

World Types, Worldviews, and World Literature in Japanese Modernity (Part 1)

Shū SAKAGUCHI

Translated by Eric Siercks

Problematizing the World

Before exploring the central concern of this essay, the concept of the world, I would like to address a transition that I sense occurring in contemporary literary research and critique. Presently, the novel is retreating from its central position within the narrative arts. This change affects how novels are utilized as primary materials intrinsic to observations of social inquiry. Any one of the some fifty thousand novels being published at present can exist as an object of sociological importance. We could also read contemporary literature itself as one kind of ethnography. None of this is a problem in and of itself. We might say that this is the way that novels have found contemporary significance, a reasonable sense of security. Let us return briefly, however, to the golden age of the novel form, the development of modern literature, and extract something resembling its genetic information. That is to say, I'd like to explore the central characteristics of the novel form, outline the various stylistic experiments present within contemporary novels, and identify continuities that can be observed historically and theoretically. This is vital if we are to consider new possibilities for literary research today, especially when we engage with literature itself. Put differently, this approach might allow us to step more freely into new possibilities of literature, or discern literature's older, humanistic significance.

If one were to line up the words “literature” and “world” beside each other, one would instinctually imagine the phrase “world literature.” Theories of world literature emerged relatively early in Japan, initially appearing at the end of the 19th century. Even so, world literature found limited popularity beyond a narrow subset of theorists until the early 1920s, when the publisher Shinchōsha released the multi-volume set of collected novels, *The Collected Works of World Literary Arts*.¹ The 1930s marked a tendency for publishers to release collected volumes of *theory* related to world literature, particularly Shinchōsha’s *Lectures on World Literature* (published between 1924 and 1931) and Iwanami shoten’s *Iwanami Lectures on World Literature* (1932-34). We might say that the era contemporaneous to these developments in publishing—roughly from the beginning of World War I to the end of World War II—was defined by conflicts between countries across the globe as they fought to attain a hegemonic position in the world.

During the postwar era, the popularity of world literature shifted away from the theoretical concepts produced by the mainstream modernist (or internationalist) members of Japan’s intellectual elite—the writers who became targets of critical attacks by Takeuchi Yoshimi and other intellectuals advocating for a new postwar theory of “national literature”—and moved more recently towards the translated theories of foreign scholars like David Damrosch and Franco Moretti. Although the debate has seen its ebbs and flows, world literature has remained a constant topic of theorization. And yet, I cannot shake the impression that all of these theories of world literature, beginning from the middle of the 20th century, are essentially repeating the same debate. I cannot see any major revision to the framework of the debate on world literature across decades of popularity, beginning in the 19th century, moving into the 1930s, certainly in the postwar moment I just described, and in more recent years, since roughly 2000. The central point of the debate remains whether a dialectical sublation has occurred between the particular

1 Shinchōsha was not the only major publisher to release low-cost, multi-volume collections of “World Literature”—meaning fiction specifically—during the beginning of the 20th century. Shinchōsha’s collection, however, has often been considered a landmark anthology of foreign novels translated into Japanese. See Sasanuma Toshiaki’s *The Rise and Fall of “National Literature” as Thought* (Gakujutsu shuppankai, 2006), 89-90.

and the universal, where national or regional literatures act as the particular—insofar as they maintain some individuality—and world literature takes the place of the universal. I am left with the strong impression that the “world” has expanded regionally to encompass the global (insofar as it is taken as an object of politics/economics) and, in so doing, has spent the last few decades closely intertwined with expanding theories of multiculturalism.

When we consider literature, the concept of “world” (insofar as it is taken as an object of philosophy and, later, psychology) is crucial when it indicates the expansion of the subjective consciousness of the character “I.” We might consider the modern novel emerging from the west in precisely such a form that it can depict—or rather, *grasp*—the world. Yet this “world” does not connote the cosmological “world” that appears in theologies central to Christianity, nor the earlier mythologies of ancient Greece and other areas, nor the semi-religious thought found in Asia, such as Buddhism or Confucianism. It is nothing more than the anthropocentric “world” that formed through the establishment of subjectivity of human existence. From the latter half of the 18th century to the end of the 19th century, an age of global world consciousness was ushered in based on the awareness of the spatial limits of the world as a celestial body. Novels prospered within that sense of “world”—which came to take the place of gods. Novels took on an expressive form indicating the spatially enclosed nature of universal human subjectivity, as if in overview. They functioned as an internal support system for modern humanity, which was reborn as “subject” for the first time.

In this sense, global world consciousness emerged from Western Europe and has shouldered concepts of world literature from the 19th century. As this concept of world spread, it simultaneously regulated the “world” as it could be depicted or appear within various novels. We might naturally consider the real-spatial “world” moving in unison with the fictive “world.” Perhaps we can develop possibilities for reforming the significance of literary history by critically considering the intersections between a uniformly conceptualized “world” and areas of study ranging from political economy to philosophy. We might be able to recover and theorize connections between the modern novel’s formal vicissitudes and concepts of “world.” As Mizumura Minae has noted, the many individual European national

literatures themselves began as no more than local literatures. It was through “translation/transnation” that these European local literatures came to be read in foreign nations first in the original language of the text, then later translated into the native language of the new locality—that is, through a system of colonization. When this process arrived in Japan, which had managed to avoid colonization by virtue of its position in the Far East, “these literatures were translated into a Japanese language which was itself still in the process of being codified. They penetrated deeply into the literature of Japan, which in turn gave rise to the first truly ‘world literature.’”² In this case, the emergence of “modern Japanese literature”—being most distant from the colonizing system of “translation/transnation”—marked the completion of “world literature.” By extension, theorizing literature’s “worldedness” in relation to the question of “Japanese literature” might unexpectedly yield significant value.

The Misappropriation of “World” in the 1980s

At present, the word “world” has expanded such that it extends across a broad range of forms that are mediated by fiction. This includes not only novels, but also anime, manga, film, poetry, video games, even the catch phrases of commercials and advertisements. The majority of these uses refer either to an abstract, all-encompassing “world”—as in phrases like “the end of the world” or “saving the world”—or to “my world,” which is enclosed within the consciousness of none other than the self. In reality, there is little distinction between the two. In the latter case, if the self’s consciousness were to vanish, meaning if the self were to die, the “world” itself would also cease to exist. In the former case, too, the “world” is essentially the “world” of consciousness as a whole, as it ultimately boils down to a binary choice between the continuation or destruction (on/off) of the “world.” In fact, in many popular narrative arts such as manga and anime, world domination by a villain (and the prevention of such) often serves as the central plot. However, for the villain, the universal “world” equals “my world,” and

2 Mizumura Minae, “‘World Literature’ and ‘Modern Japanese Literature,’” *Subaru*, June, 2018.

there is no clear distinction between the two; stopping the villain must end with their death. If we are to consider this “world” as one encompassed by subjectivity, it seems fair to say that its usage has become exceedingly widespread, particularly since the turn of the 21st century.

This likely coincides with the increased use of “world” as a substitute for the objective notion of “international,” as seen in phrases like “acting around the world” or “taking off across the world.” Of course, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of the phase in which this “world” came to be so overused. However, the existence of the “world type”³ genre, which was recognized as a genre of cultural representation in the early 2000s, unmistakably made us aware of how pervasive the word “world” in this sense had become across various discourses, including critical theory. In this way, it serves as a fitting symbol of the recent destabilization of the modern concept of “world,” which has endured for over a century and a half. And as noted earlier, this early-2000s coincides with the resurgence of “world literature” theory, making it reasonable to hypothesize that the global buzzword of globalization and the expansion of “world” representations are linked. Let’s use “world type” as an introduction to the discussion.

