THE OTHER IN MODERN JAPANESE LITERATURE

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The Other in Modern Japanese Literature

Abstract

The concept of the Other plays a critical role in individual as well as national cultural identity. Each society's definition of the Other is based on its social, political, cultural, racial and spiritual paradigms. From ancient times, the concept of tasha or the Other has been an integral part of the Japanese world-view. At the outset of the Meiji period (1868), the role of the Other shifted from China to the West.

During the Meiji Restoration the Japanese embraced the Western world and its modern technology, seeing it as a way to build Japan's strength. However, the inherent danger of losing their culture and traditions eventually became apparent. The Second World War and the Allied Occupation contributed to a growing resentment of the West and a rejection of many Western values. Today Japan is a nation that belongs to neither the Asian nor the Western world but rather exists in a territory somewhere in between.

The complex and ambivalent attitude of the Japanese toward the West is reflected in modern Japanese literature and is the focus of this paper. The work of writers such as Mori Ōgai ("The Dancing Girl" and "Under Reconstruction"), Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (The Makioka Sisters), Ōe Kenzaburō ("Human beings as Sheep") and Yamada Eimi ("Bedtime Eyes") are examined for what they reveal about the values and assumptions of Japanese culture and the changing perceptions of the West as the Other.

Historical events from the Meiji Restoration onward are chronicled and then interwoven with an analysis of the literature to provide insight into the conflicting forces of tradition vs. modernity, nationalism vs. individualism, rejection vs. reconciliation and pride vs. humiliation, which have contributed to Japan's complex relationship with the West.
Introduction

The Definition of the Other

The Other is an ill-defined term that is frequently used and heatedly debated in the fields of politics, culture, economics and education. As long as two people exist in this world, then the Other will be present. As a rule, language, skin color, gender, class, and race are the criteria used to draw the boundaries between different groups of people. Otherness is manifested in such dichotomies as: male/female, sacred/mundane and domestic/foreign. It plays a significant role in the human imagination, acting as a powerful goad to fantasy. In this paper, the theme “the West as the Other” will be explored.

From a linguistic perspective, the concept of Otherness is an expression of Japanese society, frequently used in daily life to distinguish the in-group from the out-group. From ancient times, this concept has been an integral part of the Japanese worldview. As Hegel states, “There can be no thought without language; and indeed the language of different peoples reflect their different visions of things.”¹ Jared Taylor adds, “Their [Japanese] language is vital to their image of themselves and is an essential ingredient in their sense of uniqueness.”²

In Japanese society, there is another name for the Other: tasha. Ta is defined as the other and sha, as the person. To categorize another person as a tasha involves an assessment of both outer phenomena such as visible features and inner criteria such as values and emotions. Thus, to identify tasha, or the Other, the
Japanese draw on elements from their personal, social, cultural and ethnic perspectives.

Modern Japan twice experienced social and cultural cataclysms, first during the Meiji Restoration (1868) and again during the Allied Occupation (1945-1952), which completely distorted Japan’s attitude towards the Western world. Before the Second World War, the Japanese embraced the Western world and its modern technology, seeing it as a way to build Japan’s strength. However, they failed to take into account the inherent danger of losing their culture and traditions. This resulted in countless problems for Japan as it modernized and assimilated aspects of Western culture. Eventually, it led to a fantastic scheme devised by a few Japanese jingoists who alleged that only by invading China could they solve the crisis at home. The fact that this military campaign was a dismal failure, coupled with the humiliation of the Allied Occupation after the Second World War, contributed to a growing resentment of the United States and a rejection of many Western values. While continuing to embrace the superficial, material aspects of Western culture, the Japanese increasingly identified the West as tasha or the Other. This complex and ambivalent attitude towards the West is reflected in Modern Japanese Literature, and will be the focus of this paper.
Who are “the Others” for the Japanese?

As Patrick Smith observed, “Japan... [knows] itself only by way of others.”

But, who are the Others for the Japanese? Indisputably, there are Westerners, and, everyone else who lives beyond the sea. There are also the Others among the Japanese, known as the burakumin, as well as the Ainu people in the north and the Okinawans in the south. The reality that China has made Japan much of what it is culturally is as widely acknowledged as the fact that Japan has made global contributions to industry and technology. Even today, the Japanese are reminded of this historical fact every time they read the kanji or Chinese characters.

However, the Japanese viewed the Chinese as the Others long before the first Europeans arrived in 1542. The Koreans were also considered as the Others, even though their impact on Japan was less than that of the Chinese. After America sent its envoy, Captain Perry, with his four black ships into the Port of Uraga in 1853, the role of the Others dramatically shifted to Westerners.

To distinguish the old-time “Other” from the present day one, the Japanese created a special title for Westerners: gaijin. Written in kanji, the Chinese ideographic style of writing, this word embodies the distinction between human beings, gai meaning outside and jin meaning person. The Japanese never apply this term to the Chinese or Koreans. Thus, because Westerners have been defined as gaijin, regardless of how long they have lived in Japan, or how well they have learned the language, they ultimately are not accepted in the Japanese community.

A number of questions arise from these facts. What are the circumstances in which
the Japanese people define another race or ethnic group as the Other? What are the reasons the role of the Other has shifted from the Chinese and other East Asians to Westerners? How did westernization during the Meiji Restoration affect Japan’s view of the Other? How did the Allied Occupation after the Second World War impact Japanese people’s lives, and drastically change their attitude towards the Other?

An examination of the time from the Meiji Restoration in 1868 to the contemporary period, the century in which Japan was exposed to Western ideas and influences, may yield answers to some of these questions. In particular, an analysis of Japan’s relationship to internationalization may shed light on the deep historical roots of concepts of the Other, concepts that are embedded in the literature of this time period.

Fiction is a mirror through which to reflect the evolution of a culture thoroughly, its narrative often revealing the significance and experience that form said culture. Each work of fiction has significant meaning, even a short story can be viewed as a portrait of an entire nation and the background behind. Thus, an examination of modern Japanese literature has the potential to yield insights and understandings about Japanese society and attitudes towards the Other. Towards this end, this paper will explore the works of Japanese writers Mori Ōgai, Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, Ōe Kenzaburō and Yamada Eimi. The focus will be on what these writers have borrowed from the West, the ways in which they have used Western
ideas in their works, and how their individual and cultural perspectives have affected their acceptance or rejection of the Western model.
Changing Role of the Other

In Japan, the crux of westernization is known as the Meiji Restoration, named after the Emperor Meiji (1852-1912), who ascended the throne in 1867 at the age of fifteen. Coincidentally, modernization had reached the end of a crucial stage in the West, where science, technology, and industry had made swift progress. Japan’s westernization resulted from a recognition of this by the new Meiji leaders, who were surprised by the advancement of Western technology and were pressured by the revolutionary voice of some intellectuals. In order to catch up with the West, to modernize the whole country would be the alternative during that time. The Meiji leaders recognized the fact that, in terms of military strength and economic development, Japan was absolutely far behind the Western nations. Their credo thus became one borrowed from Chinese legalist thought: “fukoku-kyohei” or “enrich the country and strengthen its arms”.6

At this time, the persistent culture “imported” from China during the Japanese Taika Restoration (645) was gradually abandoned. After the naval battle of 663 in which China had been victorious, the Japanese recognized China as the emblematic leader among the Asian countries. As Hane Mikiso stated, even though the Japanese thought they were superior because they had been ruled by an unbroken line of sovereigns descended from the gods, they still saw themselves as being governed by the fundamentals of Confucianism.7 Thus, before the modernization of Japan, Chinese influence had been profound. It contributed significantly to Japanese language, culture and architecture. For example, the
Japanese writing system words such as, “Hiragana” and “Katakana” were originally imitations of Chinese characters, which through scholars and missionaries had moved back and forth between China and Japan during the Sui (581-618) and the T’ang (618-907) Dynasties.

The Chinese influence can also be seen in Japanese architecture. The Kinkakuji, or The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, situated in Kyōto, is considered to be representative of the Kitayama bunka, or the Northern Mountain Culture. As the Chinese scholar Lin Ming Do argues, this culture flourished during the T’ang dynasty. The Kinkakuji is an excellent example of the incorporation of Chinese architectural heritage into Japanese architecture, and also reflects the Japanese aristocracy’s adoption of aspects of T’ang and Song.

During the early Meiji period, as Kurozumi Makoto states, kangaku or Chinese Learning came to be seen as representing the old regime and was therefore consigned to the periphery, becoming the subject of attack, not only by the kōgaku or Japanese Imperial Learning scholars, but also by those who supported European-style modernization. After Japan’s victory over China in the Sino-Japanese war (1895), China became synonymous with tradition. From that time on, “Any thought of ‘protecting traditional culture’ was scorned.” Poems and novels written in the traditional Chinese style were now meaningless, devoid of any revelatory aspect. As Smith observes, as modernization progressed, it resulted in China, the historic Other, being ruthlessly and naturally eliminated,
becoming more of a potential political rival than a source from which Japan must differentiate itself.¹¹

The changing role of the Other from China to the West will be chronicled in the next section of this paper through an examination of historical events.
Historical Background

The Era of Restoration, 1868-1914

According to Earl David, before the Meiji Era (1868-1911), political thinking could best be described with one word, “conservative”. During the Tokugawa Era (1600-1868), intellectuals resisted change and slowly yielded to altering conditions. The Golden Age was considered to have been in the past. However, outside forces, such as the power politics of nineteenth-century Europe and America, began to make Japan’s helplessness apparent. Knowing that Westerners held a temporary advantage due to the failure of Japan to pursue its proper course forced Japan to adopt Western practices to regain its rightful place in world affairs and to insure the achievement of its destiny as the source of civilization, David argues.

