is mixed with Japanese, we don't feel the crossing from one world to another, from the West (left) to the East (right), but rather we experience a move smoothly through the narrative. Japanese characters—*kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana*—and the Roman alphabet coexist harmoniously. This is somehow strange and ironic, since the story describes how "alien" the

[19] Several writers, including Ôoka Shôhei (大岡昇平), wrote articles about the possible ending of Sôseki's *Meian*.

[20] Suzuki, 7.

narrator, named Minae (like the author), as well as her sister, Nanae, feel in American society. Stigmatized as "the Other" (Asian/Oriental) rather than individuals, these two sisters, now in their thirties, "stumble" as if they were "missing heels."

As a parody of *shishôsetsu*, Mizumura's story tries to convince the reader that this is the "factual, direct expression" of the author's experience in the U.S. Unlike the faceless mail-order bride protagonist in Tawada's story, the protagonist Minae is a Japanese from a middle-class family. The narrative is told within a narrative: Minae is writing her *shishôsetsu* or journal on a computer in her old apartment near campus (Yale, we assume). At the same time, telephone conversations with Nanae guide us to details about their lives in the U.S. since their arrival two decades earlier. Past and present are intermingled and "reinforced" by the insertion of black and white photos of the nice two-story colonial-style house and beautiful trees and flowers on Long Island where Minae's family used to live, and the rich and traditional university campus and library where she studied, along with a few pictures of desolation—abandoned house, bar, and street. Almost all the pictures seem to demonstrate her family's happy memories in the U.S. It is again ironic since the images in the pictures and her family's "stumbling" experiences and current situation—the family falls apart—entail a huge gap, like the contrast in black-and-white pictures.

Minae's (and the author's) ambivalence about choosing Japanese for her writing is also demonstrated at the beginning of the story, "Friday, Dec. 13...Twenty years since the Exodus."[21] Minae's sister Nanae shocks her on the phone that morning when she tells her that it is precisely the twentieth anniversary of their arrival in the U.S. This is again ironic because the word "exodus" implies "a departure without return;" the narrator has decided to return to Japan and tries to talk to her sister about her decision. According to Mizumura, this ironic beginning reflects her uncomfortable and somehow regretful feeling about her choice of language and her quest for a reason for her adherence to the Japanese language and Japan.[22] For Mizumura, the reasons for her choice become the theme of her writings.

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[21] Mizumura, *Shishôsetsu: from Left to Right*, 3.

Mizumura's story also reflects the socioeconomic relationship between Japan and the U.S. For Japan, especially after World War II, the world means the U.S. Japan was occupied by the U.S. alone, and at the height of the Cold War soon became the "ally" and then the "rival" of the U.S. in terms of the economy. In the story, Minae's family witnesses these rapid changes in both countries. In the mid-1960s, when they left Japan, the U.S. was for Japanese people a "dream land." Only "elite" Japanese such as intellectuals and businessmen could afford to go abroad at that time. America provided genuine hospitality to Minae's middle-class family (they were not poor immigrants) from an industrious country (the decade before Japan had gained a reputation as "rich"). After selling their house in Tokyo, Minae's parents found that the money they brought to the U.S. was barely enough for the down payment on a house in Long Island. They believed in the "eternal" value and power of the American dollar, as if it were "religious truth" (117). Two decades later, however, Japan's rapid economic growth caused the value of the yen, not the dollar, to increase by 250%, and living costs in Japan, especially real estate, soared sky high. When Minae's family sold the Long Island house, they faced a reverse of the situation they had encountered 20 years earlier. The money they received from selling the house in the U.S. was not enough to buy a tiny one-room condominium in Tokyo. When Japan became a "wealthy" nation, Minae's family became literally homeless in their home country.

As in Tawada's story, where the townspeople repeatedly tell the protagonist about her peripheral status, both Minae and Nanae learn that they will not be treated as individuals but as Asians/Orientals—members of minority groups—in the U.S. Minae recalls an incident in which she was being mistaken for a Chinese classmate by another classmate. It was about a year after Minae started living in the U.S. when she held the door for a classmate at school. The girl said to Minae, "Thanks, Cathy" (187). Observing Minae's surprised face, she then said, "I meant Minae, I'm sorry" (187). "Cathy? Cathy who? *Of course, neither* Cathy Bradley, *nor* Cathy Rosenthal. Cathy Tang—*she was the only one*" (187, italics denote original Japanese). Minae feels "insulted" at being mistaken for

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[22] See the Mizumura/Shimada Masahiko interview, 236.

Cathy, a daughter of the poor owner of a Chinese laundry, who always wears shabby clothes and does not resemble her, the daughter of a "good" Japanese businessman. However, she soon realizes that for her American classmates, both Cathy and Minae belong to the same category—Asian/Oriental. With the residing-in-Japan Koreans treated as second-class citizens, Minae's sense of superiority to other Asians mirrors Japan's ethonocentric attitude. For Minae, her adherence to being Japanese (and to the language) and realization of being Asian thus ironically conflict with each other. Her cognitive understanding and sense of solidarity with other Asians and minority members have been gradually fostered by her experiences of discrimination in American society (177). At the age of twelve, taken away from her own roots and thrown into a culture and language different from her own, Minae's life in the U.S. meant a prolonged search for a new identity.