If we focus principally on subculture works, the phrase “world type” began to circulate as a fixed trend on the internet around the autumn of 2002 (later appearing in print around 2003).⁴ Most circulations of the phrase “world type” refer to a narrative structure that shares specific traits. As the edited volume *Society Does Not Exist* states: “[World type] stories deal with small, everyday problems revolving around two people: the main character (the male ‘I’) and the object of his desires, the heroine (the female ‘she’). They include the wide variety of works that naïvely connect this ‘I and her’ directly to massive questions that are abstract and extraordinary, namely ‘world crises’ or ‘the end of the world.’ They do so without any ingress of wholly concrete (i.e. social) contexts.”⁵

This tendency to deploy a “world type” narrative structure in subculture works

3 TN: Literally 「セカイ系」, a term used in both popular and subculture media to indicate a specific narrative form.

4 TN: For a further exploration of these trends, see Maejima Satoshi, *What is the World Type*, SB Creative, 2010 and Azuma Hiroki, *Contents Thought*, Seidosha, 2007.

can be generally traced back to the TV anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (first airing in September, 1995), yet it was not until the beginning of the 21st century that this structure's latent tendencies took on a clear form. Examples include Shinkai Makoto's original anime film *Voices of a Distant Star* (first released in February, 2002)—which forged a new path in the direct expression of the “world type.” *Voices of a Distant Star* opens with the sudden proclamation by the main character, the 9th grade middle school student Nagamine Mikako, “There's this word: ‘World.’ Until I was in middle school, I had this vague feeling that the world extended just as far as my cell phone signals.” It's a peculiar turn of phrase. It goes without saying that the word “world” itself has existed for quite some time. In this instance, however, Mikako's “world” indicates the “world” that is formed through the internal consciousness of the “I,” while keeping in mind a vague spatial expansion of the “world.” Thus, *Voices of a Distant Star* skillfully deploys an opening such that “world” overlaps with a capability that is limited by a concrete means of communication—“the area of my cell phone signal's reach.” Mikako presents a “world” whose entire territory, or individual consciousness, extends in unison with advances in media supplements. Despite the fact that this film is set between the years 2046 and 2056, technological infrastructure consistently resembles that which existed when the film was made, roughly 2000. Flip phones are still in use. Power lines still crisscross towns in a messy web. The desks in the classrooms are still wooden and blackboards remain on the walls. This holds true even as Mikako herself has been selected to act as a UN soldier battling alien life forms from beyond Earth. Since the area included in Mikako's “world” aligns with the massive and extraordinary physical scale that exists beyond Earth, the usage of this term necessarily creates the impression of a vastly expanded, distorted individual consciousness.

The “world type” structure accurately describes the contents of *Voices of a Distant Star*—allowing for a reversal of gender roles, of course. It seems that “chūnibyō,”⁶ a word mostly associated with ridicule, has fallen into obsolescence

5 The Research Group on *Genkai* Novels, eds, *Society Does Not Exist: A Cultural Theory of the World Type*, Nanundō, 2009, p. 6.

of late, yet it describes a moment within the transition from childhood to adulthood—the period of adolescence—when self-consciousness experiences a rapid expansion. Middle school students who do not yet possess knowledge of social experiences awaken in the middle of an illusory “world,” one that becomes warped through imaginative limitlessness—that is, the fantastic. We can comprehend the narrative structure of the “world type” by grasping the universality and validity in how this psychological structure is explained. To some, the “world type” is characterized by the absence of a mediator one might term “society.” Others would argue that “world type” narratives involve a narrator who does not fundamentally understand who or what they are fighting. The looming “enemy” is ambiguous. In the end, it seems both explanations come from a similar point of view. Irrespective of the events being described, Mikako remains dressed in her middle school uniform, even when she launches into space to control her robot. As the story unfolds, Mikako slowly loses contact with her boyfriend Noboru across the increasing distance of space. We can’t rule out the possibility that the entire situation is a delusional fantasy created by Mikako, who is losing her boyfriend, Noboru, in real life.

However, a sense of unease lingers over categorizations of the “world type” in this manner. In the historical context of manga and anime as genres, has there ever truly been a predominant trend of actively depicting “society” or the secular “state”? It is rare for stories, particularly those aimed at youth, to serve the purpose of educating readers about societal realities—such as organization or obstacles. Even if such social “problems” were included, they are typically necessary only as stepping stones for a plot that allows characters to overcome them swiftly, with emphasis placed on transcending society altogether (a reason why this genre is also expected to appeal to adults weary of the managerial aspects of modern life). Rather than the notion of “world type” representing a sudden proliferation of a new narrative structure, this might instead be the result of the term “world” surpassing a threshold of circulation. Consequently, what may have

6 TN: Literally, “8th Grader Disease.” A pop-psychology term used to describe a period during adolescence when children develop delusions of grandeur, or a belief that they have been imbued with some kind of extraordinary power.

previously been latent in manga and anime—their inherent quality of engaging with “the world” in simplified terms—has abruptly bubbled to the surface. In other words, while there is indeed a marked increase in narratives that could be categorized as “world type” following the digital revolution of the mid-1990s (which established a networked society where global interconnection became a conscious reality), these narratives did not emerge spontaneously. After all, when Mikako says, “There’s this word: ‘World,’” it is *always already* asserted to exist as such.

I would like to enter the main topic of discussion, the concept of “world,” by considering how the theories of “world type” outlined above can be applied to literary genres. We might begin by touching on novels published in the 1980s. Major works from the 1980s also overflow with a self-conscious “world.” Murakami Haruki provides one good example. Even though the title of one of his early novels, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*,⁷ includes “world” in the title, the physical area covered in the novel never extends beyond Tokyo. It is a “world” enclosed within the extremely narrow consciousness of a single human—it wouldn’t be a stretch to say that the novel depicts a kind of claustrophobia. Murakami has found success in the global literary market—he has been read in the “world.” In this sense, Murakami’s celebrated arrival as a global author is paradoxically entwined with the oppressive narrowness of “world” as depicted in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*. This concisely symbolizes the consciousness of “world” in the 1980s moment.

As another example, I’d like to consider Shimada Masahiko’s 1984 short story “Music for a Sleepwalking Kingdom.”⁸ This story embodied the atmosphere of the 1980s, intertwining sincerity for the outdated political discourse of the decade with a sense of frivolity. The story opens,

7 TN: Originally published as Murakami Haruki, *Sekai no owari to hādo-boirudo wandārando*, Shinchōsha, 1985. In English, Murakami Haruki, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum, Kodansha, 1991.

8 TN: Originally published as Shimada Masahiko, *Muyū okoku no tame no ongaku*, Fukutake shoten, 1984.

There's a frighteningly, shockingly industrious world here. This world gets called a country, or a city, but it was built using the same techniques as the Tower of Babel. Mankind selfishly fabricated this world in the forests, valleys, and wilderness where the gods were said to have lived ... Actually, the worlds that are here, all of them fall to ruin and lawlessness. There is truly a convulsion bubbling up within the world. Mankind has grown weary of the existence of this world. They are pecking at the inner walls of this world in their anxiety, hoping to tear it down, little by little.

The narrator here is 22 year-old Chijiwa Miyabi. The story is a familiar one, as it follows the autobiographical musings of a youth that Uminekozawa Meron has described as “depicting Chijiwa’s self-consciousness and love.”⁹ However, Shimada’s story does not include some of the prototypical processes found in this kind of autobiographical story—the character travelling to central Tokyo, for example, or growing up. From the opening, the narrator depicts a “world” centered on a realistic vision of the Tama New Town, a planned city in the west Tokyo suburbs that was designed in the late 1960s and developed over the following decades. And yet, time here does not pass. Chijiwa is raised in a place that holds no historical memories, and the structure of myths such as “Babel” and “the gods” are projected onto a bleak reality. It seems as if they color his life and reveal the distress confronting the era. The story itself cannot begin without impressing the framework of these massive, mythical worlds on to the self-consciousness of a rootless person.

