Postwar Japanese Humor: Dark Humor and Laughter After the Little Boy

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Abstract

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This dissertation discusses dark humor in postwar Japanese culture, and examines the ways in which humor was used to assuage or avoid cultural trauma. This study provides a framework for understanding normative postwar Japanese literary and mass-media humor, and clarifies the relationship between conventional and dark humor. By looking at three exemplary works of humor, one conventional, one which embraces the superficial aspects of "dark humor," and one which wholly gives itself over to the chaos of "dark humor" as both a humor-making device and a governing structural principle, this study sheds light on the various humor practices of postwar Japanese written culture.

To show how normative humor helped Japanese readers turn away from postwar trauma, this study closely analyzes the seminal four-panel comic *Sazaesan*. Written by Hasegawa Machiko (1920-1992)– one of Japan's, if not the world's, greatest female cartoonists, *Sazaesan* adroitly depicts the various cultural crises plaguing everyday life in postwar Japan. By

consistently availing herself of inclusive punchlines, Hasegawa's *Sazaesan* manages to depict conflict without engaging in it. Though she may direct readers' attention to some specific cultural problem in the first panel, by the fourth she has turned readers towards universally human and broad punchlines. In this way, Hasegawa helped readers in the midst of their crises without undermining political and social systems which allowed these conditions to occur.

In his "Lessons in Immorality," Mishima Yukio (1925-1970) uses shocking punchlines and controversial anecdotes to advocate for an overturning of the order of things. But while Mishima adopts some of the more obvious methods of dark humor – obscenity, cruel humor, shock, and absurdity, in the end he is unable to leverage humor successfully to argue for his vision of a new Japan built with a novel, Mishima-made morality.

Last, this study reads Nosaka Akiyuki's (1930- 2015) *The Pornographers* as an exemplary work of dark humor. A work which uses humor to undermine contemporary Japanese society, culture, and literature, *The Pornographers* embraces and humorously depicts the chaos of an unmoored world. Ultimately, Nosaka successfully uses humor to depict the impotence of literature to affect change in reality, and presents a uniquely humorous and pessimistic depiction of postwar Japan.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 An Overview of Humor in Postwar Japanese Literature

There was some.

This study is skeptical about the ability of a portion of an introduction to adequately depict the humor "scene" of postwar Japan. That is too broad a frame to allow for precise discussion, and one would have to delve into problematic issues surrounding periodization. One could argue that World War Two is only truly post- for the privileged many who do not live in the shadow of the U.S. military.[1] Furthermore, postwar Japan saw an explosion in most media fronts; a book-length study would be required in order to adequately discuss humor in film, radio, television, literature, manga, and the theatre.

Another reason to forgo a broad discussion of Japanese literary humor here is that it has been done well elsewhere; readers interested in a comprehensive history of Japanese literary humor should seek out Howard Hibbett's *The Chrysanthemum and the Fish*. Hibbet frames his study as an erudite introduction of Japanese humor from the Edo period to the present-day, 2002.[2] While he draws conclusions about the effects of humor and its possible motives, this study is primarily invested in giving Western readers a broad understanding of the various genres

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[1] For writers from occupied spaces such as Okinawa, Yokosuka, and Sasebo, one wonders if there is anything "post" about Japan's "postwar" period. And though their language play is serious - the use of Okinawan dialect in Okinawan literature can be regarded as part of a broader project to restore dignity and agency to a people who have been occupied either by the Japanese empire, or by the US military since the late 1800s – and their stories are often dour, one cannot help but be amused by the novelty, ingenuity, and creativity of Okinawan writers such as Medoruma Shun and Sakiyama Tami. And Sasebo native Murakami Ryū's *Almost Transparent Blue* presents a wildly depraved life near an American base; one wonders if it couldn't be read as a comically vulgar work.
This study uses the term "postwar" to refer to the period starting from the *gyokuon hōsō* on August 15th 1945 in which Emperor Hirohito announced Japan's surrender to the public. And while the present-day still, technically, is the "postwar," this study focuses primarily upon cultural objects pre-dating Mishima Yukio's death on November 25th, 1970.

[2] Hibbett distinguishes himself from "Western analysts of the Japanese pysche" who "have tended to ignore laughter, except for the social sanction of being 'laughed at.'" This study serves as a corrective, and is invaluable for its presentation of the postitive aspects of humor within Japanese society. Howard Hibbett, *Chrysanthemum and the Fish*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 13.

of humor in Japan and some of its common features. Hibbet's extensive cataloging of examples of humor can be read as a correction to a prevailing (Orientalist) trend in Western scholarship: humor in Japanese literature and culture is often described incorrectly as homogenous or nonexistent. Responding to Arthur Koestler's comment in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* that "the humor of the Japanese is astonishingly mild and poetical, like weak, mint-flavoured tea,' Hibbett asserts that "humor in Japan, pungent or poetical, from the seeming stability of the long Tokugawa era down to the unsettling changes of the late twentieth century, has displayed extraordinary variety."[3]

In his introduction and subsequent three chapters on Edo-period humor, Hibbett tracks Japanese humor as the cultural center of Japan moves from the Kansai region to Edo, and as commoners and their (vulgar) culture increasingly become the subject of literature. Turning towards modern literary humor, Hibbett discusses how various forms of humor gained or lost ground in the midst of the Meiji-period's austere cultural environment, and argues that writers like Tsubouchi Shōyō and Natsume Sōseki borrowed techniques from Edo-period *gesaku* to keep humor alive.[4] In his final chapter, "Parody Regained," Hibbett discusses Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Jun'ichirō Tanizaki as two exceptional prewar humorists, before turning toward Inoue Hisahi's prolific post-war career. For Hibbett, postwar Japanese humor across the media spectrum has "regained" the parodic capacities it had during its Edo-period heyday.

Howard Hibbett also co-edited the the six-volume series *Laughter and Creation* (*Warai to sōzō)* with the Japanese Literature and Humor Research Group (*Nihon bungaku to warai*

[3] Howard Hibbett, *Chrysanthemum and the Fish*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 11.
[4] Hibbett summarizes the Modern (ie. post-Edo) tendency towards humorlessness in literature as follows: "Modern Japanese novelists often felt obliged to keep their work "pure," by which they meant purely serious....Those who were especially anxious to avoid being dismissed as mere entertainers began to define their aims in traditional Japaense terms, as a moral obligation to be sincere, a duty to offer a record of their personal experience." Howard Hibbett, *Chrysanthemum and the Fish*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 188.

kenkyūkai). The multi-author anthology brings together essays from an interdisciplinary group of scholars, with volumes one through five focusing on specific themes, and the sixth catch-all volume titled "perfecting the fundamentals."[5] Volume one's theme is to "search for Japan's ideal form through humor research."[6] These essays intend to give confused readers a systematic understanding of the "reality and personality of humor in Japan up to the present day," which will allow them to resist the rise of authoritative state power and take part in a global society as flexible and cooperative actors.[7] Some of the the latter volumes share similarly lofty goals, while some are narrower in focus: their themes are "Preparing for the construction of a new global culture," "Presenting the theory and knowledge needed for forgetting," "Presenting the foundational texts for humor education," and "Creating opportunities for compative literary and cultural humor scholarship."[8] Hibbett opens the first volume of the series with an essay on American and Japanese humor, and then opens subsequent volumes in the series with translations of chapters from *The Chrysanthemum and the Fish*. *Laughter and Creation* is a seminal compilation of Japanese-language humor criticism.

Tsuge Teruhiko's "A Literary History of Humor" ("*Warai no bungakushi*") is an equally broad, albeit more succinct, historical overview of Japanese literary humor than Hibbett's *The Chrysanthemum and the Fish*.[9] Covering Japanese humor's beginnings in the Nara period up to the present, Tsuge's piece is insightful, particularly in its discussion of the need for relaxation (*yoyū*) in order to laugh – one wonders what Tsuge would have to say about contemporary meme

[5] "*Kiso kanseihen*" in *Warai to sōzō*, Howard Hibbett and *Nihon bungaku to warai kenkyūkai*, volume 6 (2008), Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan.
[6] *Warai to sōzō*, Howard Hibbett and *Nihon bungaku to warai kenkyūkai*, volume 1 (1998), Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 1.
[7] Ibid.
[8] *Warai to sōzō*, Howard Hibbett and *Nihon bungaku to warai kenkyūkai*, volume 1 (1998), Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2-3.
[9] Tsuge Teruhiko, "Warai no bungakushi," *Kaien*, vol. 12, no. 5, (1993): 126-132.

culture as youths living in the shadow of impending economic and environmental collapse labor in a meagre gig-economy and try to find humor during rare moments of respite.[10] Tsuge's study is also valuable in that it tracks the development of self-directed (self-deprecating) humor, other-directed humor, and sexual humor in Japanese literature.

Hibbett's and Tsuge's works discuss humor as is has manifested through the long history of Japanese letters, but as both of their studies are literary histories neither devote much ink to the history of humor in Japanese intellectual discourse. Marguerite Wells' *Japanese Humour* fills this gap, giving a thorough history of how humor has been treated as an object of intellectual inquiry in Japan. Wells' work is "a study of the development of ideas about humour in Japan. It shows how Japanese society solved the social problems created by humour."[11] It opens with "The Ethics of Humour," a chapter devoted to clarifying contemporary Western theories of humor to prepare the reader to "understand another's view of humour."[12] She then divides the remainder of her work into three chapters: one on pre-Meiji views of humor, one on Meiji period views of humor, and a final chapter on ideas of humor post-Meiji and a conclusion.

Wells' method is straightforward and effective – she summarizes the seminal works of humor theory from across Japanese history, building towards a conclusion in which she summarizes the "rules" of Japanese humor. While Western countries tended towards expurgation (ie. allowing humor in a diverse array of contexts but expecting it to be expurgated of inappropriate material), Japan has leaned towards "containment by situation and professionalisation" in order to deal with the problem of humor.[13] Wells' chapters on Meiji and

[10] This insight also echoes Bergson's statement that "the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart." Henri Bergson, "Laughter," in *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956, 63-4.
[11] Marguerite Wells, *Japanese Humour*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, 3.
[12] Marguerite Wells, *Japanese Humour*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, 5.
[13] Marguerite Wells, *Japanese Humour*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, 158.

post-Meiji humor theory show how some of the negative views of humor which influenced modern Japanese literature arose from Western and Japanese scholars analyzing Japanese humor through a Western framework. [14]

The English-language scholarship pertinent to the study of Japanese literary humor is not limited to only broad surveys; Jessica Milner Davis' *Understanding Humor in Japan* is a multi-author collection of focused essays on "both literary and nonliterary forms of humor and the particular shapes they take in present-day Japanese culture."[15] The essays focus on many types of humor, from conversational humor to humor in drama, newspapers, poetry, and religion.[16] While *Understanding Humor in Japan* is an excellent resource to English-language scholars of Japanese literary humor, readers interested in a treatment of humor in Japanese (prose) literature will be frustrated to find that there is no chapter on the topic. This brings us to Joel R. Cohn's *Studies in the Comic Sprit in Modern Japanese Fiction*.

Cohn's work is the only English-language scholarly monograph devoted solely to the study of humor in modern Japanese literature, and in it he presents a convincing case that if one

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[14] It is common for Japanese humor critics to devote a great amount of space to simply arguing that Japanese people have a sense of humor to begin with. Some part of this drive to prove the existence of Japanese humor stems from early Euro-centric critiques that Meiji period Japanese society was humorless, and these accusations had lingering effects. As Wells writes of a literary debate in the 1890s:
Here we see an early case of a pattern that was to be repeated over and over again in the following century: of a Japanese author setting out to defend the fair name of Japanese humour. In later times this tended to be a response to the perception (or the supposed perception) of Japan's comic tradition as inferior to that of Europe.
Marguerite Wells, *Japanese Humour*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, 59. For an early and influential comparative analysis of Japanese and Western mirth, see Lafcadio Hearn, "The Japanese Smile," *The Atlantic Monthly* 71, no. 427 (1893): 634-646.
The image of Japan as humorless was also the result of historians' tendencies to ignore humor. Nakagomi Shigeaki gives an excellent overview of how literary historians writing in the Meiji period and subsequent historians of Meiji literature expurgated humor and humorous writing from their studies. Nakagomi Shigeaki, "*Kindai bungakushi to warai*" in *Warai to sōzō*, Howard Hibbett and *Nihon bungaku to warai kenkyūkai*, volume 3 (2003), Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, especially pages 233-238.

[15] Jessica Milner Davis, *Understanding Humor in Japan*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006, 11.

[16] Abe Goh's chapter, "A Ritual Performance of Laughter in Southern Japan" serves well as an introduction to humor and laughter in religion, but it is only a chapter. English-langauge readers interested in the topic of humor, play, and laughter in Japanese religion may find Higuchi Kazunori's *Holy Foolery in the Life of Japan: A Historical Overview* edifying. Higuchi Kazunori, *Holy Foolery in the Life of Japan: A Historical Overview*, Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2015.

reads the works of Ibuse Masuji, Dazai Osamu, and Inoue Hisashi, it is clear that "the comic spirit" is alive and well in Japanese letters. In order to show "that even in unfavorable circumstances the comic spirit can and does find expression in fiction of a high level on a stustained basis," Cohn reads selected works by each of these three writers and shows "the distinctive conditions shaping the development of comic literature in modern Japan, and the dilemmas facing its practitioners."[17]

Each chapter is invaluable reading to anyone interested in Ibuse, Dazai, or Inoue, and it is also a necessary addition to the field of Japanese literature studies in that it shows that literary humor merits scholarly attention. As he notes

> ...comedy has not generally been considered an independent literary category in Japan and has not been accorded its own place in the overall artistic scheme; rather, its existence has simply been identified by the presence of humor, or in distinction from the "serious...." Those who place a high value on "seriousness" are prone to equate its absence with frivolousness and relegate comic forms of expression to an inferior status.... The power of the cult of seriousness is reflected not only in the lack of critical discussion of comedy, but in the tendency either to exclude comic works from that discussion or at best to relegate them to a distinctly secondary artistic status.[18]

Cohn also shows how, in part because the "comic novel" did not exist as its own genre distinct from the all-too-serious *shishōsetsu* ("I-novel"), literary humor in Japan developed some distinctive qualities. The first, which is born from the multifaceted nature of the narrator as "narrator, observer, and actor" is that in Ibuse, Dazai, and Inoue "the center of comic attention... moves from what the author sees to his way of seeing things."[19] The second quality is a

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[17] Joel R. Cohn, *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, 31.

[18] Joel R. Cohn, *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, 186-7. While Cohn and others seem to regard "serious" as a synonym to "humorless," this study does not share that conviction; a great deal of humor tends to be both hilarious and deadly serious. See Steve Martin, *Born Standing up: A Comic's Life*, New York: Scribner, 2007.

[19] Joel R. Cohn, *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, 188-9. This self-reflective or self-deprecating tendency is clearly at work in Nosaka Akiyuki's *The Pornographers* as well.

downward-trending character arc in which the narrator moves towards an unhappy ending; these writers tended to write "black comedy" in which "humanity can triumph over the cruelty and senselessness of life only by refusing to acknowledge their all too obvious supremacy – that is by laughing at them."[20] Third, as the inclusion of comic elements is fundamentally at odds with the humorless nature of the *shishōsetsu,* each of these authors "depar[t] from the strictures of the conventional *shishōsetsu* formula" in other meaningful ways.[21] Whether it is through irony, novel language use, introducing characters not regularly featured in *shishōsetsu*, or leaving realism behind entirely, each of these authors critique the medium to humorous effect.

Of the aforementioned works of scholarship, this study regards itself as being closest in spirit to Cohn's work, although it differs in scope and object of concern. Cohn investigates prose fiction which features a "thematic emphasis on the incongruity between real and ideal or between perceptions and reality; and expression of such themes through integral narrative devices such as emplotment and characterization rather than merely through a string of jokes...."[22] Particularly in its analysis of Nosaka Akiyuki's *The Pornographers*, this study is interested in examining how a mere "string of jokes" can become a meaningful and essential element in a work; this study is interested in examining the formal and rhetorical effects of humor, and is not as interested in discussing whether internal comic ambiguities are central to the structure of a work.

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[20] Joel R. Cohn, *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, 191. Cohn contends Japanese literary humor is influenced by "twentieth-century black humor" and the "age-old Japanese sensibility of *mujō* (impermanence)." This study discusses the relationship between twentieth-century black humor and modern Japanese literature below, but we will forgo a review of the ways in which *mujō* has influenced modern literary humor. As an "age-old sensibility," a comprehensive discussion of *mujō* and humor is a matter best attended to in a monograph-lentgh study.

[21] Joel R. Cohn, *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, 192.

[22] Joel R. Cohn, *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, 8.

All of the aforementioned studies were written well after the publication of the works discussed in this study, and so some contemporary contextualization will help us better appreciate the conditions under which these authors worked. To that end, this study will discuss two influential contemporary critiques of postwar Japanese humor: Nakamura Mitsuo's "*Warai no sōshitsu"* ("The Loss of Laughter") and Ui Mushū's *Nihonjin no warai* (*Japanese Humor*).[23] In both, the writers contend they are living through a dark age of humor; writing in 1948, Nakamura decries Japan's lack of complex literary humor, while in 1969 Ui bemoans the dearth of "well-made" performed humor. Critiques like Nakamura's and Ui's are useful for us to examine as they give us both a: insight into contemporary attitudes towards literary humor, and b: some explanation as to why present-day discussions of Japanese literary humor seem to feel the need to assert that Japanese literary humor exists in the first place.

1.2 Nakamura Mitsuo's "*Warai no sōshitsu*" and Postwar Japanese Literary Humor

In "*Warai no sōshitsu*," Nakamura argues that Japanese elite literature is humorless because Meiji literati failed to adequately appreciate the humor of influential European novels like *Madame Bovary* and *The Idiot*.[24] This humorlessness was subsequently passed down through a patriarchal master-apprentice system, and the dominant literary movement in Japan,

[23] Marguerite Wells discusses both of these pieces in her *Japanese Humour*, and regards them as major works of criticism. Nakamura's *"Warai no sōshitsu*" is a seminal work of literary humor criticism, and Cohn's project can be read as a direct refutation to some of what Nakamura argues in his piece.

[24] Rather than adhering to convention and discussing literature (*bungaku*) as having different registers: "pure literature" (*junbungaku*) and "popular literature" (*taishū bungaku*). Nakamura uses the term *bungaku* to refer exclusively to *junbungaku*, and while this essay is often written of as though it were an overview of "literary humor in the immediate postwar" it would be more apt to read it as an assessment of literary humor exclusively within the genre of *junbungaku*. Nakamura's elitism and how it negatively impacts his argument will be discussed at greater length below. For a discussion of the differences between "pure literature" and "popular literature" in Japan see Edward Thomas Mack, *Manufacturing Modern Japanese Literature: Publishing, Prizes, and the Ascription of Literary Value*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Naturalism, remained serious to a fault. By 1948 Japanese elite literature was humorless, and therefore incapable of greatness.

Thankfully, Nakamura does not waste ink on arguing for the existence of a Japanese sense of humor. Instead, he opens his essay with a condemnation of the Japanese literati:

> I would, as concretely as possible, like to reconsider some elements lacking in Japanese literature which should be present. What I will write is nothing new, and it is common sense to anyone engaged in literature… But a peculiarity of literati today is that, unlike us, they have forgotten things that should be common sense and instead debate and fight over things they don't understand, without coming to understand them any better.[25]

While his assertion that Japanese literature should incorporate humor is "common sense" may merely be a rhetorical device, the fact remains that Nakamura does not at any point question the existence and quality of a Japanese sense of humor. This is also a remarkably optimistic view of literary humor: Nakamura takes for granted that Japanese literary humor can match the sort of humor found in Flaubert and Dostoyevsky.

But, given that he is writing for the literati journal *Literary Arts* (*Bungei*), it should be noted that Nakamura's "common sense" is not altogether common. The 1951 *Dictionary of Contemporary Japanese Literature* states that the postwar period saw *Bungei* shift from being a literary magazine devoted to "new literature brimming with contemporary consciousness" to one which "embraced literati leanings."[26] And given the familiarity Nakamura expects his readers to have with Japanese and European literary history, one is inclined to think that Nakamura's "us" in his "us vs. the literati" binary is just a young member of Japan's literary elite.[27] This is

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[25] Nakamura Mitsuo, "*Warai no sōshitsu*," *Nakamura Mitsuo zenshū*, Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, vol. 10, 107-143. 1972. 107. Though cited in Cohn, Hibbett, and Wells, no substantive translation of this essay exists. All translations are my own, and all faults in the translation are due to the inadequate efforts of those who have taught me Japanese over the years.

[26] Kindai Bungakusha. *Gendai Nihon bungaku jiten*. Tokyo: Kawade Shobō, 1951, 484.

[27] In a discussion on Japanese literary humor following World War Two between the writer Kobayashi Nobuhiko and theatre critic Senda Akihiko, Kobayashi notes that "*Warai no sōshitsu"* was not well received by the literary establishment. Kobayashi speculates that this is in part thanks to the "delicate" position Nakamura held in relation to Japan's literary elite: in 1950, Nakamura wrote "*Fūzoku shōsetsuron*," a widely read work which was critical of the

somewhat ironic, considering that this essay begins with a condemnation of the literati for pointless in-fighting. This irony is further compounded when Nakamura criticizes esoteric literati, writing that "the literati won't figure out problems in art and life for us."[28] Who but a member of the literary elite would blithely divide mankind's trials into "art" and "life" (ie. everything else); who but a member of the literati would write or read a thirty-six page essay about how *Madame Bovary* and *The Idiot* were mis-read in the Meiji era? While Nakamura's is a good overview of literary humor in Japan, it is important to remember that at all times in this critique Nakamura is concerned with elite literature and literati interests.

Nakamura argues through simple binaries, setting everyday concerns against esoteric literati ones, literature against lesser genres of writing, humor against austerity, and European against Japanese literature. Early on, Nakamura divides literary humor into two types: humor which is an "essential element in the construction of great literature," and "humorous novels and funny comedies."[29] The former type is found in *Madame Bovary* and *The Idiot*, whose protagonists share Don Quixote's humorous and tragic inability to appreciate that other people have their own lives and worldviews. For Nakamura, this tragicomic myopia allowed these novels to satirize the human condition and achieve greatness.[30]

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then-dominant literary genre the "I-novel," and post-war Japanese literature. Kobayashi Nobuhiko and Senda Akihiko, "'*Warai' de dokusha mo tamesareru: Kobayashi Nobuhiko x Senda Akihiko*" in *Kaien*, vol. 12, no. 5, (1993): 20.

[28] Nakamura Mitsuo, "*Warai no sōshitsu*," 107.

[29] "Humorous novels" and "funny comedies" are *kokkei shōsetsu* (滑稽小説) and *kusuguri kigeki* (くすぐり喜劇) in the original. Neither of these terms are carried in contemporary literary dictionaries, and in all likelihood Nakamura is not referring to established literary genres, but is generally referring to novels and plays which are written to amuse their audiences. Nor does he mention the established genre of "pure literature" (*junbungaku*) by name. Instead, he draws a line between quotidian literature and its more noble counterpart with the term "great literature" (*idai na bungaku*). One effect of this avoidance of genre-specific terms is that Nakamura's essay reads as though he is trying to distance himself from more doctrinaire members of the literary elite; again, Nakamura positions himself as a young member of the literati railing against the old guard.

[30] Ibid., 126.

So, why was Meiji period Japanese literature humorless despite the translation of works like *Madame Bovary* and *The Idiot*? Nakamura admits that much humor is dependent upon shared circumstances and culture, and that it is likely that everyday Japanese readers would not appreciate the humor in translated foreign novels.[31] But, according to him, "one with a literary spirit" would inevitably be moved by these works and appreciate their humor. Although Meiji authors had "literary spirit," Nakamura accuses them of "stiffness" which led to their humorlessness.[32] Nakamura cites Sōseki's lecture "The Civilization of Modern-Day Japan" ("*Gendai nihon no kaika*"), in which Sōseki argues that Meiji period literary reforms were met with stiffness because they were "externally motivated."[33] Nakamura is deliberate in his choice of words here, choosing "stiffness" as an analogy for resistance born from both conscious and unconscious elements.

Because of this stiffness, Meiji writers had only a superficial understanding of Western literature. But, they found mere affectation of Western style sufficient to make their works successful and make them into influential "men of letters."[34] So, rather than trying to fully understand great Western writers as possible peers, Meiji period writers treated them like distant idols. And Nakamura argues that this idolatry was the source of their failure: "idols don't smile. Because first and foremost a smile needs understanding and affection between people."[35]

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[31] Ibid., 124-5. Nakamura writes of humor as succeeding within close groups; he believes that a serious conversation can happen between strangers, but humor can only emerge between people who know something of each other's lives.
[32] Ibid., 126.
[33] Ibid., 127. The full text of Sōseki's lecture can be found here: https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000148/files/759_44901.html The essay has been translated by Jay Rubin for *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature Volume 1: From restoration to occupation, 1868-1945*.
At this point in his essay Nakamura firmly establishes the concepts of "external" and "internal" as measures by which to gauge the success of a reader – a good reader understands the "inner spirit" of the novel and can appreciate it, while a lesser (or "stiff" reader) will only understand the surface of the thing. He extends this to critique writers as well – those that merely mimic imported trends without understanding their "inner spirit" are doomed to write inadequate and humorless novels.
[34] Ibid., 127-9.
[35] Ibid., 130.

For Nakamura, this idol-worshipper relationship was additionally complicated by lingering pre-Meiji ideals regarding hierarchy. Meiji period thinkers were "internally" untouched by the Western ideas they studied, and so Western ideas eventually were used to serve internally held "feudal emotions."[36] Nakamura argues that Meiji writers maintained a "feudal" mindset in which all relationships are governed by a strict social hierarchy; they regarded Western authors with the same respect and fear that apprentices hold towards masters. And since apprentices are never to smile in front of their masters, "it was only natural for writers to overlook all the humorous elements in those [European] works."[37] So, both sides of the relationship had to be humorless: neither idols nor apprentices can smile.

