“Beyond East and West: Tawada Yōko and Hideo Levy”

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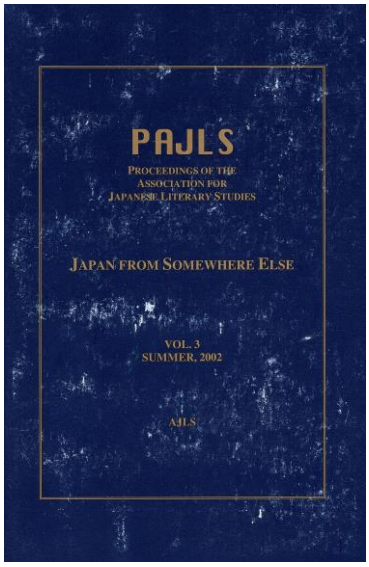

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BEYOND EAST AND WEST: TAWADA YŌKO AND HIDEO LEVY

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> If language is the single most important determinant of national identity, as many have argued, and narratives (specifically, epics and novels) institute and support national myths and shape national consciousness, what happens when the domain of national language is occupied by nonnative writers, writers whose native, mother, home, or community language is not the one they write in?
>
> Azade Seyhan. *Writing Outside the Nation*

In the new millennium, transnational authors continue to play an active part in revitalizing contemporary literatures throughout the world. Last year's Nobel Prize Laureate V.S. Naipaul (b. 1932) is a good example. Born in Trinidad to a family descended from Hindu immigrants from Northern India, he went to England at the age of 18 to study at Oxford University and has lived there since then. His debut novel, *The Mystic Masseur*, which appeared in 1957, followed by one of his most popular novels, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), are both situated in Trinidad.

This transnationality, also found among other writers in England, such as Salman Rushdie, Timothy Mo, and Kazuo Ishiguro, is representative of the new literature written in English. One remarkable feature of these contemporary producers is that they are not poor immigrants, but represent the intellectual "elite" of British society who have university degrees. Both Mo and Ishiguro were taken from their birth places (Hong Kong and Nagasaki, respectively) to England by their parents; like Naipaul, Rushdie went to England to study at Rugby and Cambridge. This "nomadism of modern thought" (Chambers, quoted in Seyhan, 65) has resulted in a worldwide flourishing of post-colonial and multicultural literatures.

Similarly, in Japan today transnational writers such as Ōba Minako, Mizumura Minae, Yi Yang-ji, Yū Miri, Tawada Yōko, Mori Kyōko, David Zoppetti, and Hideo Levy, are reactivating the so-called decline of Japanese literature. This rapid increase in the number of transnational writers since the early 1990s has shaken the monolithic notion of a postwar Japanese literature produced solely in Japan, by "authentic" Japanese authors, writing in Japanese. The exceptions reflect the legacy of Japan's colonial occupation of nearby countries, including the so-called "residing-in-Japan" (*zainichi*) Korean writers (such as Yi Yang-ji and Yū Miri) whose

descendents were brought to Japan during World War II and remained after the war, and who were born and raised in Japan.[1] For the transnational authors, the experience of cultures different from that of their heritage, or the combination of multiple cultures of heritage, is reflected in their literary imagination and creativity, including in the languages they use—their mother tongue, an adopted one, or both.

This paper explores comparatively two transnational writers, Hideo Levy (b. 1950) and Tawada Yōko (b. 1960), who live in foreign lands (Japan and Germany respectively), write in Japanese (in Levy's case) and in both Japanese and German (in Tawada's case), and whose works represent the "new" Japanese literature.

Levy was born Ian Hideo Levy in the United States, of a Jewish father and a Polish mother. (He was named Hideo after his father's Japanese-American friend who was put into the Internment camp during World War II.) As a son of a diplomat, Levy spent his childhood in Asia, living in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Upon his parents' divorce, he returned to the United States with his mother at the age of twelve. He then went back to Asia, this time to Japan in 1967, at the age of sixteen, to live with his father and stepmother. After receiving his doctoral degree at Princeton, he taught Japanese literature at Princeton and Stanford. Even at that time he had an incredible ambition for a "*gaijin*" (literally "outside people," the most common term for "foreigner" in colloquial Japanese) to become a Japanese-language writer. Currently living in Tokyo, he has abandoned the English language and writes in Japanese only.