We might also consider a writer a generation older than Shimada, Ōe Kenzaburō, who would go on to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1994, some ten years after Shimada first published “Music.” Ōe’s novel *M/T and the Fantastic Stories of the Forest* was published at approximately the same time as Shimada’s short story. Ōe’s novel similarly opens with a young, male “I” and his consciousness of the “world.” This novel is a kind of rewriting of Ōe’s previous 1979 novel *The Contemporaneous Game* and utilizes a deliberately simple style in the vein of oral

9 Quoted from Uminekozawa’s commentary in Shimada Masahiko, *Akutagawashō rakusen saku zenshū Vol. 1*, Kawade shobō, 2013.

literature to depict a mythical world. The novel uses expansive myths as a background, setting the story in a remote village in the forests of Shikoku that has been cut off from other areas since early modern times. This similarity offers a particularly enlightening comparison to Shimada's gloomy New Town setting. Ōe's main character "I" also struggles to grasp the borders of his life. He is similar to Chijiwa in that he also feels a vital need to understand these borders in the same manner as he understands his own internally imagined world.

When *M/T*'s narrator is in the third grade of elementary school during the war, his teacher hands him a piece of paper and gives him an assignment: "Draw a picture of how you imagine the world you live in at this moment." Rather than drawing what the teacher expects—a *world map* with Imperial Japan at its center—Ōe's main character, "draws a valley inhabited not by the Emperor and Empress, but by M/T." Here, M indicates the "Matriarch" and T stands for the "Trickster," two symbols that subdivide the mythological corpus. Without getting lost in the details, "I" seems to have drawn "a map of my life" built upon a mythological structure that includes that which exists before birth and after death, rather than a real map. Ōe continues:

"What makes you think this is a picture of the world?" The teacher said and struck me across the face with a clenched fist. Yet, I remained silent ... I felt deep in my heart that I had drawn a "picture of the world" that was at odds with the "picture of the world" that the teacher had described. With a deep sense of pride, I felt that what I had drawn was the world we live in. Our forest. Our village in that valley forest. Ours was that kind of world.¹⁰

Ōe's narrator says, "We live in a town completely covered by M/T's haze," he clearly differentiates between an earthly world and a "world" which imparts the feeling of universal life. That is, it points to ways that a proper "world" of the self can rescue one from the messy meanings of "world" that exist in reality.

Of course, other examples exist beyond the realm of literary arts. We would be remiss to avoid discussing *Urusei Yatsura 2: Beautiful Dreamer*, an anime film

10 Ōe Kenzaburō, *M/T to mori no fushigi no monogatari*, Iwanami shoten, 1986.

released in February, 1984 that demonstrates a similar “world” consciousness. Ramu, the alien heroine, has incorruptible, blissful dreams. When she comes under the spell of a monster (literally an evil spirit) named “Mujaki,” her friends realize that the people around her have been trapped in a world formed by these dreams, ones that endlessly repeat the evening before her school festival. *Urusei Yatsura 2* went on to become the prototype for “time loop” anime films, a theme that has been taken up frequently since the 1980s, reaching a particular apex in the 2000s. The movie unfolds as Ramu—along with the other main character, Moroboshi Ataru, and their fellow high school classmates—attempts to break the characters free from this world. When the main characters in *Urusei Yatsura 2* attempt to escape the town of Tomobiki, which has been transformed through the dream’s circular structure, they all climb aboard (literally on top of) their household jet fighter. From above, they look down on the town and see that the “world” exists on a “giant circular disc” attached to the back of a giant turtle in space. There’s no significant difference between the concepts of “world” present in this film and those internal worlds drawn by the “I” characters in Shimada and Ōe’s works. This film contains the oft-repeated phrase, “this world,” meaning “this *irregular* world.” This resonates with Murakami Haruki’s early novel *A Wild Sheep Chase*.¹¹ In a similar way, Murakami describes the “world” as an imaginary object, writing, “World—that word always reminded me of a giant disc anxiously propped up on the back of elephant or turtle.”

Modern literary scholar Chida Hiroyuki, in his book on anime and pop-culture *Crisis and Representation*, lists works across a variety of genres that he feels represent the “reflexive modernity” (in the sociological meaning) that infiltrated “society”—meaning Japanese society—from the latter half of the 1970s.¹² The only literary text that Chida selects is *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* for its “parallel worlds.” Chida writes, “This is recommended reading for anyone considering searching out and contemplating pop culture in the future.” In

11 TN: Originally published as Murakami Haruki, *Hitsuji wo meguru bōken*, Kōdansha, 1982. In English, Murakami Haruki, *A Wild Sheep Chase*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum, Kodansha International, 1989.

12 Chida Hiroyuki, *Kiki to hyōshō—poppu karuchā ga saiyaku ni sōgūsuru toki*, Ōfū, 2018, p. 26.

this sense, we can say that the reality of the “world” in the examples from the 1980s shows continuity with the “world” in later works. Even if we agree that a phenomenon occurred whereby this 1980s “world” is renamed at the beginning of the 2000s as “world type,” we can understand this shift through the acceleration and transformations seen in the digital network society (or media ecology) at the time, as well as the development of new publishing strategies such as light novels. Thus, we might consider just how far in the past, before the 1980s, we might find the origins of this “world.”

Postwar Literature and a Twist of the “World”

In addition to 1990s/2000s visual culture and 1980s fiction, postwar Japanese literature was also strongly influenced by an increasingly emphasized impression of the word “world” following the reconstruction of the postwar world order. This usage differed, however, from the entrapped “world” of the 1980s. In the postwar case, we can observe a concept of world that indicates an extensive, definitively wider space, one that had been deeply colored by the nuances of internationalization. The publisher Iwanami shoten launched the magazine *Sekai* (literally, *World*) in January 1946, immediately after the end of the war. Given that wartime censorship and regulations of published thought were lifted along with the end of the war, *Sekai* immediately became a best-selling magazine, fulfilling the public’s previously suppressed desire for print media.

If we were to ask Tanikawa Tetsuzō—a poet and philosopher, as well as the father of poet Tanikawa Shuntarō—about this fact, he would surely agree. Not only had Tanikawa given the magazine *Sekai* its name, he also participated in the first meeting of the World Federalist Movement in 1947 and continued his work as a theorist of world government thereafter.¹³ According to Tanikawa, Yamamoto Yūzō, a writer with connections to the political world, organized the *Sannenkai* group in January of 1945 in order to consider how Japan could rebuild and contain

13 One can find Tanikawa’s central writings on the World Federalist Movement in Tanikawa Tetsuzō, *Higashi to nishi no aida no Nihon*, Iwanami shoten, 1958.

the disorder that would come after Japan's defeat. Beside Tanikawa and Yamamoto, members of this group included Shiga Naoya, Abe Yoshishige, Mushanokōji Saneatsu, Watsuji Tetsurō, Tanaka Kōtarō, and Tomitsuka Kiyoshi. In the immediate postwar, this group transformed into the *Dōshinkai*. At first, Iwanami published *Sekai* as the literary organ for this group, but the publishing company wanted to turn the magazine into a widely consumed general interest magazine. Tanikawa described this situation in his autobiography: "The name *Sekai* was decided after everyone in the *Dōshinkai* gathered to offer their ideas. In the end, my recommendation received a fair amount of support and the name was settled that way."¹⁴ In addition to having previously translated Kant, Tanikawa was also an early translator of Goethe. In 1927, he translated Goethe's "Essays on Aesthetics" for the fifteenth volume of *Goethe's Collected Works*—one of these essays was Goethe's "A Reconsideration of the Theory of World Literature."¹⁵ Inspired by Goethe's works, Tanikawa penned the essay "Restoration of Humanity" for the *Tokyo Shimbun* in October of 1945, which was subsequently republished in Tanikawa's book *The Position of the Intellectual*.¹⁶ Tanikawa was a literary critic considered to be one of the literary figures called the "Old Liberalists" (or simply the "Liberalists" before the war).¹⁷ This group was primarily composed of postwar conservative theorists, including Abe Yoshishige and Watsuji Tetsurō. These critics were stubborn humanists who participated in significant exchanges with the Shirakaba School of authors. Members of the Shirakaba School, founded in the Taishō period and widely considered to have been led by Mushanokōji Saneatsu and Shiga Naoya, were recognized in the postwar moment as early internationalist authors. There was certainly nothing out of the ordinary in this concept of "world" insofar as it commemorated a new starting point for international society. "World"

14 Tanikawa Tatsuzō, *Jidenshō*, Chūō kōronsha, 1989, p. 76.

15 Tanikawa also developed a profound knowledge on the theory of "world literature" in the narrow sense of the term, eventually writing his own essay on the subject, "World Literature and Japanese Literature." Tanikawa Tatsuzō, *Bungaku no shūhen*, Iwanami shoten, 1936.