The Meiji Restoration originated with the Japanese Mito scholars, who coined the slogan Sonnō-jōi or Revere the Emperor! Oust the Barbarians! “Revere the Emperor” was a traditional Chinese reminder of ethical obligations. By “revering the emperor”, subjects would automatically be loyal to the emperor. “Oust the Barbarians”, on the other hand, was an order to the shogunate to strengthen defenses against the aggression of foreign countries. Based on this concept, the achievement of national unity demanded political, military, economic and financial considerations. As Yanaga Chitoshi stated, “the adoption of new weapons from the West and the building of military power entailed the creation of
a system of universal military conscription and the encouragement of strategic industries and munitions production through government aid. Competition from Western capitalism could be met only by increasing industrial and commercial capital.\textsuperscript{16}

In the two decades between 1890 and 1910, wars with China and Russia enhanced Japanese confidence, and additionally changed its international position. In 1894, more than one millennium after the Japanese navy first battled China, Japan again went to war with China to secure control of Korea. After only six months, Japan won a resounding victory over China, and China ceded to Japan the island of Formosa (Taiwan), and the Liaotung peninsula, as well as a large cash indemnity. For both the government and the Japanese people, this victory could have been interpreted as the sweet fruit of modernity. Two significant facts were highlighted by Japan's victory: (a) China's weakness was more than had been thought and (b) Japan's modernization had been remarkably successful. However, prior to the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905), Japan's international position was still weak. As Lin explains, despite its victory over China, Japan was still considered by the Western world to be a inferior, backward, semifudal, country.\textsuperscript{17} Apparently, from the standpoint of the Western world (the Other), victory did not make a significant difference, since both Japan and China were still part of Asia. Nonetheless, Japan's remarkable victory ten years later in the Russo-Japanese war, fought over for the control of Korea and Northeast China, inspired its people with enthusiasm.
Dominator in East Asia, 1914-1941

Japan, even though a participant in the First World War (1914-1917), was geographically predisposed to remain isolated from the European battles. Hence, the entire country was able to concentrate on industrialization. As a result, Japan's economy reached a peak due to its successful expansion into overseas markets during and after the First World War. The 1917 to 1930 period was a time of peace and prosperity in Japan. As the prewar nationalists called it in the 1930s, "The spirit that runs through history." However, during the process of the material transformation, a feeling of spiritual inferiority often dressed up as its opposite, which, turned into the psychological violence that eventually hastened Japan's ruthless aggression towards its innocent neighbor, China.

Thus, peaceful times are always transient. The failure of Western nations to recognize Japan's developing status as a major military power precipitated the development of Japanese militarism. As well, the worldwide economic depression of the 1930s also afflicted Japan's economy, and contributed to its political instability. According to Borton, "believing that Japan was invincible, the new ultranationalist movement strengthened in direct proportion to the growth of Chinese unification and their anti-Japanese movement." On the night of September 18, 1931, while the Japanese army was exploring a part of the South Manchurian railway, they alleged that they were attacked by Chinese saboteurs. As a retaliation to this sabotage, the Japanese army attacked the north barracks of
the Chinese troops and used this event as an excuse to dispatch troops to Manchuria. This historical event fixed Japan’s destiny as an invader.

Why the Japanese military invaded China and other Asian countries is the subject of much public debate. However, if we realize that Japanese children have been raised with the idea of Hakkō Ichiu or all the corners of the world under one roof, which suggests that if any country has to be the “roof of Asia”, it should be Japan, then we can understand the roots of Japanese militarism.20

After 1931, a series of domestic crises, such as inflation, enormous military expenditures and an astronomical deficit, plagued the Japanese government. Ambitious Japanese politicians saw an invasion of China, with its bountiful resources, as the only hope for escaping the existing domestic predicament. On July 7th, 1937, a skirmish took place between Japanese and Chinese troops near Lukouchiao, the Marco Polo Bridge. While neither side admitted that it was a planned attack, this Lukouchiao Event was considered by the Chinese government to be the official outbreak of war between Japan and China.

The period of 1937 to 1941 was the heyday of Japanese militarism. The Japanese army enjoyed the fruits of their victorious invasion of China. The notion of Japan as the designated “roof of Asia” bolstered Japanese morale, particularly that of the Japanese soldiers who had been trained to believe that there was no concept of surrender. Even if there were no hope of beating the enemy, Japanese soldiers were expected to fight to the end.21 Evidence of this is found in the words of the Japanese thinker Yoshida Shoin (1930-59), who emphasized the importance
of the *Kokutai* or Organization of the State: "Even if there should occur a war which is impossible to win, sovereign and subjects must stay together as one, and all meet their end and die in battle, so that not the slightest disgrace is incurred." In the Japanese ethos, no mercy is to be given to a loser, no matter how painful and difficult the situation.

**The Calamitous Denouement**

Until 1941, the Japanese government thought that the longer the war in China lasted, the greater the price for Japan to pay for it, if China was to survive. One of the major schemes plotted by Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku (1884-1943), Commander in Chief of Japan's combined fleet, was to completely annihilate the American fleet. As Hane observed, Yamamoto believed that Japan could protect its expansion into Southeast Asia only by dealing a crippling blow to the American Pacific fleet at the outset of the war. At 7:55 Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, the Japanese torpedoed the American base at Pearl Harbor. The immense loss that resulted from this attack (eighteen American ships were sunk and more than three thousand people killed or wounded) exasperated the United States and drew it into war with Japan.

After the embroilment of the American armed forces, Japan accelerated its invasion of China and Eastern Asia, which resulted in the curtains of numerous Japanese soldiers. However, the news of the disastrous defeats were kept from the Japanese people and only approbative information was made attainable. The situation at home was even worse because of the offensive led by the American
Air Force, who, from 1944 on, bombed Japan and destroyed most of the major Japanese cities.

Despite evidence that suggested little hope of success after the Battle of Guadalcanal Island in February 1943, the Japanese army remained determined to fight until the last Japanese soldier fell. To retrieve soldiers lost in battle, the ill-famed suicide mission carried out by the Tokkōtai or Special Attack Squadron (known worldwide as the Kamikaze or Shimpū, which means “Divine Wind”), was launched in 1944. Approximately 2530 highly skilled Japanese aviators deceased on this suicide mission between October 25, 1944 and August 15, 1945. Meanwhile, life at home deteriorated and there were extreme shortages of materials and food. Even though the majority of the Japanese people were not aware of it, the collapse of Japan’s militarism was imminent. After the world’s first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on Aug 6, 1945, and another three days later on Nagasaki, the war came to an end. On August 15, 1945, a message from the Emperor Hirohito was broadcast to the nation. It was the first time that the people of Japan had heard the voice of their Emperor. Unexpectedly, they were informed that the war was over and that Japan had lost.
Reconstruction under Allied Occupation

Because of the air raids, most of the major cities in Japan had been seriously damaged during the war. On August 30, 1945, General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, landed in Japan. Besides supervising the formal acceptance of Japan’s surrender, as Suzuki suggested, his main task was to oversee the development of Japanese political life and to construct a version of the “American Dream” in the unfamiliar and improbable setting of a bomb-blackened Japan.  

For the first few years after the surrender, the majority of Japanese people suffered from starvation and poverty. Besides the physical suffering, the Japanese had to accept the truth that they had lost their autonomy. Even though the reconstruction of the economy and educational and political systems was accomplished by the end of the Allied Occupation (in accordance with the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951), for most Japanese people, it was still difficult to believe that the dominators had once been their enemies. The Korean War in 1950 provided an unexpected economic opportunity for Japan to supply commodities to the war zone. Therefore, according to Sue, the year 1950 is always considered to be a turning point in modern Japanese history. By this time, the ruined cities were almost wholly rebuilt, in at least a harsh way. When the Occupation ended in 1952, Japan, with its Gross National Product expanding by about 10 percent annually, launched one of the most vigorous and sustained periods of economic
growth of any country in modern history. After 1955, its economy was at full
speed and Japan gradually separated itself from the adumbration of the war.

**The Psychological Aftermath of the Allied Occupation**

Under the Allied Occupation, intertwined feelings of antagonism and respect
confounded the Japanese people. They were hurt by their defeat during the war,
but at the same time, grateful for their improving prosperity, which could be
attributed to the support of the Americans. Their material deficiencies resulted in a
motivation to join the Western world. As Dr. Sharalyn Orbaugh observed, "In an
era when Japan was struggling to position itself relative to the postwar
superpowers... the necessity for renegotiating its place in a complex international
hierarchy of nations was self-evident."31 It is said that the Japanese have a strong
tendency to compare themselves with those around them32 and, thus, the Western
countries again became the target of comparison for Japan during this period. The
1945 defeat changed their identities dramatically from subject to object, colonizer
to colonial. Hence, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings not only ruined the
nation, but also destroyed the pride of the Japanese people. Under the Allied
Occupation, poverty reinforced Japan's sense of being inferior to the Western
world. This was bewildering to the Japanese, their unprecedented defeat and
surrender discrediting long-held concepts of national destiny and military glory.

After the war, the Japanese people were not only hungry and homeless, but
also spiritually exhausted. During the Postwar period, feelings of doubt,
uncertainty, and a sense of crisis prevailed. Their world was similar to that

Society I felt as though even I were beginning at last to acquire some vague notion of what it meant. It is the struggle between one individual and another, a then-and-there struggle, in which the immediate triumph is everything. Human beings never submit to human beings.³³

The sense of inferiority that permeated postwar Japan presumably arose from their traditional hierarchical system in which the top rank is always treated with respect. Thus, for the Japanese, feelings of inferiority resulted in obedient behavior towards the Americans during the postwar period. This was especially difficult for those Japanese who once held the top positions in this hierarchical system. How could they identify themselves, when they had lost all their authority? How could their children respond, when the owner of their house was a stranger who controlled all the supplies for the family? With whom could their children identify?

**High-Speed Economic Growth 1960-1990**

Japan became one of the world’s leading industrial and technologically advanced nations in the 1960s. In 1968, Japan’s GNP was the second highest in the world, after the United States of America. During the 1980s, the entire world was inundated with Japanese cars, televisions, video-recorders and other high-tech products. This time Japan used its economic rather than its military power, to prevail over the world. Certainly the reasons for its success vary; however, one of
the main ones is the support it received from the United States during the Occupation, who provided financial and technical assistance to foster Japan's recovery. Embedded in simultaneous feelings of admiration and xenophobia, the complicated historical layers made Japanese to admit the incontrovertible fact that the Americans played an important role in their daily life.

