Globalization, Transculturalism, and the Contemporary Japanese Novel: The Case of Minae Mizumura’s Honkaku Shôsetsu

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I. Globalization, Transculturalism, and Cultural Hybridity

While the last two decades may be regarded as a period of accelerated globalization, which has brought the topic to the fore in the scholarship of many fields, including political science, economics, sociology, literature, and cultural studies, it is often pointed out that globalization can or should be understood in its long durée, from 1500 onward. Throughout the nineteenth century, colonialism certainly constituted a major manifestation of globalization. While Japan never came under a colonial power, the key dates that mark its relation to the West are 1868, the end of the Tokugawa shōgunate and the beginning of the Meiji period, and 1945, which marks the beginning of the U.S. occupation after World War II. The pressing question concerning the relationship between globalization and culture appears to be whether globalization imposes a cultural homogeneity, a “McDonaldization,” or whether it encourages the affirmation of what is native, indigenous, a “glocalization.”

Minae Mizumura’s Honkaku Shōsetsu appears to insist upon the latter, when “Minae,” the narrator and the author’s alter-ego, affirms her attachment to Japanese culture during the period of accelerated globalization when the U.S. capitalist economy and its cultural exports reigned supreme. The predominant critique of globalization, that it creates a bland homogeneity or uniformity of culture, is decidedly refuted, for her life in the U.S. paradoxically creates in Minae a nostalgia for Japan and what is distinctively Japanese. Yet Mizumura’s own earlier, bilingual work—Shūshōsetsu, Left to Right—suggests that Japanese literature must now be reconceived in a global context. In fact, the modern Japanese novel was “always already” Western, not only because the form of the novel was imported from the West, but because its greatest practitioners, Sōseki Natsume and Jun’ichirō Tanizaki, dealt explicitly with the
question of Japan’s relation to the West. Sōseki and Mizumura share the experience of having lived and studied in the West; Sōseki studied in London and became a professor of English literature at Tokyo Imperial University. Mizumura has herself commented on the contradiction in Cebijinsū (Red poppy) between Sōseki’s explicitly renouncing the “feminized” West in favor of “masculine” Chinese rhetoric and literary forms, while giving voice to and expressing fascination with the “unruly woman” whom he destroys as an allegorical representation of the West (“Resisting”). Mizumura decisively diverges from Sōseki in valuing the novel form as one that is inclusive of both men and women; she characterizes Meian (Light and darkness), his unfinished novel which she completed, as coming closest to this ideology of form. The literary career of Tanizaki—whose presence in Honkaku Shōsetsu is felt in the Saegusa sisters who evoke the Makioka sisters in Sasameyuki—shifted between internationalist and nativist concerns, thus anticipating the doubleness of Mizumura’s focus and output. Sasameyuki has been described as a rewriting of “Japan in European cosmopolitan form via Flaubertian realism” (Buell, 61). Honkaku Shōsetsu shares that ambition; yet by explicitly focusing on post-World War II Japan’s relation to the U.S. and by explicitly acknowledging her literary indebtedness to the Victorian novel exemplified by Wuthering Heights (as well as more obliquely referring to The Great Gatsby in Tarō’s acquisition of a palatial estate on Long Island), Mizumura indicates that “Japanese literature” can no longer afford to be “pure”—purely Japanese or exclusively focused on the self, as understood by the term junbunwaku, or “pure literature.” Mizumura indicates through Honkaku Shōsetsu that cultural hybridity is at the heart of Japanese culture and identity in post-World War II Japan, and that only a hybrid literary form can do justice to their representation.

In the preface to the novel, Mizumura discusses her professional identity as “author”—by considering the way she labels herself in everyday life: on “embarkation and disembarkation cards, video rental cards, applications for credit cards” (I:5). These constitute not only the documentary manifestations of life in late twentieth-century Japan, but also the textual signifiers of those belonging to the cultural elite of any country. Minae’s membership in this global cultural elite is also signalled in her visiting appointment teaching Japanese literature at Stanford; ironically she became absorbed in Japanese literature and the Japanese language as a result of her alienation from American culture during her earlier sojourn in New York. Through this “coming
of age" in the U.S., Minae finds her calling as a novelist and the origins of her expertise in Japanese literature as well as the fluency in English that would lead to such visiting appointments.