16 Tanikawa Tatsuzō, *Chishikijin no tachiba*, Bunka shoin, 1947.

17 See Oguma Eiji, "Minshu" to "aikoku"—*sengo Nihon no nashonarizumu to kōkyōsei*, Shinyōsha, 2002, p. 196.

in this moment included overlapped meanings, both the “world” of subjective consciousness and the real, geographical “world.” In the closing of his essay “Goethe’s Human Image,” Tanikawa writes on this topic, “Goethe stood in the middle of the human world and continually took that position as his inspiration. *All activities of cultural worlds are precisely what bring the world itself into the individual’s world. Poetic activity is no exception.*”¹⁸

Immanuel Kant also theorized a practical proposal for a world order in *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*. Kant’s theory was based on the unification of law according to a “world citizen.” Kant would go on to become the forebear of a modern philosophy (specifically, German Transcendental Philosophy) which undoubtedly took concepts of “world” as central to debate. The objective of Kant’s theory of the “Copernican Revolution,” which ushered in a concept of “world” formed by the total subsumption of (perceivable) objects within human subjectivity, was a realization of the integrated return of the subject/object relation that had been split by Cartesianism. We might not know Tanikawa’s fundamental intentions, but we could describe his longing for world peace as the superimposition of two meanings of “world”: the literary/philosophical (subjective) and the political (objective).

The first decade of the postwar period saw the rapid emergence of theories of “world literature” supported by modernists (the internationalists) who linked the wartime feudalistic totalitarian system with Japan’s “delayed” modernization—and advocated overcoming it. We might count Kuwabara Takeo among the leaders of these theorists. Kuwabara advocated a “Second Theory of Art” in the immediate postwar, a theory that attacked the haiku form itself as the principle origin of the problems within Japanese literary arts. He wrote in his 1950 best seller, *An Introduction to Literature*, “That which we call the modern novel can exist without the traditional literature of the author’s country, and furthermore without historical knowledge. It can exist through understanding via direct experience, or the principal of taste.” Kuwabara repeatedly asserts an extant universality of the novel.

18 Tanikawa Tatsuzō, *Hyūmanizumu*, Hosokawa shoten, 1949. Emphasis mine.

What is important here is the universal spatiality of the “world” internal to the text. Taking from Alain’s *Collected Essays on Art*, Kuwabara suggested that if we expanded the meaning of “thought” to include ideas such as “the subject-object relationship,” “the relationship between cause and effect,” or “the function of human thought on objects,” then the communicative intention of the novel could be considered nothing other than “thought.” He emphasized that this thought could not be restricted to a particularity within spoken expression. Consequently, Kuwabara sets realism as an absolute condition of the modern novel, yet separates that concept from a stance that realism is the *reproduction of what is seen*. He continues, “It is impossible to fully depict things in words....Rather than a representation of that which we see, realism is the method through which we become conscious of having seen.”¹⁹ Regardless of the language in which a work is written, the objects of reference that inform the structure of the work are universal. There is no difference between the original text and its translation provided both preserve the novelistic time-space indicated by the work.

I’d like to expand on this idea, since it will be essential to later aspects of this essay. Kuwabara writes that we cannot observe a “true literature” within the established position that “mass literature” accommodates mass tastes, indicating a literature that falsely claims to represent “the individual’s genuine interests.” Intense subjectivity is indispensable to the modern novel and nothing is more important than the construction of a “new experience.” *Modern Literature (Kindai bungaku)*, a literary magazine founded in the immediate postwar period by Ara Masahito and other critics, published a long-running “Debate on Subjectivity” which began in 1946 and lasted for several years. Although this debate is well known to literary scholars, I’d like to focus on how the “subjectivity” present in theories of “world literature” from this time period is key to the debate. By specifying how this debate aimed to recuperate the ideal universal “world,” we can better understand the backlash to the old liberalists in the postwar era—who were proposing an impossible regression—and how “national literature” and “Asianism” took on the form of resistance.

19 Page 135, emphasis mine.

If we were to summarize prevailing theories of “world literature,” we would find that many of our assertions share a degree of messiness with the problems that also arise when considering what has been taken up by present day multiculturalism. They do not focus primarily on recognizing the diversity of various regions or individuals. Rather, their true objective lies in establishing and expanding a universal space capable of encompassing and articulating those differences. Though multiculturalism and universalism may appear to be in opposition, the “value of diversity” upheld by the former cannot exist without the foundation of the latter. Multiculturalism, whether within capitalism or communism, is a concept that only comes to be asserted on the basis of an existing foundation, upon which the relationships of those included can be considered. Based on its original name, it would be acceptable to think of a corpus of world literature that combines every literary work written in every possible language into one aggregate whole. In reality, however, the title of “world literature” is granted only to those works that meet certain selective criteria. While these criteria can be proposed in various forms, they invariably include the element of transcending homogeneous groupings such as “nation,” “state,” “ethnicity,” or “native language”—concepts that are in opposition to the concept of world literature itself. Conversely, this implies that without implicitly integrating such concepts as self-evident premises, world literature cannot be defined. World literature, so to speak, denotes a distinguished status attained through a kind of contest (a world selection), not a title indiscriminately granted to all works. It is precisely this selective nature that makes the methods for achieving such recognition a subject of debate.

For the world literature that Kuwabara proposed, we might directly emphasize the internal conditions that are shared across all world literary texts, a more traditional kind of “universalism,” rather than summing up “world literature” as *precisely those objects within which we might discover difference* through contemporary multiculturalism—that is to say, by paying no attention whatsoever to the many external factors and variables wrapped up in a work’s life and circulation. Those internal conditions include the construction of the independent “world” internal to the work, or what we might alternatively call the intentions of the form of the diegetic “world” as understood through its construction. The independence of the

work includes the possibility that it might travel to any area of the globe. It is through the initial self-realization of this mobility that works come to be read within the global meaning of “world.” I will demonstrate later how this universal conception itself is a kind of “reaction,” but there is another topic we must discuss first. There is a strong consciousness of generational disconnect with the old-liberalist theorists of world literature in the immediate postwar. The theorists who came of age during the war (those of Yoshimoto Takaaki’s generation) distance themselves from the simple liberalist mode of argumentation as if they are wrapped up in a kind of performance. It is in this moment that we find Tsurumi Shunsuke’s anomalous theory of world literature.

The first section of Tsurumi’s 1964 article “The World of *Dogura Magura*” is entitled “The Birth of the World Novel,” in which he asks the question: “When was the consciousness of a world first born in the world?” Tsurumi notes that, if we are thinking of world on a global scale, we can find a “world consciousness” as far back as the Roman Empire. In Japan, this world consciousness is a “product of the Taishō period.” To be more precise, Tsurumi notes that this concept appears along with two global events: World War I (1914-1918) and the Russian Revolution (1917). After witnessing soldiers sent from Japan to fight in Siberia at the time (1918-1922), Japanese intellectuals and writers found that this experience brought about in them a “world consciousness.” According to Tsurumi, the middle of the Taishō period was the origin of a transition from “modern literature” to “contemporary literature.” The condition for this change was the existence of a “world consciousness.” Consequently, contemporary literature must necessarily be considered “world novels.”