Unlike most of the world's cultures, Japan, as an entity, had managed to keep its autonomy for more than one thousand years. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the Second World War were both catastrophic and apocalyptic for the Japanese, seriously undermining their sense of autonomy. If one were to draw a picture of human evolution, it might look like many pyramids built on a horizon, rising step by step towards an unknown "sublime", each pyramid representing one people or nation. The phenomenon of 'the sublime', as defined by Martin Jay, is a "yearning for a presence that can never be fulfilled." The sublime is a kind of utopia that exists only in the mind. In 1945, the "pyramid" of Japan collapsed. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was catastrophic, and resulted in the entire Japanese "pyramid" of national autonomy and dignity being destroyed and returned to "ground zero".

The concept of "zero", as interpreted by Hiroki Azuma, is "flat equals zero". Azuma also introduced the concept of "Super Flat", "[referring] to the path from the dismantling of art, to its reclamation, from zero to transcendence." Awakened by the humiliation experienced during the Allied Occupation, the Japanese turned their ethnicity into a motivation for reconstructing their society
and returning from “zero” to “transcendence”. However, the new world that emerged belonged neither to the Asians nor the Westerners, but rather existed in the borderlands between the two. On a superficial, material level, the Japanese ascribed to Western values, but on a deeper, psychological level, they rejected Western culture, and identified it as tasha, or the Other. Thus, the catastrophic events of 1945 were also apocalyptic for the Japanese. These events served not only to illuminate the strength of the Japanese people and their ability to survive tragedy, but also to highlight their values, which in many ways differed from those of Western cultures.
Modern Japanese Literature

Prewar Japanese Literature

Modernization is a complex process that simultaneously eliminates the past and creates the future. While it is the enthusiasm of the dissatisfied in a society that often provides the impetus for change, an awareness of economic, political, social and intellectual deficiencies also plays a role in the push towards modernization. To better understand the concept of modernization, an examination of the assumptions inherent in the terms “tradition” and “modernity” perhaps deserves more attention.

In general, “tradition” tends to be associated with the inner life of spirit and emotion and manifests itself in a society’s culture, art and religious beliefs. Its focus is on universal human truths that remain constant over time. In contrast, “modernity” tends to be associated with the outer life of practical material reality and manifests itself in such things as politics, commerce and technology, which allow a society to function on a day-to-day level. In most societies, “tradition” and “modernity” coexist, although not always in harmony or balance with one another. Thus, in a country such as Japan, which has roots in ancient history and long-held “traditions”, the movement towards Western “modernization” beginning in the Meiji Restoration, although useful, was essentially alien. This close association of the West with “modernization” has contributed to the identification of Westerners as “gaijin” or the Other.
Modern Japanese literature often reflects this uneasy relationship between "tradition" and "modernity", and the ambivalent attitudes that result from this for many Japanese. Images of Westerners as the Other are often reflected in these works. During the Meiji (1867-1912) and Taishō (1912-1926) eras, the ideology of "self" became a significant issue as a result of Japanese intellectuals' search for new self-expression in response to Western influences. However, with all the cultural impact of the Meiji and Taishō periods, in addition to the swift shift in political and economic systems, the process of redefining personal identity was not as easy as people expected. Many who were born in the Meiji era and lived through the Taishō era struggled with both the old (tradition) and the new (modernity) values that surrounded them. There was also little time for the Japanese to ponder their image during such a period of turmoil, especially when the Meiji intellectuals were eager to catch up with Western countries at full speed. However, even though frustrated by the paradoxes caused by the clash of Eastern and Western values, the Japanese elite proceeded to move towards modernity without really knowing their destiny.

Mori Ōgai: "Maihime" or "The Dancing Girl"

The interaction of Western and Japanese literary traditions created an epoch that climaxed in the late Meiji period, when numerous talented writers produced an abundance of significant work. Mori Ōgai (1862-1922), a graduate of the medical school of Tokyo Imperial University, was among the eminent writers of this era. Ōgai’s career as a novelist started after his return from Germany and
reached the highest point during the early twentieth century. While staying in Germany (1884-1888), Ōgai studied hygiene as well as literature, the arts and philosophy. Along with Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916), another well-known Japanese author, Ōgai was considered one of the most standout writers of the Meiji and Taishō eras. Ōgai was the first major Japanese novelist to study the literature of a Western country abroad. The fact that he started learning German at age ten presumably affected his attitude towards the Western world and therefore it is not surprising that the dominant foreign influence on his writing was German. Ōgai’s ample knowledge of Eastern and Western culture molded him into a supreme critic of contemporary Japanese civilization and left his name to posterity.

Unlike the style of storybook promise of permanence, Ōgai’s writing derives its interest by carrying the reader through an abundant analysis of the protagonist’s mentality to the realities of his/her personal situation. Writing about a different culture can potentially create a bridge or a barrier to that culture. Thus, literature can play a significant role in both promoting and discouraging the development of understanding between cultures. Europe, the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, was well suited for describing the cultural and historical background of the Other for the Japanese. Ōgai chose a European setting for his story “The Dancing Girl” in order to explore the complexity and ambivalence of Japanese attitudes towards the “modern” West, during the period of Japan’s modernization.
Published in 1890, "The Dancing Girl" is based on Ōgai’s personal experiences. The story chronicles the adventures of Ōta Toyotarō, a young Japanese man who is sent to Berlin by the Japanese government to study for three years. Attracted by European life, he neglects his studies and takes a great interest in European culture, particularly the arts. His mother passed away in Japan, which leaves him with no burden at home, and so he decides to stay and complete his studies in Germany. Unexpectedly, he meets and falls in love with a lovely young girl named Elis, who is a dancer in the chorus of a popular theater. Few months after, she becomes pregnant with his child. Ōta, who has by now discontinued his studies, is persuaded by his friend Aizawa Kenichi to serve as an interpreter and translator to Count Amakata, who is visiting Berlin. The Count invites Ōta back to Japan to develop his career. Torn between conflicting desires, Ōta meanders the snowy streets until he falls dangerously ailing. Eventually, Ōta finds himself choosing to return to Japan. When Elis realizes that Ōta will abandon her, she becomes delirious. Tragically, Ōta returns to Japan alone.

Conflicts exist everywhere in this story: nationalism vs. individualism, feudalism vs. egotism, modernity vs. tradition, and so on. Caught between changing times and personal desires, the protagonist must struggle with conflicting values within himself. Ōgai has created a character whose most important ties, to his parents, country and work, are cut away from him. Nonetheless, spiritually, Ōta’s mind is still burdened with the values and assumptions of traditional Japanese culture.
"I had merely followed a path that I was made to follow." he recalls on his way back to Japan. Apparently, Ōta had lived a traditional life before going abroad to study. For Ōta, to respect his parents meant to achieve “their” goals, a common aspiration in Eastern families. However, when Ōta returns to Japan he is not the same person as when he left. The time spent in Germany has exposed him to new ideas and values. Ōta continually sighs, “What was right yesterday is wrong today”.

After his three year stay in Germany, Ōta’s thinking has altered significantly. “Now, however, at the age of twenty-five, presumably since I had been unmasked to the liberal ways of the university for some time, there grew within me a kind of disquiet.” By narrating the story in the first person, Ōgai successfully draws in readers who suffer from the same dilemma, who see Ōta as a reflection of themselves. Ōgai also attempts to reveal the various layers in Ōta’s concern, and the social and personal expanse of his self-perception. At each encounter with his lover Elis, Ōta comes to realize the growing dissimilarity between her ardency and his own indecisiveness.

Germany, one of the greatest countries in the Western world during the 1900’s, was seen as a model for Japan to achieve its modernization. One of the goals of the Meiji Restoration was to “seek knowledge throughout the world in order to provide for the welfare of the state.” Ōgai was sent to Germany to study military medicine. During his stay there, he became aware of the differences between Eastern and Western culture and this was later revealed in his writings.
In “The Dancing Girl”, when Ōta first arrives in the big German city, he is very impressed with the pretty ladies, carriages and elaborate fountains. Evidence of the modernity and prosperity of the Western Other is revealed around every corner. However, Ōta does not seem to be willing to merge completely into the Other’s world because of the burden of his traditions. Through Ōta’s ambivalent attitude, Ōgai seems to suggest that a blending of Western modernity and Japanese tradition would be best for both Western and Japanese cultures. The former is scientific, practical and democratic, and the latter literary, artistic and feudalistic.

As Ōgai explains, “There are two kinds of scholars. Orientalists, who incline to Oriental culture are too conservative, and in contrast, Westernizers who are too radical. Therefore, the appropriate scholar is the one who can combine the features and keep balance.”

The desire to identify the Other is a universal human need. The way one defines the Other is intimately connected to the way one defines oneself. Thus, different concepts of the Other will lead to different approaches to the “self”, and will determine how the “self” is identified.

In “The Dancing Girl”, Ōgai explores this interaction between the self and Other through the protagonist’s struggle with tradition and modernity. “The Dancing Girl” thus epitomizes the process of modernization during the Meiji Era. Richard John Bowring describes “The Dancing Girl” as, “A chronicle of the birth and premature stifling of the modern sense of individualism and self-awareness of the Meiji intellectual.” The protagonist Ōta, a naturally ordained victim of the
Restoration, struggles between love (egotism) and nation (altruism), finally yielding to the latter. This is because, as Carol Gluck observed, Japan’s indigenous morality began with filiality and the family, and then extended to the nation in the form of loyalty and patriotism. Western individualism and concepts such as self-love and self-life were viewed as destructive.