Minae, the narrator of the portion of Honkaku Shōsetsu that constitutes a shishōsetsu (an autobiographical novel), the 165-page section titled "The Long Story before Honkaku Shōsetsu Begins," comes to the U.S. with her father, an employee of a Japanese company. The life that she describes growing up on Long Island is a typical result of Japan's aggressive entry into overseas markets during the 1960s. There she meets Tarō Azuma, a chauffeur employed by an American executive, who proves to be the protagonist of "Honkaku Shōsetsu." The gulf between the upper-middle-class Minae and the migrant worker Tarō reproduces the insuperable class difference between Tarō and Yōko, recounted in "Honkaku Shōsetsu." Leaving Japan for the U.S. enables Tarō to advance, through his extraordinary talent and effort, leaving behind his menial life as a chauffeur eventually to become a spectacularly successful salesman of medical devices (who drives a Mercedes and lives in a luxury condominium). With the fortune he has amassed, he ultimately forms a partnership to invest in the development of such devices. The final chance meeting between Minae and Tarō in a Manhattan sushi restaurant is marked by a reversal in their relative social positions: Minae finds herself feeling awkward and embarrassed in encountering the obviously successful and wealthy Tarō, who picks up the bill for Minae and her sister.

From Yōsuke, a young man who worked for her publisher, and who seeks her out in Palo Alto, Minae learns the story of Tarō's disadvantaged childhood and adolescence before his arrival in the U.S., in particular his mixed Chinese parentage—which signifies a problematic hybridity in the Japan that prizes purity and has insistently upon its superiority to other Asian nations. Through Tarō's parentage the novel makes reference to Japan's twentieth-century history of colonialism in Asia. Yōsuke goes on to recount the now spectacularly wealthy Tarō's return to Japan, in order to seek Japanese investors for his capital ventures. He vindicates his humiliating childhood most notably by purchasing—under cover of an assumed identity as a Dutch investor—the prized property in Karuizawa of Yōko's declining and now insolvent family.

It is from this perspective of an "outsider," who has at first been rejected as "homeless" by Japanese society, but who eventually returns, successful on Japan's own
terms, that Tarō assesses with authority late twentieth-century Japan.

“I never thought Japan would become like this.”

He spoke without emotion.

“I never thought it would become so affluent. . . . But I thought it would become more decent than this . . . I grew up hating Japan, so it’s not that I wanted Japan to become better. But I thought it certainly would be in the past fifty years. It must have been the times—believing in progress without even thinking about it.”

He then turned to Yōsuke and told him that he was apparently of half-Chinese blood. “When I was a child, someone told me that I was better off not being Japanese.”

Tarō explained that he was grateful for the encouragement from the man, among so many who discriminated against him, and did not think much more about it; but recently he had been reflecting on the true meaning of that statement. “I’ve recently been thinking that I’m really glad that I’m not Japanese—at least not one hundred per cent Japanese—I’ve begun to think that, on the level of genetics. . . [Japan is] shallow. . . with no weight of existence—like the bubbles in a champagne glass. . . the three old ladies were at least not shallow.”

(II:400-2)

Yōsuke, though only twenty-six, agrees with this judgment and feels that Tarō has articulated something about Japan of which he was “vaguely aware” (II:402). Mizumura’s account of the post-war years indicates that she also is skeptical about the idea of progress and critical of the path that Japan has followed since World War II. Through this engagement with history, Honkaku Shōsetsu can be characterized as making a postmodern departure from modernism, which decidedly broke from—at times even effaced—the past. Indeed, the novel insists upon the historical context of the events it recounts. Mizumura herself has stated: “Only novels can fulfill the function of history” (Tegami 62). For in Honkaku Shōsetsu Mizumura’s subject is the national identity of post-World War II Japan as well as the lives of the Japanese who have been transformed by the effects of different forms of globalization, past and present, from the post-War U.S. occupation and importation of American culture to
Japan's entry into the global market and the migration of Japanese through various avenues to the U.S. According to Mizumura, moreover, the pre-War past continues to have a pressing and abiding importance for contemporary Japan.

In the last sentence of the novel proper (which is followed by the Afterword), Yūsuke departs for the U.S., having won the Immigration and Naturalization Service lottery. Yūsuke thereby implicitly follows the footsteps of Tarō, whom he admires, though under very different historical circumstances and at a very different point in the history of relations between Japan and the U.S. His entry into the U.S. will also be affected by his class affiliation—unlike Tarō, he is university-educated and vacations in Karuizawa with a friend—though ironically, he will probably not experience the kind of spectacular success that Tarō achieved.