Tsurumi also noted that we generally “think of the Shirakaba School when we speak of world consciousness.” From a postwar literary historical perspective, the Shirakaba School, with Mushanokōji Saneatsu as its leader, included the first writers to aspire to the “world.” They were predecessors to the postwar internationalists. According to Tsurumi, however, Mushanokōji and Arishima Takeō, both members of the Shirakaba School, simply appeared alongside a “world consciousness” inspired by the likes of Tolstoy and Whitman. The Shirakaba School writers did not internally develop the “world consciousness” brought about

by World War I in Japan. It may come as a shock, but Tsurumi cites the novel named in the title of his essay, Yumeno Kyūsaku's 1935 *Dogura Magura*, as "the progenitor of the world novel in contemporary Japan." There was probably a performative element in Tsurumi's identifying Yumeno as the origin of Japan's "world novel." Yumeno was best known as an offshoot of domestic literature, or as an author that left strong, strange impressions on his readers. According to Nishihara Kazumi's commentary from Yumeno's *Collected Works*, Nakai Hideo read *Dogura Magura* enthusiastically upon its release. Nakai himself was author of *An Offering to the Void*, one of the three novels counted among the major works of bizarre thrillers alongside *Dogura Magura*. Tsurumi noted that thinkers who were *middle school students* at the time of *Dogura Magura*'s release finally arrived as established critics in the postwar period. Tsurumi himself was born in 1922, and was likely one of those children who had felt truly neglected by the older generation who had dragged the country into war. For Tsurumi and others among the "wartime generation," it was very likely that they looked at *Dogura Magura* as a text of generational significance, one that resisted the "reason" of the sensible intelligentsia.

What Tsurumi considers the "contemporary" moment almost certainly extended to the beginning of the 1960s. In April of 1961, Yuri Gagarin became the first person to experience space flight aboard the Volstok 1. This era came to be defined by people's new consciousness of a bird's-eye view of Earth. Tsurumi comments on other post-Yumeno works in this essay that he saw as expressing a "world consciousness." These include: Yokomitsu Riichi's *A Lonely Journey*, published between 1937 and 1946, which explores settings in both Japan and France, though Tsurumi eventually omits this work, considering it an underdeveloped engagement with world consciousness; Nogami Yaeko's *Labyrinth*, published between 1936 and 1956, which spans from 1935 to the immediate postwar years and moves across Tokyo, Karuizawa, Ōita, and China and depicts the hard struggle of the younger generation as they move through the "labyrinth" of leftist thought; Haniya Yutaka's lifework, the long novel *Spirits of the Dead*, published between 1946 and 1995, which features philosophical speculations through a style of conceptual grandiloquence; Hotta Yoshie's 1963 novel *Judgement*, which questions

the post-nuclear human condition by focusing on the exchange between Japanese citizens and an American who guided the atomic bombings as the meteorological equipment captain on a military aircraft—and his subsequent ethical anguish; Takeda Taijun's novel *A Festival for Forests and Lakes*, published between 1955 and 1958, which depicts the liberation movement of the Ainu people in remote Hokkaidō; And finally, Kinoshita Junji's drama *A Japanese Called Otto*—published in the July/August, 1962 volume of *Sekai*—which depicts widespread spying by the Communist party. With possibly the exception of *Spirits of the Dead*, all of these works are largely forgotten even to avid readers of literature and scholars of postwar literature. This is not likely an accident.

Setting aside *Spirits of the Dead*, all of these works show a characteristic use of “world” that is fundamentally broad and international. They deploy overlapping topics that range from the question of an ethics that might overcome the nation and be appropriate to all humanity—and the international wars (or national struggles) that arouse such feelings—to activities of the Communist Party, a group that originally took internationalism as its guiding principle. Among this set of texts, *A Japanese Called Otto* most effectively evinces spatial size. It is set from the night before the Manchurian Incident in 1931 through early 1940s Tokyo, dramatizing the life of Ozaki Hotsumi, a member of Richard Sorge's Soviet spy organization, the “Sorge International Intelligence Group.” A dramatic conflict ensues based on differences in vision between Sorge, who (according to the afterward) “sees saving the entire world as his absolute goal,”²⁰ and Ozaki, who cannot prevent himself from establishing a subjectivity based on his home country of Japan. Stylistically, we might compare the use of language between Kinoshita's *Otto* and another early example of a novel that depicts a multilingual situation: Yokomitsu Riichi's *Shanghai*. Although Yokomitsu sets his novel in Shanghai, an international city divided into concessions, the dialogue in his novel flows along in clear Japanese without any impediments. The characters speak in a variety of foreign languages, yet exist in an imaginary linguistic space. Kinoshita's *Otto*, by contrast, demonstrates a schema for depicting spoken foreign language through

20 Kinoshita Junji, *Otō to yobareru Nihonjin*, Chikuma shobō, 1963.

stilted Japanese. Instead of converting the content of the conversations to Japanese as a way to smooth over the dialogue, Kinoshita is consciousness of the actual adversity that so often rushes to the fore when trying to establish a language of human coexistence. We might consider that this text presents the paradoxical possibilities of a universal internationalism, one that exists only through the recognition of difference across various languages. If we were to call this novel world literature, however, it would certainly be of a “world” that is the object of geographical/geopolitical space.

Dogura Magura possesses a structure fundamentally different from the content of the novels listed above. We might say that it holds a viewpoint of “world” at a scale that is unparalleled in modern literature of the past. It does not address physical distance or constant movement; rather, the axis of time within the novel becomes cyclically warped, and the memories of living cells—measured in millennia—become entwined with the present of individuals. The story is eternally trapped within the labyrinthian brain of the “madman” main character. It is a world of subconscious depth. When Tsurumi first begins developing his argument, he treats the concept of “world” in world literature in the sense of an external space. However, as he further explores the concept, he comes to recognize a “world of fractured time” internal to narrator of *Dogura Magura*, a text he sees at the very start of a true world literature in Japan. In a way, we can see the discord and disorder in the early 1960s treatment of “world” within the very form of Tsurumi’s writing.

Of course, *Dogura Magura*’s story expands beyond the borders of any single country. The “madman’s” memories of past lives could be stretched back to the reign of Emperor Zuanzong of China’s Tang Dynasty. The setting, centered in Kyūshū Imperial University’s Department of Psychiatry, participates in the “regionalist movement” critique of Japanese modern literature and the tendency to set narratives in Tokyo. Neither of these features show a loss of awareness of the geographical “world.” Even beyond the specific contents of *Dogura Magura*, Yumeno—whose real name was Sugiyama Yasumichi—was in fact the son of Sugiyama Shigemaru, a political operative who held no office yet exerted tremendous influence on the political world from behind the scenes. Yumeno’s

father, maintained a close relationship with the right-wing group *Genyōsha*, which was led by Tōyama Mitsuru. This group promoted a kind of pan-Asianism (or Asian Liberation) built on “an international outlook.” Tsurumi emphasizes that Yumeno wrote the 1933 novella *A Horizon of Ice* on the theme Tsurumi sees as the direct origin of “world consciousness.” In this novel, the characters are sent to Siberia as soldiers. For Tsurumi, the entirety of Yumeno’s literary output displays “the essential meaning of feeling international.” Being that *Dogura Magura* is considered Yumeno’s most important work, “it intensively expresses Japan’s right-wing thought, as well as the characteristics that spring from that thought.” Tsurumi concludes that this embodies precisely what could be called a “world spirit.” Yet, if we read the novel for what it is, there seems to be no better text to challenge the image of “world literature” that Goethe advocated in 1827.

The “world” in *Dogura Magura* is fundamentally the internal “world” of the mind. We can’t shake the impression that Tsurumi has taken a decisive leap in his argument. No matter how we might deny it, if we take Tsurumi’s position on “world spirit” from “The World of *Dogura Magura*” directly as he describes it, only Haniya’s *Spirit of the Dead* might assume Yumeno’s “world novel” mantle. Even as it utilizes a limited physical space—Tokyo around 1935—Haniya’s work captures the cosmological vision of an “unreal place” that exists wholly according to the abstract and metaphysical conversations between characters.