Natsume Sōseki, a writer who also lived during the late Meiji and Taishō periods, majored in English literature at Tokyo Imperial University and studied in England from 1900 to 1903. Sōseki and Ōgai dominated Japanese literature during this era and the literati respected them as articulators of the significant problems and attitudes of their day. In one of Sōseki’s finer novels, Kokoro, or The Heart, self-analysis is used to delineate egotism and the dark side of humanity. Scholars and critics often refer to Sōseki’s use of the word Jikohoni, or egotism. As Noriko Thunman noted: “After more than one year in London, Sōseki [had become] aware of the importance of egotism.” Sōseki was intrigued with the Western concern for the quest of “self”. In the work of both Sōseki and Ōgai, Western “self” is associated with egotism and Japanese “self” with altruism. Ultimately, for both authors, egotism is viewed as a negative quality. As Ōta, the protagonist in Ōgai’s “The Dancing Girl” concludes, “Even though I do not know much about this mundane world, I realized that I cannot trust human beings anymore.” The sense of human diversity and conflict, dreams and desires, that both Ōgai and Sōseki were able to capture in their work, made them outstanding writers who,
committed themselves to a free and pluralistic society, in which both Western and Japanese values coexist.

Ôta’s feelings of distrust for this “mundane world” is quite understandable. While staying in Germany, his Japanese colleagues’ attempts to denigrate him make him recognize the negative aspects of humanity. In addition, admonishments from his good friend Aizawa contribute to his breakup with Elis whom he both loves and rejects. There seem to be opposing voices debating in Ôta’s mind; the voice of Western individualism and of Eastern nationalism.

Ôta’s life, like Ôgai’s, reflects the reality of most of the Meiji-Taishō elite. In “The Dancing Girl”, duty overcomes romance. Concerned about his mother and his country, Ôta sacrifices love. Ôgai utilizes Ôta’s ambivalent relationship with the Western and Japanese characters in this story to explore the conflicting sense of self-definition that was experienced by many Japanese after the onset of modernization. As Ôta confesses, “When I attempted to clarify my relationship with others, the emotion that I had previously believed became confused.”

During the Meiji Restoration, everything Chinese was viewed old fashioned. However, as time went by, Japan’s enamorment with Western modernity began to fade. The Meiji leaders began to realize the danger inherent in a loss of traditional Japanese culture. A similar process takes place in the relationship between Ôta and Elis. Had Ôta not known Elis, he would not have experienced so many dilemmas. However, it is because of his contact with the Western world, and his relationship with Elis, that he is able to experience a
growth in self-awareness. Perhaps Japan would not have experienced so many
difficulties had it not been exposed to Western values, but perhaps it too has
grown in self-awareness and developed an ability to distinguish between what is
Japanese and what is Other. Thus, in many ways, the experiences of Ōta in “The
Dancing Girl” function as a mirror to Japanese society during the Meiji
Restoration.

Just as Ōta’s relationship with Elis signifies his ambivalent attitude towards
the modern West, so his relationship with Aizawa signifies his ambivalence
towards traditional Japan. At the end of the story, Ōta sighs an emotionally
revealing confession, “Friends like Aizawa Kenichi are rare indeed, however, to
this very day there remains a part of me that still hates him.” Aizawa is Ōta’s
friend who first introduced him to duty, in the form of the count. Aizawa
represents the Japanese tradition with its values of filiality, family, loyalty and
patriotism. He attempts to dissuade Ōta from going back to Elis, and plays an
important role in Ōta’s decision to return to Japan. Ōta’s conflicting feelings about
returning to Japan suggest that he has become increasingly westernized and
influenced by the values of the Other. Central to this conflict is the polarity
between Western values, which stress individual freedom, and Japanese values,
which emphasize duty to family and country before the needs of the individual. It
is this polarity that forms the essence of the Japanese sense of the West as Other.

When Ōta first met Elis, he was astonished by her appearance. “She was
extremely beautiful! If I had been a poet, I might have been able to portray that
beauty in words." In this passage, it reveals that even though the girl plays an important role in the story, her image remains entirely within the narrator’s aesthetic perspective. She is characterized as nothing more than a pretty Western girl. As Hitoshi Oshima states, “they [Westerners] appear in Mori Ógai’s story as beautiful silhouettes decorating the author’s romantic frame.”

Seemingly, Ōta was impressed by her appearance, but deep inside his heart, the power of the traditional feudal system still profoundly affected him. For Ōta, the notion of “the equality of all classes” does not apply to a commoner like Elis. Even though the Meiji Restoration had been envisioned as a revolution that would negate all inequalities, this notion seems to have been restricted to the Japanese because Westerners were regarded as the Other. Presumably, the credo from ancient China was still rooted in Ōta’s heart, “The good marriage only happens when the two families have equal fortune and social status”. Ōta unconsciously separates himself from Elis. His failure to overcome this mental obstacle because of the slandering from his colleagues disheartened him. No matter how his thinking had been influenced by Western culture, the traditional Japanese norms were embedded in his mind. Ōta was not aware to what extent this was so until he was on his way back to Japan. For Ōta, as for most Japanese people, Westerners are still considered as the Other on both a practical and a spiritual level.

The ambivalent feelings generated by a society that places enormous stress upon obedience to the group, especially in the form of filial piety towards one’s parents, and loyalty to the state, is conveyed in “The Dancing Girl” through Ōta’s
relationship to his own mother and to that of Elis. Elis's mother is a money-oriented person. The impression Ōta has of her when he first meets Elis and escorts her home, is that she is "gray-haired and ugly-looking with impoverishment traced on her forehead." After dating Elis for a few months, Ōta becomes unemployed due to his scandalous relationship with Elis. Worried that her mother might be against her relationship with Ōta, Elis tells him, "If my mother knows you do not have any money for tuition, then she may force us to part. Therefore, please do not let her know that you are unemployed." Clearly, Elis's mother is not concerned about Ōta, but only about his financial condition. His relationship with her is a superficial one, devoid of any sense of loyalty or trust.

In contrast, Ōta's mother is regarded as Ōta's inspiration since she always encourages him to become a live dictionary, not for himself, but for his country. At the moment when Ōta is apprised of his unemployment, he receives two letters from his hometown. One is from his mother and the other is from his relatives, informing him of his mother's demise. As Ōta explains, "I can not recite what my mother wrote to me, for the tears hinder her writing." Ōgai tries to impress on the reader, how great a traditional Japanese mother is. Instead of blaming Ōta for his behavior (because she did not get a chance to know of his unemployment), she encourages him to do his best for his country. Ōgai uses the character of Ōta's mother to convey the Eastern emphasis on self-sacrifice and commitment to society as a whole.
By 1890, the Japanese no longer believed that the West possessed superior knowledge, but rather viewed Western modernity as something that had been imported. As Ōta observes, “What was right yesterday becomes wrong today.”55 The renewed sense of their traditional values increasingly resulted in a sense of the West as Other. In “The Dancing Girl”, both Elis and Ōta begin to see each other as the Other. As Elis helps Ōta dress for his first interview with the court, she notes, “When I see you dressed up like this, you somehow do not look like the one I used to know.”56

The Japan that emerged at the end of the Meiji Restoration was a country that no longer wholeheartedly embraced the West and its modernity. It was a society that existed somewhere in between the Eastern and Western world, a country that had adopted many modern practices but that also had a renewed sense of its traditional values. Its future lay in its ability to integrate the two.

As Nobel nominated Japanese novelist Mishima Yukio observed in The Temple of the Golden Pavilion,

The past does not only draw us back to the past. There are certain memories of the past that have strong steel springs and, when we who live in the present touch them, they are suddenly stretched taut and this then propels us into the future.57

In “The Dancing Girl”, Ōgai’s use of a writing style similar to the watakushi shōsetsu or I-novel, a diary-like confessional narrated in the first person, functions to reinforce the sense of Otherness that Ōgai is trying to portray. The I-novel style,
which flourished in the Taishō era, was established by the *Shinwasedaha* or *New Waseda School*, which consisted of Hirotsu Kazuo, Kasai Zenzo and Uno Koji. It has its roots in the diary style of the early Heian period, which mixes reflection and perceived action and emphasizes the inner flow of personal emotion.

Ōgai, like all his contemporaries, spent his early education in a system that emphasized the Japanese and Chinese classics and thus immersed him in this style of writing. The fact that it stressed discipline over romanticism, and the nation over the individual, makes it an excellent vehicle for revealing the opposing attitude of the Other in "The Dancing Girl".

**Mori Ōgai: "Fushinchū" or "Under Reconstruction"**

Another story written by Ōgai is "Fushinchū" or "Under Reconstruction". Published in 1910, the title symbolizes the state of Japan and it is against this backdrop that Ōgai sets this poignant short story. The protagonist is a high-ranking Japanese bureaucrat whose name is Watanabe. As the story begins, he comes to a restaurant in a Western-style hotel in downtown Tokyo to meet his former girlfriend, a German singer. They meet without enthusiasm and have a brief and insignificant conversation. At the end they part without making any future plans.

In "Under Reconstruction", Watanabe and his mistress are like Ōta and Elis of "The Dancing Girl" transmuted into a sophisticated, middle-age couple. It seems that Watanabe has full of confidence who, has no sense of regret, and is not a sentimental young man anymore. At the beginning of the story, while Watanabe is waiting for the lady, "...he [Watanabe] did not care in the slightest whose face it
was that he would soon be seeing across that flower basket. He was surprised at his own coolness. In contrast to Elis, this woman is a singer, not a dancer, and unlike the faithful Elis, travels with a Polish man. Their conversation is brief and ironic that readers can not sense any romance.

Perhaps as Sharon A. Minichiello suggests, “Ōgai’s use of synecdoche, a hotel representing the nation as a whole—was a whole new attitude toward the symbolic value of fiction. Any element of the story can function as a symbol—even the characters themselves.” Truly, the form of this brief story is effectively arranged. It seems that the conversation between these two old lovers reveals present emotional attitudes as well as past memories. As the title suggests, both Watanabe and his former lover have reconstructed themselves since their youth, suggesting that we only live once, continually reconstructing our lives with each new experience. The future is thus unpredictable.