Minae, Tarō, and Yūsuke thus exemplify Japan's relation with the U.S. in the last four decades of accelerated globalization. Homi Bhabha's influential notion of cultural hybridity as the product of postcolonialism can be usefully extended to the transnational culture of post-World War II and contemporary Japan, which was never actually colonized but experienced the notable effects of globalization in the second half of the twentieth century. The disruption of hierarchy between and among cultures and the consequent levelling that Bhabha describes is evidenced in Honkaku Shōsetsu, not only in its melding of Japanese and Western literary traditions (shishōsetsu and the Victorian novel, specifically Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights, which Mizumura invokes as a predecessor), but also in the authority wielded by those characters, notably Tarō and Minae—and even Yūsuke as the narrator of "Honkaku Shōsetsu"—whose subject positions are marked by cultural hybridity.

II. Honkaku Shōsetsu and the Victorian Novel

In Tegami, Shiori o Soete (A Letter, with a Bookmark Enclosed), her 1998 epistolary exchange of essays with novelist Tsuji Kunio, Mizumura writes: "Literature is fundamentally nothing other than a dialogue with prior texts" (21). In this collection, she includes a number of essays on the Victorian novel, including two on Wuthering Heights, which in Honkaku Shōsetsu she explicitly invokes as a literary model. Here she praises Wuthering Heights for its otherworldly transcendence, mediated to the reader by Nelly Dean, who comprehends only the visible world. Mizumura contrasts the absence of recognition and consignment to obscurity that
Brontë experienced during her lifetime with her later canonization. Although Mizumura has enjoyed critical acclaim throughout her career, she clearly sympathizes with Brontë as a fellow writer who “must write in the absence of such recognition and without any certain knowledge that such reception will come,” because canon formation is an “accident of history” and there is no guarantee that a masterpiece will be recognized as such (84).

One way in which Honkaku Shōsetsu rewrites Wuthering Heights is by filling in the gaps and silences of the antecedent novel. Heathcliff’s origins are never revealed: described as “dark almost as if it came from the devil,” he is brought from Liverpool, a port, hinting at the possibility that he has come from abroad (77, 91). Moreover, his destination and the particulars of his life after running away from Wuthering Heights remain obscure, so that the means by which he acquired his wealth and refinement is never made clear (though America is one of the possibilities mentioned). Mizumura turns Wuthering Heights inside out, as it were, by beginning her novel with an account of Taro’s Horatio Alger-like success story in New York; moreover, unlike Brontë, Mizumura also makes clear Taro’s mixed Chinese-Japanese parentage. The mystery of Heathcliff’s parentage and activities is displaced onto the opacity of Taro, from the point of view of Mine, who seeks to “decipher” him as a compelling “stranger” from another class; his indecipherability anticipates that of Fumiko in the “Honkaku Shōsetsu” to follow.

Honkaku Shōsetsu significantly diverges from Wuthering Heights in the centrality of the figure of Fumiko, who does not remain a mere narrator, but becomes an important protagonist in her own right. In the 1850 Preface to Wuthering Heights, Brontë characterizes Nelly Dean as “a specimen of true benevolence and homely fidelity” (39), though hinting at her intelligence and perhaps even her ambition for self-improvement in the statement that she has read all the books in the library (101). Fumiko exhibits these same traits ascribed to Nelly. Fuyue, identifying herself more as a friend than as an employer, describes her as “extraordinarily intelligent, not only serious and dedicated, but also possessing a dignified character” and compares her favorably to her older sisters, of whom she admits being ashamed (II:386). Yet Fumiko’s fate surpasses Nelly’s when, at the end of the novel, she apparently learns in the presence of her former employers that after contracting the sale under the cover of a Dutch holding company, Taro had deeded the Karuizawa estates, formerly

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belonging to her employers, to her (II:370-72). This disposition of property markedly departs from *Wuthering Heights*, where Heathcliff acquired both Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights; the property is eventually restored to "the lawful master" and "ancient stock" (365) after Heathcliff's death.