Following a discussion of humorous pre-Meiji Japanese literature, Nakamura contends that contemporary Japan's literary humorlessness is "a stunning exception" in both Japanese, and world literary history.[38] He speculates that the reason for this is the ascendence of the Naturalist school during the Meiji period.[39] Though by 1948 Naturalism felt "like a distant memory" to contemporary readers, the motives that brought the naturalist writers to the fore remained present in the Japanese literati.[40] Meiji period writers readily embraced the ideals of naturalists like Émile Zola, and before long the Japanese naturalist school and the "I-novel" dominated the Japanese literary landscape. Naturalism itself was not the problem, but rather the intellectual skittishness which birthed it. Writers leapt from one intellectual trend to the next, believing that the only way to keep prominence within the literati was to pioneer the next intellectual fad. So

[36] Ibid., 131. Nakamura also notes that this may have been more pronounced amongst literati, as most of them were from samurai households.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 135.
[39] For a discussion of the history of the naturalist school and their mis-reading by critics including Nakamura first and foremost, see Ken Henshall, "The Puzzling Perception of Japanese Naturalism" in *Japan Forum*, 22(3-4) 2010: 331-356.
[40] Nakamura Mitsuo, "*Warai no sōshitsu*," 136.

new Western works were translated, and their ideas were engaged with superficially. For Nakamura, the same superficiality that plagued early Meiji writers persisted, and the 1948 literati continued to pick up vogue philosophies and ideals without trying to truly understand them.[41]

This faddishness led to an inevitable gap in quality, as flighty writers created works based on superficial understandings of the foreign-born ideals which inspired them. These lesser works could only be enjoyed by the handful of literati readers who were already conversant in whatever intellectual trend the particular novel engaged with. So, everyday readers inevitably turned towards superior works of translated literature. This resulted in the vicious cycle which Nakamura believes led to the stagnation of Japanese literature from the Meiji period up until 1948. Writers sought inspiration in translated masterpieces, starting new foreign-inspired trends that only superficially engaged the ideals that birthed them. These superficial works appealed to a narrow readership, and paled in comparison to superior translated works. Thus, writers continually turned to newly translated literature, launching one trend after the next.[42]

So, how was Japanese literature to escape this cycle? Nakamura proposes a return to what he regards as the fundamental role of literature: to move readers. And he does so with rhetorical panache, citing sources thousands of years apart in support of his belief that contemporary Japanese literature needs to devote its energies to developing playful and liberating language which can move readers. First, Nakamura cites the *Mao Tradition of the Poetry* (ie. *The Classic of Poetry*) preface to the "Odes of Zhou and the South." His gloss of the preface reads:

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[41] Ibid., 136-7.

[42] According to Nakamura, in the first twenty years of the *Shōwa* period alone, the literary elite have engaged with and then forgotten many Western ideals and writers "including Marxist criticism and its variants, their exemplary works, and writers like Morand, Cocteau, Lawrence, Joyce, Rilke, Hesse, Carossa, Proust, Gide, Valéry, and Shestov." Ibid., 137.

> Feeling stirs within, and appears in words. Words are not enough, and so we lament. Lamentation is not enough, and so we write poetry. If writing poetry is not enough, we unthinkingly wave our hands and stomp our feet. [43]

Nakamura contends that this preface touches upon all the problems of expression and the essence of literature, which he writes Valéry summed up with: "if we regard everyday language as walking, then poetry is dancing in words."[44]

Interestingly, Nakamura does not maintain Valéry's distinction between poetry and prose. In his "Poetry and Abstract Thought" Valéry writes that a child will learn to walk first and then to dance, and "parallel with *Walking* and *Dancing*, he will acquire and distinguish the divergent types *Prose* and *Poetry*."[45] Valéry conceives of prose as instrumental and poetry as figurative, while Nakamura divides "everyday language" (ie. instrumental) from the "dance" that should be pursued by "poets and writers."[46] Nakamura's conceptualization of literature regards figurative language as a means to an end: it should make its readers dance. And if writers pursue their own language capable of moving readers, humor will return to literature naturally.

Nakamura returns to the present-day in his conclusion, arguing that humor is a necessary device for any writer working after the war:

> We have lost both reason and morality. Order has been overturned. For our economy, we don't know what tomorrow will bring. Politics change depending on which way the wind

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[43] Nakamura gives no citation for his gloss, though it is clear that he is quoting from a gloss of the original text. His gloss, 情・中に動て、言に形はる。言うて足らず、故に嗟嘆す。嗟嘆するに、足らず、故に詠歌す。詠歌するに足らざれば、手の舞ひ、足の踏むことを知らず, aligns fairly closely with the original: 情動於衷而形於言，言之不足，故嗟歎之，嗟歎之不足，故咏歌之，咏歌之不足，不知手之舞之，足之蹈之也. (Mao Tradition of the Poetry preface to the "Odes of Zhou and the South" full text available at the Chinese Text Project: https://ctext.org/text.pl?node=416147&if=en). In the Japanese-language context, *The Mao Tradition of the Poetry* (毛詩) seems to be regarded as synonymous with the *The Classic of Poetry* (詩経). According to Kern, *The Mao Tradition of the Poetry* is the received version of the *The Classic of Poetry*, attributed to a scholar named Mao Heng from the third to second century BC. (Martin Kern, "Early Chinese "Early Chinese Literature, Beginnings through Western Han," in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, edited by Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010: 20-22).

[44] 日常の言語を歩行にたとへれば、詩とは言葉の舞踊にほかならない Nakamura Mitsuo, "*Warai no sōshitsu*," 140. Given Nakamura's background in French literature, it is fair to assume that this is Nakamura's own translation.

[45] Paul Valéry, "Poetry and Abstract Thought" in *The Art of Poetry*, translated by Denise Folliot, Princeton Legacy Library, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, 70.

[46] Nakamura Mitsuo, "*Warai no sōshitsu*," 140.

> is blowing that day. And nobody knows just how sincerely laws will be promulgated. In this world in which we have been made to live like animals, what can we do other than look at it as comedy?[47]

Looking backward, Nakamura proposes that Japanese authors should move forward by regaining the independent creativity and sincerity of authors like Futabatei Shimei and Natsume Sōseki, and address their current moment.[48] Reminding us that Kierkegaard wrote that the human condition "is fundamentally comical without end" and that to grapple with this condition "one must use a certain amount of satire," Nakamura ends his essay hopeful that Japanese literature capable of portraying "the contemporary human comedy" will soon emerge.[49]

Nakamura closes his essay with the line "and it should go without saying that this comedy will be fundamentally different from what popular novelists are trying out today, and from what we find in humor novels and *gesaku* literature."[50] Nakamura does not explain why "humor novels" and "*gesaku* literature" were not included in his discussion;"*Warai no sōshitsu*" is regarded as the seminal postwar work of literary humor criticism for good reason, but Nakamura's view of what constitutes "literature" is impossibly narrow.

Nakamura's elitism causes him to overlook two major humor writers active at the time: Dazai Osamu and Ibuse Masuji. In Dazai's case, writer Kobayashi Nobuhiko claims Nakamaura ignored him for a fairly straightforward reason: "…(laughing) It's just as simple as this: Nakamura Mitsuo didn't write about Dazai Osamu because he hated him."[51] And, even though Ibuse was already an "award-winning writer" when "*Warai no sōshitsu*" was published, that award was the *Naoki Prize* for popular literature; it is likely that Nakamura did not regard Ibuse

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[47] Ibid., 141.
[48] Ibid., 142.
[49] Ibid., 142.
[50] Ibid., 143.
[51] Kobayashi Nobuhiko and Senda Akihiko, "'*Warai' de dokusha mo tamesareru: Kobayashi Nobuhiko x Senda Akihiko*" in *Kaien,* vol. 12, no. 5, (1993), 23.

as an author worthy of his attention.[52] While humor critics commonly champion underappreciated writers and genres, Nakamura is not a humor critic. He is a literature critic invested in improving present-day elite literature, not redeeming humor which already exists in lesser (ie. non-literary) genres, or written by lesser writers. In fact, he even admits that there is humor to be found in laughing at the narrators in novels like Tayama Katai's *Futon* and Iwano Hōmei's *Dankyō*.[53] But this is not the humor he is looking for; it is not the elite humor which he regards as essential to works like *Don Quixote, Madame Bovary,* and *The Idiot*; postwar Japanese culture was not necessarily humorless, but rather without the particular type of elite humor which Nakamura valued. So elite literature was humorless, but what of humor elsewhere? As Nakamura notes, there was humor in the "humorous novels" and "funny comedies" written for the hoi-polloi, so what sort of humor was being enjoyed by the masses?

1.3 Ui Mushū's *Nihonjin no warai* and Postwar Japanese Quotidian Humor

Like Nakamura, Ui Mushū describes postwar Japan as humorless. Or, at least, lacking in his humor of choice. In his 1969 historical overview of Japanese humor *Japanese Humor*

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[52] Kobayashi notes that it wasn't until Kobayashi Hideo's positive review of Ibuse ("Everyone takes Ibuse too lightly") that Ibuse Masuji came to be regarded highly by literati. Ibid., 21. Joel Cohn's *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Japanese Fiction* is devoted to finding works which embody that quality whose lack Nakamura bemoans; Cohn chooses to read the development of modern Japanese literary humor through "works that most fully embody the comic spirit, that is, those works in which comic dualities figure as an integral informing principle and not simply in the form of incidental humorous passages." In this respect, Cohn's work can be read as a direct response to Nakamura's "*Warai no sōshitsu*." Cohn saw fit to devote entire chapters to both Ibuse and Dazai; in this respect, Cohn's work can be read as a direct rebuttal of Nakamura. Joel R. Cohn, *Studies in The Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, 31.

[53] Nakamura Mitsuo, "*Warai no sōshitsu*,"115. As Cohn so adroitly puts it "…the shishōsetsu, in its less convincing moments, can occasionally read something like the adventures of Don Quixote as recounted by the Don himself.…" Joel R. Cohn, *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, 27.

Critic Suzuki Sadami reads the "pointless" narrators in works like Tayama Katai's *Futon* as parodies of contemporary Japanese society. Suzuki contends that contemporary militarization and the increasing demands of Japan's empire-building led to a society which instrumentalized its people, and these "pointless" narrators and their "pointless" actions would have been amusing to contemporary readers. Suzuki Sadami, "*Kin/gendai shōsetsu ni okeru 'warai' no kenkyū no tame no oboegaki*" in *Warai to sōzō*, Howard Hibbett and *Nihon bungaku to warai kenkyūkai*, volume 1 (1998), Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 251-267.

(*Nihonjin no warai*), Ui conceives of humor as being divisible into a binary: "well-made" humor and "poorly made."[54] After citing Cervantes, Shakespeare, Moliere, "funny folk tales" (*minkan shōwa*), traditional rakugo (*koten rakugo*), and successful foreign film comedies as examples of his "well-made humor," Ui writes that

> So, there is humor which inclusive, and humor which is exclusive. And there is robust humor which holds up over time, and humor which appears and disappears instantly, like foam on water. Of course, inclusive and long-lasting humor is good, so we'll call the former "well-made" humor. And we'll call the latter "poorly made."[55]

For Ui, humor must be "inclusive" to be "well-made." Focusing primarily on performed (*rakugo* and *manzai*) "well-made humor," Ui describes the process by which inclusive humor is made.[56] In Ui's schema, laughter requires an audience (ie. those who laugh) and an object (ie. that which is laughed at). Humor has a third element: a catalyst (ie. that which causes laughter).[57] Ui argues that the comedian, who acts as the catalyst for laughter, is a transgressive figure. At times the comedian laughs with the audience at an object, and at times the comedian makes themself the object of audience laughter.[58] And during the Edo period in which strict class divisions were observed, class transgression was an important part of performed humor. The comic would elevate themselves by treating the audience as peers. This temporary transgression itself was comical, and united the audience in their laughter at the jester. Affected affinity also enabled the

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[54] Ui Mushū, *Nihonjin no warai*, Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 15.
[55] Ibid..
[56] Manzai is a form of standup comedy in which a comic pair, a straight man and a goof ball, banter in front of a single microphone. The staging is generally simple, and there are few props – manzai showcases language play. Similarly, rakugo, a form of performed comedy in which a single story-teller sits in front of the audience and entertains them with comic anecdotes, relies heavily upon virtuoso language play and verbal acrobatics to create humor. At the beginning of this study, Ui states that he will left the work of discussing more elaborate forms of dramatic humor like kyōgen and kigeki ("comedy,") for a future study. Ibid., 4. For an excellent overview of the state of humor in drama, see IIzawa Tadasu, "*Nihon no kigeki*" in *Shibai: tsukuru. miru*. Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1972. Like Nakamura and Ui, Iizawa finds contemporary humor wanting. This study will not discuss Iizawa's essay at length though, as Marguerite Wells has already written a thorough summary of Iizawa's work. See Marguerite Wells, *Japanese Humour*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, 148-152.
[57] Ui uses the terms *Warai te*, *Waraware te*, and *Warawase te*, to refer to these three roles. Ui Mushū, *Nihonjin no warai*, Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 16.
[58] Ibid., 17.

jester to direct audience laughter towards some absent third party.[59] And finally, once the comedian develops a sense of community by having the room laugh together, he can have them to think together as well: "well-made" humor pleases its audience by having them think like the comedian. Citing a manzai routine in which an implied a punchline must be created by the audience for themselves, Ui proposes that "well-made" humor is co-constituted and protects community standards by leaving explicit punchlines unsaid.[60]

For Ui, "well-made" humor was scarce in postwar Japan. Since mass media judges success solely on sales, listenership, and viewership statistics, comedy had to lower its standards to reach the widest possible audience. To reach an impossibly broad audience, the comedian had to give up on co-constitutive and community-building humor. Implied punchlines were done away with, and television and radio comedians resorted to explicitness. Comic novels seeking the broadest readerships possible assaulted values and often resorted to "unpleasant foolishness."[61] Ui describes the humor in these novels, a genre he refers to as *akahon*, as follows:

> From the very start, these *akahon* denied the pleasure of those readers who dig out humor from the space between the lines. They assault their readers with a humor that idiotic humor which attacks the central nervous system and dulls their capacity to think.… Now, these works will only disgust and anger readers who are hoping for uplifting laughter.[62]

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[59] Ui points out that the restriction of access to venues to particular classes enabled the development of the theater as a safe space for fluid comical transgression and laughter is reminiscent of both Bahktin's understanding of the carnival, and Oda Shōkichi's theory of the *Warai no ba*. Mikhail Bahktin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984; Oda Shōkichi, *Warai to yūmoa*, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1979.

[60] He cites the Manzai duo Akacho and Entatsu who, in short, performed the following routine A:"My you're thin!" E: "Yup! You know, they say that thin people come from good families…. You're a fatty, aren't you!" Ui Mushu, *Nihonjin no warai*, 18. The unsaid punchline is, of course, "you must come from a bad family."

[61] Ibid., 19.

[62] この種の赤本は、行間から笑いを掘り起こしていく読者の楽しみを、最初から否定して、神経中枢をしげきし思考力をマヒさせる白痴的な笑いを、おしつけてくる。…こころよい笑いを期待する読者に嫌悪感をあたえ、腹たたしくさせるだけになってしまった。Ui Mushu, *Nihonjin no warai*, Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 20.

Ui's "Well-made" humor is at odds with mass-production and mass-consumption, and it was a victim of Japan's economic boom. Furthermore, contemporary Japanese audiences confused their values, laughing at humorless things and not appreciating what was truly funny.[63] Ui contends that contemporary Japan lacked the "open-heartedness" needed to properly appreciate humor, and that his ancestors better appreciated humor despite relative poverty.[64]

Following this pessimistic discussion of contemporary Japanese humor, Ui discusses the history of Japanese humor and the contemporary state of humor creation. For him, contemporary Japanese society was comprised of atomized urban families that did not reach out to form community bonds. For him, this stemmed from two long-standing social phenomena: discrimination against "country bumpkins" by urbanites (ie. Edoites), and distrust of the other fostered by a long period of "spy governance" during the Edo period. This situation was exacerbated by Meiji militarization and the creation of a strict domestic observation apparatus. Ui summarizes the history of pre-war history of Japanese humor thusly:

> Put simply, Meiji was "a period in which one couldn't laugh." Then we passed through a brief and incomplete thaw during Taishō democracy, before leaping into Shōwa. At first, Shōwa was a "troubled age in which one couldn't laugh even if they wanted to." But then it became an "an era of militarization in which laughter was lost." In this way, Japan has made its people "the world's most humorless people" of the pre-World War II period.[65]

While he decries the lowbrow mass humor which caters to atomized audiences and laments the dearth of "well-made" humor which brings communities together, Ui is ultimately optimistic regarding the future of humor in Japan:

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[63] Ibid., 20.
[64] Ui's term, "*kokoro no yutori*," is reminiscent of Tsuge Teruhiko's use of the term *yoyū* in his short history of Japanese humor. Both seem to regard humor as arising solely in conditions which allow for leisure or generosity of spirit, a theorization of humor which functions well enough under conventional circumstances. However, the absence of leisure does not immediately lead to the absence of humor; see Steve Lipman, *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humor during the Holocaust*, Northvale NJ, Jason Aronson Inc., 1991.
[65] Ui Mushu, *Nihonjin no warai*, Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 25.

> In the postwar, Japanese people finally are able to laugh freely. But it's only been twenty years since the war ended. So, we could say that contemporary Japanese people are freshmen who barely know how to laugh.[66]

He contends that for Japanese humor to move forward it must understand and recapture elements from Japan's bygone "open-hearted" days. It is beyond the scope of this study to fully examine whether or not Ui's optimism was rewarded with a return to "well-made" humor. But, given the prevalence of vulgarity and overt punchlines in contemporary Japanese television – punchlines are often presented with their own subtitles, making them overtly overt – one doubts that Ui would find much of his co-constitutive and thought-provoking "well-made" humor in popular Japanese media today.

But both Nakamura and Ui acknowledge that audiences were laughing, so was Japanese culture really as humorless as these critics made it seem? Here, Cohn's comments on the relationship between popular and elite humor are apt:

> Perhaps the most conspicuous and enduring polarity of all, however, is that created by the existence of two distinct strains of comedy associated with two very different types of creators and audiences, the low or popular, whose texts are more often viewed as sources of amusement or of ethnographic or historical information than as artifacts with significant literary properties, and a culturally, socially, economically, and often politically privileged elite commanding the high ground of "art," marked by pronounced refinement of style and sensibility, as against the presumed crudity or vulgarity of popular forms.[67]

Both Ui and Nakamura regard theirs as perplexing days: humor existed, but not the sort they desired. And neither seems willing to allow for the possibility that there was merit in "lesser" forms of humor.[68] For Ui, mass-market humor was too broad and too explicit to reach the heights

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Joel Cohn, *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, 15.

[68] Their narrow view also possibly reflects an insufficient appreciation for the ways in which humor, parody in particular, frustrates simple genre divisions; Cohn writes: "… there is never a simple black-and-white dichotomy between popular and elite, but rather a more or less spectral gradation, with a constant process of cross-fertilization being carried out in the forms of parody and cultural slumming." Ibid., 18.

of his ancestors' "well-made" humor. For Nakamura, literary humor in Japan was too simple, and did not touch upon the comedic nature of the human condition. But, both of these critics are wrong and I am right.[69] Postwar Japanese humor was created with a high degree of skill, brought people together, commented upon the human condition, made people laugh, and helped people heal.

1.4 Laughter in the Dark: "Black Humor," *"kuroi yūmoa"* "*burakku yūmoa,"* and "Dark Humor."

> For well over a century, one of the main themes in Japanese scholarship has been the classification of Japanese phenomena in terms of categories inherited from Europe. Since the categories do not fit very well, this makes the game great academic fun: there is infinite scope for rethinking and reclassification. This game of classification and reclassification is perhaps particularly complex in studies of humor or humorous genres.[70]

Let the games begin! Before discussing the relationship between humor and trauma, we must first discuss both the palliative role that humor can play, and also a genre of humor found in trying times commonly called "black humor."[71] "Black humor" straddles the line between acceptable discourse and taboo. It is a dangerous genre of humor, but with great risk comes great reward – as we will see with Nosaka Akiyuki, "black humor" can allow a writer to bring joy into stories about horrific topics. It is a type of humor uniquely suited to chaotic and challenging times; it is a type of humor uniquely suited to postwar Japan.

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[69] It is easy to blithely dismiss the concerns of critics writing a half a century ago; both Nakamura and Ui are arguing passionately with and against their peers on the frontline of an issue which they regard as essential to the future of their culture. My dispassion and moderation is the result of a privileged distance. Were I to write about contemporary humor, I would be hard-pressed to not express some disgust over cringe-humor, and confusion over tiktok, memes, and other new genres of internet-based humor which I find relatively uninteresting. And no doubt, in fifty years some young humor scholar would have no trouble picking me apart.

[70] Marguerite Wells, "Satire and Constraint in Japanese Culture," in *Understanding Humor in Japan*, ed. Jessica Milner Davis (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006), 193.

[71] "Black humor" is commonly understood to be "Comedy, satire, etc., that presents tragic, distressing, or morbid situations in humorous terms; humour that is ironic, cynical, or dry; gallows humour." OED entry on "black humor" accessed July 3rd, 20201. https://www-oed-com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/view/Entry/282814?redirectedFrom) While there are competing terms used to describe this type of humor such as "gallows humor" and "galgenhumor," neither of them are as widely used. This study will engage with the problematic history of this term, as well as briefly touch upon the challenges of continuing to use this term in the present-day.

It is difficult to place the exact moment that the term "black humor," translated as "*kuroi yūmoa*" or "*burakku yūmoa*," entered the Japanese literary lexicon. Translated anthologies of foreign humor were followed by domestic anthologies, and while *kuroi yūmoa* preceded *burakku yūmoa,* both terms have come to be part of the Japanese literary landscape. The English-language term "black humor" was born into ambiguity – from its first appearances in Western literary scholarship it has always denoted more than one thing, and has done so with little clarity or certainty. In both English- and Japanese-language literary realms the widely known terms used to describe this strain of humor have been coined by anthology compilers, rather than humorists, critics or humor scholars. Given that an anthologist may be more inclined to adopt an arbitrary or vague understanding of this genre of humor to allow a broader selection of works to be anthologized, it is not reasonable to expect a clear definition of this type of humor to emerge from literary anthologies. However, if this study is to discuss what we will eventually call "dark humor," a clarification of terms is necessary; "black humor" does not mean what many of us think it does, nor is it synonymous with either of its two common Japanese-language counterparts *kuroi yūmoa* and *burakku yūmoa*. So, following an analysis of some of the earliest appearances of these terms in both Western and Japanese literary scholarship, this study will propose to adopt a lesser-known but equally apt term, "dark humor."[72]

1.5 A History of "Black Humor" in Western Literature: *Anthologie de l'humour noir*

[72] This study is aware of the irony that, by selecting a term roughly synonymous with "black," we end up almost exactly where we started. Furthermore, by using "dark" to refer to an oft-denigrated and peripheral genre of humor that has a fraught relationship with mainstream culture, this study is maybe perpetuating the sort of unconscious linguistic bias that reinforces the "Bad is Black" effect. But, "dark" is less troubling than "black" and its variations; "dark" is not without its weaknesses, but it is the most apt term. For the "Bad is Black" effect, see Adam L. Alter, Chadly Stern, Yael Granot, and Emily Balcetis, "The 'Bad Is Black' Effect: Why People Believe Evildoers Have Darker Skin Than Do-Gooders," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 42, no. 12 (December 2016), 1653–65. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167216669123.

"Black humor" has a relatively short and fraught history as a genre of literary humor, and it was re-defined by two early anthologies whose titles use the term. André Breton's 1939 *Anthologie de l'humour noir* was an early and widely-read adopter of the term "black humor" to refer to the sort of bleak or morbid humor which is commonly associated with the term today. In his 1939 introduction, titled "Lightning Rod," Breton offers little by means of a concrete definition of the term; rather than defining the term through explanation, it seems as though he hoped his editorial decisions would define the term through example.[73] To Breton's credit, starting with Jonathan Swift certainly sets his anthology off on the right foot. He calls Swift the "true initiator" of black humor, and writes that a defining trait of his humor is that "Swift 'provokes laughter, but does not share in it'…."[74] Breton's anthology regards "black humor" to be a cold humor that is "the mortal enemy of sentimentality."[75] In other words, "black humor" is humor which affords us temporary joy, but ultimately plunges us into the bracing waters of unsentimental reality.

Breton doesn't offer an explanation for why he selected the term "l'humor noir" or "black humor" in 1939, and his broad and insufficient definition may lead one to believe that the term was already present in his reader's vernacular. But he gives a fuller history for the term in a preface to a later edition:

> Let us simply recall that when it first appeared, the words "black humor" made no *sense* (unless to designate a form of banter supposedly characteristic of "Negroes"!). It is only afterward that the expression took its place in the dictionary: we know what fortune the notion of black humor has enjoyed.[76]

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[73] In this introduction Breton cites Freud's joke about the man condemned man approaching the gallows on a Monday morning: "what a way to start a week!" André Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, translated by Mark Polizzotti, San Franciscom City Lights Books, 1997, xviii. One wonders what motivated Breton to reach for his own term rather than simply adopt Freud's term, galgenhumor.
[74] Ibid., 3.
[75] Ibid., xix.
[76] Ibid., xii.

So, "black humor" was already a part of contemporary idiom, and Breton simply appropriated it to denote his "new" genre of humor.[77]

1.6 A history of "Black Humor" in Western Literature: *Black Humor*

The second major literary anthology to use the term is Bruce Jay Friedman's 1965 *Black Humor*. Friedman's selections for the anthology reflect a narrow view of "black humor;" his collection only includes work by then-living white American men with one exception in Louis-Ferdinand Céline. But, in the introduction Friedman writes,

> I have a hunch that Black Humor has probably always been around, always will be around, under some name or other, as long as there are disguises to be peeled back, as long as there are thoughts no one else cares to think…. So there is Black Humor, after all, although you wish they would call it something else or perhaps call it nothing and just know it is in the air. Especially since there is no single perfect example of it….[78]

Despite editorial decisions which strongly argue otherwise, Friedman describes "black humor" as a universal phenomenon, something that exists "as long as there are thoughts no one else cares to think."

So, which of his two "black humors" gained traction? The "black humor" of Friedman's broad definition, or the "black humor" of his narrow editorial choices? It seems that American critics latched onto the latter. According to Kurt Vonnegut, those writers Friedman designated as "black humorists" were an odd group: "it was simply Friedman's conceit that we were all black humorists. Critics accepted this because it allowed them in a simple phrase to deal with fifteen

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[77] Breton's off-hand comment is part of this section's raison-d'être, as this origin makes "black humor" indigestible. It is beyond the means of this study to fully investigate the history of the humor of black people, and the interesting possibility that the technique of presenting negative situations with humor that defines "black humor" was something already present in humor by black people before Breton appropriated the term. Langston Hughes' postwar work *Laughing to Keep from Crying*, for example, was published before the first major English-language literary anthology which built upon Breton's re-defined "black humor," and his humor is just as "black" as anything in either Breton's or Friedman's anthologies. Langston Hughes, *Laughing to Keep from Crying*. New York: Holt, 1952.

[78] Bruce Jay Friedman, *Black Humor*, New York: Bantam Books, 1965, x-xi.

writers or so… we were all about the same age, and none of us is a patriot; we are all social critics."[79] Vonnegut goes on to debunk the idea that "black humorist" is meaningful in designating a narrow and contemporary group of writers:

> The term was part of the language before Freud wrote an essay on it – 'gallows humour'. This is middle European humour, a response to hopeless situations. It's what a man says faced with a perfectly hopeless situation and he still manages to say something funny…. It's generally called Jewish humor in this country. Actually it's humour from the peasants' revolt, the thirty years' war, and from the Napoleonic wars. It's small people being pushed this way and that way, enormous armies and plagues and so forth, and still hanging on in the face of hopelessness. Jewish jokes are middle European jokes. And the black humourists are gallows humourists, as they try to be funny in the face of situations which they see as just horrible.[80]

Vonnegut's comment points to tensions inherent in both Breton's and Friedman's definitions of "black humor" as a genre of literature – for both, "black humor" is something which could be written by all, but has only been written almost exclusively by a handful of white men.[81] And neither Breton nor Friedman seem invested in clearly defining "black humor;" both are content to allow their editorial definitions speak for themselves. So, how was this undefined and possibly indefinable genre of literary humor taken up by Japanese writers?