Born and raised in Tokyo, Tawada's life circumstances resemble those of Levy in many ways. Then twenty-two years old, Tawada, who just graduated from Waseda University with a degree in Russian, went to Hamburg to work for a book trading company in 1982. Originally, she intended to stay there only for a few years, but after quitting her job, she studied German literature at the University of Hamburg. She also received a Ph.D. at a university in Switzerland. She has been living in Hamburg for nearly two decades, and writes both in her native tongue, Japanese, and her adopted language, German.

In Germany today, among many transnational writers (from East Europe, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, etc.), Tawada is the one from Japan, while Levy is the first and one of a few writers from the West to participate

[1] The 700,000 Koreans, as perennially second-class citizens, remained a sizable minority and were relegated to lesser occupations and professions. Only after a 1991 treaty between Japan and the Republic of Korea was signed did the long-standing practice of fingerprinting Koreans in Japan stop (Meyer, 241).

in the literary world of Japan.[2] It was evident at the time of their 1994 interview entitled "Far from the Mother Tongue" ("Bokokugo kara tōku hanarete"), that Levy considered Tawada, his junior by ten years, to be a "comrade" with whom he shared literary as well as socio-political views. In the interview, Tawada explains the reason she is the sole writer from Japan: Japanese can neither imagine a non-Japanese writing fiction in Japanese, nor a Japanese writing in German. Before leaving Japan, Tawada too had been a "slave" to that thought. After living in Germany and being surrounded by the language not her own, she realized that Japanese was not identified with her, but something like "an independent living thing" (144). Both Levy and Tawada agree that the image of Prussian Germany—authoritarian and homogeneous—that the Meiji government eagerly absorbed in the process of modernization is, even now, strangely mirrored by Japan's narcissistic concept of homogeneity. This notion has led both to attempt to break that mirror through their writings. Other commonalities include their East-West border crossing, and keen awareness of the socio-historical relationship between Japan and the West, with a focus on the U.S. and Germany.

In Tawada's 1992 novella "Perusona" (Persona), and Levy's trilogy book, *Seijōki no kikoenai heya* ("The Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Can't be Heard" 1987; "November" 1989; and "Nakama" 1991), the protagonists, like the authors, live in Hamburg and Tokyo, respectively. Through their experiences in foreign lands—a Japanese woman in the West and an American boy in the East—each author raises the question of national identity or identities and problematizes the ethnocentric ideologies of the East and West.

Levy's debut in the Japanese literary world made history. Unlike the *zainichi* Korean writers who have no choice but to write in Japanese since

[2] In a strict sense, Levy is not the first Westerner in postwar Japan (especially Americans—owing to the occupation) who wrote (mostly, non-fiction) books in Japanese. For instance, *Tekisasu no koinobori* by Jack Seward and *Han-Nihonjin ron* by Robin Gill (Americans), and *Harupen Jakku no nihongoreki* by Jack Halpern (the German-born Jew) appeared in Japan in the 1980s. That is to say, there were a number of lesser-known predecessors, at least in the sense that these Westerners wrote (serious) books in Japanese (and also in English), but Levy broke new ground and certainly raised the bar much higher in terms of literary quality. Four years after Levy's appearance, another writer from West appeared in the Japanese literary world: the Swiss David Zoppetti (b. 1960) who studied Japanese on his own, came to Japan in 1986 made a debut with "Ichigensan" which received Subaru literary prize in 1996.

their "mother" tongue is Japanese,[3] Levy can write his stories in his mother tongue, English, the hegemonic language of our time. Why, then, does he write in Japanese? This question led people to consider Levy's debut to be part of Japan's "*kokusaika*" (internationalization)—an ambivalent term based on the belief in *keizai taikoku* Japan (economic giant Japan), whose economic power is superior to the West's (specifically, the U.S.).