Although Fumiko is apparently astonished by the news, there remains the possibility that she may in fact be performing this astonishment to deflect the anger of her former employers, whom the deed will displace. The opacity of Fumiko becomes even more pronounced when those around her attempt to decipher the nature of the relationship between Fumiko and Tarō. Initially, it is assumed that Tarō's act is motivated by his sense of gratitude toward Fumiko, but the picture becomes murkier when Fuyue reveals to Yūsuke that she had learned many years ago that Tarō and Fumiko were involved in a passionate sexual relationship when they were sharing an apartment (as brother and sister, according to Fumiko's own account to Yūsuke). This surprising and "shocking" disclosure indicates that Fumiko had displaced Yoko as Tarō's lover; moreover, Fumiko comes to the fore as the object of interest and fascination for the reader. Even with this disclosure, however, the nature of their relationship is never clarified beyond the crude and gossipy report by a neighbor (characterizing Fumiko as having "dragged in" a younger man [II:387]), and Fuyue's empathetic speculation that she had fallen in love with Tarō and that Tarō continued to feel duty-bound to her. Fumiko thus emerges as a central, if enigmatic figure in this novel—Yūsuke says of his final meeting with Fumiko: "Nothing could be gleaned from Fumiko's expression as she saw him off, standing at the open sliding glass door (II:375)—whom self-representation as a devoted and selfless servant is certainly at odds with the account of a sexual woman who acts upon her desires. Fuyue, who even wonders if Fumiko had other lovers besides Tarō, confesses to envying Fumiko—clearly not only because she is now the proprietor of lands formerly belonging to Fuyue's family, but because Fumiko possesses impressive energy and vitality that Fumiko feels that members of her family lack. Fuyue's admission of envying Fumiko recalls Minae's feeling of awkwardness in encountering the obviously successful and wealthy Tarō. Both moments represent decisive reversals in what appeared to be clearly defined hierarchical relationships between the social superior and the subaltern.

Enacting a similar reversal on the level of narrative, the primary focus of the
novel, then, shifts from Tarô and Yôko's romantic and adolescent relationship, which nevertheless haunts Tarô, to Tarô and Fumiko's complex relationship encompassing sibling affection, a sexual liaison, and subaltern equivalences. Mizumura thus rearticulates *Wuthering Heights* by declining to dwell exclusively on the doomed love between Tarô and Yôko, and instead focusing her attention on Fumiko—who rises from a servant to a professional woman and business partner, and finally an owner of substantial real estate—as the true heroine of her "Honkaku Shôsetsu" of late twentieth-century Japan. In an essay praising Jane Eyre's "exalted will to freedom," Mizumura had described Jane as the first "plain female protagonist" of romance, and Charlotte Brontë's novel as at once based upon and critiquing the Cinderella story. Mizumura in fact may be rewriting Jane in the character of Fumiko, for both are competent women who are compelled to work for wages, but who in the end achieve notable social mobility.¹¹ Mizumura admires in Jane ethical characteristics—*bitoku* (high-minded virtue) and a strong "will for freedom"—and praises the novel by posing the rhetorical question, "what could be more edifying and hopeful for us women readers?" (*Tegani* 61). Yet in *Honkaku Shôsetsu*, Mizumura turns away from the idealism verging on fantasy of *Jane Eyre* to render Fumiko as more ordinary, and hence more "human," but nevertheless unable to be completely comprehended. She thereby takes Brontë's critique of the Cinderella story even further by rewriting the prince's love of Cinderella for her beauty and Rochester's love of Jane for her virtue to make Tarô's relationship with Fumiko a complex and multifaceted one that defies simple categorization. In the character of Fumiko, then, Mizumura successfully challenges and rearticulates the "realism" of, as well as the compulsory focus on love and marriage in, the Victorian novel.¹²

III. *Postcolonialism, Globalization, and the Subaltern — Honkaku Shôsetsu and Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea—*

In explicitly invoking *Wuthering Heights* as well as in its implicit rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, *Honkaku Shôsetsu* bears equally significant comparison to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which fills in the gaps and silences of *Jane Eyre*. Both are ambitious attempts to update important Victorian novels written by women. Beyond this shared interest in claiming the mantle of a literary tradition, both novels engage explicitly with the historical context of modernity: in Rhys's case, the colonial situation of the

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female subject, Antoinette, "renamed" by her husband and named in Jane Eyre as Bertha Mason; in Mizumura’s case, Japan’s aggressive entry into a world economy that brings both Minae and Tarō to New York, as well as the post-war disruption of a strictly class-based social order that enables the subalterns Tarō and Fumiko to rise above their “betters.” The parallel (dis)location of the two authors—Rhys was born and grew up in Dominica, but lived much of her life in England, where she wrote Wide Sargasso Sea, and Mizumura spent her formative years in the U.S. and has returned to teach there—exemplify Homi Bhabha’s theory concerning multiple or hybrid cultural identities inflected by gender.