Having suffered enough personal changes during their attempts to modernize society, the Japanese intellectuals became aware of their own consciousness. Patterns of traditional social behaviors were changing with such rapidity that it must have seemed as though equilibrium might never be restored. Ōgai now had to face the consequences of a move towards rationalism. Even though it continues in the same style as “The Dancing Girl”, Ogai’s “Under Reconstruction” no longer reveals the introspective helplessness of the individual. At this point in time, it seems that the Japanese people did not encumber themselves with the same psychological burdens as they used to.
Watanabe and the German lady reveal the volatility of an unstable world. This story was written in 1910, a time following the frantic pursuance of Westernization when the Japanese needed to reconsider the true value of tradition and modernity, and when confusion afflicted most of the people. Neither conservative nor progressive groups in the pre-Taishō era had found a way to solve the dilemma between compliance and rebellion, nor had they created a popular alternative to state authority. While enjoying the fruits of modernity, somehow the Japanese found themselves in a precarious condition. It seemed that knowledge sought directly for its pragmatic applications had immediate and foreseeable results, but that its long term effects were, to a large extent, difficult to predict.

In the almost forty years of social, political and economic reform that followed the Meiji Restoration, the posture of the majority towards the Western world changed gradually. Though benefiting materially and technically from Western modernization, Japanese intellectuals experienced frustration arising from a sense of inferiority to the West in dealing with international affairs. This not only impacted the culture but also affected their self-assurance. When comparing kaika or enlightenment and development to that of the Western world, Natsume Sōseki suggests:

Different from the natural, inner forces for western industrialization, the Japanese Kaika was carried out under external pressure and
therefore the psychological effect on the Japanese would be dissatisfaction and uncertainty, also the feeling of emptiness.62

The result of rapid modernization for the Japanese was a sense of spiritual loss and a need to slow down to digest these changes.

In contrast to “The Dancing Girl”, the setting for “Under Reconstruction” has shifted back to Japan, to Tokyo. The decorations in the hotel room where the protagonist waits for the German lady, an ill-assorted mixture of Eastern and gaudy Western-style, give the reader a confusing and unpleasant impression:

Watanabe sat down on the sofa and examined the room. The walls decorated with an ill-assorted collection of pictures: nightingales on a plum tree, an illustration from a fairy tale, a hawk. The scrolls were small and narrow, and on the high walls they looked strangely short as if the bottom portions had been tucked under and concealed. Over the door was a large framed Buddhist text. And this is meant to be the land of art, thought Watanabe.63

The language is clear, simple and meaningful. The visual observations precisely detail the distasteful juxtaposition of Eastern and Western images—Japanese plum trees and nightingale, alongside a Western hawk. This brief passage captures much of the disorder that Japan now finds itself in. The asymmetry of the short and narrow scrolls hanging on the tall wall captures the essence of the unbalance that characterizes current Japanese society.
The German lady tries to kiss Watanabe, but is stopped by him. He repeats several times, “Here is Japan.” as if to remind the lady and the readers that the focus is now on Japan. In “The Dancing Girl”, the protagonist stands on the stage of the Western world, the Other’s world. Therefore, no matter how much effort Ōta puts out he still is the one considered as the Other. The Otherness is formed through the reflection of Ōta’s traditional thinking, which separates him from the Western world. In “Under Reconstruction”, the stage has shifted back to Japan. Watanabe stresses, “Japan is not fully developed. Japan is under reconstruction.” However, the “reconstruction” is considerable. Only forty years have elapsed since the Meiji Restoration, and already Japan has become a major power, not only exceeding other Asian countries, but also emulating the Western world. While most of the Japanese agree that Japan has improved because of modernization, many want answers to difficult questions about how far Japan’s modernization should proceed. However, not all government leaders and intellectuals seem to be sufficiently aware of the fact that these questions are related to the fragile and unstable condition of the “new” Japanese state.

Interestingly, in “Under Reconstruction”, there is evidence of Japan’s ambition towards the Other. While Watanabe and the German lady are discussing where the exchequer is, Watanabe says, “The next after Russia is America.” Japanese history reveals that it always does battle with that which it views as the Other. As previously mentioned, several battles occurred between Japan and China, because the latter used to motivate Japan to catch up with it, and if
possible, overcome it. Now that this goal had been achieved, it seemed that America would be the next target. But meanwhile, it was time for Japan to rest and reconstruct itself.

Ōgai is careful to delineate the social and philosophical layers of the story. Both Watanabe and his former mistress have "reconstructed" themselves since their juvenile years, and thus it seems that there is no motivation for them to be together again. Changes result in new definitions of the self, for both the individual and for nations. Having pursued and imitated Western culture and advanced technology for several decades, it was time for Japan to reconsider its relationship with the Eastern world and to redefine itself.

Mori Ōgai was a prolific writer, and his life experiences led him to experiment with every literary form available to him during the period of his creative life. A number of central themes provide a consistency of design throughout his work, and the variations on these themes reveal much about his growth and development as a writer and a human being. His writing provides some of the best evidence of the impact of Western modernization on the Japanese psyche.

The term "subjective" and "objective" are often used to express the degree of separation or distance between the observer and the observed. The subjective viewpoint is one in which the self becomes closely identified with aspects of external reality, while the objective viewpoint separates the self from this reality, creating distinct boundaries between the self and Other.
During the early stages of the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese embraced many aspects of Western modernity. While identifying with aspects of Western culture, they still retained close ties with traditional Japanese culture. This was the world of Ōta that Ōgai captured so poignantly in “The Dancing Girl”.

However, after having achieved a level of modernization, the Japanese were no longer so enamored with the West, distancing themselves from it with calm objectivity. Unlike Ōta in “The Dancing Girl”, who is torn between his Western lover Elis and his home country of Japan, Watanabe in “Under Reconstruction” is able to meet his former Western lover with cool “objective” detachment, clearly seeing her as the Other.
Wartime Japanese Literature

For the Japanese, the West represented not only political and intellectual freedom, but also psychological freedom from family ties and the constraints of custom, convention, and morality. As a result, the Western world was their model for everything. However, through the experiences of two World Wars, the Japanese realized that the international environment could be a cruel one, in which Westerners did not always meet their expectations. The destruction of war made the Japanese less naïve and more nostalgic. As a writer, one could do nothing to change the material or political conditions of life during wartime. Thus, the alternative was to look back to find an ideal past, in which one could find a kinder and more peaceful world than the present one.

Tanizaki Jun’ichirō: Sasameyuki or The Makioka Sisters

Tanizaki Jun’ichirō (1886-1965) was prominent in Japan from his literary debut in 1910 until the end of the Second World War. In 1948, after the publication of Sasameyuki or The Makioka Sisters, which had been banned during the war, he became the preeminent living Japanese writer. His place in the history of Japanese literature was thus made secure.

In addition to his fiction, Tanizaki is remembered in Japan for his translation into Japanese of the eleventh century classic, Genji Monogatari (The Tale of Genji), which is said to have had a deep influence on The Makioka Sisters. In 1949, Tanizaki received the Order of Culture, the highest honor the government can bestow on an artist.
The Makioka Sisters is a story of the decline of a once affluent merchant house as revealed through the lives of four sisters: Tsuruko, Sachiko, Yukiko, and Taeko. Tsuruko, the oldest sister, is married to Tatsuo, an adopted husband who has become the active head of the family after the death of their father. The novel is primarily concerned with the three younger sisters who live near Osaka. Sachiko, who is married, and Yukiko and Taeko, both single. Ostensibly the plot is about the family's continual attempt to find a suitable husband for Yukiko, who has to be married before the younger sister Taeko. A few years earlier Taeko had caused a minor scandal by attempting to elope with Okubata, the son of a socially prominent family. This affair not only tarnished the reputations of Taeko and her family, but also became one of the impediments to Yukiko's ability to find a husband, as people often confused Taeko with Yukiko in this affair.

The elegant and elaborate narrative of The Makioka Sisters unfold as the sisters endeavor to find a most suitable husband for Yukiko and meanwhile adjust the changes of their lives since their father passed away. This story is centered on the five miai (formal meetings between a prospective bride and groom) of Yukiko. Sachiko, as the elder sister, hopes that Yukiko put aside her family pride and self-respect since she is not young anymore. It seems that every candidate has some defect; even if one at first appears to be promising, the family is always able to uncover some insurmountable imperfection in his life. Tanizaki uses the unsuccessful results of the miai to reflect Yukiko's perfectionism. In Yukiko,
Tanizaki portrays an individual who possesses the traits of gentleness, strength and invincibility that a traditional Japanese woman is supposed to have.

After Yukiko’s brother-in-law Tatsuo failed to arrange a marriage for her, he realized that “the shy, introverted Yukiko, unable though she was to open her mouth before strangers, had a hard core that was difficult to reconcile with her apparent docility.”69 Tanizaki’s portrayal of Yukiko expresses, at once, the Japanese cultural norm and the firm ethnicity of Japan. It reveals Tanizaki’s perspective on his country. Even though defeated in the war, Japan will never be submissive to the alien power—the final victory will eventually belong to Japan. Yukiko shows no sign of emotion. Instead of anger, Yukiko states, without a trace of bitterness or defiance, “I knew my day would come.”70 Although defeated in the war, Japan was not doomed to lose everything forever. As Tanizaki predicts, the world will see Japan’s invincibility one day.

The characters of Yukiko and Taeko are developed through their symbolic opposition. In contrast to Yukiko, Taeko, the youngest sister, is depicted as an individual who stealthily smokes (during a time when it was considered taboo for Japanese women to smoke) and waits impatiently for Yukiko’s marriage, so that her own secret liaison can be acknowledged. She is always in revolt against the traditional Japanese norms. The two sisters Yukiko and Taeko contrast with one another, Yukiko epitomizing the East and Taeko, the West. “Yukiko was the most Japanese in appearance and dress, Taeko the most Western.”71 “Taeko usually wore Western clothes, and Yukiko wore only Japanese clothes.”72 However,
traditional Japanese norms also play an invisible role in binding these two sisters together in their daily life, and on a deeper level, Yukiko does not totally repudiate the West:

People who did not know her well took Yukiko for a thoroughly Japanese lady, but only because the surface (the dress and appearance, speech and deportment) was so Japanese. The real Yukiko was quite different. She was even then studying French, and she understood Western music far better than Japanese.73

Clearly, what Tanizaki considers ideal is to adopt the advantages of the West, while keeping Japanese traditions intact. Even though the West is the place Tanizaki dreams of, it must be separate from his dream of an ideal Japan. This was especially true for Western females who did not fit the traditional Japanese definition of the ideal wife.