According to Levy, Japanese audiences fail to recognize his criticism of what he calls, "nihongo nationalism"—a "fetishistic" belief in Japanese language for Japanese only. The Japanese assume that non-Japanese can master the grammar of the language, but "uniquely Japanese modes of thinking and behavior are incomprehensible for non-Japanese" (Yoshino, 37) since the language is "the core of Japanese culture, symbolizing and representing the essence of Japanese history and race" (Hijiya-Kirshnereit 107). The so-called "nihonjinron"— discussion of unique Japanese-ness or national character—in the mid-1970s–1980s underlined the virtues of a "monoracial" society (*tan'itsu minzoku shakai*)—one race/one language/one nation—with Japan's economic success stemming from the high moral and social standards of a homogenous nation.[4]

Levy's trilogy (The Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Can't be Heard), which won the *Noma Bungei shinjin shō* (the Noma Bungei prize for New Writers), highlights the nihongo nationalism that refuses invasion by "gaijin." Based on his experience more than two decades ago, Levy's "autobiographical" stories can also be read as a parody of *shishōsetsu*—the "most salient and unique form" of modern Japanese literature. The term originated in the 1920s, at the height of modernization (westernization) of the Taishō era, and were written exclusively by (Japanese) male authors in a small literary circle (bundan). *Shishōsetsu* was considered "a single-voiced, faithful record and reproduction of the author's lived, personal experience" (Suzuki 5), as opposed to the Western novel which was seen as a "fictional, imaginative construct" (Suzuki 3). In Levy's trilogy, the protagonist, Ben Isaac, is a 17-year-old American youth who arrived in Japan in fall 1967, to live with his father, an American ambassador, and Chinese stepmother and half brother. They live in the so-called White House in Yokohama, which Japan cannot reach. The American flag flies high every day.

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[3] Yi Yang-ji's novella "Yu-Hee" (1988) describes a *zainichi* Korean woman's experience in her "native" land, Korea, focusing on her sense of belonging nowhere—neither Japan nor Korea.

[4] Prime minister Nakasone's infamous speech of July 1985 stated that Japan's homogeneous society made today's (economic and social) success, as opposed to the decline of the U.S. economy due to minorities in the multi-racial America.

His father, Jacob Isaac, represents both the hegemonic power of the West, namely America, and the outsider, as a diasporic Jew who, according to Ben, "could have been killed if he was in Europe during World War II" (41).[5] His father, a Brooklyn Jew, has also been disowned by his own family because his second wife is a Chinese woman who is 20 years younger than he is; he has no place to return. His multi-ethnic family—Jewish/Chinese/American—becomes the target of curiosity for the Japanese, and a "threat" for the small Caucasian circle in Yokohama.

Ben runs away from home—the White House and his father—to become a member of Japan, learning Japanese. His decision reflects his resistance of his father, who admires the Chinese language as a symbol of "reason and universality," and despises Japanese, especially "womanish" (*memeshii*) hiragana, as a symbol of "culture easily indulged to sensual" (*kannō ni oboreru bunka*, 58). His decision is also a challenge to his father's warning: "no matter how fluent you speak their language. . . even if you go to the Imperial Palace, and commit seppuku, shouting in perfect Japanese, 'Long Live the Emperor!,' you won't be able to become one of them" (71).

Levy uses Ben's longing for uniforms to emphasize the conformity of Japanese society. After leaving his father's White House, Ben stays with his Japanese friend Andō. As Ben awakes in Andō's tiny one-room apartment, he finds Andō's uniform (*gakuseifuku*)—black and big—hanging on the wall next to the picture of Andō's favorite author (Mishima Yukio) in a military uniform, and thinks to himself: "*I want to wear this Andō's uniform*" (emphasis original, 131). Armoring his skinny white body with the big black uniform, he wants to melt into the groups of students who are also wearing uniforms (132). The uniform—"the distinctive outfit intended to identify those who wear it as members of a specific group" (*The American Heritage Dictionary* 1399)—is a signifier that he has become one of them, the Japanese.

Levy purposefully presents the reversed image of Japan and the U.S. through Ben and Andō. Andō's handsome, strong-built body and Ben's unattractive skinny body are often emphasized. In the public bath scene, when Ben and Andō wipe their bodies in front of a big mirror, noticing Ben's comparison of his own body with Andō's, Andō jokingly says, "Ben, you look like an Asian!" (56). This scene reminds us of the famous "rendezvous" picture of Emperor Hirohito and MacArthur (taken on

[5] According to David G. Goodman in *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, during the war, "even as it resisted Nazi demands to destroy the Jews in its power," the Japanese government used antisemitic ideas to "persecute domestic dissidents" (13). After the war, Japanese people shared the feeling of (Hiroshima and Holocaust) victims with the Jews.