In Culture and Imperialism, Edward Said treated Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park as “a novel based in an England relying for the maintenance of its style on a Caribbean island” (36). Said demonstrates that the apparently incidental references to Antigua are absolutely crucial to the action of the novel, for Sir Thomas’s wealth is based upon the sugar plantations sustained by slave labor. One of the most celebrated classics of Caribbean postcolonial literature, Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea, a rewriting of Jane Eyre from the colonial margins, makes evident that even though Charlotte Brontë wrote from a subaltern gendered perspective, she still wrote from the center of the British Empire, while only fleetingly acknowledging the equivalences between the “madwoman in the attic” and Jane (most notably through the scene in which Bertha tears Jane’s wedding veil, thereby forestalling Rochester’s bigamous marriage to Jane). Rhys challenges the British writer’s muted and vexed representation of the colonized by imagining “Bertha”’s existence in Jamaica—as “Antoinette”—before she is taken to England by Rochester, where she eventually comes to spend her days imprisoned in the attic. Rhys makes explicit what Said has called attention to as the ghostly—but never entirely effaceable—nature of the colonial presence in “British Literature.”

Just as gender is superimposed on the register of postcolonial or transnational relations, so class constitutes another important register in both novels. In Jane Eyre, the liminal status of the governess—as one of the few respectable employments for impoverished women—corresponds to the ambiguous status of Antoinette in Wide Sargasso Sea: Antoinette seeks to maintain her sense of entitlement as a white Creole over the black natives, but Rhys emphasizes her inescapable subaltern status: the “negroes” taunt her, a member of a faded family of former slaveholders, as “white
cockroach" and "white nigger" (13, 14); and from the perspective of her husband who seeks to subjugate her, she is assimilated to the colonized culture. Both novels accord centrality to the ambiguous and ambivalent figure of the female servant: in Rhys, Christophine, the maternal servant who in her practice of obeah embodies African religious traditions and resistance to colonial oppression, and the servant Amélie who displaces Antoinette in her husband's bed; in Mizumura's novel, Fumiko, who combines the roles of Christophine and Amélie, the maternal servant and sexual rival.

Much of the power of both Wide Sargasso Sea and Honkaku Shōsetsu derives from the authors' vivid imaginings of and their complex affinities and empathies with the subaltern: Antoinette's situation captures Rhys's experience of the Caribbean—both share an intense appreciation for its natural beauty and affection for its culture coexisting with alienation from it, because of their liminal positions. Antoinette's ambiguous status in terms of class and race reflects Rhys's as a daughter of a British man and a Creole woman, as well as her divided allegiances to Caribbean and African culture through her mother, and to British culture through her father and through her immersion in its literary tradition. Not only is Jane Eyre a prominent subtext, but Rhys refers to other works of English literature such as Shakespeare's Macbeth and Scott's Ivanhoe. Despite her aversion to England, Rhys spent most of her life there, participating in its literary culture. Mizumura's account of her intense longing for Japan as she grows up in New York recalls Rhys's evocative, tactile, and even sensuous nostalgia, associated with the early years as well as the earlier history of Japan's westernization. This intense longing expresses itself in Minae's immersion in Japanese literature, for example Takeo Arishima's Aru Onna (A Certain Woman), and her disdain for Japanese translations of Western classics abridged for "girls" (I: 57). Mizumura's aversion to American culture mirrors Rhys's disaffection from British culture: just as Rhys chooses as her subject the Caribbean, so Mizumura repudiates English to write in Japanese. Yet neither can completely escape or eradicate the colonizing presence of Britain and the U.S. as dominant cultural powers.