1.7 A history of "Black Humor" in Japanese-language literature: *kuroi yūmoa*

One of the earliest appearances of some equivalent term to "black humor" in Japanese-language literature can be found in the 1967-1969 series *The Completed Works: the Discovery of Modern Literature* (*Zenshū: gendai bungaku no hakken*). Compiled by and with an afterward written by Hanada Kiyoteru, one volume in the series is devoted to *kuroi yūmoa*. Though not

[79] Kurt Vonnegut, "Running Experiments Off: An Interview," interview by Laurie Clancy, *Meanjin Quarterly*, vol. 30 (Autumn, 1971), 53–54.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Two of the forty-five writers in Breton's anthology are women: Leonora Carrington and Gisèle Prassinos.

stated explicitly, André Breton's anthology is the likely source of this term – both Breton and his anthology are cited in the afterword, and Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir* was translated into Japanese as *Selected Works of kuroi yūmoa (Kuroi yūmoa senshū*).[82]

Kuroi yūmoa is written in Japanese with a mix of scripts. *Kuroi* is written in kanji and hiragana (黒い), while *yūmoa* (ユーモア) is written in katakana. In modern Japanese, katakana is used to represent loan words originating from foreign cultures, while kanji and hiragana are used to represent "native" Japanese words. The decision to simply adopt the term *yūmoa* for "humor," rather than using a pre-existing term such as *warai*, and then write the term in katakana marks *yūmoa* as something explicitly non-Japanese in its origins. But, the use of a Japanese-language adjective to describe *yūmoa*, and its subsequent codification with kanji and hiragana visually ties *kuroi yūmoa* to Sino-Japanese cultural history. The marriage of these different scripts reflects the potential for *kuroi yūmoa* to refer to humor which is both Japanese and not. And in the essay "*Hakujihōshuhei*" which serves as the afterward to the volume, critic Hanada Kiyoteru goes searching for a *kuroi yūmoa* which originates outside of the West.[83]

Hanada, recalling his earlier encounter with *kuroi yūmoa* in his 1950s art criticism, writes that he initially equated *kuroi yūmoa* to Freud's *galgenhumor*.[84] But, in editing this volume and writing its afterword he wanted to find a Sino-Japanese *kuroi yūmoa*, "a *kuroi yūmoa* that

[82] Published in a two volume translation by Kokubunsha in 1968 – 1969.
[83] In English the piece is known as the "White porcelain phoenix-head jar," and it is housed at the Tokyo National Museum. It dates from the Tang period, has a thin white glaze, a tear-drop-shaped body and a bird's head cap. High-resolution images and a brief English discussion of the piece are available at https://emuseum.nich.go.jp/de tail?langId=ja&webView=&content_base_id=100881&content_part_id=0&content_pict_id=0 Despite his stated interest in finding some form of Sino-Japanese *kuroi yūmoa*, Hanada does not include any translated works in this collection.
[84] Hanada first encountered galgenhumor (*garugen fumōru*) as a critic of Avant Garde art, and defines galgenhumor as "desperate jokes; the kouta of a man being taken to the gallows." Hanada Kiyoteru, "*Hakujihōshuhei*" in *Zenshū gendai bungaku no hakken: kuroi yūmoa,* edited by Ōoka Shōhei, Hirano Ken, Sasaki Kīchi, Haniya Yutaka, and Hanada Kiyoteru, 610-617. Tokyo: Gakugei shorin, 2003, 612.

Westerners hadn't thought of."[85] Hanada contends that a novel Sino-Japanese strain of *kuroi yūmoa* exists, and that it was described best by Lin Yutan who wrote that

> a specialty of Chinese people is to add a humorous flavor to formal events like graduations, weddings, and funerals. And they do it with a straight face… that humorous spirit first appears when people reach a point in history when folk wisdom matured enough for them to bad-mouth their own ideals.[86]

From this, Hanada turns to the Tang-period jar from which this essay gets it title. Seeing the jar in an advertisement, Hanada is thrilled, and he argues that this goofy-looking jar exemplifies a Sino-Japanese *kuroi yūmoa*. In a moment of unexpected levity, Hanada's theory is deflated when he goes to the advertised museum and sees the jar itself – what he mistook for a comically tilted ear was a crest, what he thought was asymmetrical was symmetrical, and what he thought was a Chinese jar had actually been made in Sassanian-period Iran.[87]

Hanada ends his discussion of Sino-Japanese *kuroi yūmoa* with this comical inversion, but he does not make explicit what is implicit in this revelation: that Hanada's essay itself and the *kuroi yūmoa* he sees in that statue are manifestations of a universal form of humor. Breton's *l'humor noir* and its subsequent translation refer to a sliver of Western humor, while Friedman's "black humor" came to refer to a small cohort of American humorists. Hanada's *kuroi yūmoa* fails to describe a Sino-Japanese strain of this kind of humor, or even to define it at all. Rather, Hanada's *kuroi yūmoa* is a universal genre – something that can be found in Iranian vases,

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[85] Ibid., 613. Hanada also cites Breton as a foil; part of his motivation for seeking out a Sino-Japanese strain of black humor is because Breton wouldn't even be able to understand the pun in the title of Iizawa Tadasu's *Zatō H* ("座頭H")

[86] Ibid., 613.

[87] His afterword is a humorous self-referential work of semi-autobiographical critique. Taking inspiration from Sterne's Tristram Shandy, he writes an afterward seemingly more motivated by whim than by the drive to clarify the meanings and origins of the works in the anthology. Though he does devote some space to discussing Osaki Midori's "Wanderings in the Realm of the Seventh Sense." Inclusion in this volume and Hanada's writing on Osaki led to a rediscovery of her work. For more, see Osaki Midori, Kyoko Selden, and Alisa Freedman, "Wandering in the Realm of the Seventh Sense," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2015), 234.

idiosyncratic textual commentary on Lao Tzu, and in the eager mis-reading of an artwork by a Japanese critic. But are competitive terms as broad? We turn now to a competing term, *burakku yūmoa*, which was used notably by the humor writer Atōda Takashi in his later writings and in his anthology *Masterpeices of 'burakku yūmoa' (Burakku yūmoa kessakusen*).

1.8 A History of "Black Humor" in Japanese-language Literature: *burakku yūmoa*

On the matter of defining his *burakku yūmoa*, Atōda is just as indirect as Breton, Friedman, and Hanada. He lists various terms and examples in an attempt to describe *burakku yūmoa* via montage: "Cruel humor, the laughter that comes with fear, the spirit to scoff at taboo, the song of a man being led to the gallows, the cackling of a madman, absurd humor."[88] This fractured collection implies a whole which is greater than its parts, and he writes that all humor is "tinged with a tendency to go against morals, and is an attempt to sneer at man's sincere undertakings…."[89] Stating that all humor has some *burakku* elements to it, Atōda avails himself of the broadest definition of *burakku yūmoa* possible, making his job as an anthologist easier. For him, black humor is any humor that "even the smallest amount of venom" mixed into it.[90]

Like Friedman, Atōda divorces the humor denoted by his term from the history of the term itself. Noting that this "Western-style" word has only been in the language for "between ten to twenty years," Atōda points out to readers that half of the works he selected for the anthology pre-date *burakku yūmoa* as a part of the Japanese lexicon.[91] As he puts it, "the terminology may be new, but the thing itself has been around for a long time."[92] But while Breton and Friedman's

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[88] Atōda Takashi, *Burakku yūmoa kessakusen,* Tokyo: Kobunsha, 1989, 364.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] *Burakku yūmoa* is written in katakana alone, and thus its script does not visually imply the same syncretic potentials of Hanada's kuroi yūmoa.
[92] Ibid., 366. Atōda's collection is published in 1989, and his rough estimate for the term puts it as emerging in Japan somewhere after 1969. In 1970, Hayakawa shobō published a six-volume collection of translated works titled

editorial choices argued that their anthologies represented a discrete body of literature bound by the birth dates and exemplary authors, Atōda explicitly states that his selections as an anthologist frustrate any attempt to date *burakku yūmoa*. Furthermore, despite noting that the term is "Western-style," Atōda doesn't include any translated Western works. Rather, he is entirely comfortable using *burakku yūmoa* to describe works which written exclusively by Japanese authors and in the Japanese language. Atōda uses *burakku yūmoa* as an inclusive term describing a genre of humor unbound from geographical or temporal constraints.

These early anthologies had a large part in forming critical and popular conceptions of "black/*kuroi/burakku*" humor. But they are first and foremost literary anthologies, and none devotes sufficient space to developing a critically rigorous definition of the genre of humor they contain. Atōda's clearest and most comprehensive discussion of *burakku yūmoa* is saved for a separate volume of humor criticism, *Humor Revolution* (*Yūmoa no kakumei*). In it, he first defines *burakku yūmoa* by example, asking readers to picture a student laughing and running in circles, waving a test on which they've scored a zero.[93] For Atōda, *burakku yūmoa* is a tool for relieving the burden put upon our souls by encountering something wholly negative.[94] Breton, Friedman, and Hanada have all hinted at the connection between humor and trauma, but Atōda is the first to draw an explicit connection between humor and affective release. For Atōda, this type of humor heals, and we will see how his theorization of *burakku yūmoa* conforms to the relief theory of humor, which is discussed in the palliative humor section of this introduction and in Chapter 2: *Sazaesan* and Anodyne Humor in Postwar Japan.

Burakku yūmoa. The collection features works by Evelyn Waugh, Roland Topor, Terry Southern, and others. This is an early appearance of the term *burakku yūmoa* in the Japanese literary context, and may be what Atōda is pointing to with his rough estimate of "ten to twenty" years. Notably, the six-volume collection does not feature any Japanese writers.

[93] Atōda Takashi, *Yūmoa no kakumei*, Tokyo: Bunshunshinsho, 2001, 138.

[94] Ibid., 140.

In *Yūmoa no kakumei*, Atōda further expands his definition of *burakku yūmoa* through reading Ueno Hidenobu's collection of miner's stories.[95] He points to these stories, and the dark comic anecdotes told by survivors of the Vietnam war, and writes that *burakku yūmoa* is a humor that "cannot be spoken aloud or laughed at under normal circumstances."[96] With this, Atōda describes a second feature of *burakku yūmoa*: context. The designation of a work of humor as *burakku* is dependent upon both its content and its context.[97] Thus, a joke told at a funeral and a joke told about a funeral can both be *burakku yūmoa*; a joke told in the office may be harmless, and that same joke may be *burakku yūmoa* in a graveyard.

In the end of his analysis of *burakku yūmoa*, Atōda discusses the work of thanatologist Alfons Deeken and laughter as a response to an insurmountable obstacle.[98] Atōda states that it might be difficult for his readers to connect Deeken's cheerful optimism to Atōda's seemingly-bleak *burakku yūmoa*, but they both the same (and both *burakku*).[99] For Atōda, humor made in order to lighten the burden one feels when facing aging and death is no different than the humor that a child avails themselves of when they get a zero on their test.[100] In other words, *burakku*

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[95] Ueno left college early to work in mines, and over the course of his career as a miner collected miner's stories and wrote about miner's lives. The work cited by Atōda, Chi no soko no waraibanashi, is a collection of funny stories which circulate in miners camps. Ueno regards these stories as a well-developed folk art, and shows how these stories have commonly reoccurring characters, tropes, and themes, and how they not only amuse, but also encourage and inspire miners. Ueno Hidenobu, *Chi no soko no waraibanashi*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1967.

[96] Atōda Takashi, *Yūmoa no kakumei*, Tokyo: Bunshunshinsho, 2001, 143.

[97] Atōda's comments are reminiscent Bergson who wrote that "our laughter is always the laughter of a group." Henri Bergson, "Laughter," in *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956, 64. But unlike Bergson, Atōda extends his comments to include not just the social group within which the laughter arises, but also their surroundings.

[98] Deeken, originally born in Germany, taught "the philosophy of death" at Jōchi university.

[99] In comments made summarizing the social role of humor in retirement homes, Deeken writes that humor "originates from our love and consideration for others." Alfons Deeken, "*Kōreisha no ikigai to yūmoa*," in *Rōnen Shika Igaku* 20, no. 3 (2005): 112. His view of humor is largely benign, even claiming at one point that it is impossible to both laugh and be angry at the same time – a point I am certain both Nosaka and Mishima would oppose. It is likely for this reason that Atōda believes his readers would be unlikely to associate Deeken with the often-morbid or disturbing *burakku yūmoa.*

[100] In arguments elsewhere, Atōda draws directly upon Freud and his discussion of galgenhumor, functionally equating the two. See Atōda Takashi, "*Buraku yūmoa shiron*," in *Kyōfu korekushon*, Tokyo: Shinchō bunko, 1985, 195-211.

yūmoa includes humor about morbidity and chaos, and the harmless jokes heard in retirement homes and hospices. Atōda concludes that

> aging and death are the most awesome and fearful evils. And we all know that they cannot be escaped. So one tool we have to let us face these absolute evils when they are right before our eyes is humor. It is the only thing we have….[101]

Atōda makes it explicitly clear that he conceives of *burakku yūmoa* as a palliative form of humor, as easily defined by its content as by its context. So, it is *burakku yūmoa* when young and healthy friends tell morbid jokes to relieve some of the tension they feel towards death as a distant and abstract concept. And for Atōda, it is also *burakku yūmoa* when two invalids tell anodyne knock-knock jokes to relieve stress in hospice. With this, Atōda gives us the "what" and the "why" of *burakku yūmoa*, but not the "how."

1.9 Towards a Universal Genre: The Comedy of Entropy

In is 2010 *Bloom's Literary Themes: Dark Humor* Howard Bloom eschews the term "black humor" in his title. Predictably, Bloom doesn't clearly define his alternative term, nor does he discuss his rationale for adopting it. As Bloom notes, "defining dark humor is virtually impossible because its manifestation in great literature necessarily involves irony, the trope in which you say one thing and mean another…."[102] For Bloom, it seems that "dark humor" is simply "black humor" by another name, a term condemned to be defined in only the most ambiguous terms. Or, perhaps Bloom was content to leave the matter to Patrick O'Neill; Bloom includes O'Neill's 1983 article on black humor in his collection, in which O'Neill proposes a critically robust definition of the genre.

Summarizing the problems with the ambiguous term "black humor," O'Neill writes:

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[101] Atōda Takashi, *Yūmoa no kakumei*, Tokyo: Bunshunshinsho, 2001, 149.
[102] Harold Bloom, introduction to *Bloom's Literary Themes: Dark Humor*, New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010, XV.

> Different writers use the term [black humor] to mean humour which is variously grotesque, gallows, macabre, sick, pornographic, scatological, cosmic, ironic, satirical, absurd, or any combination of these. There are those who would limit its application as a literary term to a particular decade in a particular country; there are those who would use it typologically as an inherent trait of human nature; there are those who claim that in its highest form it is not a species of humour at all; and there are those who would suggest that all humour is at bottom black.[103]

This is, of course, unsatisfying – a word that denotes everything denotes nothing. But as O'Neill sifts through the history of literary humor and the development of benign humor from its pre-existing derisive and cruel antecedents, he begins to see a quality unique to "black humour." The issue, he writes, is that too many define humor based on content, and that "Black humour in short cannot be defined in terms of its subject matter alone; it must be defined in terms of its mode of being…."[104] All "non-black humor" betrays an understanding of the world and society as coherent; there are worthy values, and there is an order to things. But, "Black humour on the other hand contrasts with both of these in that it is the humour of lost norms, lost confidence, the humour of disorientation."[105] O'Neill calls this form of humor "the comedy of entropy" or "entropic humor."[106]

O'Neill's definition provides a workable model for an understanding of "black humor" as it manifests across various genres of cultural production. There is no one method to this madness, so we need not worry ourselves with Hanada's concerns regarding the need for a local history of the form. Rather,

> Entropic humour is based firstly on an essential incongruity – the comic treatment of material which resists comic treatment – and secondly on the evocation of a particular

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[103] Patrick O'Neill, "The Comedy of Entropy: the Contexts of Black Humour." In *Bloom's Literary Themes: Dark Humor*, ed. Harold Bloom, New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010, 80.
[104] Ibid., 88.
[105] Ibid., 89.
[106] Ibid., 89 - 90. The term "entropy" comes from thermodynamics. It describes an unfortunate fact of physics that in all physical interactions on all scales some energy is inevitably lost to heat. This heat cannot be recaptured and made into usable energy, and all of the energy of any closed system, even one as vast as our own universe, will eventually be converted into heat. AP physics: Introduction to Thermodynamics, Christopher Holway Bond, Trumansburg, New York: Spring 2000.

> response, namely the reader's perception that this incongruity is the expression of a sense of disorientation rather than a frivolous desire to shock.[107]

Every culture will have its own taboos, and every writer will express their disorientation differently, but O'Neill's "entropic humour" allows us to set works from different cultural histories on the same stage.

For O'Neill we do not laugh at chaos itself, but rather our attempts to bring order to chaos. In our discussion of Atōda we wrote that to tell a joke at a funeral is *burakku yūmoa*. But a joke told at a funeral is only entropic humor if that joke draws our attention to the disorienting chaos just the other side of the veil. Like Atōda, O'Neill regards this humor is humor which has a palliative purpose. He concludes that entropic humor "allows us to envisage the facelessness of the void and yet be able to laugh rather than despair… while we laugh there's hope."[108] Unlike Atōda's *burakku yūmoa*, O'Neill's "comedy of entropy" makes it explicit how this type of humor relieves us. Entropic humorists show audiences the void, asks them to laugh at their "lost norms, lost confidence" and "disorientation", and hopes their laughter reconciles them to the truth: entropy will be all that remains.

1.10 "Dark Humor"

Now that we have a thorough definition we can use, it is time to pick a term. While O'Neill's is the most critically rigorous definition, this study is not entirely confident that "entropy" is worth the price of admission. It ties a universal human humor genre to a localized set of revelations in the field of thermodynamics; "entropy" evokes a set of concepts which would have been foreign to many pre-modern individuals writing works which could be called

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[107] Patrick O'Neill, "The Comedy of Entropy: the Contexts of Black Humour." In *Bloom's Literary Themes: Dark Humor*, ed. Harold Bloom, New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010, 90-91.
[108] Ibid., 100.

"entropic humor."[109] Second, it uses a two-dollar word when the ten-cent "dark" will do just fine. Third, the entire intellectual history supporting O'Neill's "entropy," is Western. In his 1990 study, *The Comedy of Entropy*, O'Neill ties the development of the comedy of entropy to the rise of entropic thought from Copernicus right up through Pynchon without citing a single non-Western thinker.[110] Can people from outside of that intellectual history compose and appreciate entropic humor? Can a term born from that local soil be used to discuss a global genre of humor?

This study has done what it will do in pursuit of a clear and functional definition of a particular genre of humor, and is not interested in outlining an intellectual history for every humor-producing person on the planet. So, we will do what Harold Bloom has done, and draw upon O'Neill's work while simply using the term "dark humor" instead. This study regards "dark humor" as being synonymous with O'Neill's "comedy of entropy," except unmoored from the intellectually and geographically specific history which O'Neill has given it. This is done out of recognition that "dark humor" allows one to accurately and meaningfully discuss and associate humor of this type across borders in a way that "the comedy of entropy" does not.

While similar to Atōda's *burakku yūmoa*, this study regards "dark humor" as different in that it adds one important element: *burakku yūmoa* describes laughter in the dark without making it explicitly clear that we are also laughing *at* the dark.[111] What "dark humor" does not do,

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[109] In *Hōjōki*, Kamo no Chōmei writes about the decline of Heian-period Kyoto, and the final twist to his text – the inescapable irony that living as a hermit devoted to Buddhism only leads to strong attachment to his peaceful mountain hut – subverts his Buddhist worldview. Does Kamo no Chōmei's work anticipate O'Neill's "entropic" humor? Does a text like the *Taiheiki*, a medieval war chronicle easily read as a dark parody of the Tales of the Heike, similarly point towards an "entropic" worldview? It is hard to say, and to fully examine these texts is beyond the scope of this introduction. But, this points to an exciting comic potential unique to literature from Japan: as a culture noted for its syncretic religious environment, has there always been skepticism towards systems which propose to give perfect order to existence? And has Japan's early embracing of ephemerality made it a fertile bed for a humor which points to the chaos of all life?

[110] Patrick O'Neill, *The Comedy of Entropy: Humor/Narrative/Reading*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990, 3-23.

[111] This attempt at precision is made despite the fact that any many jokes can be found risible for any number of reasons, and that the final judgment on what constitutes the butt of the joke ultimately lies with the audience. As a genre of discourse, humor is heavily dependent upon reception. And particular to the study of literary humor, there

however, is stipulate that the "dark" we laugh at be the death of all coherent worldviews as the horrors of the world make it evident that there is naught but chaos in the universe. Rather, "dark humor" encapsulates the humor which allows us to laugh at any of our fears, from death to lobsters; dark humor laughs at the pointlessness of life, the fundamental disorder of society, culture, and all things. And as we explore relief theories of humor and discuss the potential of humor as a healing device, we will see how this understanding of dark humor allows us to better appreciate humor's palliative potentials.

1.11 Palliative Humor: Healing through Laughter

> "The vaunted 'miracle cures' that abound in the literature of all the great religions all say something about the ability of the patient, properly motivated or stimulated, to participate actively in extraordinary reversals of disease and disability…. What we are talking about essentially, I suppose, is the chemistry of the will to live."[112]
>
> "Laughter is the best medicine"[113]

When thinking of humor and healing, contemporary readers inevitably picture Patch Adams wearing his famous clown nose, or Norman Cousins.[114] In 1979, Cousins, a man often credited with being the father of the contemporary "laughter as medicine" movement, published an account of his battle with an unknown illness. Having been told that he was unlikely ever to

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are unavoidable subjective and hypothetical elements to this sort of work. This study takes for granted that nearly any instance of humor can be found risible for more than one reason, and so to can the same instance of humor provoke drastically different affective responses in different audience members. Not everyone finds the same things funny, and not everyone finds something funny for the same reasons.

[112] Norman Cousins, *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient: Reflections on Healing and Regeneration*, New York: Bantam Books, 1979, 47.

[113] Every grandmother.

[114] Patch Adams, the real-life doctor portrayed famously by Robin Williams in 1998, is the most widely recognized advocate for the use of clowning in medicine. For a scholarly first-hand account of his Gesundheit institute's work abroad see Peter McGraw and Joel Warner, *The Humor Code: A Global Search for What Makes Things Funny*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014, 175-196. The Gesundheit Institute also publishes a great deal about its mission on their website. Patch Adams, "The Gesundheit Institute," accessed 3.31.2021, https://www.patchadams.org/.

recover, Cousins checked himself out of his hospital and into a nearby hotel. In the most well-known passage in his memoir, he recounts how laughter helped him recover:

> Allen Funt, producer of the spoofing television program "Candid Camera," sent films of some of his CC classics, along with a motion-picture projector. The nurse was instructed in its use. We were even able to get our hands on some old Marx Brothers films. We pulled down the blinds and turned on the machine. It worked. I made the joyous discovery that ten minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anesthetic effect and would give me at least two hours of pain-free sleep.[115]

His condition improved, and Cousins devotes the rest of his *Anatomy of an Illness…* to discussing the placebo effect, and the incredibly powerful role that mental disposition plays in recovery. Despite the majority of his text being devoted to the importance of the patient playing an active role in their own treatment (ie. maintaining a positive attitude, communicating often and openly with their medical provider, etc…) Cousins' work was largely misread as proof of laughter's healing powers.[116] The result of this misreading was that Cousins' account became one of the pillars of a new medical fad:

> There are fads in medicine and behavioral science just as in literature, art, and styles of dress. Today it is fashionable to attribute healing and restorative powers to laughter. The current popularity of the healthy laughter notion owes much to Norman Cousins's 1979 book…."[117]

Though positive views of laughter as a healthy activity have existed since Aristotle, Cousins' work can be thought of as catalyzing the current attitude towards laughter as medicine.[118]

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[115] Norman Cousins, *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient: Reflections on Healing and Regeneration*, New York: Bantam Books, 1979, 39.

[116] Cousins anticipates this, writing "I was reluctant to write about it for many years because I was fearful of creating false hopes in others who were similarly afflicted. Moreover, I knew that a single case has small standing in the annals of medical research, having little more than "anecdotal" or "testimonial" value. Ibid., 27.

[117] Jeffrey H. Goldstein, "Therapeutic Effects of Laughter," in *Handbook of Humor and Psychotherapy: Advances in the Clinical Use of Humor*, ed. William F. Fry and Waleed A. Salameh, Sarasota: Professional Resource Exchange, 1986, 2.

[118] There is some evidence that Cousins' work has influence Japanese medicine as well: in 2019 Nomoto and Yabe write that they began their study of laughter after reading Anatomy of an Illness and realizing that "what was missing from the hospital was laughter." Nomoto Yūji and Yabe Masahiro, "*Waratte byōki wa fukitobaseta ka*," *Waraigaku kenkyū* 26 (2019): 65.

Tracing the development of thought on "the therapeutic effects of laughter," Jeffrey Goldstein summarizes the clinical understanding of laughter's palliative properties thusly: "what is most striking about the literature on laughter and health is how far our convictions exceed our knowledge."[119] Despite a popular belief that laughter is beneficial, in 1986 there was still insufficient clinical evidence to adequately support the thesis that laughter is beneficial to the body or the mind.

The field of therapeutic laughter study has grown since Goldstien's survey, and a contemporary survey by JongEun Yim presents a very different picture. Writing in 2016, Yim summarizes the psychological effects of laughter as borne out by clinical examination thusly:

> laughter (1) reduces stress, anxiety, and tension, and counteracts symptoms of depression; (2) elevates mood, self-esteem, hope, energy, and vigor; (3) enhances memory, creative thinking, and problem solving; (4) improves interpersonal interaction, relationships, attraction, and closeness; (5) increases friendliness and helpfulness and builds group identity, solidarity, and cohesiveness; (6) promotes psychological well-being; (7) improves quality of life and patient care; and (8) intensifies mirth and is contagious….[120]

It seems that studies have shown what many have suspected for a long time: it's good to laugh, and laughter can affect phycological and physiological change. But what about laughter elicited by dark humor? Is all laughter created equal?

At this point, there seems to be little nuanced research done on the comparative palliative effects of different genres of humor. This is understandable. As Takayanagi notes "*burakku yūmoa* can possibly bring about the opposite [ie. negative] effect, and is a risky strategy" for

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[119] Jeffrey H. Goldstein, "Therapeutic Effects of Laughter," in *Handbook of Humor and Psychotherapy: Advances in the Clinical Use of Humor*, ed. William F. Fry and Waleed A. Salameh, Sarasota: Professional Resource Exchange, 1986, 15.