Tsurumi initially published his critique in October of 1962. In that moment, Tsurumi’s position on reorienting the “world” was related to many outside factors unique to the era. Yet we can imagine that this was actualized through and buoyed by the long-continuing transformation of the conception of “world” that developed in the realm of literature. The twist in the 1980s—where “world” came to indicate the enclosed mental world, as we saw in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*—appears to be connected to this paradigm. Theories of world literature formed the base for an internationalism that existed at the center of postwar democratization—roughly from the end of the war to the mid-1950s. Even while a theory of “world literature” continued to describe something ideal, we can also see the underlying structure of a reactionary desire for the return of an ideal “world” precisely because older concepts of “world literature” did not align with the actual

consciousness of the new era. We might consider writers like Abe Kōbō, who traces a line of “influence” to later writers like Ōe Kenzaburō and Murakami Haruki, but I’d like to set aside the details of this argument for later when I consider the postwar period again.

Rather than working backwards from our contemporary concept of “world type” in order to discover when the concept of “world” first formed within Japanese literary history, we should consider the historical moment of *Dogura Magura*—the 1930s—in terms of the experience of a significant turn.²¹ We can see Tsurumi’s keen eye here, focusing on this point during the early 1960s when debates regarding the transition from “modern” to “contemporary” were at their loudest. We therefore need to at least take the first step and trace this debate back to before the 1930s “turn” in order to fully understand what that turn truly signifies. To do this, I’ll borrow from the parallel questions Heidegger sets out in the framework for his philosophical lectures from 1938, “The Age of the World View.”²² That is, I’d like to read Heidegger’s philosophy as a theory of novels. As I will mention later, Heidegger explained philosophically why it is that “world” came to be formed in the early 19th century (as image), critiquing how that image must be overcome in the present. It is important to note that Heidegger, similar to Tsurumi, was working from an epochal consciousness that distinguished the contemporary era from that which came before. Oddly enough, the Japanese translations of these lectures were published in January of 1962, just a few months before Tsurumi

21 Of course, the 1930s is simply a convenient dividing line. Even within Yumeno’s works, it is possible to argue that his 1922 novel *White Haired Boy* marks the starting point of his transformation of “world” into something closer to a world of high fantasy, predating the world view we discover in *Dogura Magura*. If we understand the “world” as it was realized in *Dogura Magura* to have its origin in the fantasy worlds of fantastic folk tales, it would be possible to trace a single lineage from this work to representative novels we discussed from the 1980s. Works by Ōe and Murakami, for example, are “world” novels that present a reality that approaches something like fantasy.

22 TN: Originally published in German in the collected volume Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege*, V. Klostermann, 1950. Quotations here are taken from the English translation: Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World View,” trans. Marjorie Grene, *boundary 2*, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 340-355.

released his own work to the world. This is not to say specifically whether or not Tsurumi actually read Heidegger's work, or whether or not it had any kind of hidden effect on Tsurumi's theory of world literature. I want to discuss a reality that could be grasped across both the 1930s and into the 1960s. That is, there was a critical awareness that the old era of "world" image was coming to an end and a new "world" must be reconstructed. Of course, Heidegger doesn't show any indication of dealing with literature in this volume, yet it is precisely because Heidegger shows a potential freedom to deploy a theory that exceeds boundaries that we can also state that his theory guarantees meaningful connections with literature, much like the way that Freud advocated for the eloquence of silence. However, what I discuss below is neither a philosophical discussion of Heidegger, nor is it an expository commentary on "The Age of the World View." I would simply like to remind the reader that this is an *attempt at literary theory* that borrows a frame of reference centered on theoretical possibilities.

The Age of the "World View" and the Structure of Novels

Heidegger critiqued the essence of modernity in his essay, "The Age of the World View." In a broad sense, Heidegger argues that humans became modern when they found liberation in the self and, in freeing themselves from medieval constraints based on theological systems, entered into an era centered on humanity called individualism. Yet this is merely a rough generalization. To be more precise, modernity is the era when humanity became "Subjekt." We should define the modern era as the period when humanity forms a particular existence of "world" as "Subjectum"—that is to say, as a fundamental subject. If we are to consider the essence of modernity, we must also necessarily consider humanity's "world view." Why is this the case? Because it is only through this "world view" that humanity has generated a new "fundamental subject" that can substantiate a guarantee for all existence in place of "God." On the topic of "engagement" with human existence, Heidegger writes, "But when man becomes the first and real *subjectum*, then man becomes that existent, in which all that exists is grounded in the character of its existence and its truth."²³ This is not something which can be

contained within a word like individualism. Heidegger continues:

It is certain that as a consequence of the liberation of man the modern age has produced subjectivism and individualism. But it is just as certain that no age before this has created a comparable objectivism, and that in no previous age did the nonindividual in the form of the collective come into its own. The essential point here is the necessary interplay between subjectivism and objectivism. It is precisely this mutual conditioning which points in turn to deeper processes.²⁴

The modern “world” is the “conception of existence as a whole” within the range of human subjectivity (which is theoretically infinite). However, this also marks an unprecedented period of objectivity. We can see this in the flourishing of science, which takes the “real” as its object, so long as the real has been guaranteed within the boundaries of the “world.” Essentially, a tautology is present here, where “world” has humanity (meaning the foundational subject) as its base, and which is subsequently ensured within the “world.” In its subjectivity, Heidegger writes, humanity “takes on himself the manner in which he is to stand to the existent as the objective.”²⁵ Modernity is the era when humanity gains a “new existence,” where “to be new is peculiar to the world which has become a view.”²⁶ According to Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, this is the birth of the “empirico-transcendental doublet.”²⁷ From the end of the 18th century to beginning of the 19th century, humanity simultaneously became a dual object and subject (including as the subject of research within the environment).

When we hear the word “image,” therefore, it would not be accurate for us to conjure in our minds something with a concrete design like a world map or a realistic drawing. When we say that we “understand” that we possess existence, we are talking about a footing or posture that we assume, or perhaps an

23 TN: Heidegger, “World View,” p. 349-350.

24 TN: Ibid., p. 349.

25 TN: Ibid., p. 352.

26 TN: Ibid.

27 TN: Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Routledge, 1970, p. 357.

acknowledgement of a rough design or configuration, in order to express the feeling that “matter itself exists there in front of us, just as we also exist.” Perhaps we might better understand this idea of image intuitively in the form of a metaphor. Rather than an image proper, we should consider this a kind of “perspective”—although Heidegger himself does not use such a word. Heidegger states, “world view, properly understood, therefore means, not a view of the world, but the world understood as view,” thus, “the world view does not change from a previous medieval to a modern one, but this fact—that the world as such becomes a view—is the distinguishing mark of modern times.”²⁸ The concepts “medieval world view” or “ancient world view” themselves are not formed through the same process as the modern world view. When Heidegger explains that there is no “world view” in “medieval art,” he is likely thinking in the corner of his mind that medieval art was without the kind of perspectival rules (that is, linear perspective) that had been established in modern paintings.²⁹ Heidegger states that the birth of the “subject” occurred within the turn towards the 19th century, wherein it is unlikely that the foundation of the “modern essence” was strictly reliant on the idea of modern perspective that was born in the distant renaissance era. Indeed, if we take the connection between “world view” and visual arts as our question, we will move beyond an old, modern “framed vision” of the ideal painting, or a work that narrows a view as if through a window frame. The panoramic vision—as in an overview—emerges between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century and becomes equated with the realization of a limitless perspective. Here, we should attend to the massive expansion of techniques of perspectival illusion from earlier historical periods. I will expand on this in the following section.