September 27, 1945) right after the war. The image of Japan's (dominant) male bodies during the war was transformed to subordinate female bodies (Hirohito) in light of the dominant power of the United States (MacArthur), and the entire population of Japan became "good pupil[s]"—obedient "children attending General MacArthur's School of Democracy" in the postwar world (Dower, 302–3). In the story, the big Japanese Andō is the kind teacher who introduces Japanese culture and language to the pale American Ben who, as a "good pupil" enjoys following Andō around the maze of Tokyo streets.

Levy's stories take place at the height of the Vietnam War in 1967—four years after the assassination of John F. Kennedy (Levy's second story, "November," describes Ben's experience of Kennedy's funeral in Washington, D.C.), three years after the Tokyo Olympics (the symbol of Japan's recovery from defeat), a year before Kawabata Yasunari's Nobel Prize in literature, and three years before Mishima Yukio's suicide and the renewal of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty (*Anpo*). Japan's love–hate relationship with America is clearly seen in the stories. Shouting, "Yankee, go home!" and "destroy Anpo! (*Anpo funsai*)," many students, along with professionals and workers, participated in anti-America and anti-war demonstrations in Tokyo; at the same time, many students wanted to practice English to ensure their materialistic success in the near future. When Ben starts taking a Japanese class at a university, Japanese students often enlist him as an "exotic" tool for their English conversation lessons. Finding out that Ben is Jewish (according to him, they ignore his Polish side), they ask Ben many questions: "What do you think of Zionism?" and "You definitely support Israel, don't you?"[6] Yet, for them, the blue-eyed and blond-haired Ben is representative of White supremacy, so they also ask him if he feels guilty about Hiroshima and America's actions during the Vietnam War.

By inserting texts from his favorite authors, Mishima and Ōe Kenzaburo, Levy's stories demonstrate the intertextuality and challenge the "authenticity" of *shishōsetsu*. For instance, in Ōe's novel, *Kojinteki na taiken* (1964, *A Personal Matter*), the scene of the protagonist Bird's

[6] It is worth mentioning that in 1971 in Japan, the book entitled *Nihonjin to Yudayajin* (The Japanese and the Jews) was published under the pseudonym name, Isaiah Ben-Dasan (born and raised in Japan) and became a best-seller. The author was actually a Japanese (Yamamoto Shichihei) and wrote the book to "affirm and reinforce" the myth of Japanese uniqueness or "the Jew's blessing" to Japan's uniqueness—"the Japanese are exceptionally pragmatic and harmonious, and that they live according to unspoken principles that no foreigner (not even Ben-Dasan) can understand" (Goodman 181).

encounter with the transvestite is also re-presented in Levy's story. When Bird is vacantly standing in front of a store window in a Tokyo street, a large woman in "a resounding male voice" says "Hey!" to him. Turning his head, he too says "Hey!" The transvestite immediately realizes his mistake (Ben is not one of his kind) and hurries away (3–4). In Levy's story, during his walk around Shinjuku on a winter evening, he feels the gaze of a bar-hostess-like woman in her fifties who is wearing heavy make-up and a gaudy dress and standing on the veranda of a second-floor house. She calls out to him in her "male" voice, "samui na" (It's cold, isn't it), and Ben replies, "sore wa ieru" (lit. you can say that). Hearing Ben's Japanese, the transvestite laughs cheerfully and says, "ieruyo na" (yeah, we can say that) (137–8). Levy stresses here the friendly encounter of two outsiders in society—gaijin Ben and the transvestite.

Moreover, Ben's otherness is emphasized through Mishima's "famous" protagonist Mizoguchi, whose stuttering serves to alienate him from the world in which he lives. Levy quotes in English from *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (*Kinkakuji*, 1960): "The first sound is like a key" (139). Mizoguchi's stuttering prevents him from uttering the first sound, while the first sound of Ben's Japanese ironically distances him from Japanese people. When they realize that Ben is speaking Japanese, they are so surprised that they cannot hear him further—they suddenly become deaf. They try to ignore his Japanese or over-praise it so that Ben never forgets that he is an outsider.