[120] JongEun Yim, "Therapeutic Benefits of Laughter in Mental Health: A Theoretical Review," *The Tohoku Journal of Experimental Medicine* 239, no. 3 (2016): 246. Yim also summarizes the physiological benefits of laughter therapy, stating that it "reduces the level of stress hormones, increases the level of health promoting-hormones such as endorphins, and strengthens the immune system…. In addition, it also has an effect of reducing blood pressure by controlling vasoconstriction… and reducing cortisol thus raising blood sugar." Ibid., 243.

making patients laugh.[121] This, of course, is anecdotal; Takayanagi cites nothing in stating that *burakku yūmoa* may cause a negative effect. But humor interpretation is highly subject to the whim of the audience, and as such it is to be expected to find anecdotal evidence in discussions surrounding dark humor. Anyone who regularly engages with humor has doubtless encountered a piece of dark humor that has made them feel strong negative feelings like cynicism, hopelessness, or a desire to disengage from the world.[122] Given that human lives are at stake, it stands to reason that doctors researching the physiological effects of humor on patients would stick to anodyne humor. But what about the possible psychological effects of dark humor and the laughter it invites?

In her study of humor in group therapy for trauma survivors, Jacqueline Garrick proposes that humor has a palliative effect by helping survivors mitigate the negative effects of stress. Garrick's study focuses on the recovery of a group of traumatized war veterans, and while some of her conclusions are particular to that setting, her comments on the relationship between laughter and stress are broadly applicable.[123] Drawing on Valent's work on stress, Garrick proposes a model for how humor impacts stress responses:

> Maladaptive responses to stress create distress, while adaptive responses bring eustress. Eustress equates to motivation, competition, and determination, which are important ingredients for success. Consequently, eustress is not only normal, but is also healthy…. Distress can become eustress when humor is added to a situation. Tension and anxiety can immediately be relieved by a smile or a laugh.[124]

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[121] Takayanagi Kazue, "*Hokandaitaiiryō toshite no warai*," *Japanese Journal of Complementary and Alternative Medicine* 4, no. 2 (2007), 56.
[122] For literary humor which heightens pathos or invites negative feelings, see Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*, John Hawkes' *Second Skin*, Zhang Xianliang's *Half of Man is Woman*, or Ibuse Masuji's *Black Rain*.
[123] Her comments on dehumanizing humor and the negative applications of humor within military settings are insightful, and resonate with John Dower's work on wartime propaganda and the systematic "othering" of the enemy through dehumanizing caricature. See John Dower, *War Without Mercy*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.
[124] Jacqueline Garrick, "The Humor of Trauma Survivors: Its Application in a Therapeutic Milieu," *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 12, no. 1-2 (2006): 173.

Garrick's conclusions regarding the psychological benefits of humor to the individual align closely with Yim's, and she gives a simple model (distress-eustress) for understanding how humor helps. And though she carefully delineates between the various genres of humor often found amongst traumatized groups, Garrick does not state that any form of humor has more or less palliative effect than any other.[125] So, as long as humor is being used to help patients engage with difficult emotions and mitigate their distress by converting it into eustress, it seems that all forms of humor are created equal.

Garrick's study makes it clear how dark humor can help the individual, and even proposes a possible explanation for the role literary dark humor can play following a large-scale trauma. Discussing the effects of humor on the therapy group, Garrick notes that dark humor serves a cohesive function for people who have shared trauma:

> When facilitating a therapy group with survivors, getting them to focus on their humorous memories can be a means of encouraging group cohesion and validation. When they can laugh with one another and share their feelings, they can release the shame and loneliness they have attributed to their "sick" sense of humor and allow them not to feel so alone. It can be very reassuring for survivors to know that others find humor in the same things, even when they have not shared the same exact experiences.[126]

If individuals sharing humorous memories helps Garrick's room full of Vietnam war veterans to heal, sharing on a larger scale may have similar effects. Broadly disseminated works of dark humor could produce the same community-building and eustress-relieving effects culture-wide.

The following three chapters touch upon exemplary works of humor by three excellent comic writers active in postwar Japan. This study regards these three comics as representative of three different types of humor. Hasegawa Machiko's *Sazaesan* represents normative quotidian

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[125] Garrick addresses "gallows humor," which she understands as focusing on "death and destruction," "black humor" which focuses on "the oppressor and the murderer," and "inappropriate humor" which is used by trauma survivors to distance themselves from their own experiences and bury true emotions under a "comical mask." Ibid., 176-7.

[126] Ibid., 180.

humor, and a close reading of her work will give us insight into conventional (ie. “non-dark humor”) postwar humor. While *Sazaesan* may touch upon dark topics, it ultimately upholds a set of values and promotes a view of the world in which there is, or should be, an order to things. In other words, *Sazaesan* can be thought of as anodyne jokes at a funeral.

Mishima Yukio’s *Fudōtoku kyōku kōza* (*Lessons in Immorality*) is a provocative essay series in which a darling of the literary establishment dips his toes in the genre of mass-market social criticism. Using a variety of humorous forms, these essays seem to be “dark humor” as they point to the disorder of contemporary society. However, we see that Mishima uses these essays to promote his own novel moral system, and do not deal with chaos any more than Hasegawa’s work. If *Sazaesan* is a knock-knock joke at a wake, and Mishima’s *Lessons…* is an obscene joke told in the office.

Last, we will discuss Nosaka Akiyuki’s *Erogotoshitachi* (*The Pornographers).* This study regards *The Pornographers* to be an exemplary work of dark humor, as it exposes the chaotic underbelly of postwar Japanese life and then asks us to laugh at it. Nosaka puts readers in front of the reaper itself and makes jokes about its tattered robes.

Chapter 2: *Sazaesan* and Anodyne Humor in Postwar Japan

On April 22nd 1946, the evening edition of the *Fukunichi shinbun* carried the inaugural strip of Hasegawa Machiko's *Sazaesan*.[127] In the opening panel, Sazae's mother (Fune) brother (Katsuo) and younger sister (Wakame) sit on a tatami floor.[128] Fune is in a kimono, while the children are both in European dress. Fune smiles mildly, and in the second panel she calls out to her daughter. Sazae replies, remaining invisible to the reader. Her speech bubble comes out from behind a *fusuma* screen with a flowering branch painted on it; everything about the scene evokes a traditional family household. Wakame has leaned over into mother's lap, but keeps her knees on the floor. Katsuo keeps his posture, hands on knees, but looks out of panel towards Sazae. The eldest child's absence is noteworthy, and the reader sees the veneer of propriety peeling. There is tension, but the Isonos have yet to truly trample the conventions of a first meeting – one can readily forgive a distracted child Wakame's age for breaking her stiff sitting position, and perhaps Sazae is dutifully attending to some task elsewhere in the home.

In the third panel our heroine appears: Sazae, the eponymous protagonist of the strip, is now standing in the doorway. She holds a steamed bun in her right hand, and her left hand rests

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[127] Hasegawa Machiko, *Sazaesan*, Asahi bunkō, Asahi shinbun shuppan, 1994, vol. 1, 1. Publication details from Hasegawa Machiko, et al, *Yorinuki Hasegawa Machiko ten: Sazaesan seitan 70-nen kinen*. Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 2016. Its *Hasegawa Machiko nenpyō*, 328-339, is a concise and coherent chronicle of Hasegawa's life and writings beginning with her birth on January 30, 1920, and ending with the special exhibition for which *Yorinuki Hasegawa Machiko ten: Sazaesan seitan 70-nen kinen* was published.
As this study of *Sazaesan* involves conclusions drawn from close readings of/looking at of the comic strips, the strips will be described extensively. Copies of the strips themselves will be included in later versions of this study if possible, however there is reason to believe that Hasegawa and her estate are hesitant to allow her strips to be reproduced. Excepting those publications through either her own publication company, Shimaisha, or through Asahi shinbunsha – the newspaper for which Hasegawa penned most of *Sazaesan*, the strips are rarely allowed to be reproduced for secondary publications. For example, Shimizu Isao's *Sazaesan, Sazaesan* no shōtai, published by Heibonsha, does not contain a single reproduction of a strip, despite being a monograph devoted solely to *Sazaesan*. The one exception to this policy seems to have been made for Hasegawa's mentor; Tagawa Suihō's two studies on humor, both published by Kōdansha, feature many reprinted *Sazaesan* strips. Writing in 2016, Kurukawa Sō states that Shimaisha's tough stance on copyright helped establish the concept of manga copyright in Japan, but that this also cost *Sazaesan* its opportunity to be evaluated by critics. Kurokawa Sō, "'*Sazaesan' ga egaita jidai,*" *Geijutsu shinchō* vol. 67, no 9 (2016), 49.

[128] For the purposes of clarity, this chapter will refer to Hasegawa's cartoon strip as *Sazaesan* (as opposed to the hyphenated English-language equivalent "Sazae-san") and to the strip's heroine as Sazae.

akimbo at her hip. Her right foot is crossed in front of her left. It would be physically uncomfortable for her to be leaning as all of her weight would be on her right forearm which holds the bun; her stance is impossibly casual. Her hair is tied on top of her head and behind in a top-bun that contrasts comically against her mother's coiffure. Fune scolds Sazae, while Katuso informs her that they've gathered together to greet their readers.

In the final panel Hasegawa draws Sazae in full retreat; she has sweat drops flying off her head, likely signifying anxiety or embarrassment as she ducks out of the panel.[129] Her cheeks are reddened, she has buried her face in her arms, and she is using her hands to cover her top-bun. But, her face is not ashamed, and the squiggly line of her mouth is upturned at the very end – as though she is smiling slightly at her own plight. Fune faces the audiences and offers an excuse for her daughter's behavior, while Sazae's younger siblings have now relaxed and are smiling. Fune's apology, literally "she's always that way, and it causes trouble" anticipates the humor pattern which will define *Sazaesan* for its over 6000 total strips: we all, the butt of the joke included, will be brought to laugh at universal and inevitable human error.

But *Sazaesan*'s first run was brief; *Sazaesan* ran in fits and starts in a variety of newspapers before finding her longest home and largest audience in the morning edition of the *Asahi shinbun*. *Sazaesan* was first published in a Fukuoka-based evening newspaper, the *Yūkan fukunichi*. Hasegawa and her family had returned to the area during the war, and *Sazaesan* was conceived of in and heavily influenced by Hasegawa's time outside of Tokyo during the war.[130]

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[129] Though different than what we will find in Western cartoons, both Western and Japanese cartoons make use of image-as-symbol to depict extreme emotions. These sweat drops are evocative, rather than figurative icons. Sazae's sweat drops are meant to evoke the concept of panic just as Charlie Brown's gaping maw and massive tears are meant to evoke a child's sadness.

[130] It is outside the parameters of this study to fully examine the ways in which Hasegawa's nostalgia for wartime Fukuoka have profoundly influenced her cartoon. Given *Sazaesan's* massive popular appeal and broad reaching cultural influence, an investigation of Hasegawa's affection for life during wartime would likely yield meaningful insights into the ways in which popular media perpetuated wartime (and prewar) conceptualizations of the family.

Before evacuating to Fukuoka, Hasegawa had been an apprentice of Tagawa Suihō, the author of *Norakuro* and one of Japan's foremost cartoonists.[131] Hasegawa was recognized as a promising young cartoonist, and it wasn't long after the end of the war before Hasegawa returned to Tokyo from Fukuoka.[132]

On April 16th, 1951, *Sazaesan* replaced Blondie in the morning edition of the *Asahi shinbun*. From its inception in 1946 until 1951 *Sazaesan* was published in a variety of papers, but primarily in those associated with the Fukuoka-based *Fukunichi shinbun* and the Tokyo-based (and nationally-circulated) *Asahi shinbun*. But following the move in 1951, *Sazaesan* stayed the lead cartoon in the *Asahi shinbun* until 1975.[133] According to survey figures from 1966, *Sazaesan* was the most widely recognized and beloved cartoon strip in Japan.[134] Critic Tsurumi Shunsuke asserts that in 1973, *Sazaesan* had a daily readership of roughly 15,000,000 people.[135]Assuming that the contemporary population likely lay somewhere between the 1970

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[131] *Norakuro* was a major pre-war manga strip starring a black stray dog named "*norainu no kurokichi*," which is shortened to *Norakuro*. Over its run from 1931 to 1941, the strip follows the clumsy and forgetful *Norakuro* as he enlists in the Japanese army and rises in the ranks thanks to a mix of stubbornness and luck. There are few English-language resources readers interested in Tagawa Suihō. However, Max V. Dionisio's dissertation, Drawing on History: Tagawa Suihō and Early Japanese Manga Culture is a valuable resource. It contains ample biographical information, critical discussions of Tagawa's writings on pedagogy, the military, and the manga industry, as well as a critical reading and translation of Tagawa's *Norakuro*. Dionisio also translates the entire 1967 Kōdansha *Norakuro Complete Works*. Naturally, more resources are available in Japanese. Readers are encouraged to seek out Tagawa Suihō: *Norakuro ichidaiki* by Takamizawa Junko. Tagawa died in the middle of writing his autobiography, but his wife was able to build upon his notes to co-author the semi-autobiographical study.

[132] A feature in the October 1935 edition of Shōjo kurabu features a profile of the then-fifteen year old Hasegawa, as well as her two page cartoon "Tanuki's Mask." The profile is filled with laudatory quotations from Tagawa, and a few biographical details. In Hasegawa Machiko, et al, *Yorinuki Hasegawa Machiko ten: Sazaesan seitan 70-nen kinen*, Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 2016, 31.

[133] The term used to describe *Sazaesan's* position in the Asahi news is *Kanban manga* (看板マンガ). The term does not denote "lead" as in the "lead headline" ie. on the front page. Rather, the term is used to describe the most popular cartoon carried in the newspaper. Ibid., 20. For a precise publication record including the various newspapers which carried early *Sazaesan* strips, see Ibid., 328-339.

[134] Tsurumi Shunsuke, "*Sazaesan*" in Tsurumi Shunsuke, and Saitō Shinji, *Sazaesan no "Shōwa*," Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 2006, 37.

[135] Tsurumi cites Asahi shinbun's contemporary circulation of roughly 5,000,000 editions a day, and theorizes that there were at least three readers for each paper printed. Newspapers were often passed between family members, and *Sazaesan* and other cartoons were read by most family members, including children too young to read the articles in the paper. While Tsurumi's methods are not at all precise, they are useful in approximating *Sazaesan's* popularity during its run; if anything, Tsurumi's estimate is low as he does not include those who read *Sazaesan* in paperback, or children sharing strips with their friends.

figure of 103,720,000 and 111,940,000, roughly 15% of the population of Japan read *Sazaesan*.[136]

For all of its social and cultural significance, *Sazaesan* has garnered little critical attention. In his analysis of three popular family-based anime, William Lee writes:

> Although [*Sazaesan*, *Chibi Maruko-chan* and *Crayon Shin-chan*] may lack the critical edge associated with popular culture on the margins of society, this does not necessarily disqualify them from serious analysis. On the contrary, I would argue, their very popularity demands that they be taken seriously and the reasons for their popularity carefully examined. I shall take it as a given that [their] success …could not have been achieved without their speaking to and reflecting widespread trends and values in Japanese society.[137]

This study agrees with Lee in that there is something to be gleaned from understanding the dominant popular cultural forms of an era; one expects that a deep engagement with *Seinfeld* would yield as much insight into the concerns of 1990s American culture as a close reading of Thomas Pynchon would. But one must recognize that pop culture successes are not merely lenses which reflect some particular zeitgeist. They actively participate in and construct their cultural moments; if we are to treat *Sazaesan* as a mere cultural artifact and read it as a passive reflection of its historical moment, we make the mistake of looking past the work itself.

Closely reading *Sazaesan* as a work of humor, and examining how its humor functions will allow this study to sketch out tentative answers to the questions "how was *Sazaesan* able to gain and keep its popularity," "how has *Sazaesan* aged so well," and "what role did *Sazaesan* play in the lives of its readers in postwar Japan?" As a corollary, this chapter will also provide

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[136] Figures drawn from the *Nihon jinkō no suii*, in *Nihon daihyakka zensho* (accessed online through JapanKnowledge, July 2020).

[137] William Lee, "From Sazae san to Crayon Shin chan," in *Japan Pop: Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture*, edited by Timothy J. Craig, Armonk, NY, M.E. Sharpe, 2000, 186. Lee's chapter lays out the ways in which these programs address the anxieties of their viewers. The utopian *Sazaesan* and Chibi Maruko-chan give viewers respite through idealized representations of specific points during the Japanese postwar, the sixties and seventies respectively. Crayon Shin-chan creates humor by showing a family which is not at all ideal, giving viewers a chance to laugh at themselves.

insight into humor norms in Japan from roughly 1945 to 1970, and discuss how humor can act in a palliative capacity for people living through strife; this chapter will show how *Sazaesan* used humor to soothe readers living through a period of intense political and cultural change.

So, why has *Sazaesan* cast the longest shadow of its contemporaries? Certainly the television show has helped, but why aren't there other contemporary strips with successful long-running television adaptations? There are other early postwar comic strips worth reading and remembering, so what made *Sazaesan* special?

2.1 Newspaper Cartoons in Postwar Japan

Sazaesan was not the only popular and long-running comic strip of its time, nor was Hasegawa Machiko the only successful cartoonist; contemporaneously, Yokoyama Ryūichi's long-running *Fukuchan* was in the *Mainichi shinbun*, and Akiyoshi Kaoru's *Todoroki Sensei* was in the *Yomiuri shinbun*. All were adored in their day, but all have faced different fates over the years. In 2009, Shimizu Isao wrote that

> *Mainichi shinbun's "Fukuchan*," *Asahi shinbun's Sazaesan* and *Yomiuri shinbun's "Todoroki sensei"*: these are three manga which were said to have built the age [the postwar boom in four-panel comics]. But, in the generation born after the war (which are the majority of the current population), surprisingly few know *Todoroki sensei*.[138]

First published in the *Asahi shinbun* in 1936, *Fukuchan* was Japan's longest-running comic strip until *Sazaesan* surpassed it.[139] Though *Fukuchan* was also briefly adapted to television, ultimately it faded away just like *Todoroki* sensei.

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[138] Shimizu Isao, *Yonkoma manga: Hokusai kara "moe" made*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009, 108.

[139] *Fukuchan's* run was comprised of 5534 strips. Publication figures for *Fukuchan* taken from the *Fukuchan nenpyō* on the Yokoyama Ryūichi museum website: http://www.bunkaplaza.or.jp/mangakan/chronicle/chronicle.html. *Fukuchan* was a spun-off from Yokoyama's month-long *Edokko Kenchan*. *Edokko Kenchan* ran from January 25-February 25, 1936. Yokoyama was asked to continue the strip following the 2.26 incident in order to "lighten up" Japan during dark times. Shimizu Isao, *Yonkoma manga: Hokusai kara "moe" made,* Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009, 84. The 2.26 incident was a coup attempt begun on February 26, 1936. In response to internecine conflict, young members of the kōdō faction of the military attempted to assassinate rival officers and unsympathetic

Kusamori Shinichi provides tentative answers to how *Sazaesan* aged better than its contemporaries. He argues that *Sazaesan* has been able to connect with readers more effectively due to Hasegawa's "superior efforts to make readers laugh," while *Fukuchan* is simply provokes nostalgia in readers, and that at its core is divorced from readers' sense of everyday life.[140] *Sazaesan* was more relatable to contemporary readers because it was closer to their quotidian experience – its author came of age during the end of the war, and the strip responds to changes in the real world.[141] This gives one possible explanation as to why *Sazaesan* was so successful during its initial newspaper run, but then why did *Sazaesan* reprints do so well? The long-running television show no doubt helped the latter day paperback reprints find an audience, but the success of the television show does not explain how the comic strips avoided being relegated to the realm of "mere nostalgia" like *Fukuchan*?[142]

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politicians. Though they succeeded in killing a handful of opponents, the coup was ultimately a failure. This incident inspired Mishima Yukio's famous short story and film Patriotism (*Yūkoku*).

[140]この差は、笑いの発見への努力が、長谷川町子の方が上だというばかりでなく、横山隆一のフクちゃん、およびフクちゃん一家が、私たちとかかわるものを、いまや郷愁的にしかもっていないということである。フクちゃんの行動様式、フクちゃん一家の家族構造とその思考のパターンが、私たちの生活感情にたいして、根っこから剝離してしまっているからである。Kusamori Shinichi in Tsurumi Shunsuke, and Saitō Shinji. *Sazaesan no "Shōwa."* Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 2006, 6-7.

[141] Ibid., 7.

[142] As this study is primarily concerned with the original print run of four-panel *Sazaesan* and its subsequent paperback republications, we will not be discussing any ancillary products. This includes the incredibly popular television show, which merits a study of its own. For an English-language discussion of the television program, see William Lee, "From Sazae san to Crayon Shin chan," in *Japan Pop: Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture*, edited by Timothy J. Craig, 186-206. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000. Japanese language discussions abound, and Hasegawa's many obituaries are an excellent resource for those seeking insight into just how long a shadow *Sazaesan* casts. Sanyūtei Enraku, himself a familiar face on television having appeared in the Sunday evening rakugo broadcast *Shōten* since 1977, writes about *Sazaesan* and *Shōten* with language that clearly shows that the televised *Sazaesan* and its utopian representation of the multi-generational household have deeply informed the national imagination. Sanyūtei Enraku, *"Shōten, Sazaesan no shichōritsu wa*?" *Bungei shunjū*, vol. 92 no. 3 (February, 2014), 280 – 282. See Steinberg for a fascinating study of the trans-media relationships between cultural products and their ancillary offspring in postwar Japan. Marc Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

Discussing a 2004 reprint, Iso Yōsuke posits two possible answers, the first being that the strip gives readers an opportunity to reflect upon the dramatic changes in Japan from 1974 to 2004.[143] The second reason is that *Sazaesan*'s humor

> had not faded in the least…Mixing together contemporary issues and seasonal sentiments, Hasegawa draws out laughter which overcomes its era and is new. I have a newfound respect for the breadth of author Hasegawa Machiko's imagination.[144]

So, *Sazaesan* is able to escape the same fate as *Fukuchan* in part because it is still funny. Below this study will discuss *Sazaesan*'s particular brand of humor and provide tentative conclusions to why it has been able to remain funny for so long. But first, we must look at Iso's surprise; why would Iso and other latter day readers find themselves surprised to be laughing at *Sazaesan*? The answer lies, in part, with how *Sazaesan* is misread.

2.2 How Not to Read *Sazaesan*

In general, *Sazaesan* is read by scholars and critics as though it were a historical document. Iwakawa calls *Sazaesan* is a "vital record of everyday life," while Kusamori Shinichi writes that *Sazaesan* is a "history of postwar Japanese everyday life and its customs."[145] As a result, much of what has been written about *Sazaesan* isn't truly about *Sazaesan*; writers look past *Sazaesan* in order to examine their object of inquiry. This reading method disregards *Sazaesan*'s potential to critique, which leads to a second reading problem.[146] Frequently,

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[143] Be henshūbu, editor, *Sazaesan o sagashite*, Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 2005, ii. Note: page unnumbered, but would correspond to "ii" in conventional pagination – passage taken from the second page of the preface.
[144] ただ、それにもまして反響が大きいかった理由は、「サザエさん」という作品の面白しさが、少しも色褪せていなかったためだろう。時事問題や季節感を織りまぜながらも、紡ぎ出す笑いは、時代を超えて新しい。作者である長谷川町子さんの創造力の豊かさに、あらためて敬服する。Ibid.
[145] Iwakawa Takashi, "*Sazaesan to nininsankyaku, harubaru to yonjūnen*," *Ushio*, no. 392, November, 1991, 352; Kusamori Shinichi in Tsurumi Shunsuke, and Saitō Shinji. *Sazaesan no "Shōwa."* Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 2006, 10.
[146] This "*Sazaesan* as history" reading method is enabled by the fact that *Sazaesan* rarely overtly critiques its historical moment. *Sazaesan* is invested in making humor in a home, and the strips are often insular. The referentiality of newspaper cartoons will be discussed further below. See Kōsaka Fumio, *Warau sengoshi*, Tokyo:

Sazaesan is used to discuss some phenomenon that is regarded as inherently "Japanese," and *Sazaesan* is then read through a problematic nativist lens – *Sazaesan* defines and is defined by "Japanese-ness." It is regarded as though it passively reflects some inherently "Japanese" quality, rather than being a work which actively created and critiqued the "Japanese-ness" it depicts.

In his introduction to *Searching for Sazaesan* (*Sazaesan o sagashite),* Asahi newspaper editorial staff member Iso Yōsuke writes of the 2004 decision to reprint *Sazaesan* in Asahi's Saturday insert "SaturDAY."[147] Iso writes that

> As we all know, *Sazaesan* is a *kokuminteki* four-panel manga which ran from April 1946 until February 1974, moving from the Evening Fukunichi (*Yūkan Fukunichi*) newspaper to the Asahi newspaper in 1949. In 1994 Asahi published a forty-five volume paperback edition of *Sazaesan* that became a best-seller – which should still be fresh in our memory. The Sunday television show boasts a regular viewer share of nearly twenty percent.[148]

Koku（国）means country, min（民） means person or people, and teki（的）functions similarly to the English-language -esque; here, *kokuminteki* can be thought of as being roughly equivalent to "national."[149] What is it about *Sazaesan* that leads Iso and his colleagues to view *Sazaesan* as something reflective of "the people," whomever they may be?

Unlike Iso, some have made an effort to explain just what is "Japanese" about *Sazaesan*. Iwakawa provides a more thorough definition of what constitutes the "national" character of *Sazaesan*. He writes that:

Toransubyū, 2002, for a reading of Mappirakun as a humorous history; Mappirakun lacks a consistent cast of characters and relies heavily on external reference for humor, making it a good text for this reading method.

[147] In *Sazaesan o sagashite,* Iso and his colleagues use individual strips as jumping-off points for brief essays tracking cultural phenomenon as they have changed from the early postwar to the present-day (then-2004). Essays include such broad topics as "fish," and "polite language," as well as narrower ones such as "Misora Hibari," "cockroaches," and "color televisions." Iso and others read *Sazaesan* as document/documentary, rather than as an individual's depiction of a fictional/ideal Japanese postwar.

[148] ご存知のように「サザエさん」は、昭和 21（1946）年 4 月から、「夕刊フクニチ」に連載（49 年から朝日新聞、74 年 2 月に終了）された国民的な 4 コマ漫画だ。94 年に朝日新聞が文庫本全 45 巻を発売し、ベストセラーになったのが記憶に新しい。日曜夜に放映されるテレビ・アニメは、常に 20%前後の高視聴率を誇る。Be henshūbu, editor, *Sazaesan o sagashite,* Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 2005, ii..

[149] Kokumin, kokutai (the body politic), and similar language were prevalent in wartime discourse in Japan. Its evocation here echoes those earlier uses, and kokuminteki has a slightly conservative feel to it.