As the female protagonist's mail-order marriage is central to Tawada's story, marriage becomes significant for Nanae, the oldest daughter of the family. And, as Minae never thinks of writing her stories in English, her parents never consider non-Japanese husbands for their daughters. Even Nanae's "Americanized" appearance and behavior (heavy make-up, showy dresses, and dating of many boys) do not stop them from pursuing "authentic" Japanese men—born of good Japanese parents in Japan—as prospective husbands, as if her "pure-blood" Japanese heritage were the only qualification for becoming the wife of a Japanese man. According to Minae, the incredible kinship between Nanae and her mother (an anti-Electra complex) sours when Nanae's marriage to a Japanese man repeatedly fails because of her "non-Japanese-like" appearance and manner, and the possibility of an "ideal" marriage becomes slim when she turns thirty. The mother's disappointment with Nanae's "lack" of qualifications to become the wife of a Japanese man causes her to pursue a Japanese boyfriend of her own. Abandoning her senile husband to a nursing home, and her two (unmarried) daughters, she runs away with her boyfriend to Singapore.

Unlike the shocking ending in Tawada's "Missing Heels," Mizumura's story begins and ends with snow—pictures of tiny white dots on a black background, or "*yuki*" (snow). These snow photos resemble the computer screen being used by Minae and produce a contrast: the computer screen is reflected in the window of her

apartment. Through the window, we watch snow fall heavily and vertically, as opposed to the horizontal lines on the screen. It falls like correction fluid runs over words to be erased.[23] Snow here becomes the symbol of Minae's desires to erase the distance between Japan and the U.S., and the gap in the two languages—Japanese and English. As in Tawada's first book, the vertical Japanese is like "falling rain," in contrast to the horizontal German—the gap in which Minae lives is visible, yet disappearing. This image demonstrates the new beginning for Minae (and the author). She decides to go back to Japan to become a writer in Japanese, free from the "phantom" of Japan.

As demonstrated above, Mizumura consciously chooses Japanese for writing, and her target audience is "foreigners who can read Japanese, and to a lesser degree,...Japanese readers who can read Japanese like the foreign language."[24] Her *Shishôsetsu: From Left to Right* itself manifests the challenge to literature of the English language, the world literature of our time, since her story (which mixes Japanese and English) can be translated into other languages but not English. Tawada, on the other hand, explains her reasons for writing in two languages by telling us that "the purpose of my writing in German is to create a language different from the native speakers'. By doing so, I also attempt to destroy the notion of the 'beautiful' or fine Japanese (if such a thing ever exists) when I write in Japanese. That is, I don't intend to be a writer who skillfully manages both languages. Nor do I intend to abandon one language to grasp the other."[25] In short, reconstructing both languages while deconstructing them is her aim in writing in German and Japanese.

Tawada's opposition to the concept of an "ultranationalistic beautiful Japanese language" (*kokusui shugiteki na utsukushii Nihongo* [国粋主義的な美しい日本語])[26] both rejects and recalls Kawabata

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[23] See Tawada, *Katakoto no uwagoto*, 107-08.

[24] Mizumura and Shimada, 248.

[25] See the Tawada/Hideo Levy interview, 142.

[26] *Ibid.*, 145.

Yasunari (川端康成), who in 1968 became the first Japanese writer to receive the Nobel prize for literature. In his acceptance speech, Kawabata emphasized the notion of a "beautiful" Japan (and Japanese), implying a unique mythic quality within Japanese culture and language that can only be appreciated by "authentic" Japanese. This "Japan-centric" ideology ironically matches what Said has called Orientalism—Western images of the "exotic" Orient. Young Mizumura's obsession with the Japanese language reflects her desire to be an "authentic" Japanese in the U.S., or her quest for identity through language. In 1994, another Nobel laureate from Japan, Ôe Kenzaburô, renounced Kawabata's concept of a beautiful Japan in his own acceptance speech, "Japan, The Ambigious, and Myself" (a "parody" of Kawabata's "Japan, The Beautiful, and Myself"). Instead, Ôe's experiment with language has led him to create what critics have called, both with praise and criticism, a "translated-like" language. That is, his Japanese lacks a smooth flow, sounding instead like a translation from a foreign language and causing the audience to experience the feeling of stumbling without "heels."

Similarly, in rejecting the concept of a Japanese language for Japanese only, both Tawada and Mizumura attempt in their narratives to defamiliarize the language itself as well as the subject matter. Their multi-linguistic voices and bi-cultural vision allow them to function as critics of their own writings. For them, writing is what Walter Benjamin called an act of translation. Quoting Rudolf Pannwitz, Benjamin stresses "when translating from a language very remote from his own he must go back to the primal element of language itself and penetrate to the point where work, image, and tone converge. He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language."[27] In their works, both Tawada and Mizumura expand and deepen language to produce "stumbling" Japanese and German. They distance themselves physically and emotionally in order to observe the world around them, and to step outside/inside of languages—their mother tongue and adopted languages—and cultures, and to examine what they are writing. Characterized by heterogeneity, their narratives manifest the separation

[27] Benjamin, 80.

of language and nation, rejecting the (political) concept of a "homogeneous" nation, national culture, and identity, and demand that the reader reexamine ethnocentric ideologies.

Tawada and Mizumura expect that more authors, like Mori Kyôko (森京子) and Ursula Hegi, whose mother tongues are Japanese and German, respectively, will write their stories in English, while authors including themselves who choose to write in regional languages, including Japanese and German, will continue to do so. As literature in the English language has been revitalized by "peripheral" writers such as Salman Rushdie and Kazuo Ishiguro, Tawada and Mizumura want to be writers of Japanese (and German as well, in the case of Tawada) whose works stimulate and motivate people to choose to write their stories in Japanese and German, rather than in their native tongues.

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