Though the story is related chiefly from the viewpoint of Sachiko and her husband, Teinosuke, The Makioka Sisters is controlled by an invisible narrator who conducts the entire story with a fixed tone. Tanizaki’s preference for utilizing authentic and fictitious documents through the juxtaposition of different voices is well known. Even though the sisters look intimate to each other, they do not express their feelings easily. No one, for instance, definitely understands what Yukiko’s deep thought, neither for Taeko. Although it is not pellucid who the main character in this story is because of the multiple narratives, the title Sasameyuki suggests that Yukiko is the protagonist (in Japanese, Sasameyuki
means light snow, *yuki* means snow, and Yukiko means snow child). This is supported by Tanizaki’s apparent preference for Yukiko’s qualities over those of her younger sister Taeko:

Yukiko appeared to be the most delicate of the sisters... that she looked as though she might come down with tuberculosis at almost any time had helped frighten off many prospective husbands. The truth was, however, that she was the strongest of them all. Sometimes when influenza went through the house, she alone escaped. She had never been seriously ill. Sachiko, on the other hand, would have been taken for the healthiest of the sisters, but her appearance was deceiving. She was quite independent ....[Sachiko was] the center of her father’s attention when the Makioka family had been prosperous.74

As many commentators suggest, Tanizaki uses the marriage arrangements to compare Yukiko with Taeko, and the health conditions to compare Yukiko with Sachiko. Tanizaki clearly points out that Taeko possesses Western characteristic that contrast with the traditional traits of Yukiko. Sachiko, who had witnessed the success of her family during the late Taishō era (the 1920s), could not apply this to the present time. The old times made Tanizaki sentimental, and presumably that is the reason why he chose the retroactive setting of this writing to reveal his nostalgia. However, the war had made him face the fact that infatuation with the past cannot help to change the reality of the present. Tanizaki’s perspective was thus a balance of nostalgia and reality.75 Sachiko, the representative of the old
time, is like a greenhouse flower, vulnerable to any sudden change. In contrast, Yukiko, with her resolute strength hidden under her delicate appearance, will not be worn by time.

Clearly, the ailment and health problems of the Makioka family, which Tanizaki so carefully develops, represent the seeds of Japan's decline. Disease has not only killed the sisters' mother, but has also resulted in the failed attempts to find Yukiko a husband. Even at the end of *The Makioka Sisters*, the strong and shy Yukiko suffers from diarrhea while on the train from Kyōto to Tokyo, where she is to marry. This seems ironic because Yukiko had never before been defeated by illness. Why does Tanizaki choose to portray her this way in the finale of the story?

The Japan depicted in *The Makioka Sisters* is not representative of the Japan of November 1936 to April 1941, in which the novel is set. The world in this story is not "prewar" as has often been suggested. The real world in which Tanizaki writes this novel is that of 1943, when the Japanese military was at the height of the Second World War. Forced to stop writing by government censorship, Tanizaki did not yield to their authority but went ahead and published underground. The primary reason that the military authorities objected to this work was, as many commentators suggested, because it was given over so thoroughly to the portrayal of the private life of a single family, at such an emergency time when all citizens were expected to devote themselves to the nation. The novel, with its sensitive illustration of the nuances of human relationships, was based on a
respected Japanese tradition, and it was this nostalgia that was despised by the Japanese jingoists. *The Makioka Sisters* portrays old-time, upper-middle-class life in Japan just before the war, and as Donald Keene suggests, “It is an effort of memory to recreate what must have seemed to Tanizaki in 1947 to be a vanished world.”77 A sense of tranquillity pervades the novel through descriptions of various annual events, such as the viewing of cherry blossoms, the capture of firebugs, and the performance of traditional Japanese dances. Keene suggests that Tanizaki “seems intent on preserving for posterity the memory of Japan in the mid-1930s, when people of the upper middle class led civilized, even cosmopolitan lives.”78

Since Tanizaki was unable to express explicit disapproval of the military, *The Makioka Sisters* then became the only place where he could repudiate the ultranationalism and militarism and thus in effect took a political position. The odd ending of this story is somewhat open to interpretation. Yukiko boards the train bound for Tokyo for her wedding ceremony, still suffering from diarrhea. This rather unsettling ending raises the question of whether or not Yukiko’s marriage will be a happy one. With such an ending, perhaps Tanizaki is speculating on the future of Japan and whether it too will be dogged with misfortune.

As Kinya Tsuruta has observed, the writings from Tanizaki’s Tokyo period “indicate his [Tanizaki’s] profound loathing for the dirty, disorganized city, and a desire to flee its oppressive realities. [Tanizaki believes] there had to be a place
beautiful enough to satisfy his aesthetic needs. That place was the West. In The Makioka Sisters, two foreign neighbors live next to Sachiko’s house; one is from Russia and the other from Germany. The Russian family becomes good friends with the three sisters through Taeko’s doll workshop. One day, the Russian grandmother invites Taeko to go skating. Although she has never skated before, Taeko has confidence in her athletic abilities. But after she arrives at the skating rink and sees the grandmother’s skating skills, she is astonished:

The moment they were on the rink she [grandmother] sailed off with complete aplomb, straight and confident, treating them now and then to a truly breathtaking display of virtuosity. All the other skaters stopped to watch. Katharina, the daughter of the energetic Russian grandmother, is popular at Sachiko’s house as well. Tanizaki reveals his contrasting attitudes towards Russians and Americans through Teinosuke’s comments,

It was true, she [Katharina] should have a try at Hollywood, but there was in her face not a suggestion of Yankee coarseness about her. Indeed something gentle and ladylike in her manner made it easy for her to be friendly with Japanese women.

Obviously, Tanizaki considered the Russians to be more friendly than the Americans. After the First World War, Japan’s diplomatic relationship with Britain and the United States became worse due to political conflicts in Asia, while its relationship with the Soviet Union improved. The following episode from
*The Makioka Sisters* provides evidence of this deteriorating relationship with America:

Once there was a flood that ruined numerous villages and killed many people. Unfortunately Taeko was stranded in the middle of the flood and was in grave danger. However, eventually her friend Itakura was able to rescue her. It seems as if Itakura’s rescue had taken a long time, and Itakura blamed this fact on his watch. “The self-winding watch Itakura had brought back from America—that, he was very proud of was said to be water-proof, but in the course of the morning it had stopped.”

Tanizaki devotes more than six chapters of *The Makioka Sisters* to describe this breathtaking flood. It provides a metaphor for Tanizaki’s attitude towards the war, which, like the flood, caused enormous death and damage. The United States of America, the leader of the Allied countries, was no longer Japan’s good friend, but the enemy personified.

Tanizaki’s anti-America attitude is conveyed in other scenes from the novel. Etsuko (Sachiko’s daughter) receives a package from New York that contains the shoes their friend (Peter) had promised to buy for her in the United States. Even though Peter had taken Etsuko’s measurements, the shoes are too small for her. They are elegant patent-leather party shoes that Etsuko had tried on several times. Eventually, Sachiko snaps, “Oh, give it up, Etsuko. You are not going to wear them, no matter how you try.” From 1930 to the mid-summer of 1940, the
military power that the Nazis had demonstrated in Europe had greatly reinforced the position of those Japanese advocating an Axis Alliance. After Japan signed the Tripartite Treaty with Italy and Germany in Berlin on September 27, 1940. Japan’s position as the leader in Asia was admitted by the alliance member. The Axis Alliance recognized the leadership of Germany and Italy in Europe and that of Japan in greater East Asia through the establishment of a New Order. After this, the United States was increasingly regarded as Japan’s enemy.

Unlike their relationship with Americans, the Makiokas’ relationship with their German neighbors is a good one. Because they live side-by-side, from the second-floor veranda, Sachiko has the chance to observe her neighbor Mrs. Stolz at work.

The kitchen utensils were always arranged by size around the stove and the cook’s table, was always as polished and shining as weapons in an armory. The cleaning, the laundering, the cooking were so regular that the Makiokas had only to glance next door to know what time it was... But the fact is that she was not all sternness, that she had her gentle and affectionate side. At the time of the flood, Mrs. Stolz, hearing that two or three half-drowned flood refugees had taken shelter at a near-by police box, gathered shirts and underwear for them, and urged the maids to give away any summer kimonos they did not need.

The discipline and punctuality of the German neighbor is admired by Sachiko’s family and the foreign neighbor is their model in daily life. She is not
only quick and efficient in her work, but also has a good heart, showing benevolence even to non-Germans. After 1940, Japan and Germany were on the same side, and this political reality is perfectly reflected in *The Makioka Sisters*.

Tanizaki’s narrative style is strong enough to make the reader disbelieve all the fictitious sources that he uses in his writing. Ironically, his explicit denial of this absurd and complex fabrication functions as an admission. The more the narrator appears to tell the truth through contrasting and proving his sources, the tighter his grip on the reader becomes. As a result, the readers are caught by the story, and expose much about the inward life of the author.  

The image of the Other in *The Makioka Sisters* is a reflection of the existing state of Japan’s international relations. Tanizaki’s negative portrayal of the Americans highlights the fact that they were increasingly regarded as the Other as the war progressed, while his portrayal of the Russians and Germans suggests a more respectful, if not closer, relationship. The strong and beautiful Yukiko is the embodiment of an invincible Japan, whose heyday will return when the Other is defeated.