> Sazae will always be like a daughter, as opposed to like a wife. If we look at it thusly, *Sazaesan*'s moderate social engagement, its "woman on top" household, its housewife's point of view, its lack of desires, its optimism, its depiction of three generations living together peacefully, its clean-ness, its middlebrow ideology, the composed common sense of the everyman… and so on. *Sazaesan* is a "*kokumin*-esque" manga, and I feel as though we can see many reasons for why it has continued for so long.[150]

This is a frustrating argument, as this incomplete list does not sufficiently describe what it is that constitutes the *kokumin-esque*. It also does not give us enough material from which we can imagine the constellation of elements that make up the elusive *kokumin-esque*. Furthermore, Iwakawa entirely ignores the fact that *Sazaesan*, being a literary work and not a historical document, is always commenting upon and attempting to objectively depict those elements which Iwakawa proposes compose the *kokumin-esque*.[151]

Contemporary critics were more inclined to read *Sazaesan* as critical of postwar Japan. In 1973, critic Tsurumi Shunsuke read *Sazaesan* productively as Hasegawa Machiko's political and cultural critique through the quotidian.[152] For Tsurumi, Sazae's complaints about the price of goods are actually veiled critiques of an economy that strains middle and lower-class families. The meek father Namihei is a symbolic rejection of the prewar patriarchal national system of

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[150]サザエさんはいつになっても（女房という感じではなく）娘のようだ。このようにみてくると、ほどほどの社会性、女上位、主婦の眼、無欲、楽天性、平穏な三世代同居、清潔感、中ぐらいの思想、しっかりした庶民の常識……などなど、「サザエさん」が"国民的漫画"となり、永続してきた原因がいくらかわかるような気がする。Iwakawa Takashi, "*Sazaesan to nininsankyaku, harubaru to yonjūnen*." *Ushio*. no. 392 (November, 1991), 361.

[151] The same simple association of *Sazaesan* with some inherent "Japaneseness" or "kokumin-esque quality" is present in rhetoric surrounding the television show as well. In his discussion of popular and long-lived Sunday evening television tryptic of *Shōten*, *Sazaesan* and *Chibimarukochan*, rakugo performer Sanyūtei Enraku describes *Sazaesan* as depicting a "Japanese spirit" and a culture which "Japanese people" have passed on for a long time. And while Enraku directs readers towards a possible explanation of what it is that constitutes a "Japanese heart," the love and kindness of a three-generation family living under one roof, he, Iwakawa, and Iso are ultimately unsatisfying in that they do not coherently theorize what it is that makes *Sazaesan* a "national" or "Japanese" comic strip. Rather, they view *Sazaesan* as a reflection of some inherent "Japanese" quality, or as a representation of an inherently "Japanese" life. These three exemplify the normative reading of *Sazaesan* – it is often treated as a jumping-off point for discussions of historical and social problems as though it were a document rather than a commentary. Sanyūtei Enraku, "*Shōten, Sazaesan no shichōritsu wa?*" *Bungei shunjū*, vol. 92 no. 3 (February, 2014), 280 – 282.

[152] Tsurumi Shunsuke, "*Sazaesan*" in Tsurumi Shunsuke, and Saitō Shinji, *Sazaesan no "Shōwa,"* Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 2006.

emperor-as-father. The Isono's generally conservative and self-sufficient household is a critique of the logic of Japan's period of rapid economic development. The frequent comic inversion of authority figures advocates for equality and critiques postwar Japanese competitive society as a continuation of the Meiji ideal of *rishhin shusse*, and so on.

So, why do later critics tend to read *Sazaesan* like a historical document rather than as a work of literary humor? Why do so many write of *Sazaesan* uncritically as a work that depicts "national character" rather as a work that critiques upon and actively creates "national character?" In other words, why do so few critics treat *Sazaesan* as an object worthy of their full critical attention? While there are doubtless many avenues of inquiry which could yield insight into these questions, this study will turn now to form; perhaps so many underestimate *Sazaesan* thusly because of its genre: the deceptively simple four-panel comic.

2.3 Four-panel Newspaper Comics in Japan

Sazaesan is a four-panel comic strip published in the morning edition of a daily newspaper. Its panels are arranged vertically, and are read top-to-bottom, right-to-left. Readers familiar with Western cartoon strips such as Garfield or Peanuts will be grateful for the cosmopolitan origins of newspaper manga; a Japanese four-panel comic shares much with the Western four panel comic.[153] The panels tend overwhelmingly to be discrete boxes separated by a white space ("the gutter") which denotes some kind of division between the panels, generally

[153] For a history of the four-panel newspaper comic in Japan, see Shimizu Isao, *Yonkoma manga: Hokusai kara "moe" made*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009. For a general discussion of *Shōwa* period newspaper cartoons as well as broad sampling of *Sazaesan* and its contemporaries, see Matsuo Kikuo, editor, *Shōwa shinbun mangashi: warai to fūshi de tsuzuru seisō 100-Nen*, Tokyo: Mainichi shinbunsha, 1981.

temporal although panels can also depict cotemporaneous scenes divided by a geographical or thematic motive.[154]

Sazaesan has also experienced enduring success in bound form; as the cartoon was being run in newspapers, Shimaisha collected and reprinted them in codex. Having taken sick leave from the *Asahi shinbun* on March 22, 1960, Hasegawa read though the then-34 volume Shimaisha *Sazaesan* collection. Picking only those strips she deemed either "funny" or "very funny," Hasegawa curated Shimaisha's *Selected Sazaesan*.[155] In 1994 *Asahi bunko* published a forty-five volume collection simply titled *Sazaesan*, and in the late nineties *Asahi shinbun kaisha* published the Hasegawa Machiko Completed Works which contain *Sazaesan*.[156]

Though bound and released serially in *bunkōbon* form like many popular manga, *Sazaesan* and other four-panel newspaper manga are slightly different from their periodically published multi-panel brethren.[157] Four-panel comics have both a different publication form

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[154] While I will engage more substantively with certain aspects of the four-panel comic form particular to the Japanese context, Western comics scholarship can be useful for discussing and understanding the general features of a comic strip. Scott McCloud's work is the source of much of the vocabulary used in Western discussions of comics; the term "the gutter" comes from his chapter on inter-panel transitions, 60-93. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Harper Collins, New York: 1993.

[155] Hasegawa Machiko, et al, *Yorinuki Hasegawa Machiko ten: Sazaesan seitan 70-nen kinen*, Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 2016, 185. Shimaisha's Yorinuki *Sazaesan* presents a problem to scholars like Shimizu Isao who would search the archives for the missing strips in an attempt to recreate an original or "true" *Sazaesan* (see Shimizu Isao, *Sazaesan no shōtai*, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1997). A newspaper cartoonist has to meet deadlines and please editors, but Hasegawa edited the Selected *Sazaesan* herself, and it was published by her family's publishing company. The argument could be made that the Selected *Sazaesan* is the "truest" form of *Sazaesan* available.

[156] The initial newspaper strips were curated before their re-release, and there are strips missing from the reprinted editions. Critic Shimizu Isao productively reads into the editing process to show the ways in which the reprints actively elided strips which were later deemed to be inappropriate, impacted the strip as it was to be read in a bound volume (ie. removing strips which represent characters behaving in an unexpected fashion, etc…), moments of cruel humor, and so on. By Shimizu's count, there are roughly 700 strips from the initial newspaper run that did not make it into the Shimaisha collection. Subsequent reprints were based on the Shimaisha edition, with the Asahi bunko edition missing another fifteen strips. Shimizu Isao, *Sazaesan no shōtai*, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1997. However, as this study is primarily concerned with investigating the cumulative effects of *Sazaesan's* persistent use of anodyne palliative humor, it is content to have used the Asahi bunko edition as its base text. While the occasional cruel cartoon would doubtless have had some impact on the reader, this study believes that the missing strips would do little to change the reader's experience of *Sazaesan* as a work of palliative humor.

[157] The bunkōbon is roughly equivalent to the English publication medium of the "paperback." Often, successful manga are republished monthly or quarterly in the bunkōbon format. Though this study does not take up this line of inquiry, just as Netflix has changed the way that television is watched, one expects that the bunkōbon changed the

(newspaper) and format (a discrete number of panels displayed alongside other material on a single newspaper page) than their magazine-bound kin. To better discuss the differences between these two genres, critic Ibaragi Masaharu subdivides manga into two categories: cartoons (*kātūn*) and comics (*komikku*).[158] For Ibaragi, *kātūn*, which would include *Sazaesan*, have a relatively short history in Japan; *kātūn* were introduced in Japan with Western newspapers at the end of the Edo period (1600-1868).[159] K*ātūn* held an important place in mass media as a medium for satirizing politics, and also as a site for the straightforward depiction of everyday life and contemporary customs.[160]

Where *komikku* tend to depict narratives which can frequently span multiple volumes, *kātūn* are atomized works, with one day's *kātūn* having little bearing upon the next. To put it in more contemporary terms: *komikku* would be those multi-volume manga which can span years (*Naruto*, *One Piece*, *Dragonball* and its subsequent iterations) following one or more narratives, while *kātūn* are atomized works which may have coherent setting and cast of characters but are narratively unrelated to one another from one strip to the next (*Garfield*, *Blondie*, *Sazaesan).*

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way manga is read. For a discussion of the bunkōbon "boom", see Murakami Tomohiko, Takatori Ei, and Yonezawa Yoshihiro, *Mangaden : "kyojin no hoshi" kara "kuishinbo" made*, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1987, 167 – 188.

[158] Ibaragi Masaharu, *Manga janru stadīzu*, Tokyo: Rinsen Shoten, 2013, 2.

[159] Ibaragi posits a longer history for komikku, arguing that komikku can be regarded as the extension of early forms of attempts to express narrative meaning in picture, with or without panels, such as the chōjūgiga (鳥獣戯画). Ibid., 8. For an excellent English-language discussion of early narrative pictures and their relation, or lack thereof, to present-day Manga, see Adam L. Kern, *Manga from the Floating World: Comicbook Culture and the Kibyōshi of Edo Japan*, Harvard University Press, 2006. For a succinct discussion of the slightly more complex origins of the newspaper and newspaper comics in Japan see Shimizu Isao's closing entry in Matsuo Kikuo, editor, *Shōwa shinbun mangashi: warai to fūshi de tsuzuru seisō 100-Nen*, Tokyo: Mainichi shinbunsha, 1981, 272-274. Itō gives a history of the development of Japanese newspaper manga through eleven biographical entries on major historical figures. What this text lacks in analytical rigor, it makes up for with readability, and it is a useful resource to those wishing to know more about the early years of newspaper manga. Itō Ippei, *Nihon shinbun mangashi*, Tokyo: Zōkeisha, 1980.

[160] 政治現象を風刺的に描き出す政治漫画のみならず、世相・風俗を端的に描き出すメディアとして、日本においても一九五〇年代までは新聞や雑誌といったマス・メディアに掲載される勢いを有していた。 Ibaragi Masaharu, *Manga janru stadīzu*, Tokyo: Rinsen Shoten, 2013, 4. Readers interested in a history of *Shōwa* period satirical manga should see Manga Shūdan, *Manga Shōwa shi: manga shūdan no 50-nen*, Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 1982.

While they are re-printed in similar paperback format, *komikku* and *kātūn* have different initial publication sites which demand different qualities. Long narrative *komikku*, like narrative literary works, require some kind of coherent sense of world and character. Osamu Tezuka's *Buddha* tracks the character development of Siddhartha as he grows from spoiled young prince into the Buddha, while the long-running One Piece depends upon multiple complex sub-plots and an incredibly broad world filled with diverse characters and locations. Though some *kātūn* like *Sazaesan* are incredibly long-lived, they do not develop lengthy narratives. Part of the reason for this is publication outlet – *komikku* tend to be published in weekly or bi-weekly periodicals devoted to manga which allow for a higher page/panel count. The different publication frequencies of the two forms also lead to certain changes in content. Because of its greater potential to develop complex narratives, characters, and worlds, a *komikku* can create complex and self-referential humor which has little to do with the outside world; *komikku* can create in-jokes. And while this potential for self-referential humor is not absent from *kātūn*, *kātūn* are less able to create their own contexts and thus tend to rely heavily upon referencing the everyday in order to connect with readers in order to create humor. In order to be funny *kātūn* have to be either timely, or timeless. Satirical *kātūn* tend to be timely, while *Sazaesan* exemplifies the latter.

Magazine publication also allows *komikku* to develop greater niche appeal, as magazines bundle multiple *komikku* together in the same volume. But with the discontinuation of *kātūn*-publishing periodicals such as *Bunshun manga dokuhon* in the 1960s and 70s, *kātūn* came to be published solely in newspapers.[161] Unlike magazines which offered niche material to small audiences, newspapers served a wide readership.

[161] Initially published in Showa 29, *Manga dokuhon* was notable for introducing many foreign cartoonists such as Otto Soglow, Virgil Partch, and Raymond Peynet, as well as exposing Japanese readers to foreign humor, and everyday customs in the West. Shimizu Isao, *Yonkoma manga: Hokusai kara "moe" made*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009, 95.

This broad readership presents a problem to would-be *kātūn* writers, particularly those who sought to write critical satires. The demand for broad appeal ultimately resulted in the enervation of Japanese *kātūn* as a satirical or critical mode of expression:

> In order to be appreciated by all their readers, who were now an undifferentiated and diverse mass with a variety of interests, cartoonists had to select themes which anyone could understand, and needed depictions which offended no one. For this reason, the works themselves became something which was "neither medicine nor poison." Furthermore, were they to stick with the satirical style of depicting things as black or white, the readership for "black and white" satire had been shrunk.[162]

While Ibaragi is focusing here on single-panel political cartoons, similar observations can be made about four-panel comics; newspaper cartoons such as *Sazaesan* were also read by more than just a single family member.[163] But while many one-panel *kātūn* satires struggled and ultimately failed to reach a diverse readership, *Sazaesan* thrived under the demands of mass-publication. While anodyne humor written for every possible reader was the death of the one-panel satirical *kātūn*, it was the key to *Sazaesan*'s success and enduring popularity.

2.4 *Sazaesan*'s origins and form: Tagawa Suihō, *moriagari, ochi,* and *kishōtenketsu*

Hasegawa Machiko originally conceived *Sazaesan* while living outside of Fukuoka immediately following World War II. In 1946, Hasegawa was tapped to write a comic strip for a local evening-edition paper, the *Yūkan fukunichi*.[164] *Sazaesan* would follow Hasegawa to Tokyo,

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[162] 多くの不特定多数かつ多様な関心を持つ読者を相手に、すべての人に認知してもらうには、誰でもわかるテーマを選び、誰をも傷つけることのない描写を必要とした。そのため作品自体が「毒にも薬にもならない」ものとなった。また、従来の「黒白はっきりさせる」風刺スタイルを貫くと、読者層 が縮小化された。Ibaragi Masaharu, *Manga janru stadīzu*, Tokyo: Rinsen Shoten, 2013, 5. While Ibaragi does not go further in investigating the decline in satirical comic strips, it should be noted that contemporary cartoonist contract policies may have had a hand in the decline. Japanese cartoonists sold publication rights of a single cartoon to a single paper, doubtless exacerbating the challenges cartoonists faced in reaching audiences wide enough to have a sufficient number of readers who would appreciate pointed satire. Matsuo Kikuo, editor, *Shōwa shinbun mangashi: warai to fūshi de tsuzuru seisō 100-Nen*, Tokyo: Mainichi shinbunsha, 1981, 64-5.

[163] Both Iwakawa and Tsurumi discuss the comic *Sazaesan* as being read multi-generationally, and most critics writing on *Sazaesan* begin their discussions with some fond memory of reading the comic strip as a child.

[164] Hasegawa Machiko, *Uchiake banashi*, Shimaisha, Tokyo: 1979, 40.

eventually to be published in the *Asahi shinbun.* But *Sazaesan* was not Hasegawa's first cartoon strip, nor was she by any means a novice. Hasegawa cut her teeth in the world of cartooning through an apprenticeship to Tagawa Suihō.

Hasegawa first moved to Tokyo in the Spring of 1934, following the death of her father. Hasegawa's older sister was sixteen, Hasegawa was fourteen, and her younger sister was only eight. Six months after settling in Setagaya, Machiko mused that she wanted to apprentice to the famous Tagawa Suihō – Japan's then most-successful cartoonist, famous for his immensely popular comic *Norakuro*. Hasegawa's mother overheard, and had her oldest daughter take Hasegawa straight to Tagawa's home in Ogikubo. Refusing to be brushed off without a meeting, Hasegawa and her older sister were eventually allowed to see Tagawa. Tagawa was immediately impressed by Machiko's sketches and took her into his employ.

Hasegawa describes her teacher as a quiet man, and she describes his studio with a poem: "the apprentice submits their work with apprehension, the master, silent, gazes into the sky."[165] Evidently Tagawa offered up little by way of critique when it came to Hasegawa's manga.[166] However, he would speak at length on topics such as "the logic of humor" and the like."[167] In her recollection of her apprenticeship Hasegawa does not clearly explain Tagawa's "logic of humor," but instead gives insight into Tagawa's comic method through anecdote.[168]

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[165] 弟子習作ヲ捧ゲテ畏マリ・師大空ニ黙然タリ Ibid., 7.

[166] A cursory viewing of her childhood notebooks leads one to believe that there was perhaps little that needed to be said by Tagawa on the technical front. While the characters are somewhat simpler than those in *Sazaesan*, the artwork in the notebooks showcase Hasegawa's famous attention to fashion detail and use of pattern, and display a level of artistry on par with Tagawa. Hasegawa Machiko, et al, *Yorinuki Hasegawa Machiko ten: Sazaesan seitan 70-nen kinen*, Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 2016, 28-9.

[167] 「笑いの論理」など Hasegawa Machiko, *Uchiake banashi*, Shimaisha, Tokyo: 1979, 7.

[168] As this study is primarily concerned with Hasegawa's humor, and therefore her understanding of Tagawa, we will not be devoting space to Tagawa's extensive writings on humor. Interested readers are encouraged to seek out his *Kokkei no kenkyū* and *Kokkei no kōzō*. The former is a discussion of various philosophies of humor and the development of humor in Japanese arts and letters. The latter is a systematic classification of the different types of humor production with a particular eye on how humor is created in one- and four- panel manga. Tagawa regards humor as being created through two types of "errors:" an error in logic and an error in method – with twenty errors in method and six errors in logic, Tagawa's schema gives readers a 120-class classification system which ostensibly

In her first anecdote, Hasegawa recalls Tagawa's habit of answering the phone with a disguised voice. Pretending to be another member of the household, Tagawa would inform his eager and unfortunate editors that Tagawa was "out for the day," and that he "wasn't sure when he would come home."[169] This sort of simple prank is a feature of Hasegawa's work, with Katsuo frequently playing some sort of practical joke on Sazae. In the second anecdote, Tagawa invites all of his apprentices to the house for a party and asks for their favorite foods. He then writes all their orders on colored paper, and has Hasegawa tuck the cards into the lintel. The cards hang down, creating a festive, restaurant-like atmosphere. Tagawa's guests are impressed, until they look closer and see that Tagawa has written "sold out" on over half of the items listed. While these pranks are different from each other in meaningful ways to be discussed below, they both share the same two-part structure. As Hasegawa writes, "Tagawa liked a "build up" and a "let down" in everything he did, and that "this was the sort of thing I learned from him."[170]

The terms Hasegawa uses for "build up" and "let down" are *moriagari* (盛り上がり) and *ochi* (落ち), respectively. While *ochi* is used commonly translated as "punchline," they are not exactly synonymous. *Ochi* is used broadly in discussions of *rakugo*, or comedic storytelling, to denote the moment in the (often lengthy) comic anecdote when the story reaches that point which induces the most laughter from the audience.[171] It is typically the end, and creates laughter through word-play or an incongruous or surprising twist.

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allows them to define all forms of comic humor. This study is not interested in utilizing this system of classification as it yields little in the way of productive discussion, but cites it as proof of the seriousness in regards to Tagawa pursued humor.

[169] Hasegawa Machiko, *Uchiake banashi*, Shimaisha, Tokyo: 1979, 8.

[170] 先生は、何をなさるにも「盛り上がり」と「落ち」をつけて楽しんで入られました。知らず知らず私はこういう所を学んでいったと思います。 Ibid., 9.

[171] Before writing *Norakuro* Tagawa worked as a rakugo writer, and considered pursuing a career in rakugo. He begins his *Kokkei no kenkyū* by writing of himself as primarily a humorist "a man who works in expressing humor" (滑稽を表現する仕事に携わる人) rather than a manga artist. Tagawa Suihō, *Kokkei no kenkyū*, Kōdansha, Toyko, 2016, 3.

We can use Tagawa's pranks as test cases for the potential for humor to provide relief from tension. Both pranks conform to the same *moriagari – ochi* formula, they foster anxiety, and then provide relief. As Bergson noted with laughter, to be understood humor must be read in its "natural environment, which is society,"[172] and so one must consider the broader audience impacts of these practical jokes in order to determine the important structural differences between the phone prank and the party prank. We must ask, who are the parties involved? Who is affected by the *moriagari* (ie. made anxious), and who is included in the relief-bringing *ochi*?

In the telephone prank, the disguised conversation is the *moriagari* and then the still-disguised hang-up is the *ochi*.[173] Tagawa amuses himself and his apprentice at the expense of the editor, who is not party to the *ochi.* The editor is left stranded in a post-*moriagari* state; the editor is anxious without a relieving *ochi.* This type of *ochi* will be referred to as an "exclusive *ochi*." An exclusive *ochi,* as opposed to an "inclusive" one, is an unbalanced and cruel feature of humor in which the butt of the joke or some party otherwise involved with the moment of levity is left in an unresolved *moriagari* state. Hasegawa uses exclusive *ochi* sparingly in *Sazaesan*, though she would find an outlet for this sort of humor in her masterpiece of cruel humor *Ijiwaru bāsan*.

In the party prank everyone involved in the prank is equally involved, resulting in an inclusive *ochi*. Tagawa starts the *moriagari* early, making sure to ask all his invitees what their favorite foods are and exciting them for a feast. Their expectations were doubtless further heightened by Tagawa's festive decoration and restaurant-like décor. The *ochi* would finally arrive as each partygoer would look closer to read "sold out" on the slips. These attendees would

[172] Henri Bergson, "Laugher" in *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher, John's Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1956, 65.
[173] Hasegawa writes that latter apprentices doubtless saw Tagawa do this as well. The joke would hardly continue to work were Tagawa to ever reveal to the other party on the phone that it had been him all along, so while the end of the prank is not given in *Uchiake banashi*, it seems most likely that Tagawa ended the phone calls while still in disguise.

all have the opportunity to laugh *with* Tagawa and each other at this *ochi*. The mirth induced by this prank would have placated any who would have been upset to find that Tagawa had been unable to get their food for the party. Rather than distancing Tagawa from his comic victim as the phone-prank does, this pulls them together as they all laugh at the shared *ochi*. No one is left anxious, and the effect of the inclusive *ochi* is to create balance. This balance is ultimately what allows humor to have a relaxing and palliative effect: all individuals party to the *moriagari* all share in the *ochi.*[174]

Hasegawa's *Ijiwaru bāsan* is a masterpiece of selfish and violent prank-based humor, and is an excellent source to answer the question "what is the palliative potential of humor which uses exclusive *ochi* and ends imbalanced?" The star of the strip is an unnamed older woman referred to as "granny" (*bāsan*) who plays creative and cruel tricks (*ijiwaru*) on hapless victims. The strip rarely ever depicts an inclusive *ochi* or implies any sort of post-strip balance. Following the same formal pattern of *Sazaesan*, in any given strip there are generally three panels of *moriagari*, with a fourth panel *ochi* that creates humor by revealing the scope of the prank's cruelty, the prank's consequences, or *Ijiwaru bāsan*'s clever techniques. In an exemplary strip, the granny buys a fake snake in panel one, and in the second panel we see her standing by a man who shouts at the sight of a snake on his shoulder.[175] In the far-right background we can see a spotted cat in a cage, and the man is in a crowd of people looking at something behind glass off-panel to the left. In the third panel we see him being lifted up on a stretcher, with a medic telling the old lady that "practical jokes are all well and good…." In panel four Hasegawa pulls back to

[174] Naturally, the degree to which one experiences *moriagari* and *ochi* will vary wildly based on subject position. What is their role in the group, how much power do they have over the situation, etc… It is beyond the scope of this study to fully examine and develop a theory for dealing with these kinds of variations in experience. However, it must be noted that when discussing relief theories of humor and the palliative role humor can play one must experience some kind of tension in order to be relieved from it. Thus, while we will discuss the palliative role that these humorous comic strips can play, we will not take for granted that *Sazaesan* relieved all its readers.
[175] Hasegawa Machiko, *Ijiwaru bāsan*. Tokyo: Shimaisha, 1969, vo1 4, 16.

reveal more of the surrounding environment, and we see that they are standing in front of the snake exhibit at a zoo. As the medics walks away with the stretcher he finishes his comment that "you've got to consider your surroundings!"[176] Importantly, Hasegawa's titular trickster is entirely unphased, in panel four she wears the same dour expression she wore in panel two when springing the trick on the stranger.[177] And the victim of the prank, a random stranger in the crowd, is not seen again. While there are other characters who appear regularly in the strip, like the granny's long suffering sons and their spouses, the series rarely depicts a prank which either creates an inclusive *ochi* or comedically undermines the old woman in an effort to create balance.

Because of this lack of balance, reading an entire volume of *Ijiwaru bāsan* can be a trying experience; one tires of the consistent successes of the cruel and arbitrary protagonist. *Ijiwaru bāsan* was originally published in a weekly magazine, and was an outlet for Hasegawa to explore a cruel vein of humor would perhaps tire daily readers. Whatever the case may be, though both strips utilize the same three panel *moriagari* - one panel *ochi* pattern, through inclusive *ochi* and either depicted or implied balance *Sazaesan* is a comparatively relaxing work of humor. It is every bit as funny, but not at all pessimistic or wearying like *Ijiwaru bāsan*. *Sazaesan* takes place in an optimistic and just community, while *Ijiwaru bāsan* takes place in a world in which bitter people are free to violently act out against one another for their own amusement, and there are rarely any consequences.[178]

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[176] Ibid.

[177] Hasegawa published her first *Ijiwaru bāsan* strip on January 6, 1963, in the special new-years' large edition of the *Sandē mainichi*. Hasegawa experimented with other "*ijiwaru*" titles, including *Ijiwaru kangofusan* ("Prankster Nurse"), *Ijiwaru otetsudaisan* ("Prankster Maid"), and *Ijiwaru rasshi* ("Prankster Rush" [Rush is the name of the strip's cruel canine protagonist]). *Ijiwaru bāsan* was the longest-running of these by far, but they all adhered to a similar formula for their humor. Each contained a cruel protagonist who was rarely, if ever, depicted as facing consequences for their pranks.

[178] There are occasional strips in which the old woman is the butt of the joke, but they are rarely satisfying. For example, in one strip she gives 500 yen to a beggar to get something to eat. In panel two she walks down the street

Hasegawa's strips are not without cruel pranks, and she often has Katsuo selfishly prank Sazae to the reader's delight. But Hasegawa is careful in who is the "butt" of the joke, and who is left out of the joke and for how long. One strip, in which Katsuo and Wakame prank Sazae while she is in the bath, features an exceptionally selfish joke, and it is notable in that it explicitly depicts balance rather than implying it.[179] In the first panel, we see Sazae cowering in the bathtub as lightning flashes and thunder rumbles outside. In the second panel, Hasegawa has a frantic Sazae hurriedly entering the living room from the right hand of the panel. She has asked her parents, both sitting in front of the television if they heard the thunder.[180] Namihei appears confused, and Ofune simply says "no." These first two panels are Hasegawa's *moriagari,* with the *ochi* coming in the third panel as a furious Sazae sneaks up on Katsuo and Wakame who are laughing outside the bathroom window with noisemakers and flashlights.