Furthermore, Levy presents a 20-year-old Japanese man named Masumura as a symbol of nihongo nationalism. Ben gets a part-time job as a waiter in a restaurant, and Masumura is a fellow waiter and a "warrior" who defends the Japanese language and culture from the invasion of foreigners. According to Ben, this pale unattractive waiter with little expression displays professionalism as an experienced waiter—quick, exact movements. Mimicking his manners, Ben desperately wants to be a "Japanese" waiter, but Masumura rejects Ben's attempt to steal his Japanese-ness. When Ben asks Masumura about the book he is reading, he answers Ben, "you foreigners cannot understand it" (*antatachi niwa wakaranai*, 178). That is, the language belongs to the Japanese people only. On another occasion, another co-worker tries to teach Ben how to eat fish with chopsticks. Masumura scornfully says, "It's impossible for him to eat fish properly. You know, he is different" (184). That is, Ben is not Japanese. In this manner, Masumura strongly resists Ben's intention to master the language and culture as if he were invading the sacred space.

In contrast to Masumura, Levy describes Andō as Ben's "messiah." He is "saved" by the 19-year-old Andō, who is portrayed as a student against

both trends of the era—interested neither in left-wing political involvement nor in the English language and the West. The country-bred Andō seems to be rather a right-wing student with a clean-cut hairstyle and school uniform and cap. He practices the martial art Kendo and admires Mishima. Andō is the first and only Japanese to tell Ben that he should speak Japanese since he is in Japan, and helps him to learn the language through activities of daily life. For Ben, Andō and his apartment become the only room in Japan where "The Star-Spangled Banner Can't be Heard."

At the beginning of the Trilogy, Ben is a traveler who cannot read Japanese except for hiragana. Following Andō, Ben walks around in a Tokyo in which everything is transformed into hiragana through Ben's eyes, such as the names of train stations (Kanda, Kudan, Takada no baba) and Japanese writers (Yoshimoto Takaaki, Hani Gorō, and Mishima Yukio). The sights of Tokyo are defamiliarized and readers experience "the discovery of landscape" in Karatani Kōjin's term: Landscapes "had to be discovered as landscapes from which we had become alienated" (29). Levy's stories cause the reader to re-view Japan—its history and nature of society—through foreigners' eyes.

As Levy re-creates his experience in Japan through his writings, Tawada, living in Germany, writes both in German and Japanese about transnational experiences. Her first work in Germany, published in 1987, was originally written in Japanese (coincidentally, Levy's first work in Japan appeared in the same year). The book, entitled *Nur da wo du bist da ist nichts/anata no iru tokorodake nani mo nai*, is arranged, as the title suggests, with Tawada's Japanese version and a German translation (by Peter Pötner) side by side. The visual contrast—the vertical writing in Japanese and the horizontal writing in German—produce an imaginary gap or "third space" in Homi Bhabha's term—reflecting that in which Tawada lives.

Four years later, in 1991, she made a sensational debut in Japan with a short story, Kakato o nakushite ("Missing Heels"), which won *Gunzō shinjin shō* (the Gunzo Prize for New Writers). This postmodern story demonstrates a world of reality and fantasy in which, crossing an "invisible" border, the nameless mail-order bride protagonist comes to a town in a foreign land and "stumbles" to face culture and customs different from her own. The title of the story, Missing Heels, itself is a metaphor for those who, living in foreign countries, lose their heels, the foundation of their roots, and feel like they are "floating."[7]

[7] Further analysis of "Missing Heels," see Reiko Tachibana's "Monadic Writers of Japan: Tawada Yōko and Mizumura Minae, *PAJL*S 2 (Summer 2001): 400–19.

A year after the publication of "Missing Heels," Tawada wrote another short story, "Perusona" (Persona), a more realistic story of a Japanese woman's experience in Germany. This story retains the image of floating and stumbling throughout. The protagonist, whose name is Michiko, and her younger brother Kazuo have been living in Hamburg for a year. Unlike the poor mail order bride in "Missing Heels," both Michiko and Kazuo are scholarship students. Michiko is working on a thesis on transnational women writers of Turkey who, living in Germany, writes in German, while Kazuo is studying more "authentic" medieval German literature.