The figure of the servant is important in both novels because she embodies the subaltern position, displacing onto class the ambivalent estrangement, at once disabling and enabling, of the authors from their own culture. Both novels empower the subaltern, whose position paradoxically provides opportunities that bring them distinction: by contrast, those who have laid claim to as well as enjoyed the benefits of
property and social standing are in irreversible decline. As Homi Bhabha says, referring to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, "the most individuated are those subjects who are placed at the margins of the social" ("DissemiNation" 302). Yet while Antoinette, imprisoned by her husband in Britain, can only exercise her agency in destruction and self-destruction, Tarō and Fumiko become the heirs of post-war Japanese society, and it is their narratives, along with that of Minae's coming of age as a novelist between cultures, that predominate over that of the once glamorous but now faded aristocratic sisters and their descendants. In fact, it is precisely their liminal, subaltern position that enables these characters to distinguish themselves in the brave new world of late twentieth-century Japan.

IV. *Honkaku Shōsetsu* and the Contemporary Japanese Novel
— Toward a "World Literature" —

It has long been a truism concerning Japanese society that belonging is prized, indeed, taken for granted; yet to belong is also to be invisible. Thus the dislocation of Minae and the subaltern status shared by Tarō and Fumiko make them at once marginal and central. Mizumura's literary tour de force seems very different from the decidedly anti-literary, gritty, and at times sensationalistic realism of Natsuo Kirino's *OUT* (1997), but both novels focus on the crucial and compelling role of the outsider in contemporary Japan: in Kirino's case, the protagonist Masako, who has devolved from a white collar worker in a financial institution to a night-shift worker in a *bento* factory and from a wife and mother of a middle-class household to a dismemberer of corpses for hire; and her counterpart Satake, the owner of a night club, haunted by the sexual murder of a woman committed when he was a member of the *yakuza*. Kirino's novel also bears comparison to Mizumura in the interest they both share in the consequences of globalization. While Mizumura's point of reference centers on the U.S., Kirino's transnational references are third-world: Satake's night club is staffed by Chinese workers, Masako is wooed by a Brazilian worker, the son of a Japanese immigrant to Brazil earlier in the century. Kirino's project of writing a novel about the experience of Japanese migrants to Manchuria indicates another intersection with Mizumura's work, in calling to the fore Japan's vexed past as a colonizing empire in Asia.

In addition to Kirino, Mizumura in *Honkaku Shōsetsu* joins other writers of her
generation in looking beyond the self, the focus of shishōsetsu, the autobiographical novel considered to constitute junbunbukku, the purest form of Japanese literature. Rather, Mizumura and her contemporaries take as their subject the history of modern Japan's relation to other nations and cultures. For example, Toshihiko Yahagi's Ajapan (2002), praised by Kazuya Fukuda as “a representative work of contemporary Japan” (777), follows the counterfactual history of Philip K. Dick's The Man in the High Castle to imagine a Japan that is divided after World War II along an East-West border between Russian communism and U.S. capitalism; this Japan is seen through theeyes of an African-American CNN reporter. A former film director and a prominent author of animé, Yahagi’s recent La La Kagaku no Ko (Technology’s Child) (2004), taking its title from the well-known theme song of Tetsuwan Atomu (Astroboy), sees contemporary Japan through the eyes of a former student activist (during the 1960s Ampo protests against Japan’s acceptance of U.S. military bases), who secretly returns to Japan after having lived in China for thirty years. The protagonist of Massahiko Shimada’s trilogy Mogen Kanon (The Infinite Canon) (2000-2003) traces his ancestry to Madame Butterfly and Pinkerton; though predominantly a love story, this trilogy, like Mizumura’s Honkaku Shōsetsu, considers the relationship between love and the history of modern Japan’s relation to other nations, in this case not only the U.S. but also Russia. As Mizumura has pointed out, “love” has functioned in the history of Japanese literature as the sign of the prerogative of the West (“Resisting,” 30-31). The hybrid ancestry of Shimada’s protagonist is mirrored in the hybridity of the literary influences it exhibits; the first volume has as epigraphs passages from Wuthering Heights and Yukio Mishima’s Hara no Yuki (Spring Snow), the first volume of the tetralogy, Hōjō no Umi (Sea of Fertility); the second a passage from the Iliad; and the third a passage from Machiavelli’s The Prince.