This comic reveal amuses readers who have an opportunity to appreciate Katsuo and Wakame's clever prank. This strip is exceptional, however, in that it makes explicit what is an often implied element of Hasegawa's exclusive *ochi* prank-strips: balance regained through some other means. The overwhelming majority of Hasegawa's prank strips end with an *ochi* in the fourth panel. In this particular strip, Hasegawa does not draw the punishment, but simply writes "I have cut this scene because of its cruelty" over a white background.[181] This fourth panel is funny as well, and it also functions as a second *ochi* of a sort – it relieves us from the tension we

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happy, proclaiming that she's banked a good deed with heaven. In the third panel we see two heavenly figures looking down through a hole in the clouds. The first asks the second how much they owe her, and then has him write it on a tag and hang it on the gateway to heaven. He instructs the second figure to pay her back and kick her out on arrival, that 500 yen isn't enough to put them in her debt. While the readers have a laugh at this, it's simply another cruel joke; the old woman isn't party to the *ochi*, nor do we have any expectation that she'll get even with heaven. Ibid., 69.

[179] Hasegawa Machiko, *Sazaesan,* Asahi bunkō, Asahi shinbun shuppan, 1994, vol. 32, 131.

[180] Hasegawa works an elegant master-stroke of four-panel economy here by drawing Sazae's mouth open, but giving her no speech bubble. The resultant panel would have been unnecessarily busy, as the responses to her question "Thunder?" and "no" make it entirely evident what Sazae's question had been.

[181] この場面ざんこくにつきカットいたします。 Ibid.

might have felt at the prospect of the prank creating a victim of humor. While this is strip is an exception for its overtness, Hasegawa routinely depicts or implies some kind of return to balance in the final panel of a prank-focused strip.

Explicit depiction of a return to balance is not always possible in an exclusive *ochi* prank strip, and often Hasegawa ends a strip with the victim of a prank lacking any visible recourse as the prankster flees the scene unpunished. Hasegawa mitigates the problems this might pose to balance by taking advantage of her strips' longevity.[182] In the majority of her pranking strips the butt of the joke is a member of the family, most often Sazae herself.[183] As readers know her to be implacable and inexhaustible, she eventually becomes the perfect butt for Hasegawa's crueler humor; over the years readers come to expect Sazae to spring back from every Katsuo prank uncowed and feel little anxiety at her being the victim of a practical joke. Even in the strips which do not depict or imply some kind of balance, Sazae's steadfast character leaves little doubt that Katsuo will eventually be repaid in kind for his pranks.

For critics like Kusamori, *Sazaesan*'s lack of character development across the series is a weakness. The strip was best when it was a mirror in which those struggling with cultural change could see themselves as Sazae – a person who failed but did so with a smile and at full speed. Kusamori argued that by 1967 cultural change had somewhat settled, and *Sazaesan* lost its temporality. Though she could be admired for her pluck during a period of confusion, during a period of no cultural change Sazae is simply an insufferable person tripping through life making all kinds of mistakes. Many critics point out the peculiar fact that the characters never age, and

[182] For an interesting critique of *Sazaesan's* lack of character development over time, see Kusamori Shinichi in Tsurumi Shunsuke, and Saitō Shinji, *Sazaesan no "Shōwa,"* Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 2006, 6-25.
[183] It is inevitable that a long-running strip like *Sazaesan* will have variety, and there are cruel pranks in the comic. However, they aren't nearly as prevalent as those in which a family member suffers, or in which some kind of balance is either realized or implied.

Hasegawa herself even makes light of it within *Sazaesan*.[184] For readers expecting character development, *Sazaesan* can only be a disappointment. But *Sazaesan* was never devoted to being a realistic depiction of a family as they change over time, or a character-driven serial. Rather, it was a utopian project.

Each instantiation of *Sazaesan* is only four panels however, and the series as a whole does not construe itself as narratively coherent. While there are certain events such as Sazae's marriage or the arrival of a lovable cousin from the countryside which impact later strips, *Sazaesan* is more an atomized series of four-panel comics than a coherent narrative depicted in four-panel installments. And, there are certain features of the four-panel form which have bearing upon humor production. The Japanese four-panel comic developed out of a set of cosmopolitan influences – American, French, and British cartoons and cartoonists were all influential in early Japanese newspaper cartoons, as were older Japanese cultural forms such as late-Edo period manga by Hokusai. [185] According to Shimizu Isao, contemporary four-panel manga derived their narrative rhythm from Japanese cultural influences. This rhythm is the built upon the quadripartite aesthetic of *kishōtenketsu:* 起承転結; *ki* (起 introduction) – *shō* (承 development) – *ten* (転 twist) – *ketsu* (結 resolution).[186] The nascent forms of the present-day four-panel cartoon, early Meiji period newspaper "fictions" reminiscent of illustrated works from

[184] In a new-years cartoon, Hasegawa depicts the family twenty years in the future. In the third panel they all convene to comment upon how nice it is to be in a manga and not aging, and in the fourth panel Hasegawa draws them all bowing towards the readers (ie. front-page) and expressing best wishes for the new year. Hasegawa Machiko *Sazaesan* zenshū, Asahi bunkō, vol 29, pp. 118.

[185] Shimizu Isao, *Yonkoma manga: Hokusai kara "moe" made*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009

[186] *Kishōtenketsu* has become a widespread aesthetic pattern in Japanese poetry, narrative, and elsewhere. It originated in Tang dynasty poetry, particularly in lüshi (regulated verse). Zong-qi Cai describes how *kishōtenketsu* was the second of two structural rules observed by poets of "High Tang" *lüshi*: "The second structural rule is the optional observance of a four-stage progression: *qi* (to begin, to arise), *cheng* (to continue, to elaborate), *zhuan* (to make a turn), and *he* (to conclude, to enclose)." Cai, Zong-qi: *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, 165.

the Edo period, conformed to the *kishōtenketsu* pattern.[187] For Shimizu, the four-panel form won out over three- and five-panel variants in part because of the ease with which it could adopt the familiar *kishōtenketsu* form. The predictable rhythm of introduction-development-twist-resolution in four-panel comics was a comfortable fit for readers.

While Shimizu's argument is compelling in its elegance – *kishōtenketsu* is a quadripartite aesthetic structure deeply imbedded in Japan's literary history and four-panel comics have four-panels – one wonders to what degree Hasegawa's readers actively desired or even noticed the *kishōtenketsu* structure of each strip. As mentioned above, Hasegawa's four-panel strips generally follow a 3-1 pattern: three panels of *moriagari* with a fourth panel *ochi*. Although it is not uncommon to have an *ochi* which begins in the third panel with a fourth panel which further develops the *ochi*, the 3 – 1 pattern is the dominant one. In fact, it is such a fixed feature of the comic strip that Hasegawa expects readers to be sufficiently familiar with this conventional pattern; Hasegawa uses the *moriagari-ochi* pattern itself as the object of a joke.

In the first panel of the strip in question, Sazae stops to admire a four-panel manga that Katsuo and Wakame have drawn on large sheets of paper laid down on the ground. In the first panel Sazae looks down and says "so you've drawn a cartoon," and in panels two and three she simply progresses through the comic saying "so this is the second panel," and then "so this is the third panel." It is a visually and contextually understated strip. Sazae occupies most of each panel, with Katsuo and Wakame's crude drawings only partially visible on the bottom of the panel. The effect is similar to that of a close-up in a film, we feel a sense of *moriagari*, of build-up, because of the two-fold effect of this closed view. We feel a heightened engagement with Sazae's thoughts at this point because she occupies so much of the panel, but we also develop

[187] The term "fictions" is a translation of Shimizu's 八話 (*hachiwa*, or "eight stories") which is derived from the earlier term 嘘話 (*usobanashi*, "fictional tale") and 嘘八話 (*usoppachibanashi*, also "fictional tale").

anxiety because we cannot see what is going on around her. By now the average reader would have likely read hundreds if not thousands of *Sazaesan* strips, and would be looking for hints to what the *ochi* might be. In the fourth panel steps, Sazae steps on and crashes through Katsuo and Wakame's final sheet of paper – they dug a pit underneath it as a prank on Sazae. As Katsuo and Wakame run away towards the left-hand border of the panel a smiling Wakame calls out: "don't four-panel comics have an *ochi* in the fourth panel?"[188] We chuckle at the pun on *ochi,* with Sazae literally falling (to fall being "*ochiru*", the verb from which the noun *ochi* is derived) and we are also relieved from the anxiety of trying to figure out what the fourth-panel twist would be.

Of the many competing humor theories available, the incongruity theory is one of the more coherent, comprehensive, and elegant theories of "response-side" humor.[189] Briefly, humor is one of our (most humor research recognizes humor as almost exclusively a human/higher primate response, despite anecdotal evidence about racoons which would suggest otherwise) fundamental responses to the incongruous. We expect one thing, but are given another.[190] This basic humor theory allows us to understand how deeply ingrained the *moriagari-ochi* pattern is in Hasegawa's readers – appreciation of the expectation which Hasegawa knows to be present in her readers *a priori*. She can begin a *moriagari* out of reader expectation for a *moriagari - ochi* patterned strip without having to explain it to her readers. She heightens anticipation for the *ochi*

[188] Hasegawa Machiko, *Sazaesan*, Tokyo: Asahi bunkō, Asahi shinbun shuppan, 1994, vol 35, 59.
[189] Although Latta provides a compelling refutation of the incongruity theory of humor, the resultant theoretical apparatus is unwieldy and, more importantly, perhaps too complex a tool to merit its use in any work save that which is wholly devoted to humor theory itself. Robert L. Latta, *The Basic Humor Process a Cognitive-Shift Theory and the Case against Incongruity*, New York: Mouton De Gruyter, 1998. Kant sums up his theory of laughter (and humor) being the result of incongruity theory in one line: "Laughter is an affect resulting from the sudden transformation of a heightened expectation into nothing." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, sec. 54. Incongruity theory allows us to tentatively discuss readers' and writers' assumptions and draw conclusions regarding shared cultural values. While Latta's theory is compelling to theorists, it does not add enough to the discussion of literary humor to merit its use in place of the more elegant incongruity theory.
[190] Or, as the Freudians would put it: "humor is when you expect one thing, but get your mother."

by depicting Sazae through an ever-narrowing frame, and then the *ochi* of her comic (and of Katsuo's) overlap in a supremely basic and undeniable moment of incongruity – the pitfall.

So, it is clear that *Sazaesan* readers expected two things: an *ochi* in the fourth strip, and for said *ochi* to serve as the telos of the strip in question. Unfortunately, Hasegawa never wrote a similar strip explicitly stating her expectation that we appreciate her use of the *kishōtenketsu* form. However, the strips certainly seem to support Shimizu's argument – whether picking up a volume and reading at random, or flipping through a volume of the *Sazaesan* collection from front-to-back, each strip of *Sazaesan* certainly feels as though it coheres to the *kishōtenketsu* pattern.

In respect to humor, layering the binary *moriagari – ochi* humor pattern over the quadripartite narrative structure of *kishōtenketsu* leads to an interesting result: the fourth panel *ochi* coincides with the *ketsu* ("resolution.") So where humor demands a moment of mirth-inducing incongruity, Tagawa's *moriagari-ochi* binary demands a release from tension, and the narrative of the four-panel comic demands a *ketsu*: a bringing-together of threads, a satisfying conclusion which settles any anxieties and meets any expectations one may have developed over the course of the work. Thus, Hasegawa generally abjures absurdity, non-sequitor, or other comic conclusions which create mirth through chaos and would prevent a *ketsu*, or "resolution." The result is a four-panel strip which reads as a closed loop; rather than exploding outward towards nonsense, the *ochi* often directs readers inward towards some form of coherent and balanced conclusion.

2.5 Palliative Humor in *Sazaesan*

To review, *Sazaesan* is a four-panel comic strip which adheres to the narrative rhythm of *kishōtenketsu,* implements a simple binary humor structure of *moriagari* and *ochi,* and orients its comic conclusions towards fostering a feeling of balance in readers either by using an inclusive *ochi,* or implying some kind of extra-textual balance through making its inexhaustible characters the objects of exclusive *ochi*. While the above discussion delineates the causes of *Sazaesan*'s humor, what are its effects?

Of the theories of humor, the relief theory is second only to perhaps the superiority theory in the breadth of its quotidian appreciation; in the due course of everyday life we all feel humor both sting and soothe. Partly in thanks to the cliché "laughter is the best medicine," and partly in thanks in to works like Norman Cousins' *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by a Patient,* laughter is regarded by many as a panacea. While its efficacy remains in dispute, the concept of laughter as palliative remains popular in part because of the compelling anecdotal evidence present in each of us: a good laugh makes us feel better. Freud in his *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* expressed his belief that humor was a "defensive process," that "perform[s] the task of preventing the generation of unpleasure from internal sources."[191] Freud, discussing *Galgenhumor*, "gallows humor," writes that

> …humor is a means of obtaining pleasure in spite of the distressing affects that interfere with it; it acts as a substitute for the generation of these affects, it puts itself in their place…. The pleasure of humour… comes about … at the cost of a release of affect that does not occur: it arises from *an economy in the expenditure of affect.*[192]

[191] Freud, Sigmund, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, translated by James Strachey, New York: Norton, 1960, 233.
[192] Ibid., 228-9. Italics in original. For the non-affective counterpart to this theory (i.e. the rational) see Marvin Minsky, "Jokes and the Logic of the Cognitive Unconscious" in *Cognitive Constraints on Communication: Representations and Processes,* edited by Lucia Vaina and Jaakko Hintikka, Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1984, 175-200.

Though this study disagrees with the idea of the relief theory of humor constituting a meaningful explanation of humor's causes, relief theory is certainly useful when discussing humor's effects. We often feel better after laughing, and humor can induce this relief-giving laughter.[193]

So how does one go about ignoring the cultural upheaval of the present moment, especially in a *komikku* – a genre of literature which demands that the author rely heavily upon shared context to compensate for the brevity of the form? Simple – *Sazaesan* depicts the Japanese postwar without discussing or critiquing it through humor; Hasegawa Machiko's cartoon is comically ambivalent.

There is an almost universal appreciation for humor's potential as critique. If we laugh at something, there is the potential that we will somehow come to regard it as beneath us.[194] And by laughing at a person who is victim to a prank, we set them apart. Humor can divide by splitting us into those who laugh and those who are laughed at, or by dividing us into those who laugh and those who do not.[195] *Sazaesan* deftly avoids using humor which would lead readers to regard themselves as being laughed at, or as being left out of the joke. Taking place in postwar Japan, it is inevitable that *Sazaesan* will depict settings which threaten to divide readers politically,

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[193] If we accept that *Sazaesan* and its humor have palliative potential, then we can situate *Sazaesan* into a broader network of Japanese literary production that aims to soothe its readers. Writing about what he calls "ambient literature," Roquet tracks the development of "*iyashi-kei*" or "soothing" literature. For him, "ambient literature," typified by the works of Yoshimoto Banana and Murakami Haruki, regards the novel to be a "mood-regulating device," and aims to "generate calming moods and to provide a space to reflect back on therapy culture as a whole." Paul Roquet, *Ambient Media: Japanese Atmospheres of Self*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2016, 154. It is beyond the scope of this study to fully explore this connection, but there are enough salient shared priorities between *Sazaesan's* humor and Roquet's "ambient literature" that one expects that the case could be made that Hasegawa's anodyne humor could be productively thought of as a kind of "ambient humor." See Roquet, 151-176.

[194] The superiority theory of humor has some weighty advocates in Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes, but all three regarded this sense of superiority as the cause of humor. This study regards a feeling of superiority as one of the possible effects of humor, and of course a possible cause as well, but not all humor is born out of recognizing the inadequacies of an other.

[195] This is one of the possible sources of humor's potency for critique, as a humorous insult which unites a community in laughing at a shared comic object stings more than a mere insult. A quip both insults and isolates its object.

culturally, or otherwise. In those settings, *Sazaesan* avails itself primarily of two techniques to avoid humor which would make a reader feel as if they (or their side of the depicted political/cultural conflict) are being laughed at. The first is to have an inclusive *ochi* which derives its humor from making light of universal human qualities, diverting readers' attention away from the broader issue and inward towards themselves (or outward towards all mankind). These strips will be called "diversion" strips. And to avoid having readers feeling left out, *Sazaesan* often implements ambiguous *ochi* which can be laughed at for a variety of reasons; strips featuring open *ochi* will be called "ambiguous" strips.

In an exemplary diversion strip, Sazae is talking with someone who appears to be an older laborer – he is bald and wearing a sweatband.[196] The man is bald with a wrinkled face, and he wears his headband with the knot up in front – Hasegawa frequently depicts older tradesmen, restaurant delivery people, and senior festival participants with this visual vocabulary. Sazae and the man occupy small positions at the bottom of the frame, while the speech balloon takes up the majority of the first panel, and all of panels two and three; the reader's eye is drawn to Sazae's speech bubble and the focus of the first three panels is on Sazae's commentary and not on her circumstances.[197]

Sazae begins her monolog with a hypothetical: "what if oil supplies run low?" Sazae then contends that an oil crisis will force "education mamas" to become "standing-in-line mamas".[198] In panel two, Sazae continues with her string of logic. She contends that "standing-in-line

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[196] Hasegawa Machiko, *Sazaesan*, Tokyo: Asahi bunkō, Asahi shinbun shuppan, 1994, vol. 45, 30.
[197] In frames two and three, Sazae and the old man are no longer visible. Rather, Sazae's argument is written as caption to simple drawings depicting her hypotheticals.
[198] Parents concerned with their children's education are hardly particular to postwar Japan. However, the demanding postwar educational system, and the huge rewards one could reap were they able to graduate from a top-tier university, led to an increase in number and visibility of "Education Mamas" (kyōiku mama) – mothers who infamously pushed their children to study incredibly hard. Depicted here as a scowling mother standing over a browbeaten child at a desk, "education mamas" are generally depicted as either exhausting their children or themselves (or sometimes both) in trying to help their children excel in school.

mamas" will become "organized mamas," forming groups to protest inflation. She depicts this protest group simply – four seated women with stern looks on their face argue underneath a banner which says "stabilize commodity prices."[199] They are on the right-hand side of the panel, and on the left there is a group of children chasing a ball. Their hands are aloft, they are running hard enough to whip up great dust clouds, and they are all smiling – Sazae contends that "organized mamas" will lead to healthy children. Afterall, without their mothers to force them to study, children will play outside.

In the third panel Sazae presents another premise and its hypothetical conclusion. The crowd of healthy children on the left-hand side of panel two will lead to doctors with nothing to do – a nurse knits while a seated doctor yawns and stretches himself to full height like a cat. These bored doctors will now have time for yard work; the yawning doctor from the right-hand side of the panel is now trimming hedges on the left.

The fourth panel pulls readers out of Sazae's speech and back into Sazae's setting. On the right-hand we have Sazae, leaning against a garden wall saying "so, after all of it, you're going to be short on work!" to the old man. It is revealed that the old man is a gardener, the headband being part of a uniform which includes a jacket with the characters "to plant" prominently emblazoned on it. The old man continues his work, cigarette dangling lazily from his mouth. His reply to Sazae-san is simply "no, no, I'm booked solid up to New Year's Eve."[200] The inclusive *ochi* for this strip is Sazae's massive oversimplification and her dubious logic; the real world rarely travels in the kind of direct line that Sazae has drawn. The humor of the strip diverts readers' attention away from a politically charged subject, the oil crisis and its attendant social and economic anxieties, and towards the universal human desire to use (il)logic to simplify the

[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid.

world. Readers concerned about the oil crisis were also no doubt comforted by the old man's calm reply, and in laughing at Sazae's illogical train of thought hypotheticals readers were likely also laughing at their own anxious musings about possible consequences to oil shortage.

Now, let us turn towards an ambiguous *ochi* used in a politically charged setting, The strip in question depicts Sazae speaking at a women's liberation town-hall.[201] In the first panel Sazae climbs the stairs into an auditorium; she is just left-of-center in the panel. She is wearing heels, a form-fitting patterned dress, a hat at a jaunty angle, and her eyelids are drawn down. Her comportment gives off an air of confidence, though a more conservative reader could describe her aspect as haughty. She is followed into the auditorium by two men, both visibly sweating; one has his coat over his arm and is fanning himself with his hat, the other has his jacket open. Both men are sweaty and disheveled in contrast to Sazae, who is immaculately groomed and seems unperturbed by the temperature and all three are entering a building which bears a sign reading "Gender Equality Debate Forum"[202] Perhaps they are walking into the auditorium simply to follow Sazae, maybe they're just getting out of the heat, or maybe they're sweating because they are nervous; are this disheveled and sweaty pair coming to argue on behalf of men, and sweating to see their opposition so cool and confident? Or are they merely overheated allies? Are they depicted as overheated merely to further establish Sazae's confidence in this setting? It is unclear, but the lack of clarity is the point. There is enough subtle ambiguity in this panel to allow multiple readings.

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[201] Scholars of Japanese popular culture may be familiar with this strip, as it is the one discussed at length by William Lee in his chapter on *Sazaesan*, Chibimarukochan, and Crayon Shinchan.

[202] Hasegawa Machiko, *Sazaesan*, Tokyo: Asahi bunkō, Asahi shinbun shuppan, 1994, vol 1, 70. This sign is dead center in the panel, and Hasegawa has penned the sign with the same weight as other lines in the frame. It is not uncommon to depict lecherous men in cartoons as sweaty, or bearing the markers of being overcome by heat. The sign gives an anodyne alternative explanation for the men's sweat – which is conspicuous given Sazae's calm demeanor.

The second panel rapidly undoes the superficial divisions between Sazae and the men who followed her in. In it, Sazae is on stage at the far right-hand side of the panel. She stands behind a clothed table, wearing a dark vest over a white shirt, and some form of dark dress or pants – it is unclear. Whereas in the first panel her attire was paramount, here it is a neglected detail– Sazae is often drawn in clothing like this when she is out running errands or doing chores around the house. The costume change is quite jarring, and one may even miss the fact that Sazae is now up on stage. Her eyebrows are raised, her eyelids are pulled together, and she has sweat on her face and flying off of her brow.[203] She is leaning forward, her weight in her left hand on the table and her right raised above her shoulder. Her fist is closed, and the stars coming off the table just below where her right hand would land were she to allow it to fall strongly imply that she has just violently banged her fist on the table. She is argument incarnate, and she calls to the audience "Men! You should liberate women!"[204]

In the same panel, a person with a similar, albeit not identical, haircut to the man who had his jacket over his arm stands up and shouts encouragement. This person also has the same glasses, facial features, and shirt. It is not entirely obvious that the person in the second panel is the same as the one in the first, and there are changes in the hairstyle that might lead one to believe that it's a different person entirely, despite the other similarities. Sazae's costume change is important. With no explanation for the costume change given, one may be inclined to imagine that Hasegawa simply had to draw quickly to meet a deadline, or simply that this particular strip will not be invested in consistent character depiction. Whatever the case may be, as a result of Sazae's change, the reader is unlikely to pay attention to the subtle differences in hairstyle

[203] Sweat above the character's head is a common comic convention for depicting passion, and not to be taken as a literal sign of sweating. Though, the sweat bead drawn prominently on Sazae's cheek is readable as a depiction of real sweat, and in looking at Sazae one feels that she is truly "working up a lather" in this panel.
[204] Ibid.

between these two men. If the main character is going to change outfits between panels, why bother closely reading the details of background characters?

In the third panel a man with a five o'clock shadow and mussed hair stands and shouts at Sazae's supporter that men should fight on behalf of men.[205] The audience is now staring at him, rather than Sazae, and their mouths are agape. In panel two on the left-hand side there was a man with a five o'clock shadow in the audience, and as the view widens in panel three we are led to believe that he is that same man. From this wider view we can also see that he is the only man with untidy facial hair that could be read as a result of poor hygiene or negligence. Other men in the audience have closely trimmed mustaches, but he alone has a beard, and a scruffy one at that. He is not drawn with any of the conventional visual markers in this comic strip for poverty (patched clothing, ruddy complexion, dirt or grime on skin, etc…), but he is presented as an outlier in this room. He is one of two standing people, he is clearly the least well-kept individual present, and the whole room is looking at him. Hasegawa has isolated him, and this feels as though the *moriagari* of this strip is, in part, the isolation of this figure to serve as the victim of the fourth-panel *ochi*. To the right we see Sazae's supporter, looking at the man with lines of shock radiating from their face. Sazae's supporter is visible from the waist up, standing in the midst of the audience, but Sazae and the stage are no longer visible. While the supporter occupies equal space on the page, they do not have equal emphasis – the shouting man draws the reader's and the audience's full attention.

In the fourth panel the audience parts, and we see that Sazae's supporter is wearing a patterned skirt. She angrily states "I am a woman!" towards the now-seated bearded man, who has sat down and is muttering an apology. This would seem to be a fairly easy-to-read inclusive

[205] Ibid.

ochi in which the audience all laugh at the simple mistake the man has made. Simple cognitive errors like these are common in *Sazaesan,* and are part of what has helped it age so well. *Sazaesan* may depict a particular place and time, but it only ever makes fun of people.

So what, if anything, does this strip say about women's liberation? Certainly, this can be read as a resounding victory for the woman, as the opponent to women's liberation closes out the cartoon ashamed and the object of laughter. Lee and others would cite as evidence of this comic strip being generally in favor of the contemporary push for equal rights. But is this really the case? Returning to the fourth panel, site of both the humorous (*ochi*) and the narrative (*ketsu*) climax, the titular star of the comic is no longer present. Superiority humor is a powerful but often blunt tool for critique – we laugh, and our laughter encourages a feeling of superiority over the object. But who is being laughed at? For that, we have to turn to the audience.

What judgment, if any, shows on audience faces? Like a Greek chorus, could they guide our interpretation; through them, can we tell who this *ochi* directs us to laugh at? The whole audience is laughing, and looking at the Sazae supporter rather than the man. What do we make of this?[206] In the midst of a contentious political context, at the terminus of both the narrative and humorous trajectories of this cartoon, the final panel is humorously ambiguous. We know we are laughing, or at least that a humorous moment has occurred, but the strip does not give us a definite humor target. But, the humor has directed us away from the setting, a women's liberation town hall, and diverts readers away from the political with a human-centered *ochi.* In addition to being apolitical, the *ochi* is also somewhat unclear.

[206] If audience laughter was directed at the man, the strip would feel like didactic humor critique. One would readily feel that the man is regarded as inferior and the butt of the joke. By association we would also likely regard the strip as looking down on those who did not advocate for equality. Hasegawa uses the audience-as-chorus device to guide readers' laughter to great effect in her shorter series *Nakayoshi techō*. The multi-panel cartoon takes place in a girls' school, and its ochi inevitably take place in front of a giggling chorus of young women whose laughter helps define a single comic object. *Nakayoshi techō* can be found in Hasegawa Machiko, *Hasegawa Machiko zenshū*, Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1997.