At the time of these lectures, Heidegger was principally concerned with grasping “world” according to a transcendental self (as subjectivity) as had been first indicated by Kant, the forebear of modern philosophy. We might see this concept of “world” vaguely resembling the thought that bloomed in the early nineteenth

28 TN: Ibid., 350-351.

29 This logic is similar to Karatani Kōjin’s argument when he compares “the discovery of landscape” to the development of western art. See Karatani Kōjin, *The Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, trans. Brett de Bary, Duke University Press, 1993.

century and flourished through German Idealism (for example, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel). As represented by his famous term “being-in-the-world,” Heidegger inherited a lineage of German modern philosophy that had been based on an exhaustive reinterpretation of Kant. Without this continuity, it would not have been necessary to identify the early nineteenth century as the moment the “subject” was born. Heidegger intended to cause one more “turn” in this philosophy. If he were to describe the “world view” in the early nineteenth century, his critique would necessarily have to reflect the state of *their* “world” to some degree. In the end, the German philosophy that produced Nietzsche came to be established in an era that realized at last a lapse in the power of the old Gods. Secularization as religious reform began as early as the 16th century, working to establish a world system that might replace that lost power.

Then again, if I continue on this point it might seem that I have strayed quite far from the discussion of the actual question, “modern Japanese literature.” Let us work our way back to the topic at hand by way of the development of the concept of national literature in the world. Goethe, predecessor of German Romanticism and a member of German Idealism broadly defined,³⁰ wrote to his colleague Eckermann on the 31st of January, 1827 on the meaninglessness of adhering to “national literature.” Goethe indicated that his present moment “was the beginning of the age of world literature.” This indication gave birth to a “world” of “world literature.” We cannot forget that the circumstances of this “world” resonated with the concept of “world” offered by Kantian-derived transcendental philosophy. As I noted at the beginning of this essay, Kant searched for the construction of a “global citizen” that might offer the possibility for international harmony. Kant was a philosopher that combined a “world” consciousness—which included the nuance of the actual and global—with the epistemological concept of “world.” That idea of “world literature” arrived in Japan, in its position in the Far East, in the middle of

30 As is commonly known, there was an underlying connection between German Romanticism and German Idealism. Goethe frequently contemplated the form and creation of a theory of “world,” particularly in his exchanges with Schelling. See Takahashi Yoshito’s translation of Jeremy Adler, “The World View in the Lyric Poetry of Schelling and Goethe,” *Morphologia: Goethe and Natural Science*, Vol. 18, 1996.

the 1890s. In an unexpected way, it became the catalyst for the formation of a “national literature” in Japan.³¹ We might naturally infer that the concept of “world” that was born in “the age of the world view” also infiltrated a central position within modern Japanese literature.

Although I have focused here on concepts of the world in German philosophy, I would point out that it has not been the only source of those concepts. We should, however, focus on the influences that accumulated within the formation of “modern Japanese literature” in the Meiji period. In this context, there was a clear permeation of aesthetics drawn from German philosophy. We might directly cite Mori Ōgai (who lived in Germany from 1884 to 1888) and Shimamura Hōgetsu (who studied in England and Germany between 1902 and 1906) as two authors who brought aesthetic concepts from abroad to the debate on literary production. Natsume Sōseki was also indirectly involved in this exchange, having attended lectures on aesthetics by Raphael von Koeber, a special foreign lecturer at Tokyo Imperial University. Koeber, who contributed to the Tokyo University-affiliated *Journal of Philosophy*, was friends with the philosopher Karl Robert Eduard von Hartmann (who himself influenced Ōgai’s views on literature). Sōseki’s 1907 *Yomiuri Shimbun* article, “A Literary Sketch,” shows influences that blend old Kantian aesthetics with a new “aesthetic empathy”³² from Germany in Sōseki’s contemporary moment. Ōtsuka Yasuji was the first Japanese professor in Tokyo Imperial University’s lecture series on aesthetics. He studied aesthetic theory in Europe at the end of the 19th century, from 1896 to 1900. Sōseki’s relationship with Ōtsuka was so strong that Sōseki used him as the model for the character Meitei, an aesthetic theorist, in his 1905-1906 novel *I am a Cat*.

Transcendental philosophy’s concepts of “world” also include a reaction to France’s self-evident worldedness (or universality) as a cultural center of Europe. We are left with a strong impression that the framework of the German “world” as ideology was precisely a reactionary impulse to their subsumption within French centrism, a position that developed from the perceived “lateness” of German

31 Sasanuma Toshiaki, *ibid.*, 33-34.

32 TN: Taken here from the German philosopher Theodor Lipps, and his concept of *Einfühlung*.

nationalism. There was a spiritual reaction to the experience of physical invasion at the hands of Napoleon, whom Hegel described as “world spirit” on the back of a horse. The subjectivity of “world” within German thought could be expanded, but not contracted. The Japanese government, which also saw itself as having made a delayed entry into the western world, began to develop its institutional infrastructure, forming an army and drafting the Imperial Constitution. Given the results of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), Germany had become a natural model for underdog victors amongst the national powers. It is not difficult to imagine why the essence of the German concept of “world” would subsequently permeate the field of literature insofar as it represented subjective activity.³³

On the other hand, French literature also had a tremendous impact on literary production. However, the majority of works produced in this era refer to French literature in the sense of literary arts as they are to be understood thematically or methodologically, while the German language formed the philosophical foundation upon which questions regarding how the conscious form or organization of “world” should be depicted within novels. We can generally consider German language culture to be the origin of this thought.³⁴ This was an age when personal exchanges or discourse on the relations of “art” were wholly limited to discussions of France, and the fact that literature was at that time understood as fundamentally included

33 In Japan, the 1880s witnessed the establishment of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan, commonly known as the Meiji Constitution. Along with the establishment of the first Imperial Diet in 1890, this period was marked by the rapid proliferation of so-called “German Studies.” Mori Ōgai studied medicine in Germany from 1884 to 1888, and in 1889 he began his literary activities in earnest.

34 Of course, we cannot ignore the influence of literary themes adopted from English-speaking thinkers. Herbert Spencer became an inspiration to many Japanese intellectuals between the 1880s and 1890s. The 1890s saw a decline in German idealism—with Hegel as the leading figure—and a relatively strong emphasis on the importance of British empiricism. However, the non-metaphysical characteristics of sociology and psychology—which were specialties of Anglo-Americanism—generally contributed to social structures as they existed within the world of novels or in the realistic exteriorization of characters behaviors. We must separate this from conceptual questions regarding the construction of the novelistic world itself. Generally speaking, literary theory since the end of the 19th century has been searching for a way to unify or mediate these two trends.

in the “techniques” governing “art” made the connection to France even stronger. It is difficult to readily identify literary influences that come from German thought. From a different angle, one that takes formations of “world view” seriously, we find that the discourse that laid the philosophical foundation for the origin of “world” in Japanese literature generally had origins in German-language culture. We can distinguish the cognitive schema that surrounds these origins and the impact they had on how “world” came to be depicted in novels. Of course, what we are paying attention to at present, the importance of German thought, has not often been reflected in literary histories to date.

In order to better assist our understanding of this topic and summarize the above concepts, I have borrowed terminology from Heideggerian philosophy and drawn the image below (Fig. 1). I have tried, to the best of my ability, to present a multi-faceted image of the formation of “world” that takes as its basis a 19th century concept of the “subject” as it was indicated in “The Age of the World View.” The person on the right represents the fundamental subject, or *subjectum*. The line that extends from this person’s head, moving upwards, shows the “transcendence” of subjectivity. This line traces a circle, which itself forms a “world” that coincides with the expanse of transcendental subjectivity. The existence of all things is

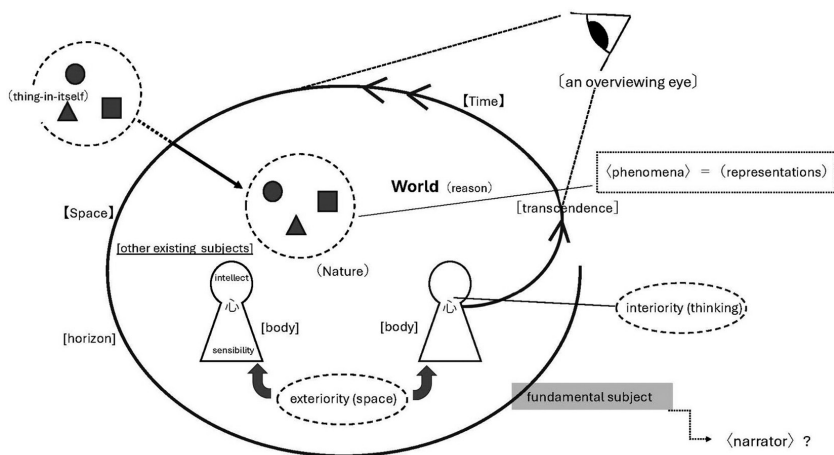


Fig. 1

contained within this representation of “world,” as is the existence of the self. Thus, the “subject” is formed transcendently and is coterminous with the empirical existence of things.