In “On National Culture,” Frantz Fanon stated: “It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the source of all culture” (248). Mizumura’s Honkaku Shōsetsu, along with these works of her contemporaries, demonstrates that Japanese literature of the early twenty-first century exemplifies Fanon’s insight. Moreover, they bear out Marx’s prescient pronouncement concerning the rise of capitalism, the advent of globalization, and the concomitant production of “world literature”:
The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world-market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country... In place of old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature (476-77).

Marx is characteristically ambivalent concerning globalization and its effects, but unambiguously affirmative concerning the shift from parochialism to universality in the production of “world literature.” Throughout its history, Japanese literature largely remained distinct and separate from Western literature, even in the twentieth century—as exemplified by the novels of Nobel laureate Yasunari Kawabata. Yet, as the cultural consequence of accelerated globalization in post-World War II Japan, the work of Mizumura and her contemporaries in their distinctive transculturalism can be characterized as joining the ranks of “world literature.” As Said suggested in Culture and Imperialism, we need to rethink the critical practice of focusing on temporality as constituting the novel’s plot and structure in the wake of Lukács and Proust, and turn our attention to “space, geography, and location” (84). These contemporary Japanese novels articulate, to borrow Lawrence Buell’s formulation, a “global civil culture” or “postnational imaginary” that “foregrounds, rather than suppresses cultural and historical differences” (242). Because Japan was not actually colonized (though the post-War occupation by the U.S. and its aftermath can be considered an oblique manifestation of the colonial), these Japanese writers, unlike the Anglophone Salman Rushdie and Francophone Maryse Condé, do not write in a more readily accessible and hence more “universal” language of the dominant colonial powers; in a lecture delivered in 1999 at the Maison de la Culture du Japon in Paris, Mizumura reflected upon the predicament of a novelist writing in Japanese, especially her inability to reach a wider Francophone or Anglophone audience by doing so. (“La littérature”). Yet Honkaku Shōsetsu is scheduled to be translated into French and published by the prestigious...
imprint of Editions du Seuil (as well as into English, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean), and Kirino’s OUT has not only been translated into English, German, and Italian, but was nominated for the Edgar Award of the Mystery Writers of America. Such developments indicate the wider readership beyond Japan that these works are beginning to reach, and hold the promise that they and their authors will soon be included in the newly evolving canon of contemporary “world” literature.

Notes

1. Recent examples of scholarship on globalization and its effects on culture are legion. See, especially, Robertson, Buell, King, Jameson and Miyoshi, Pieterse, and Denning. On globalization and Japanese culture, see Nemoto, especially the contributions by Kató and Morin. Kató distinguishes between Japan’s turn to the West in 1868 whereby Japan embraced and chose among various European influences and the 1945 occupation by the U.S. as a semi-colonial overlord. Morin makes the point that Europeanization paradoxically entailed the ideology of liberation from the West and resistance to colonialism. They note that the expansion of world markets and the globalization of the economy has brought about a cosmopolitan culture (Kató) and transculturalism, métissage and symbiose (Morin).

2. Looser and Tachibana discuss Mizumura’s Shishōsetsu: From Left to Right in the context of globalization.

3. Buell further goes on to comment: “that globally disseminated literary forms and influences are used, usually covertly, in the evocation or recreation of endangered traditions and cultures, and that literary production of this sort is not locally determined, but part of the ongoing development of geopolitical and geocultural relationships, is not usually so well attended to or its implications forthrightly faced” (62).

4. Translations from the Japanese from this and other texts are mine.

5. On Honkaku Shōsetsu as illuminating “the intersection of the personal with the broad sweep of history,” see Sheriff, 120.

6. On Bhabha’s influential coupling of postcolonialism with hybridity, see Location. On globalization and hybridity, see Pieterse, chapters 4 and 5.

7. Nelly Dean says to Heathcliff the child, “You’re fit for a prince in disguise. Who knows, but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week’s income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together?” (96).

8. See Robbins on servants as narrators (92) and the “sense of dangerous, misplaced worldly power” that the servant’s narrative role evokes (102-3).

9. Robbins’s discussion of servants’ sexuality centers on the relationships between masters and servants and the “erotic transgression of class” that such relationships entail (201).

10. Jameson characterizes the function of Heathcliff as “the locus of history in this romance: his mysterious fortune marks him as a protocapitalist, in some other place, absent from the narrative, which then recodes the new economic energies as sexual passion” (Political 128). In these two moments of reversal, Mizumura exemplifies the economic and
sexual energies in Tarô and Funiko.