The ambiguity and instability of character's appearances anticipates and is mimetic of this final comic ambiguity, and there is no clear butt to this joke. Do we laugh at the man because he made a mistake? Do we laugh at the woman for her fashion or her frustration? Are we laughing at the irony of the scene in its entirety, that a man has mis-gendered a woman in an arena so rife with gender-conflict possibilities? Hasegawa gave us an audience, and could have used them to distinguish a single comic object. But there are no pointing fingers, no derisive smirks, or any other markers to help readers find the comedic argument this strip makes. Who do we feel superior to? Who are we laughing at? This strip humorously depicts the women's rights movement and its passion, but with an ambiguous humorous conclusion the strip cannot be read as either critiquing or advocating for it. A reader who wants to read this as humorous critique could find it funny in a way that opposes gender equality (HA! She dresses funny!) or in a way that supports it (HA! What an idiotic caveman!).

Whether used to divert readers away from a contentious topic, or ambiguously in order to allow for multiple comedic interpretations, Hasegawa's inclusive human-centered *ochi* were integral to her popularity. *Sazaesan* makes humor out of the everyman's foibles, turning readers away from the political and the particular and towards the humane and universal. A historical event or political figure may be a part of the strip but they are only ever depicted, never critiqued. Through the *Asahi shinbun's* wide circulation *Sazaesan* was read and enjoyed by a diverse community of readers, and Hasegawa gave readers a judgment-free comedic depiction of the changing world around them. In diversion strips the inclusive *ochi* relegates the political to the background as readers laugh at themselves or, at least, a human foible which they could readily find in themselves. In more comically complex ambiguous strips, Hasegawa's humor allows readers of varied political interests to laugh at a strip for their own reasons.

2.6 Hasegawa Machiko and Humor in the Dark

By design, *Sazaesan* is culturally and politically ambivalent; it positions itself in a judgement-free neutral space. *Sazaesan* depicts its day, but is not critical of it. In fact, the aggregate strips are a master-stroke of anodyne humor; the majority of the strips make fun of the human condition as a universal, and the rare politically charged joke is generally ambiguous and minimally bi-, if not multi-, valent in its manifold potential interpretations. The varied conflicts of postwar Japan are depicted in *Sazaesan*, but somehow both sides are winning the fight. The true secret to *Sazaesan*'s popularity lies in its inclusive *ochi*, last-panel twists which make light of universally human qualities like simple mistakes in judgment, reasoning, or recognition.

But what role can, and should, humorous literature play during dark days? The jester is famous for their capacity to speak truth to power, but is that potential an obligation? Jesters can lance communal boils, using humor to control both the timing and direction of the catharsis that laughter brings about. With critical comedy one can direct audience energy, and subsequent ire, towards a particular butt. But anodyne humor diverts this energy away from the particular, and the audience is relieved without the after-taste which makes critical comedy such a potent tool for political and social action. But what are the consequences of anodyne humor's calming effect? *Sazaesan* soothes its readers, so what?

In February 2020, as the war in Syria dragged on, Abdullah Al-Mohammad achieved internet notoriety with a tweet showing himself and his daughter playing a game.[207] He taught his

[207] "Syrian father, protecting daughter from trauma, turns sound of war into a game," Reuters online, February 19, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-game-idUSKBN20D239
In various iterations of my discussion of palliative humor I have done and re-done this paragraph. Sadly, every time I return to this draft there is always a more recent example. Since writing the first draft of this passage in February 2020, the world has been brought to a halt by the spread of the Covid-19 virus, and humor has raced in to help calm the fears of those of us who are now living in quarantine. Global pandemic has created a universal shared comic substrate, a shared set of expectations which people from all nationalities can subvert to comic effect. In my first

daughter to laugh as hard as she can every time she hears a bomb drop, and they made a game out wartime. Watching the Reuters news report on Abdulla Al-Mohammad and his daughter, one is struck by the success of Abdulla's program. His daughter looks absolutely fearless, and seems to be filled with joy at the sound of the falling bombs. Like Abdulla Al-Mohammad in Idlib, prisoners of concentration camps and ghettos similarly sought humor to relieve their pains:

> During the Holocaust, religion and humor served a like – though not identical – purpose: the former oriented one's thoughts to a better existence in the next world , the latter pointed to emotional salvation in this one. Both gave succor and provided an intellectual respite beyond the immediate physical surroundings.[208]

Sazaesan is suffused with this idea that humor can give "succor" to people during a troubled time. And where communal succor is concerned, the less divisive the work, the better. But should *Sazaesan* be committed to succor? Should Hasegawa's readers, like Abdulla and his daughter, embrace a laughter that turns them away from their windows?

What is the danger of neutrality and inward-looking humor while others struggle with insurmountable problems? In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1986, Elie Wiesel proposed that literature had an obligation to expose injustice:

> And then I explain to him how naïve we were, that the world did know and remained silent. And that is why I swore never to be silent whenever wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men and women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must – at that moment – become the center of the universe.[209]

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draft of this argument, years ago, I had a paragraph about a quip made during a terrorist attack on a German airport. The way things are going, by the time I put the final edits in place on this chapter, there will no doubt have been some other tragedy which will demand our humor. (Early Summer 2020 revision note: there is no satisfaction in being correct in the assumption that things will get worse. January 2021 revision note: there continues to be no satisfaction in being correct in the assumption that things will get worse). But I am tired of chasing tragedy, so forgive me if this passage is no longer timely when you read it.

[208] Steve Lipman, and Mazal Holocaust Collection. *Laughter in Hell: the Use of Humor during the Holocaust.* Northvale, NJ, Jason Aronson Inc., 1991, 11-12.

[209] Elie Wiesel, "Acceptance Speech," NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2020, Sun. 12 Apr 2020, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1986/wiesel/acceptance-speech/

There is an early *Sazaesan* strip set in a park.[210] Children play at the swings during the daytime, a homeless father and son enter the park at dusk, and in the fourth panel we see them sleeping using the swings as their pillows. But the strip says nothing about their hunger; *Sazaesan* doesn't take a side. We are to be amused by their ingenuity, and are encouraged to laugh at their ingenuity in repurposing a toy for another purpose. This strip ends with an *ochi* which leaves behind the political for the human. The *moriagari* of this strip, the anxiety we may feel to see a hungry and distraught family of two approaching a set of sturdy ropes, is diffused. And while a political and social issue is depicted, it is not critiqued. The energy produced by the *ochi* could have been become the energy which proved a reader to action. Instead we have an inclusive ochi which diverts us from the political towards the human. We are amused at their ingenuity, and move on to the next day's strip without lingering to think about the hunger in that boy's stomach.

Unlike Abdulla Al-Mohammad in Idlib, Hasegawa encouraged people to laugh during a period of distressing change that they could have had a hand in shaping. Or at least, it seems that way. Some *Sazaesan* strips depict a Japan in flux because of external pressures – rising oil prices, rising cost of goods, etc…, but others depict domestic political problems, like women's liberation, which could be addressed by a politically inclined readership. And there was doubtless some positive effect brought about through the mere depiction of these challenges – perhaps an increased awareness of the push for women's liberation somehow benefitted those people fighting for women's rights. But, as far as its humor is concerned, *Sazaesan* regards the ups and downs of postwar political and social change as something to which its readers are subject. *Sazaesan* presumes political impotence. And, dangerously, perhaps *Sazaesan*

[210] Hasegawa Machiko, *Sazaesan*, Tokyo: Asahi bunkō, Asahi shinbun shuppan, 1994, vol 2, 48.

encouraged its readers to feel like Abdulla and his daughter, they had nothing they could do but laugh. Perhaps they came to *Sazaesan* in search for *ochi* that could turn them away from the outside world, and diffuse the *moriagari* brought about by postwar poverty, famine, overwork, and political, cultural, and social turmoil. Perhaps the energy that a reader could have spent lifting a picket sign in a protest, was expelled in a guffaw at a fourth-panel *ochi*. Hasegawa's humor encouraged readers to regard the world as something in which they could not take part; *Sazaesan* turned readers back towards their families, turning turns their eyes away from the window and towards smiling faces.

Chapter 3: Lessons in Immorality: Mishima Yukio's Humor and Social Satire[211]

> Japanese forms of laughter have not, historically, been privileged objects of knowledge in the West.[212]

> It seems impossible that the mediocre, the false, and the prefabricated in literature produced for the enjoyment of the reading masses…should not frequently seep into his true works of art….But the reverse experiment has never been tried: since none of the minor works intended for popular consumption have been translated, we cannot search in that tangle of themes better developed elsewhere…for dazzling or sharp images, episodes pregnant with truth, which would have found their way into these works as if inadvertently, and which belong instead to his 'true works of art.' It seems, however, unimaginable that the two endeavors remain isolated.[213]

3.1 Mishima's Mass-Market Forays

In the winter of 2018, mass-market literature from Japan is making a greater impact in English-language readerships than ever before. Publishers like kurodahan, haikasoru, and the online-only translation platform "j-novel club" have brought light novels, science fiction, and a variety of mass-market Japanese literary works to English-language readers. But translation tendencies skew towards either the contemporary, works by mass-market masters like Edogawa Ranpo, or science fiction; little of the mass-market work by Japan's literary elite has been translated.[214] Marguerite Yourcenar's eloquent lament regarding Mishima Yukio's untranslated

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[211] The title of this essay series 不道徳教育講座 (*Fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*) has been translated elsewhere as Lectures on *Unethical Education* (Inose Naoki and Sato Hiroaki, *Persona: A Biography of Yukio Mishima*, Berkeley, Stone Bridge Press, 2012). or *Lectures in Immoral Education* (John Nathan, *Mishima: a Biography*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1974).

[212] The passage continues: "This almost ludicrous statement either sounds like a deadpan parody of the critique of the underrepresented that launches so many academic studies of hitherto obscure subjects or smacks of the humorless pedantry that ironically – and yet with no apparent sense of irony – characterizes so many intellectual inquiries into the things that make us laugh." If it is possible, this study aspires to both pedantry and humor. And while what Levy means by 'irony' is unclear, but a full examination of the many meanings of the term "irony" are beyond the scope of this study and this footnote. Indra A. Levy, ""Comedy" Can Be Deadly: Or, How Mark Twain Killed Hara Hōitsuan," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011), 332.

[213] Marguerite Yourcenar, *Mishima: A Vision of the Void*. New York: Farrar Strauss, and Giroux, 1986, 25.

[214] Edogawa Ranpo's transcendent popularity challenges the simple divide between "mass-market" writers and "elite-writers" – while this paper will not devote itself to a greater investigation of the divide between "high" and "low" literature, it recognizes that the boundary between the two bodies is always shifting and often arbitrary. Readers are encouraged to seek out Edward Mack, *Manufacturing Modern Japanese Literature*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. Publishers' catalogs for the aforementioned presses can be found at https://www.kurodahan.com/wp/e/catalog/ and http://www.haikasoru.com/our-books/ . It is unclear whether or not this page constitutes a complete catalog of all titles, however j-novel club's "titles" page offers a fairly extensive list of works https://j-novel.club/search.

and unanalyzed mass-market remains apt today. This is a problem for readers of literature in translation in general, but it is particularly frustrating Mishima's case.[215] Mishima compartmentalized his writings, and assigned certain talents to certain genres; his drama and mass-market writings showcase literary talents which go almost wholly unused in his "high literature."

Yourcenar's lament is laced with the language of literary elitism, preferring "true works of art" over the "mediocre… false… literature produced for the enjoyment of the reading masses." At the same time that she bemoans a lack of material, she exposes and reinforces the ideology of the literary elite in which mass market literature has merit solely as a form of failed "true" literature. Mishima held similar sentiments regarding his own canon, dividing his works into a "high-low" binary: serious works and "entertainments." Keene writes that Mishima referred to his mass-market works as "entertainments," borrowing the term from Graham Greene.[216] Speaking with the Paris Review in 1953, Greene states that his "entertainments" were "distinct from the novels because as the name implies they do not carry a message."[217] Keene wrote of Mishima's "entertainments" in language which resonates with Yourcenar's:

> [Mishima] seems, however, to have found in such writing an outlet for aspects of his personality that were generally obscured in his more important works. His sense of humor, a delight to his friends, was much more readily revealed in his light fiction than elsewhere… The "entertainments" are precisely that, and they form a distinctive though

[215] Mishima continues to be translated however, as 2018 saw the publication of *The Frolic of the Beasts* (獣の戯れ), and *Star* (スタア) was published in 2019.

[216] Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Volumes 1 and 2: Fiction*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1189.

[217] It is unclear whether or not Mishima took up Greene's ambivalence towards this division when he adopted his terminology. From the Paris Review interview: "GREENE: …The Entertainments (Samboul Train, written a year after Rumour at Nightfall is the first of them; then Gun for Sale, The Confidential Agent, The Ministry of Fear, and The Third Man and[sic] The Fallen Idol) are distinct from the novels because as the name implies they do not carry a message (horrible word). INTERVIEWERS: They show traces though of the same obsession; they are written from the same point of view… GREENE: Yes, I wrote them. They are not all that different." Graham Greene, "Graham Greene, The Art of Fiction No. 3." Interview by Simon Raven & Martin Shuttleworth, The Paris Review, no. 3 (1953): 32. As the interview continues it seems as though Greene does not entirely embrace his own offhanded dismissal of his "entertainments," saying: "I had to write a pot-boiler, a modern adventure story, and I suddenly discovered that I liked the form, that the writing came easily, that I was beginning to find my world." Ibid., 33.

> not major part of his oeuvre. It is unlikely that their humble status will be much affected by critical reevaluation, but even these lesser works deserve attention.[218]

The "entertainments" were play, and the "important works" were work.

Mishima, Keene, and Yourcenar discuss these bodies of literature in a language that reflects an elitist self-flagellatory literary aesthetic. Works for the masses are consumed and enjoyed, while "true works of art" are for the literary elite to… what? Endure? Challenge and overcome? And what are the grounds for literary elite's denigration of "entertainments?" Are they worth less merely because they are written quickly and for a wide audience? Is it their flimsy paper stock and gaudy advertisements? Is it their accessibility?[219] Whatever the case may be, surely mass-market works have their own merits and are worthy of attention. This is certainly true for Mishima's "entertainments," as they contain literary devices, themes, and features generally absent from his "important" writing; Mishima's mass market works give readers a different side of the author, one that challenges conventional perceptions of him as a humorless nihilist obsessed solely with beauty and death.[220]

Mishima's satirical essay series *Lessons in Immorality* (*fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*) is an erudite, charming, and entertaining collection of satirical essays written in the late 1950s. In each

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[218] Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Volumes 1 and 2: Fiction*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998 – 1999, 1190. Writing in 1984, and thus likely discussing the 1975 Mishima completed works, Keene notes that "The entertainments are not normally read by critics, either. The editors of the Complete Works, feeling that it would be an insult to Mishima's memory if his "middlebrow" fiction was included in the same volumes with his serious works, segregated them into volumes of their own." (Ibid., 1189) In the 2000 Completed works the object of this study, Mishima's Lessons in Immorality is housed in volume five of the "criticism" portion of the works. It is not clearly designated as apart from his serious "true" writing. The volumes are organized by genre, long fiction, short fiction, drama, criticism, and so on. While this is a step forward in encouraging engagement with Mishima's "entertainments," coupling all the works together by genre presents its own problems, as will be discussed below.

[219] For an analysis of the early literary debates which guided the formation of a "high-low" ideological binary amongst Japanese literati, see Edward Mack, *Manufacturing Modern Japanese Literature,* Durham: Duke University Press, 139-179.

[220] Naturally, exceptions abound. *The Golden Pavilion*'s Kashiwagi produces acidic humor and anti-social critiques which resonate with these essays; the first meeting between Kashiwagi and Mizoguchi reads like an elaborated version of the essay "You should antagonize the weak" (*yowai mono o ijimeru beshi*).

essay Mishima, the narrator of every essay in the series, lampoons a moral convention and proposes an "immoral" alternative. Humor is the essential element which motivates the argument in each essay; Mishima attempts to win over readers with quicksilver wit, shocking punchlines, and charming anecdotes, not with long earnest discussions like those found in *The Golden Pavilion* or *Sun and Steel*. And, at their best, these essays have moments more convincing than their "high literature" counterparts.

Mishima is judicious in his use of humor in his "true works of art," and as a result is regarded by many as being an entirely earnest author. This could not be further from the truth, and *Lessons in Immorality* highlights the inaccuracy of this misconception. For Mishima's large international (i.e., those reading Mishima in translation) readership, essays like these and his other humorous works are a necessary corrective to a drastically skewed representation of the writer.[221] To find misrepresentation of Mishima, one need not even open most of his books. Christopher Ross' title (*Mishima's Sword: Travels in Search of a Samurai Legend*), the cover art for Inose and Sato's *Persona* (a katana and a rose), and the covers of many paperbacks (most notably the various editions of *Sun and Steel*) featuring an oiled, flexing, and semi-nude Mishima gripping a sword all beg the Western reader to regard Mishima as some kind of "last samurai" figure. Mishima wore many different masks and costumes, but he was no more a samurai than he was a soldier, or a mobster.

Masks and the quest for an "authentic Mishima" plague readers to this day. Many have (rightly) resigned themselves to the impossibility of this task, and there are others who read

[221] Unfortunately, these essays along with much of Mishima's humorous writing remains untranslated. Interested readers will find a fair amount of Mishima's wit in his drama however, and should seek out Kominz's *Mishima on Stage: The Black Lizard and Other Plays*. Mishima's *Sardine Seller's Net of Love* is a delightful light comedy with a virtuoso bit of wordplay which wins the heart of a princess, while *The Black Lizard* is a sexy and somewhat absurd crime play featuring a female master thief, Japan's greatest detective, and a museum of taxidermied youths.

Mishima in appreciation for the impossible labyrinth he constructs out of all of his false faces.[222] But, there are still many readers with a passion for biographical reading who perhaps hold out hope that they will someday crack the Mishima Code. The habit to read for the "real" author can be especially pronounced with Mishima, and his humor further complicates this misguided reading method. Works of humor are formed around unreliable centers – humor is at its core untrustworthy. It says one thing and means another. These works give us a better appreciation of Mishima's literary talents, but they give us no more insight into the "real" Mishima than any of his other fictions. The mass market works give readers a yet another Mishima, one who complicates the reader's map of Mishima's meanings, priorities, talents, and tastes.

In *Lessons in Immorality* Mishima uses humor in the familiar manner of a satirist or cultural critic who hopes his writing can change the minds of their readers. While in his late career he would abandon hope for literature to effect change, giving himself over to an obsession with the body and real-life violence, in these essays Mishima writes as a satirist convinced of literature's potential to change the world. Hidden away in this "entertainment" is a new kind of Mishima, one not adequately addressed by critics. Here is a charming Mishima, an author trying to win audiences over with wit. Here is a satirist who conjures amusing moments of mirth out of dark and anti-social topics. Here is a work that can help readers solely familiar with his "true works of art" better understand the scope of Mishima's literary

[222] For those reading for the "real" Mishima, See Gavin Walker, "The Double Scission of Mishima Yukio: Limits and Anxieties in the Autofictional Machine." *Positions* 18, no. 1 (2010): 145-70. In it, Walker shows how Mishima's public persona is a seamless self-referential construct which frustrates readers seeking autobiographical detail in Mishima's works, sending them on wild goose chases back into different layers of Mishima's own fabricated public persona.

talents, better appreciate the source of his widespread fame and popularity, and appreciate his career with a heightened sense of pathos.[223]

What follows is an analysis of these essays along two lines of inquiry. The first is one inspired by Gerard Genette and the methods of textual studies. In the section titled "Voice and Paratext" I will discuss how a comic work is impacted by changes to a work's format impact its success in making its readers laugh. I will offer tentative answers to questions like "is a hardcover less funny than a paperback" and "how can orthography change a joke?"[224] This section will hopefully show the benefits of close attention to the object when reading on literary humor. The second section "Humor in *Lessons in Immorality*," discusses some of Mishima's more virtuoso applications of humor in these essays, introducing readers to a heretofore unknown side of Mishima Yukio. This section will show Mishima's breadth as a humorist, but also point to his ultimate failure as a humor writer: Mishima is so invested in amusing his audience that he ultimately undermines his own positions through indiscriminate use of humor.

3.2 Voice and Paratext

Lessons in Immorality debuted in the July 27th 1958 inaugural issue of the magazine "Weekly Morningstar" (*Shūkan Myōjō*) and ran until November 1959.[225] The original Japanese title, *Fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*, proposes both a genre and a central ethic for the work. It will be

[223] There is something darkly comic about Mishima's final gesture: from the heckling soldiers who drown out his speech and the very anti-climactic (and sad) fashion in which his head refused to depart his neck with the elegance he anticipated to the entire failure of his suicide to motivate any meaningful change in Japanese society. It can be regarded as a performance piece, a bizarre and un-funny parody of his earlier *Yūkoku*, in which he beautifully depicts the austere suicide of a young military couple. But what little humor there is to be found in Mishima's final moments is there only by audience projection – there is nothing in Mishima's manner that leads one to believe that he undertook his last gesture with any sense of irony or humor whatsoever.

[224] "Usually" and "in lots of ways," respectively.

[225] Mishima, *MYZ*, vol. 42, 418.

"anti-moral" (*fudōtoku*) and it will be an "educational-lecture series" (*kyōiku kōza*).[226] Peppered with dark and shocking humor, the essays have provocative titles to match: "You Should Go Drinking, Even with Men You Don't Know," "You Should Abuse Women," and "You Should Tell Lies as Often as Possible" are some of the more outstanding examples.[227] These essays were very popular, and they inspired a stage adaptation, a feature film in which Mishima appeared as "the author," and a television series. In these essays Mishima presents himself as a witty raconteur, humorously critiquing society through anecdotes and pointed quips.[228]

Mishima often closes his anecdotes and essays with shocking conclusions, and his punchlines are often dark. Just like these essays, his most famous works are littered with dark images; he was fascinated with man's destructive and dark urges. In this respect, we can see some of "literary darling" Mishima in his mass-market persona. *That* Mishima was funny may come as a surprise to some, but *how* Mishima was funny is likely a surprise to none: he often turned toward the taboo and the terrible to shock and amuse his readers.

Briefly postponing a discussion of the humor genre of these essays, their formal genre is easy enough to describe. These essays are of the *zuihitsu* tradition. Roughly defined in English as "miscellaneous essay," the genre is a capacious one whose "usefulness and prestige in Japanese literary history come from …flexibility."[229] *Zuihitsu* can be arbitrary in both organization and

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[226] This title is not entirely appropriate in either language however, as Mishima doesn't advocate a morality which stands in direct opposition to morality (the prefix in-/im- and the Japanese 不 being roughly equivalent in having to do with negation, or anti-), but his own novel morality. These essays make seemingly immoral propositions, only to show how they are Mishima-moral. Lectures in a New Morality (*shindōtoku kōza*) would be more apt.

[227] Mishima Yukio, *Fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*, Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 40.

[228] I discuss narrative voice in greater detail below. However, it should be noted here that in this study I will often use the word "Mishima" in lieu of "the narrator" or "the essays" when discussing the arguments presented by the texts. The most accurate term would be "The raconteur and critic Mishima as represented in these essays," but this is unwieldy. I will use "Mishima" for the sake of brevity, and hope that no reader believes this study asserts that it has gleaned Mishima (the real historical figure and writer)'s intentions or feelings.

[229] Linda H. Chance, *Formless in Form : Kenkō, Tsurezuregusa, and the Rhetoric of Japanese Fragmentary Prose*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, xiv.

theme. One finishes *The Pillow Book* or *Essays in Idleness* feeling as though they understand the intimate curves of the writer's mind; one who reads *zuihitsu* as a coherent whole building towards an end will be frustrated.[230] Often, their only organizing principal is time – that which was written first is read first, and so on.

These essays are satire, but satire at its subtlest can be entirely indistinguishable from an earnest work and is often hard to discern.[231] It has no formal rules, and there is no guidance to just how obvious the humor needs to be to qualify as satire.[232] But, broadly, a satire can be regarded as a work of humor that uses humor to draw a reader's attention to some ill; it is a humorous critique. Satire varies in discernibility and intent, from the subtle to the overt, and from the merely mocking to utopian satires which critique to "clear a path for the propagation of new myths and plans" that are explicitly laid out therein.[233] Delineating between the various genres of satire is messy and often subjective business.

As humor theorists have noted, humor has a social aspect to it which is inescapable, an assertion supportable enough by anecdotal evidence – surely one notices how much more we laugh in the presence of others, and how rarely we laugh alone. Henri Bergson argued that

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[230] While the essay can function this way in Western literature, it rarely seems to do so. However, edited editions, compilations, and collected works can be excellent approximations of the *zuihitsu*. Opening the completed works of Montaigne and reading essays at random would create the *zuihitsu* reading experience neatly enough.

[231] What follows is a discussion of the salient features of satire as understood by a lay (i.e. non-humor theorist) audience and a provisional and broad definition of the word. Pollard, Rose (especially pp.80-90), will be of interest to readers desirous of a more precise definition of satire in general. Those interested of satire specifically within the Japanese context are encouraged to read Well's chapter "Satire and Constraint in Japanese Culture" in Davis, or "*Warai no honshitsu, bunrui, igi*" in Howard Hibbet and *Nihon bungaku to warai kenkyūkai*, *Warai to kōzō*, Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 1998, vol. 1.

[232] The filmmaker Paul Verhoven famously made satires which closely resembled their satirized objects. Audiences often mistook Robocop, Starship Troopers, and Showgirls as sincere attempts. In literature, Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and *Lolita* can be read in a pair as overt and subtle satires of self-impressed and self-indulgent academics.