The element that motivated Tanizaki to write *The Makioka Sisters* was, as Kōno Taeko observed, “The increasingly bleak and oppressive life created by the Second World War.” This resulted in Tanizaki’s nostalgia for the Taishō era, and reveals his wish for the whole world to go back to the old times. As this was a sentiment shared by many other Japanese, *The Makioka Sisters* can thus be seen as the best portrayal of the interwoven lives of the 1936 to 1941 period in Japan.
Tanizaki’s sensitive handling of the Russian and German characters in this story reflects the degree to which the Japanese have come to accept the “strange new world” that these Others have constructed in Japan. While Tanizaki had no desire to become involved in politics, it is interesting to note that at a time when Japan and Germany had recently formed the Axis Alliance, his portrayal of the German woman is such a positive one. In contrast, any reference to the Americans tends to be negative. Tanizaki portrays them as untrustworthy, having betrayed the Japanese with both their modernity and military might, and clearly entrenching their position as the Other.
Postwar Japanese Literature

The complex and ambivalent attitude towards the West that the Japanese developed during the Allied Occupation is reflected in frequent references to “the Other” in the Japanese Literature of this period. The writings of two popular Japanese authors, Ōe Kenzaburō and Yamada Eimi, are useful for examining Otherness, and for their explicit, bizarre and vivid descriptions of Gaijin (foreigners). Both authors have had an enormous impact on Japanese culture and contemporary Japanese society.

Ōe Kenzaburō: “Ningen no Hitsuji” or “Sheep”

Ōe Kenzaburō was born in 1935 in a remote mountain village in the Aichi Prefecture. While studying French literature at Tokyo University, he began publishing short stories, and, at age 23, won the coveted Akutagawa Prize for “Shiiku” or “Prize Stock”. Since that time he has become a leading figure among postwar Japanese writers. In the story “Sheep”, Ōe reflects on his own emotional feelings of humiliation under the Allied Occupation of Japan and on his hatred of this foreign power. The story depicts how Allied soldiers humiliated innocent, weak Japanese people who were unable to defend themselves.

The story beings with a young man, on his way home from tutoring French. He is waiting for the bus on a foggy night. He boards a bus that is crowded with Japanese people, as well as some intoxicated Allied soldiers. A Japanese woman, who looks like a prostitute, sits amongst the soldiers and tries to irritate them by flirting with the young protagonist. As the bus lurches violently forward, the
woman falls onto the floor of the bus, which infuriates the soldiers, who think it is the young man’s fault. One of the soldiers holds a knife and forces the protagonist to remove his pants and show his naked buttocks. As the soldier takes the protagonist’s pants off, other soldiers being to sing, “Sheep killer! Sheep killer! Bang! Bang!” Having found pleasure, they take even more people’s pants off while continuing to sing. Suddenly, the Japanese become helpless sheep, and the bus, an abyss for them. “The soldiers grabbed me firmly and tore off my raincoat as though they were skinning the fur off an animal. I bent forward like a four-legged beast, exposing my buttocks to the jeers of the soldiers.”

The bus becomes a slaughterhouse where the butcher (i.e. the soldier holding the knife) relentlessly bullies the tame sheep (i.e. the young man). After having their fill of fun, the soldiers leave the bus. This cruelty towards the defenseless incenses a teacher who has witnessed the event and who consequently convinces the protagonist to incriminate the soldiers by reporting them to the police. However, the unsympathetic attitude of the police humiliates the protagonist even more.

The narrator describes one soldier as having a “thick, fleshy red neck”, most as having “low brows and the large, moist eyes of cow[s].” and, as a Japanese woman suggests, “hair even on [their] back[s]”. Such a vivid description of the Allied soldiers easily distinguishes between the Japanese and the Other, and the comparison of Gaijin (foreigners) with animals reveals Ōe’s disgust for them. In this story, Ōe, whose childhood was lived during a turbulent era, portrays foreigners as non-human beings to express the antagonism he feels towards them.
In his eyes, as in the eyes of the majority of the Japanese, these foreigners are the Other.

Although he does not agree, the protagonist can do nothing but follow the conductor’s instruction to sit in his designated seat. Due to the language barrier, he is unable to understand what the soldier says to him: “The soldiers shouted something, but I could not comprehend the threat in those terrifying words that were so full of sibilants.” The fact that the Allied soldiers do not try to speak Japanese in Japan, while the Japanese are expected to understand the language of the foreigners, is evidence that the Japanese have completely lost their autonomy under the Allied Occupation.

A distinctive line between humans and animals is drawn even between those of the same nationality on the bus. “Almost all of the sheep were clustered in the back of the bus. The others who had been spared were sitting in the front and turned excited faces to observe us.” In his description of them, Ōe reveals the anger he feels for those who gloat over the misfortunes of others: “The passengers talked among themselves in loud angry voices surrounding us like dogs out for the kill in a rabbit hunt.” For Japanese, there is no mercy for the losers, not even for their own people. The teacher and the young man represent two distinct groups within Japanese society. The former represents those alleged to have started the war, displaying an indomitable will to win, and resolving to carry on even after defeat. The latter represents those who have found that their destiny is incontrovertible, and therefore act as fatalists, obedient to whoever dominates
them. Struggling to fight to the last, the teacher forces the young protagonist to file a report with the police. However, after hearing this report, a young officer says: “Wait a minute. I am not sure how to handle this by myself,” and he adds, “I want to be very careful how I deal with problems connected with the camp”. A middle-aged policeman also emphasizes, “We must deal with cases like this very carefully, otherwise we will run into complications”.\(^\text{95}\) As a result of the country’s inability to assume power, the people lose hope. Or perhaps it is because their authority has already been taken by the Other. “Those soldiers shouted like a policeman controlling a parade with authority for a long time”.\(^\text{96}\) As Ōe reminds us, by the time the nation no longer possesses its autonomy, the country’s ideological consciousness has disappeared.

Even though the scenario is described from the viewpoint of the protagonist, his identity shifts from that of subject to that of object on the bus dominated by the non-Japanese, the Other. Instead of identifying himself with the barbarians and opportunists, he chooses to identify himself with the sheep. Sheep are always docile, defenseless, and obediently allow themselves to be exploited by human beings. Ōe’s feeling of impotence under the Occupation is revealed in the portrait of the feeble and weak protagonist who suffers humiliation from the Others who come from the West. Ōe also suffered humiliation from his egotistical fellow Japanese, especially those who tried to flatter the Others and who had the power to decide his fate.
The combative atmosphere between the Japanese and the Allied soldiers on
the bus can be interpreted as an extension of the Second World War. The only
difference is that on the bus, the Occidentals dominate the situation from the
inception. Japan, the old-time colonizer (from Shino-Japanese War in 1895),
became a defeated nation in 1945, losing its hegemony among Asian countries,
along with its sense of invincibility. The fear and humiliation of the war was
certainly ingrained in Ōe’s heart and motivated him to write such an unpleasant
story so filled with hostility. Domination of the Western world had been Japan’s
goal since the Meiji Restoration (from 1868). The attack on Pearl Harbor revealed
Japan’s desire to surpass the Western world. Though the odds against the Japanese
army seemed insurmountable, the Japanese hegemonists insisted on launching the
war and their imprudence brought tragedy to millions of Japanese people. If
Japanese militarism had never flourished, the war would never have occurred and
this catastrophe would never have happened.

Ōe’s characteristic use of animals creates an imaginary landscape for the
reader. Associating the Allied soldiers with cows and the innocent Japanese with
sheep, he creates a non-human world within the bus. Ironically, in Japanese, *basu*
or bus is a word borrowed from English. The sheep, imprisoned on the bus, are
locked into a non-Japanese world. They have lost their freedom and are dominated
by the powerful Other, the cows. The Japanese on the bus who were fortunate
enough to escape being insulted are considered as human beings. The apathy they
express is a reflection of postwar society in Japan. The animal images are of
importance for both the victims and the outsiders. On a deeper level, the conflict that occurs between the Japanese reflects Óe’s frustration with the absence of social justice, deriving from the Other. In his work “Shiiku” or “Prize Stock”, published in the same year as “The Sheep”, Óe also uses the animal image. In this story, a black American airman is described as being “Like an agile beast”.

The protagonist’s father earlier killed and skinned a “rebellious, nimble weasel”, thus predicting the rebellion of the “agile” black “weasel” of an airman. Óe has chosen animal images for their close relationship to the story’s main themes, and to advance the narrative.

Yamada Eimi: “Bedtime Eyes”

Yamada Eimi (1959--), dropped out of school while studying at Meiji University, and later received an award for her short story, entitled “Bedtime Eyes”. Her realistic portrayal of sex with a black man shocked conservative and patriarchal Japanese society. The story is written in the first person, from the perspective of the narrator, and the plot is fairly simple: Kim is a singer working in a club where most of the customers are soldiers from the U.S. military bases. She meets Spoon (a black man who later becomes a fugitive) at the club and has sex with him, without even knowing his name. A few days later Spoon escapes from the U.S. base and hides at Kim’s home until he is arrested. Most of the plot is filled with sexual scenes and coarse language. By the time Spoon is arrested for stealing secret military documents, the relationship between Kim and Spoon is over.
This story typifies the approach of Japanese females towards Americans, and reveals the irreconcilability of Japanese and American values. As Kim confesses at the beginning of the story: “The way Spoon cherished me is really great. But, he can only grasp my body not my heart.” The story is destined to have an unromantic ending, because the two main characters are bound by sex, without spiritual communication. In this story, body language is the only medium Kim and Spoon use to communicate with each other; physical contact functioning as the agent for them to perceive the existence of the other. Throughout the description of the erotic relationship between Kim and Spoon, pleasure exists only on a physical level: “Let’s have sex and that will make you feel better,” Spoon says as he tries to console Kim after he beats her during an argument. At the same time, Kim thinks, “having sex is the only way he knows.”

Kim’s anxiety about Spoon is most evident in her confession of her failure to understand him:

I understood Spoon more and more during the days I spent with him. The word “medium” does not exist in his life. He is that kind person who likes either very sweet or very salty. My stomach does not know how to handle this kind of situation. My heart is hurt and ulcerated.

Clearly, in Kim’s mind, expectations of, and curiosity about, Americans are intertwined, resulting in an ambivalent attitude towards Spoon. Kim is at once jubilant, because her sense of inferiority is submerged while having sex with Spoon, and hurt, because he touches her “body” but not her “heart”. Spoon, a
fugitive from the U.S. military base, who has problems with drugs and alcohol, believes that all of these problems can be remedied through sex. He stays with Kim only to have fun. Consequently, their sexual experiences function as a catalyst to separate, rather than to unite them.