11. Robbins points out that Jane is identified with servants and that her reunion with Rochester at the end of the novel involves her playing the role of a servant (191).

12. Another nineteenth-century novel that Mizumura may be rearticulating here is Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, where the orphaned and plain but morally steadfast Fanny Price inherits the property of her more prominent relatives through marrying her cousin.

13. Said argues for the importance of “the global perspective implied by Jane Austen and her characters” (95), taking as his point of departure Raymond Williams’s statement in *The Country and the City*, that “at least from the mid-nineteenth century, and with important instances earlier, there was this larger context [the relationship between England and the colonies, whose effects on the English imagination “have gone deeper than can easily be traced”] within which every idea and every image was consciously and unconsciously affected” (82).

14. In *Smile Please*, Rhys gives a detailed catalogue of the books she read: “Milton, Byron, then Crabbe, Cowper, Mrs. Hemans, also Robinson Crusoe, Treasure Island, Gulliver’s Travels, Pilgrims Progress” (27).

15. For a recent account of the distinctive Japanese genre of *shishōsetsu*, see T. Suzuki.

16. Layoun treats modern and contemporary novels in Greek, Arabic, and Japanese, finding a shift in concern from the national to the international (146). The later, contemporary novels make explicit what was implicit in the earlier examples of the form: “the construction of words and worlds that are other to, different than, but not separate from, the ‘West’” (258). The examples she discusses from Japan are novels by Sōseki and Ô Kenzaburô.

17. See his chapter 12, “Postmodernism and Globalization.”

18. See Mignolo for a discussion of the “hegemonic power of colonial languages in the domain of knowledge, intellectual production, and the cultures of scholarship” and the “uncoupling of the ‘natural’ link between languages and nations... and languages and national literature” (41-42). Mignolo, however, affirms the possibility of “the denial of the denial of coevalness” as a strategy for the “relocation of languages and cultures” in order to create “the conditions for the emergence of an epistemological potential... at the multiple intersections and interstices of the ‘West and the rest’” (51).

19. The translations will be published by Adriana Hidalgo Editora (Argentina), Other Press (U.S.), Titan Publishing (Taiwan), and Munhakdongne (Korea).

20. The novels of Hideki Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto have largely represented contemporary Japanese literature to the English-speaking, more specifically U.S., audience. Yet Mizumura (especially in *Honkaku Shōsetsu*) and the writers I discuss here differ from Murakami and Yoshimoto in their substantial and serious imaginative engagement with history. In this respect, their concerns and focus intersect with those writers who examine the history of the postcolonial nation state, the most prominent of whom may be Salmon Rushdie.

References


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Globalization, Transculturalism, and the Contemporary Japanese Novel
—The Case of Minae Mizumura’s *Honkaku Shōsetsu*—

Mihoko Suzuki

The subject of Minae Mizumura’s *Honkaku Shōsetsu* is the national identity of post-World War Japan as well as the lives of Japanese who have been transformed by the effects of globalization. The author’s alter-ego “Minae,” who spends her formative years in the U.S., and the protagonist Tarō, who transforms himself from a chauffeur to a successful entrepreneur in New York, exemplify the effects of Japan’s entry into the global capital market. The novel’s transnationalism is also evidenced in its explicit invoking of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, whose love story between Heathcliff and Cathy serves as a template for that between Tarō and Yōko. Mizumura further engages the authoritative form of the Victorian novel in implicitly rewriting Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* through the character of Fumiko, the servant who emerges as a central figure in the course of the novel. *Honkaku Shōsetsu* invites comparison as well to Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which rewrites *Jane Eyre* from a postcolonial Caribbean perspective. Mizumura and Rhys share a dislocation between two cultures and a liminality that exemplify Homi Bhabha’s theory concerning multiple or hybrid cultural identities inflicted by gender; as a consequence, much of the power of both novels derives from the authors’ complex affinities with subaltern subjectivities. Finally, Mizumura’s novel can be understood in the context of the turn in contemporary Japanese literature away from the insularity of *junkinokaku* by writers such as Natsume Kirino, Masahiko Shimada, and Toshihiko Yahagi, whose works similarly exhibit an interest in Japan’s relation to other nations and cultures, and are finding an international audience as examples of the newly evolving canon of “world literature.”