I would like to emphasize here that there is a split between the body (exteriority) and the mind (interiority) within what is generally called the modern human. The many individual things that empirically exist and are enclosed within this “world view” arise within this nested condition. Kushita Jun’ichi provides a simple explanation of this, which Foucault indicated as the “empirico-transcendental doublet,” in his 2011 volume *The Question of Heidegger and Living Beings*. He writes that in modernity,

Our existence is deeply divided and doubled. On the one hand, there is the human insofar as it is a transcendental being from which the conditions for all objects are possible as phenomena. On the other hand, there is the human as it experiences existence within a world along with other extant beings with whom the human interacts. *Furthermore, this latter empirical human itself is further divided into a dual state of mind and body.*³⁵

In this way, the human mind has also become an actual object of study based on objective observation. We should recall that, although experimental psychology as a science expanded rapidly in the 19th century (from Germany, of course), it too was a result of focused attention on individual empirical humans that were secured within the “world,” although its origins can be traced back to the separation of intellect and sensibility well before the modern era. This eventually culminated in the psychoanalytical breakthrough into the “unconscious” of the individual at the end of the 19th century. I will return later to how this threatens to circumvent the framework of the larger external “world” that surrounds the empirical human.

Returning to the image, the right side of the circle is labeled “time” based on Heidegger’s concept of “transcendence,” precisely the fundamental temporality of being-in-the-world, or *dasein*. The left side of the circle is labeled “space,” meaning

³⁵ Kushita Jun’ichi, *The Question of Heidegger and Living Beings*, Hōsei daigaku shuppan, 2011, p. 41. Emphasis mine.

the limits of the physical “world” which are established by a “horizon” that exists at the limit of the expanse of consciousness. That is, the vector (or outline) of the world-form includes phase transitions between the subjective (*entwurf*, or projection) and the objective (*geworfenheit*, or thrownness). Objective reality is not given off by the “world” but, rather, the “world” is simultaneously subjective and objective. For the sake of convenience, this image draws a solid line to represent the outline of the “world”—that is, that which encompasses the sphere of the empirical human within transcendental theory, sensibility and intellect—as a function of “reason.” Things external to this circle do not exist. The “thing-in-itself” is not the object of consciousness. That which we would call the “phenomena” which constitutes the “world”—or rather a framework of subjectivity that we persist in emphasizing as “world”—is “extant” only in those elements that we would call “representations” internal to the “world.” However, “things that actually exist” are only such insofar as they belong to the “world view.” That which exists outside of the human within this world view is the “natural.” These are the objective “objects” of study in modern scholarship.

Perhaps some readers have already noticed something. Fig. 1 also depicts the mechanism of a narrator in novels. The human who appears as an object within the phenomenon of the “world” is divided into mind and body, or interiority and exteriority. This occasionally includes past versions of the narrator who appears as a character. However, we can say that an anthropocentric structure guarantees a transcendental subjectivity (equivalent to the “world”) that integrates both within the narrator. This is founded on transcendentalism, rather than simply taking reality as an objective object. This mechanism focuses on a single person (that is, the main character), even in cases where the novel could provisionally be called a third-person novel. We find this to be true whether the novel takes a perspective that is strictly limited to the interiority of a single character from beginning to end, or if it stays close to the interiority of the main character while occasionally peering inside of the interiority of additional characters that the main character meets. Either case forms the mechanism of narrative within the modern novel. It is theoretically possible that a narrative could depict the interiority of multiple characters with perfect equality, a novel produced independent of the transcendental

form. Many novels have been written with a conscious deployment of that kind of method. Yet the majority of these texts produce some difference in the level at which these many characters are viewed. This leads, in turn, to one character being established as center. Pre-modern tales take on a narrative form via a collection of oral tales that are linked through multiple narrators. Events are depicted indirectly, giving the impression that the contents of the story are being reproduced imaginatively. As a remnant of this structure, we often find that not only in pre-modern narratives but also in early Western modern novels, the ultimate-level narrator and the characters within the story do not share the same time or place; they are fundamentally separated. This separation is not merely spatial or temporal. Rather, the narrator holds a position almost external to the past “world,” embodying an entity that comprehends the story in its final form. Thus, another type emerges—common in early modern novels—where the narrative unfolds without any indication of being “hearsay,” and the externality of the narrator transforms into transcendence. This narrator, representing an omniscient entity akin to the creator (God) of the story world, reveals the story (wherein the characters gradually come to understand the larger story of the world as they are collected as pieces on its board, eventually converging within it). In either case, the reader is presented with the monophonic voice of a narrator who grasps everything from a fixed, transcendental perspective. (Even the emotions of the characters appear indirectly through the narrator’s voice, rather than through their own voices).

By contrast, the dominant depiction of narratives in the modern novel give the strong impression that a single, albeit transparent, (fundamental) subject is observing the object of the narrative (and of course also the interiority of the object) at the very place of the story. We sense the narrator to be similar to a transparent camera situated within the same time-space as the subjects of depiction, capturing scenes and characters (frequently switching to the subjective view from the perspective of the characters themselves). Pre-modern narratives, by way of a simplified, empirical contrast, possess a plot that can be grasped by listening even when character’s clothing or gestures are described in elaborate detail—setting aside any grammatical difficulties posed by classical language, of

course. This is because the tone of narration remains consistent. Conversely, modern novels, which prioritize detailed description, are not designed for comprehension through listening; rather, they are meant to be read, piecing together images as one goes along. Fully absorbing the intricate descriptions that extend beyond character and action to include environmental details risks overloading the brain's short-term memory and imaginative capacity, leading one to lose track of the storyline. Essentially, modern novels place the viewpoint within the text's spatial framework, creating depth of realism through the interplay between a limited, immersive perspective (immersion in the experiential world) and an overarching view provided by a transcendental narrator (analogous to a film director's eye). The argument that the formation of private space coincides with the birth of the novel in modern society does not merely signify the discovery of a new, private realm of human life for depiction. Rather, this private space, secluded from others' gaze, simultaneously became an object of voyeuristic desire from above. It is upon this duality that the very structure of the novel was founded.

It would not be an exaggeration to say the "age of the novel" reached its zenith with the arrival of the 19th century novel based on realism. These novels were formed through the kind of transcendental narrator who looks down upon the "world" from above. This has been called "God's perspective," though that is not actually correct. After all, the "world" is vaguely limited to the realm of human subjectivity wherein the transcendental can be experienced. Unlike the cosmological "world" that has existed since the age of ancient philosophy, this "world" has been significantly scaled down to the space of humanity's social communality. If modern novels maintain a literal "God's perspective" which does not pass through human subjectivity and is founded completely on the modernist depiction of materiality, they are likely to take the form of experimental novels. Many works by the contemporary author Aoki Junjo are examples of this, as they possess no novel form. Alternatively, novels that avoid this perspective become like Ueda Takahiro's early science fiction, which depict a cosmic environment that exists beyond human knowledge.

Note

This paper is a translated and modified version of the first half of Chapter 2 from *Sekai bungaku-ron josetsu: Nihon kindai no bungaku-teki henyo* [An Introduction to “World” Literature: Literary Transformations in Modern and Contemporary Japan] by Shū Sakaguchi, published by Shōraisha in 2025. The second half of this paper is scheduled to be published in the next issue.

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