In the story, Tawada defamiliarizes Orientalists' images of Japan—aesthetic and techno-oriented—through Noh and Toyota. Japonisme first passionately discovered the exotic beauty of Japan, including Noh and Zen, centuries ago. Japan's rapid growth into an industrialized nation after 1945 and the leader in technology—a trademark of western supremacy—led to the so-called techno-Orientalism. In a reversal of the traditional aesthetics of Japan, "the association of technology and Japanese-ness now serves to reinforce the image of a culture that is cold, impersonal and machine-like and authoritarian culture lacking emotional connection to the rest of the world" (Morley, 169). At the height of Japan's economic growth (*kokusaika*), dehumanized technological powers including robots, cyborgs, video games, and anime are seen as postmodern equivalents of Noh and Zen. Japan's new identity is thus labeled as "Japan, Inc." or "sub-human," as if this people have no feelings and no emotions (Morley, 172). Using the gestures of Japanese businessmen as their model—"robot-like bowing and expressionless laughter"—the German band Kraftwerk used android or machine-like gestures on the stage in the 1970s (Ueno).

Levy's trilogy focuses on nihongo nationalism, while Tawada's narrative uses mask-like faces as the image of the Other. The story starts with an episode in a mental hospital. A Korean male nurse named Seonryon is falsely accused by a female patient of sexual misconduct. According to Michiko's German friend Katarina who works in the hospital library, nobody at first believes the patient's story, but a hospital therapist's opinion influences people: "Seonryon appears gentle to nonprofessional eyes, but for professional eyes, his face unusually lacks expressions and emotions. So, it would be very difficult to find out if his cruelty is hidden under. We don't know what he really thinks under his mask-like face" (16). The rumor that Seonryon looks gentle, but hides his cruelty beneath his mask-like face spreads for a long time, causing him to quit his job as he develops stomach problems. The image of the mask-like face of East Asians is reinforced by Michiko's German boyfriend Thomas's similar comments to her: "I don't know what you really think. I can't read your face, so I can't tell when you

tell a lie. Your face has no expressions. Even when you smile, you don't look very happy. I've never seen you cry. You know, my sister cries very often both with joy and sorrow" (66).

Tawada then skillfully connects German discrimination against Asians into recent history through a movie watched by Michiko and Katarina in that hospital. The movie was an educational one made during World War II regarding the history of mental hospitals. The beginning of the movie shows a medical doctor explaining genes to young nurses. The phrase "natural selection" (*shizen tōta*) then appears in huge letters on the screen, followed by a scene in which mothers are combing their young children's shiny blond hair, with the caption, "good genes are flourishing, but . . . ." (45). The scene then quickly shifts to the mental patients' room where they are tightly bound to their beds. Katarina later asks Michiko if Japanese people also killed mentally ill patients during the war. As a symbol of scientific racism, the pseudo-biological creation of ethnic identity—Aryan blood of a superior German race—reminds the (Japanese) reader of the myth of pure blood of a noble Yamato race.

Tawada's story is, however, not a simple description of a dichotimized world (victim/victimizer and East/West); rather, it articulates the biases found in the ethnocentric minds of all groups. Michiko's fear of people's perceptions of Asians and minorities is accelerated by her own people's Japan-centric views, including those of her brother Kazuo. He shows indifference to Seonryon's case and the movie of the recent past. He wants to differentiate himself from other Asians, and especially from (poor) Vietnamese refugees and any minority groups. His attitude represents the Japanese communities (mostly businessmen and their families) who live in the closed world of "little Tokyo." According to Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian, Japan's "alienation from the non-West is based on Japan's refusal to articulate its relationship to the non-West, especially Asia, both in the past and the present. To this day Japan has not accepted the responsibility of accurately accounting for its actions during World War" (5).

As Ben is alien to his family as well as to Japanese society, Michiko is an "outsider" even among her own people. Her non-make-up face is regarded as Vietnamese-like, and she feels uncomfortable talking to fellow Japanese: "When I want to tell the truth, my Japanese becomes awkward. Japanese is my mother tongue and it is the language that has created my persona, though" (53). Michiko's desperate feelings, "hageshiku karitaterareru yōna okashina kankaku" (strange sensation fiercely driven from the inside of her body)—stemming from the impossibility of communicating with people even in her own language—drive her to walk

incessantly around the town, stumbling and floating. She even reaches a district where many refugees from East Europe and Africa live—one that she normally avoids entering. Soon surrounded by refugees, all men, she is asked if she is Vietnamese, Korean, Philippine, or Thai, and she answers, reluctantly "No, I'm Japanese." One of the refugees immediately responds, "Oh Toyota," as if her body had turned into a small car (40). She then hurries to the door of the refugee house called "floating Europe" since it is literally floating on the river. She stumbles up to a young refugee and has sex with him, to prove that she is not a product of technology, but a human being with emotions and feelings.