Yamada examines the very core of the internal boundaries that result from the cultural differences between Japanese and Gaijin. Kim’s failure to understand true love reminds the reader to reconsider relationships with the Other (i.e. Gaijin). If a relationship is built only on sexual desire, then its demise is inevitable. After Spoon is arrested at Kim’s apartment, the police kindly give them fifteen minutes to talk to each other. Finally, Spoon confesses, “Indeed, the love between us is only about sexual desire. But, you, until this time your eyes still reveal that you want to have sex!” Undoubtedly Kim’s intention to be with Spoon is for the gratification of immediate needs, and these will eventually wane. Because the intensity of their sexual glamour is rooted in the present moment, their relationship will inevitably dissolve in the long-term.

The image of Westerners who appear in Yamada’s work is quite different from ones presented by other writers from her country. She treats the Other as a solace where she can simultaneously fill her spiritual emptiness and make herself ideologically transparent. It is noteworthy that Yamada’s portrayal of sex boldly invites a conservative Japanese society to face the issue of gender discrimination.

After “Bedtime Eyes”, Yamada wrote a series of other works about American blacks, culminating in a collection of short stories, entitled Soul Music,
Lovers Only (1986), which are set entirely in the United States and populated solely by black men, women, and children. Although this work has fewer sexual scenes and coarse language than "Bedtime Eyes", it managed to win the Naoki Prize for popular literature and to gain a wide audience. As Yamada describes herself in Soul Music, Lovers Only: "I like black guys because they are degenerate but gentle, greedy and care about love." And she concludes, "I always consider myself as a black woman in my heart. Therefore, I am the only black woman who can speak Japanese so well." Yamada's adoration of the Gaijin reveals the trend of young Japanese women to seek foreigners as lovers. In contrast to the hostile times about which Ōe writes, today's young Japanese females (20 to 30 years old) typically approach foreigners with an attitude of polite respect, often becoming romantically involved with them. However, these romantic relationships are often short-lived because they fail to meet the needs of these young women on a deeper, emotional and spiritual level.

But why did Yamada choose a black protagonist for her work? Remarkably enough, she had never lived outside Japan and therefore must have been exposed to Black American life at an impressionable age, thus enabling her to achieve an extraordinary imaginative grasp of it. Japanese youth have a good deal more background information on Black history and culture than their elders did. The mass media provides exposure to Black performers and musicians as well as a wealth of useful information. Until quite recently, it was considered fashionable in some circles for girls to promenade in downtown Tokyo with a well-dressed black
man on their arm, an image that no doubt left a deep impression on a younger generation hooked on style.\(^{104}\) Due to the slogan *Kokusaika* or *internationalized*, today’s Japanese youth are given a reasonable excuse to contact foreigners at home and abroad, and it seems that they have not inherited the “foreign phobia” that their forefathers had a mere thirty years ago.

Even though “Sheep” and “Bedtime Eyes” were published in different epochs, (1958 vs. 1985), both authors were of the same age when they wrote them. (Ōe was 25 and Yamada was 26). Unquestionably, the different life experiences of these two authors have influenced their perspectives. Even though they both manifest the same foreigner complex, Ōe and Yamada have totally different viewpoints towards Gaijin, the former rejecting foreigners and the latter admiring them. According to Japanese history, the foreigner complex is the result of the Japanese role as borrowers from the Other. It reflects not only the way the Japanese see the Other, but also the way they see themselves. Hence, whether prejudicial or admiring, the attitude towards Gaijin depends on the nature of the epoch.

As Richard Storry has observed, “What can impose a barrier between the rest of the world and the Japanese is their own language, spoken and written.”\(^{105}\) Presumably that is why in “Sheep”, Ōe Kenzaburo attempts to emphasize the importance of language, which led to the embarrassment that the young protagonist experienced because he was unable to understand what the foreign soldier said. Ironically, the language that was supposed to create a fence between
Japan and the Other turned out to be a catalyst for humiliation. In “Sheep”, the bus is a microcosm, mirroring the larger world beyond, where the apathetic fellow Japanese and those humiliated both suffer from the same foreign power, the Other. It seems that Ōe was preoccupied with the paradox of Japan’s surrender at the end of the war that simultaneously created both humiliation and liberation. “When the nation lost a war”, he once wrote about himself, “one patriotic boy in a village found that he had to cope with a gigantic seed of submission. At the same time he also began his apprenticeship, living through the postwar period with a gigantic seed of liberation and renewal.” What the young student faced was a state of ambivalence: “like a watercolor... on which you laminate different colors before each dries up, a sense of submission, liberation, and renewal, running over and interfering with each other subtly and ambiguously, coexisting and creating a special coloration.”

However, the protagonist in Ōe’s “Sheep” only experiences humiliation. In this story, which deals with the violence of the rogue Allied soldiers, the humiliation of the young protagonist, the sense of justice of the teacher and the smugness of the fellow Japanese, the young protagonist must occupy the truly marginal position of being an outsider; a victim of both the Gaijin and his fellow Japanese. He has to suffer from the humiliation that has occurred because someone made a wrong decision. The poignant experiences of the war and postwar years meant that Ōe’s life has only bitter memories. It is obvious that in
Öe's world, he has no power to change the watercolor that has been painted by the Other.

In contrast, Yamada Eimi attempts to jump the fence that separates the Gaijin from the Japanese, so that she can merge into the Others' world without obstacle. Japanese women have traditionally held a low position in the hierarchical Japanese society. The traditional idea of the Japanese wife, the *yamato nadeshiko* or *small pink flower*, is defined as "gentle on the surface, supportive of her man to the last." However, as Hane observes, "such attitudes are changing among contemporary Japanese women, especially." As a woman born into such a society, Yamada felt the need to launch a counterattack on these traditional attitudes towards women, and retrieve the rights she feels women deserve in Japanese society.

After the Second World War, the Japanese perceived the Western nations, in particular the United States, to be at the top of an international hierarchy, politically, economically and socially. Romantic liaisons with Americans provided Japanese women with an opportunity to express their disappointment and dissatisfaction with their position in Japanese society and the authority men held in it. In contrast to what John Clammer suggests, "Japan, as many observers have noted, appears to Western eyes to be a highly eroticized culture, themes of sexuality pervading both popular and classical literature", the portrayal of sexual relationships with foreigners was considered taboo.
It is likely that Yamada deliberately chose this topic for “Bedtime Eyes”, in order to draw attention to the gender issues she felt so strongly about. And so far, Japanese women have been highly receptive of Yamada’s work, probably because it serves as a mouthpiece for them: a new generation of women in Japan.
Conclusion

Modern Japanese Literature is a vast and diverse field that mirrors Japan’s complex and ambivalent relationship with outsiders. From restoration to reconstruction, transition to challenge, and ruin to prosperity, contemporary Japanese writers vividly reflect their images of the Other in their work.

Following the Meiji Restoration, Japan decided to embrace Western civilization as its blueprint for modernization, and this fact gradually changed Japanese perceptions of Westerners, who had begun to be regarded as being civilized. Nevertheless, because Japan’s opening to the Western countries was not voluntary, but forced by military and economic pressures, “the fear of the West” remained firmly entrenched in the Japanese subconscious. Thus, Westerners became the object of fear as well as admiration. However, the invasion of China and the misjudgment of the Pearl Harbor attack resulted in enormous disaster for the Japanese at home, and completely changed their perceptions of the West. As a defeated country, Japan had no choice but to acquiesce to every arrangement the Other made for it. Thus, Westerners became the object of authority as well as the source of humiliation. As the economy took off, Japan’s confidence gradually recovered and Westerners became the object of romance as well as the symbol of immorality. This was evident in the English words interjected into almost every sentence written in Japanese and in the trademarks, labels, signs, brand names and control knobs on electric appliances, which were also frequently in English. It seemed that the language obstacle no longer existed between the Japanese and
Westerners. As Hane observed, there is no doubt that “gaijin” have played a significant role in Japanese history and that the frenzied turn of Japanese mass culture to all things Western, especially American, can be attributed to the exposure to American ways and culture during the Occupation era.\(^{112}\)

However, their acceptance of Western language and culture does not necessarily mean that the Japanese will never again consider Westerners as the Other. It should not be forgotten that a similar situation existed before the Meiji Restoration when Chinese language and culture was singularly popular amongst the Japanese people. One hundred years later, the forces of change resulted in Japan choosing the West as the Other.

Today, Japan is a nation that belongs neither to the Asian nor the Western world, but rather exists in a territory somewhere in between. By remaining in this in-between world, it is easier for the Japanese to transcend the limitations of time and space. From a global perspective, it is Japan more than any other country that is promoting a cross-cultural flow of ideas, especially in the fields of technology, animation and literature. This trend has been named “kokusaika” or “internationalization”. Apparently, Japan’s isolationism is ideological rather than a reflection of any empirical reality.

Throughout Japanese history, outsiders have always held an ambiguous position, simultaneously threatening the status quo and mediating with the outside world.\(^{113}\) In Japanese society there has been a slow but perceptible movement from the hostile tension directed towards foreigners in Ōe’s “Sheep”, to the desire for
reconciliation evident in Yamada’s “Bedtime Eyes”. It is obvious that the movement from separation to union, from retaliation to reconciliation is one in which, as Hegels suggests, the differences between two cultures must first be sharpened before these opposing cultures can unite. However, it is clear that from Ōgai’s “The Dancing Girl”, and “Under Reconstruction” to Tanizaki’s The Makioka Sisters, and from Ōe’s “Sheep” to Yamada’s “Bedtime Eyes”, that none of these stories has a happy ending. In almost one hundred years, through modernization, self-questioning, transient peace, humiliation, and reconciliation, the Japanese attitude towards the Other has been recorded in the literature of this period. But perhaps, as Hegel suggests, the last stage in the evolution of the human spirit is about to dawn, a time in which opposites unite and the Other no longer exists: a “flat” world that has truly returned to “zero”.
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