As Levy uses uniforms to emphasize Ben's desire to be a member of Japanese society, Tawada transforms Michiko from Toyota to the traditional Noh at the end of the story. Taking a Noh mask that hangs on the wall of a Japanese family's home, Michiko puts it on, sneaks out of the house, and walks around the town, as if she is searching for new identity (ies) and persona. Taken as a practical joke or "madness," her action is merely rewarded with ridicule. Presenting the two Orientalists' visions of Japan—aesthetics of the Noh mask and the technology of Toyota—Tawada demonstrates their similar characteristics—the "minimality of human expressions" (Watsuji 942).[8]

As with the Tokyo landscapes in Levy's stories, Tawada's story defamiliarizes the streets of Hamburg. Readers follow Michiko from her apartment, east toward the Great Mountain Street (Großeberg), Reeperban Station, Great Freedom Street (Große Freiheit), and then south to Elbe River and the refugee district. She then further goes west to the Japanese community, where the representatives of "Japan, Inc." live with their families. The location of the Japanese community implies their "quasi"-identity with the West—hegemonic power—while the house for refugees, called "floating Europe," reinforces their floating—uncertain and powerless—situation. As in Levy's trilogy, Tokyo streets are defamiliarized through Ben's eyes; German streets are metamorphosed into katakana

[8] It is worth mentioning that Watsuji Tetsuro wrote in 1935 an essay entitled "Men to Perusona" (Mask and Persona), the title is coincidentally similar to Tawada's story. In his essay he stated "the mysterious image of the Noh mask stems from the minimality of human expressions . . . The mask, however, paradoxically expresses most powerful persona—character (*jinkaku*) when the actor with the mask on performs on the stage" (942–3).

through Michiko's eyes. The landscapes of Germany—the recent history and contemporary society—are re-examined.

According to Tawada, if she decides to become a German citizen, German people would welcome her because of their "Orientalist" belief that she wants to escape from Japan where individualism and women are oppressed. Many Japanese, on the other hand, are against such change because they believe that Japan has better culture and tradition than the West ("Bokokugo" 144). She, however, does not want to situate on either side. She enjoys living, floating and stumbling, in the "third space" among the cultures, nations, and languages.

Born in India in 1940, living in the United States, the nomadic scholar Gayatri Spivak shares Tawada's situation. Declaring herself a bilingual person, she states:

> I have two faces. I am not in exile. I am not a migrant. I am a green-card-carrying critic of neocolonialism in the United States. It's a difficult position to negotiate, because I will not marginalize myself in the United States in order to get sympathy from people who are genuinely marginalized. . . I can now see myself as a person with two fields of activity, always being a critical voice so that one doesn't get subsumed into the other. (18)

Levy, on the other hand, wants to be a Japanese (writer) despite Japan's unwelcome attitude. Abandoning his mother tongue, English, his writing in Japanese disillusions the "die hard" concept of nihongo nationalism (*nihon go/nihon bunka/nihon minzoku/nihon jin*), and demonstrates his profound understanding of the "incomprehensible" Japanese culture. Levy often talks about what he calls "nihongo no shōri" (literally victory of Japanese language) over nihongo nationalism through the appearance of Japanese-language writers who are the non-white Other (like the *zainichi* Koreans), and the White Other (like Levy and Zoppetti). In that sense, Tawada can claim the "victory of German language" too. In their writings, the Japanese and German languages are revived in the process of deconstruction and construction.

Moreover, their writings criticize the continuing tendency of (political) constructions of national identity (e.g. Japaneseness), problematize xenophobic and ethnocentric minds of people, and provoke readers to re-examine the societies in which they live. Their East-West border crossing and choice of languages encourage more writers to write in languages other than their own in this so-called multicultural world.

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