[233] Importantly, utopian satire must clearly lay out its own "new myths and plans," otherwise it is simply satire. All satire, in a sense, critiques to clear way for the new. But common satire simply points to the problem without proposing its own viable solutions. In fact, presenting an absurd solution as viable is a very common humor device in satire. The most famous English-language satire, *A Modest Proposal*, being an excellent example of this. Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 90.

more than an aspect of humor, this was a defining trait. He states that"[t]o understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all [we must] determine the utility of its function, which is a social one… Laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a *social* signification."[234] Laughter is born from and occurs within a social context – humor and the laughter it seeks all exist within the realm of the interpersonal. As Searle points out "meaning is not a property of words: it is a consequence of relations that always include human beings."[235] This is even truer in the case of humorous meaning, and this is why it is second nature for to humor readers seek out some evidence of authorial intent towards humor, a wink giving them permission to laugh.[236]

The tone of the text, the narrative voice, and the overall atmosphere of the work are vital textual elements which encourage the reader to be receptive to humor. But tone, voice, and atmosphere are all heavily influenced by elements external to the work.[237] The text's "wink" is enabled from something without – an author is known to be a humorist from their interviews and public appearances, an introduction comments on the work's humor, the work is anthologized alongside other works of humor, or any number of other external elements

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[234] Henri Bergson, "Laughter" in Sypher, Wylie, *Comedy*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, 62.
[235] Leroy Searle, "The Conscience of the King: Oedipus, Hamlet, and the Problem of Reading," Comparative Literature, vol. 49, no.4 (1997), 317.
[236] In his note 8, Searle states that "I note here only that the marked degree of confusion that has grown up around the problem of intention, with efforts to localize its fallacies and demonstrate the impossibility of ascertaining it, relating it to problems of grammar, consciousness, logic and semiosis, may be traceable to the elementary circumstance that our ability to recognize irony, carry out comparisons, or use language for any particular purpose whatsoever depends on the fact that "intention" becomes a problem when, and only when, we fail to grasp it. Otherwise, we experience intention as comprehension, precisely at the point where expression meets a context for action." Ibid., 322. Or, briefly, "intention grasped, joke gotten."
[237] In his discussion of method in *Laughter*, Robert R. Provine showed material widely recognized as humorous (standup comedy routines, sketch comedy clips, and so on) to volunteers in his lab, few of whom laughed. Not even George Carlin recordings could warm the icy atmosphere of the lab. Given the intimate relationship between laughter and a reader regarding a work a A: humor, and B: humorous, one must consider the many extra-textual factors which influence reader experience. Robert R Provine, *Laughter*, New York: Viking Penguin, 2000.

which mark the work as a work of humor. Often the reader approaches the text ready to laugh.[238]

And so a discussion of context must precede any discussion of humor, or the study may amount to little more than an elaborate "you had to be there" anecdote – a form of failed humor familiar to many. Literary humor is subject to its own particular atmospheric influences; humor in particular is heavily impacted by its "paratext."

Gerard Genette (1997) defines paratext as:

> … text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations. And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its "reception" and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book. These accompanying productions, which vary in extent and appearance, constitute what I have called elsewhere the work's *paratext*….[239]

Everything from the front cover to the back, author interviews, and advertisements impact the reception, and thus the meaning, of a text. Genette subdivides paratext into two categories: peritext and epitext. Peritext is the constellation of productions which accompany the text in the same volume – the aforementioned introduction, for example.[240] Epitext are those elements of paratext from without the bound volume of the work itself – author interviews, newspaper advertisements, talks given on book tours and said tours' subsequent media coverage, and so-on.

Mishima wrote his diverse body of "entertainments" for newspapers and light weekly magazines; he wrote sports columns, foreign correspondence, romances, crime novels, a

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[238] Were Lolita published with the name "Kurt Vonnegut" on the cover it would likely be read as a ribald and dark satire of Cornelian/Ivy-League academics. For a fascinating piece of fiction that tinkers with the relationship between authorship and construction of meaning see Borges' "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote." Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, New York: Penguin Books, 1998.
[239] Gérard Genette, and Marie Maclean, "Introduction to the Paratext." *New Literary History* 22, no. 2 (1991), 261. The "elsewhere" Genette refers to here is his earlier work *Palimpsestes* (1981).
[240] Ibid., 266-7

science fiction novel, and other essay series. These forums would have been filled with advertisements, gossip columns, and amusing content that would have made readers expect literary frivolity. His "important works" were published in more austere settings, in literary coterie magazines, or as novels without any prior serialization.[241] Mishima, his editors, and the publishing industry kept these literary bodies physically divorced from one another; his "entertainments" and his "important works" would not have been bound within the same object. Whether the result of individual intent or simply publishing convention, the result of this high/low divide is the same: the reification of the metaphorical distance between these bodies of literature would doubtless have helped split "entertainment" Mishima and "serious" Mishima into separate semantic categories for readers, which doubtless informed their reading practices. *Shūkan Myōjō* readers would have expected "entertainment" Mishima, and would likely have been more attuned to the humor in the essays. But anthologies, republications, libraries, and even bookstore shelving practices have damaged this physical divide.

From its initial printing in an ephemeral periodical to its latter republication in various hardcover and paperback editions, these essays have undergone numerous physical changes. They were clothbound into standalone editions, shelved next to "serious" works, reprinted as flimsy paperbacks of little more permanence than *Shūkan Myōjō,* and anthologized in sumptuous Complete Works which stand sentinel in quiet library archives. These physical changes change reader expectation, and some later editions lose a great deal of the light frivolity of the original periodicals. Furthermore, as I will discuss further below, later editions have been subtly edited in ways which encourage a more earnest reading. Rather than being

[241] These publication venues would not have been without their own paratexts – literati gossip columns, advertisements, other works by notable writers, and so on. As this text is primarily interested in a singular "entertainment" and its merits rather than a point-by-point contrast of Mishima's "high" and "low" writings, this study will forgo a lengthier discussion of the paratexts of Mishima's "high" writing.

"entertainments" to be appreciated as such, they are repackaged "Entertainments" which are prescient and deserve re-reading through the lens of Mishima's "serious" works. While this is a productive reading practice, and one of the merits of Mishima's "entertainments" is that they do meaningfully inform our understanding of his "serious" fictions, it is dangerous to blithely take these essays and reconceive them as "serious"-lite. Lending too much weight to these essays may encourage misreading. These essays should not be taken as Mishima's definite outlines for a new Japanese society. They are dangerous and amusing works in which Mishima plays with nihilistic and anti-social philosophies. He diagnoses social ills and prescribes comical cures worse than the diseases they seek to wipe out. Are we to take the medicine? Are we to laugh at the extremity of Mishima's prescriptions? Rather than embracing this comic ambiguity, later editions encourage readers to take Mishima's prescriptions seriously.

Chūō Kōronsha published the first bound edition of *Lessons in Immorality* in 1959 while serialization of the essays was still incomplete, a fact which complicates discussion of paratext.[242] Were the latter essays regarded simply as the nascent forms of what would later become a bound object, ie. their *true* form? Were readers of those flimsy periodicals projecting into these essays the gravity of the bound volume? This situation is particularly vexing for the humor scholar, as the gravity of the codex can be antagonistic to the frivolity of a periodical. An expensive cloth-bound edition of a subtle satire could easily be mistaken for an earnest critique; *Lessons in Immorality* readers reading out of the Mishima Yukio Definitive Completed Works (*Ketteiban Mishima Yukio zenshū*, hereafter "MYZ") may be inclined to read more earnestly,

[242] Mishima, Lessons in Immorality, 1959. First published on March 11th 1959, and reprinted on March 16th, the 1959 Chūō Kōronsha text contains only the first thirty of the total sixty-nine essays.

given that it is bound alongside Mishima's earnest 1958-59 diary *The Naked Body and Costume* (*Ratai to ishō*).[243]

As James Wald points out, the codex is often regarded in a hierarchal relationship viz. the periodical. The codex is regarded as being "venerable," "complete," and "permanent" while the periodical is "recent," "fragmentary, open-ended" and "ephemeral."[244] The codex is the object of an "intensive" reading practice in which one engages deeply with a limited corpus of texts, while periodicals invite "extensive" reading – reading a wider body of texts quickly.[245] While the regard a reader brings to it may influence their willingness to read for humor, the codex is not inherently un-funny. In fact, literary humor which is self-reflective can function better when clothed in the respectable costume of cloth or leather binding. The formal chaos of *Tristram Shandy* is funnier and more outrageous in the gilt and red leather of the Franklin Library series than it is in paperback; Nosaka's profanity and metafictive subversion are more delightful in the Knopf hardcover, with its gold-edged pages and veneer of propriety. But for essays like *Lessons in Immorality*, the austere codex may threaten to the delicate comic atmosphere.

Keeping in mind the important relationship between atmosphere and humor, this study regards the changes in the reprinted essays as meaningful sites for exploration. How might later editors and compilers have re-contextualized these essays via their inclusion or elision of important peritextual details? Were later editions of the essays any more or less funny as a result of their republication? Were these essays reprinted in ways which mis-represented them to

[243] Were it not for the epitext of history, canon, and critique, an eager English scholar reading out of an august tome may find Swift's "A Modest Proposal" to be a grisly proposition rather than a pointed assault on contemporary insensitivity towards the plight of the Irish.
[244] Wald in Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose(eds), *A Companion To The History of the Book*, Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 421-422.
[245] Ibid., 423.

readers as Mishima's "serious" writing? And what of the original periodicals? Have they changed over the years?

Shūkan Myōjō was one of a multitude of weekly magazines that emerged in the 1950s and 60s printing boom. Despite their overwhelming abundance, weekly magazines quickly become rare and now scholars often face an ironic inversion of availability. Many major research libraries in the United States have subscriptions to, and archives of, the literary coterie magazines in which Mishima and his peers published their "serious" work. But widely available mass-market weeklies have fallen between the cracks, and there are few archives which hold them.[246] There is only one United States university library which holds any copies of *Shūkan Myōjō*; a scholar seeking a complete run of *Shūkan Myōjō* must go to the National Diet Library (NDL).[247]

The NDL is a living and ever-expanding archive of Japanese culture that aspires to keep a copy of all work printed in Japan. To gain access, one requires affiliation with an appropriate institution, and an NDL ID must be minted in a facility across the street from the archive. The main branch in Tokyo has two buildings: the main building with 5 basement and 12 above-ground floors, and the new annex which is 8 floors of closed stacks. The 5 underground floors and much of the 12 above-ground floors of the main building are inaccessible stacks. The originals themselves are archived somewhere within the aforementioned closed labyrinth. One can access digitized copies from computer terminals within the NDL, but the periodicals themselves are inaccessible. In other words, *Shūkan Myōjō* is hard to read. What effect does this have on the satire contained therein? Surely there are other paratextual elements which have

[246] It should be noted that the case for scholars without institutional backing is quite different, and this study recognizes that it has been produced under conditions of incredible institutional privilege.
[247] The following information was gleaned from my colleague Azusa Tanaka who acquired scans of the essays from the NDL on my behalf. Azusa's efforts are a vital paratext to this study – thanks to her work I was saved some of the challenges discussed below.

informed the researcher in their quest to obtain the periodicals or their digital facsimiles, but the rarity of these editions no doubt colors one's reading of them. While they were born as ubiquitous and ephemeral magazines, they now live second lives as prized possessions held in a literary storehouse. It is difficult to regard a text as light when its acquisition is such a burden, and their status as rare archival objects becomes an important epitext for their consumption.

Each of the essays as they appeared in *Shūkan Myōjō* are two pages long. The text is in four columns running from right to left, top to bottom. Each essay is divided into three sections, set apart by a subtitle presented in bold font. The title of each essay is listed on the right hand side in standard font, with Mishima's hand-written signature immediately to the left of the essay title. With the hand-written text within the illustrations and the boldface section titles excepted, Mishima's name is the only piece of text presented in an inconsistent font format. It draws the reader's eye, and serves as an overt reminder that we are reading essays by "Mishima Yukio," the famous man of letters. The calligraphic signature also evokes the xylographic print and the handwritten manuscript – his signature encourages the reader to feel an intimate connection to the author through their hand, while also reminding them that this work is a part of a long literary history.[248]

The series title is in white font in a black box in the upper right corner of the first page of each essay. Immediately to the left of the series title is one of three line-drawings that accompany every essay. These cartoons are done in a light-hearted-style, often portraying Mishima himself in caricature, or giving exaggerated versions of the characters that appear in each essay. The cartoon placement is relatively consistent across all of the *Shūkan Myōjō* essays: the first cartoon is to the immediate left of the series title, the second cartoon is in the middle of

[248] Mishima further develops this connection in the first essay, as will be discussed at greater length below.

page one in the third column of text, and the third cartoon is in the middle of page two. The cartoons were penned by Yokoyama Taizō. Yokoyama was a celebrity in his own right; he was a prolific political cartoonist featured in the Asahi Newspaper from 1954 to 1992. The sense of celebrity around these essays is toned down in the bound versions, in part because Yokoyama's name is not given in the 1969 or 2004 editions of *Lessons in Immorality*.

In the upper left hand corner there is a photo of Mishima with a brief author summary containing his birth name (Kimitake Hiraoka), his date of birth (1925), the university he graduated from (University of Tokyo Department of Law), exemplary works (*Forbidden Colors, The Golden Pavilion,* and *The Faltering of Virtue*), and his address. A friendlier headshot was selected for the second essay. The headshot was changed again for the fifth essay, and new headshots were brought in at seemingly arbitrary intervals. As author headshot changes, so too does the profile content. For example, for the October 1958 essay "You Should Make Use of Scandal," the author profile has been replaced with this: "right now he is writing the long novel *Golden Pavilion* before our very eyes. It's expected to be a masterpiece that outstrips *The Faltering of Virtue*."[249] Here, the reader is reminded of Mishima's "high literature," and encouraged to read these essays as part of a coherent body of literary activity in which the author addresses a broader set of literary concerns. These essays were presented to readers with peritextual editorializing that problematized the simple division of Mishima's literary works into either "high fiction" or "entertainment."

The word *kōza* from the title, which I have translated as "lessons" is used to describe an organized seminar class, or a series of lectures. A well-crafted course of education may build to a denouement, but each lecture would have a certain degree of autonomy, able to give a student

[249] 目下書き下ろし長篇小説を執筆中「金閣寺」「美徳のよろめき」をしのぐ傑作が期待されている。 Mishima Yukio, "*Sukyandaru o riyō subeshi*" in *Shūkan Myōjō*, Tokyo: Shūeisha, October, 1958, 15.

mastery of a discrete topic. Thus, a reader could miss one of these essays without damaging their appreciation of the following essay or the series as a whole. These essays were originally structured in a similar fashion, with peritextual details encouraging readers to regard these as "lectures" – in other words, self-sufficient and discrete essays which are contemporaneously parts of a greater whole. Every essay was numbered above its title, and beginning in August 1958, "to be continued" was appended to the end of each.

But Mishima is careful not to turn these essays into a stuffy lecture series. From the very first lines of the opening essay of the series, Mishima writes in the voice of an idiosyncratic, famous, erudite, and casual raconteur. And in the second essay Mishima travesties educators, helping to further distinguish these "lessons" from those of the more staid, academic variety. The essays' tone is that of a public lecture series given by a famous intellectual rather than a formal academic lecture series. Identifying the narrative voice is essential to appreciating these essays as satire; jokes do not exist without a teller, and the joke-teller is every bit as important as the joke. Later editions of *Lessons in Immorality*, the 1969 and the 2005 in particular, contain changes in peritext which subtly impact the voice of the essays, making them less convivial and lighthearted.

One of the most visible peritextual changes to the essays as they are republished in codex form is that "to be continued" no longer appears at the end of each entry in the series. Their absence damages the subtle balance of atomization and coherence constructed in the *Shūkan Myōjō* essays. Bound into a single volume, the essays lie next to each other with nothing reflecting their original division in both space and time. Periodical readers may have lingered on each essay, waiting for next week's installment. They may have skipped back and forth, reading that which was available with no regard for reading in continuity. But the codex promotes a

teleological reading practice similar to that of Mishima's novels – readers begin in the beginning and read forward to the end.[250] The consequences on this in regards to humor are subtle, but meaningful. What may once have been merely a playful series of charming satirical essays has been bound together and presented in a form akin to a tone of critique; peritextual changes erode the "lecture series" atmosphere of the serialized essays. The codex reader may read these essays anticipating a denouement, hastily reading the opening essays and giving greater weight to the final pages; codex readers may hear these essays in the voice of Mishima Yukio, "serious novelist," rather than Mishima Yukio, "playful raconteur."

Orthography and its particulars play a part in constructing narrative voice, and there are orthographic changes between various editions of the text that again challenge the reading of later editions as satire. The two most noteworthy changes occur in the affectation of classical language conventions, and in the changes in the number and type of text-glosses.

By the mid-sixties, historical grammar and kana were the stuff of classrooms and classics. Following the Meiji Reformation in 1868, Meiji thinkers saw the need to reform the written Japanese language to make it more amenable to the incorporation of new ideas and more legible to the masses.[251] At the time, Meiji intellectuals were still writing in kanbun 漢文, a variant of classical Chinese that served as the lingua franca between well-educated Japanese writers from various regions within the country.[252] After much argument, writers, scholars, and

[250] For those of us old enough to remember television before Netflix, there should be an intuitive appreciation of the difference in these consumption patterns.

[251] The following broad summary of Meiji language reform is drawn from Yeounsuk Lee, and Maki H. Hubbard, *The Ideology of Kokugo: Nationalizing Language in Modern Japan*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2010. For an excellent discussion of the impact of kanbun kundoku-style language on humor, see Indra A. Levy, ""Comedy" Can Be Deadly: Or, How Mark Twain Killed Hara Hōitsuan," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011), esp. 343-349.

[252] The interested reader should read Atsuko Ueda, "Sound, scripts, and styles: Kanbun kundokutai and the national language reforms of 1880s Japan" in *The Culture of Translation in Modern Japan*, Saitama-ken Sakado-shi, Japan: Center for Inter-Cultural Studies and Education, Josai University, 2008 for an excellent description of the diversity of kanbun at the time.

government officials decided on a form of written Japanese based loosely on what was thought to be the Tokyo dialect at the time. They called this language 言文一致 (*Genbun itchi*), which literally means "unification of written and spoken." This meant that spellings such as 買ふ(*ka-fu)*, which ostensibly reflected the pronunciation of Japanese when these spellings were developed during the Heian era (794-1185), were replaced with a spelling method that supposedly reflected the way Japanese was spoken in the present (~1900) day. Thus writers replaced 買ふ(*ka-fu*) with 買う(*ka-u*), ゐ (wi) with い (i), and effected other changes thought to bring about a more accurate representation of spoken Japanese.[253] Grammar such as the perfective *nu* also dropped from use at this time, as Meiji writers strove to create a language capable of capturing contemporary Japanese. The *genbun itchi* movement had done its work by Mishima's day, and historical kana use would have stood out to readers as an erudite affectation, just the sort of thing one might expect from a lecturer.[254]

The periodical essays, and all print editions save the MYZ, selectively implement classical Japanese without availing themselves of historical orthography.[255] Thus, the perfective ぬ is used, but い does not appear as ゐ, nor are any of the other conventions of historical kana use employed. The classical grammar in these essays is an affectation, reminiscent of the classical grammar used in samurai films or the inauthentic "old English" used in period pieces – there is enough to make the work feel "old-timey," but not enough to obscure meaning. These

[253] Contemporary readers would have read 買ふ(*kafu*) aloud as kau, despite the ~fu ending.
[254] According to Levy, "[b]y 1907 the genbun itchi style had come into its own as the sine qua non for both Japanese fiction and literary translation." Indra A. Levy, ""Comedy" Can Be Deadly: Or, How Mark Twain Killed Hara Hōitsuan," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011),, 347.
[255] The ensuing section discusses minute changes in orthography, glossing, and grammar over various editions of these essays. As this sort of comparison requires side-by-side analysis and is time intensive, I have limited myself to a comparison of the April 19th 1959 essay "Catchphrase Girls" (チャッチフレーズ娘), against its latter appearances in 1960 Chūō Kōron, the 1969 Chūō Kōron, the 1995 Kadokawa, the 2004 Kadokawa editions, and the 2000 Shinchōsha *Definitive Completed Works* (*MYZ*).

essays would have been intelligible to contemporary readers, but these archaic touches were not without effect. This grammar feature reminded readers that the lecturer is a sophisticated member of the literati speaking to a broad audience. This air of erudition would have influenced the voice of these essays, so important to satire and the delicate balance being struck between earnest critique and play.

The MYZ essays have been edited *into* historical kana use, making it a text which is much more marked by archaic language use than any other iteration. えがく (*egaku*) has become ゑがく (*wegaku)*, and the rubi for 滔々has changed from とうとう(*tou tou*) to たうたう (*tau tau)*. However, ゑがく (*wegaku*) and たうたう (*tau tau*) would both be read aloud as *egaku* and *dou dou*. While the sound of the text has not changed, its voice has. This text is more difficult, more archaic, and more (seemingly) culturally significant than the other printings. The voice of the "Definitive Complete Works" version of the essay is more in line with the voice one would expect from "Mishima Yukio, literary author" rather than "Mishima Yukio, celebrity author."

There are also significant changes in text-glossing, referred to in the Japanese language context as "rubi," between the periodical editions and the MYZ.[256] In "The Playful Gloss" Chieko Ariga defines rubi as

> "a reading gloss printed alongside words to indicate pronunciation or to provide additional information. *Rubi* appear in small type, normally in phonetic *kana* to the right of the Chinese characters, or *kanji* 漢字…. The term *rubi* comes from 'ruby', a type size (5.5 point) formerly used in Britain."[257]

[256] While the most interesting differences in glossing emerged between the periodicals and the MYZ, there are also significant differences between the periodicals and the 2004 Kadokawa edition. There were differences between the periodical and the 1960, the 1969, and the 1995 edition, but they were regarded as too few in number and too esoteric in location to merit devoted attention.

[257] Chieko Ariga, "The Playful Gloss, Rubi in Japanese Literature." *Monumenta Nipponica* 44, no. 3 (1989), 309.

Rubi are generally either used as a simple phonetic comprehension aid (clarifying rubi), or as a rhetorical device through innovative use (rhetorical rubi).[258] Clarifying rubi assist readers in one of two ways: a) they select for the reader one possible pronunciation for a kanji out of many attested variants (A-Type) or b) give the reader the only attested pronunciation for a kanji that they might not know how to pronounce in the first place (B-Type). For example, the periodical edition of "Catchphrase Girls" uses clarifying rubi eleven times, the 2004 essay has twenty-one, and the MYZ essay has nine.[259] But why do rubi matter?

In his theorization of Rubi in the article "On Communication In a Hyperflat Japanese Language: Japanese Criticism and Introversion" (*Chōheimenka shita nihongo de no komyunikēshon ni tsuite*), Chris Lowy proposes a reading method in which the reader and the author create the phonetic elements of the text through a co-constitutive process. In his theorization of reading, Lowy argues that

> The Japanese language demands an interactive relationship between the reader and the writer. When reading characters for which there are no rubi, the reader selects a reading that matches the context from all available readings for that character, and attaches the reading they think is correct (they attach 'unseen rubi'), and must create their own reading. Thus, at the same time they are a reader and a creator. I want to call this generative power "interactive textuality."[260]

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[258] Responsibility for rubi placement is an unclear issue. Without being able to reference manuscript copy and author-editor correspondence, it is impossible to determine who is responsible for rubi. Generally, common sense attributes innovative and rhetorical rubi to the author, while the more basic phonetic gloss rubi are more difficult to attribute. Mishima died in 1970, and this study will attribute any rubi changes following that date to his editors. While there is always the chance that he left behind notes regarding posthumous editing of his works, it seems unlikely that he would have said anything specific regarding these essays and their glossing.

[259] Of the eleven total instances of rubi in the original periodicals, five are of the A-type, and six are of the B-type. In the 2004 essays, one B-Type rubi from the periodicals has been removed, and four new A-Type and six B-Type rubi have been added for a total of twenty-one. In the MYZ all B-Type rubi save one have been cut, and three new A-Type rubi have been added for a total of nine.

[260] 日本語は書き手と読み手の双方向的な関係を要求する。ルビがついていない漢字を読む場合、読み手は漢字のあらゆる読みのなかから状況に合った、正しいと思われる読みを付けて（視えざるルビを付けて）、自分なりの読みを創りださなければならない。読み手は同時に、作り手でもあるのだ。多様な読みを生み出す生成力を、相互作用テクスト性（interactive textuality)と名付けたい。Christopher Lowy, "*Chōheimen-ka shita Nihongo de no komyunikēshon ni tsuite: tojikomoru Nihon no hihyō*," *Genron Etc* 2.4 (2012), 91.

While Lowy is dealing with communication in the "superflat" age of P2P communication on the internet, and paying particular attention to the potentials of the Japanese language to overcome the need for a phonetics, his ideas of "interactive textuality" and the "unseen rubi" can be productively applied here. Particularly, "interactive textuality" and "unseen rubi" are essential elements in creating a narrative voice.

For example, Mishima uses the somewhat uncommon kanji compound "一寸" to express the idea "a little bit." This can be pronounced as either the phrase "*chotto"* or "*issun*" (issun being the more archaic reading), but it is left un-glossed. Here, the reader applies "unseen rubi" that give this compound a voice, and with it an attendant nuance. Thus, the reader is actively involved in the construction of the voice of this text, and creates a Mishima that speaks in a voice they've co-created. While a text without rubi is potentially more challenging, it can also be more intimate as the reader is more deeply engaged in the "interactive textuality." As rubi increase, the potential for co-creation decreases. In this way, Rubi function paradoxically: they remind the reader of the diversity of readings available for each kanji, while at the same time foreclosing the reader's choices in their role as a co-creator of the text.

Generally, a text with fewer rubi demands greater creative effort on behalf of the reader, and allows them to select readings that suit their own conception of narrative voice. In other words, the un-glossed character is unvoiced. It is a catalyst that prompts the reader to imagine a pronunciation. The reader's imagination is informed by paratexts: normative language conventions, advertisements, the reader's education, cover material, the reader's knowledge of other Mishima texts, interviews, and so on. Over the course of one essay, each un-glossed character and its attendant imagined readings help constitute the narrative voice. These essays develop their comic voice through accumulation: there are many puns and low-stakes comic

moments which gradually accrete to create an overall atmosphere of comedy.[261] And so a reader must not only understand the characters and their potential readings, they must acknowledge readings which are comical and defer to them. In other words they must read comically. Readers all over the world must, in some sense, read for humor. However, thinking of "unseen rubi" and "interactive textuality" it is clear that the Japanese language offers a unique set of potentials and challenges to readers and writers of literary humor.[262]

Returning to the editions, the 2000 MYZ eliminates all but one type-B rubi and adds three type-A. This results in a text that is more difficult to read and more phonetically homogenous. The opportunities for co-constitutive phonetic creation are limited, as more of the kanji that had multiple phonetic options have been decided for the reader. The glosses tend to pick the more archaic phonetic option when possible, making the text seem older and more daunting. This rubi practice is part of what makes the 2000 MYZ essays align more closely with what one would expect from "Mishima Yukio, literary author" rather than "Mishima Yukio, mass-market author."[263]

One would not expect casual readers to own bulky and expensive anthologies like the MYZ. They would be collected by devoted fans, or resting on shelves in libraries and in scholars' dens. The MYZ is an undeniably lovely set of codices. They are over thirty in number,

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[261] Comical anecdotes which do not depend as heavily on text-play will likely still amuse even the most unimaginative reader, but they lose some of their punch if the reader does not adequately appreciate the overall comic voice and tone of the work.

[262] Readers are encouraged to peruse the critical introduction to Matthew Fraleigh, *New Chronicles of Yanagibashi and Diary of a Journey to the West: Narushima Ryūhoku Reports from Home and Abroad*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, East Asia Series (no. 151), 2010, particularly pages xxxi-xlii in which he discusses playful glosses in late-Edo/early-Meiji Kanbun literature.

[263] Not all later editions suffer from solemnity. With its numerous additional glosses, the 2004 edition is a very accessible text – this is Mishima at his friendliest and easiest. Many of the obscure kanji in the text have been glossed, and the text is now less that of the erudite and charming lecturer, and more that of the high-school teacher. And while this does little to hurt the humor of the essays, this does impact their rhetorical weight. Satire may not delineate how change should occur, but well-balanced satire engenders amusement while encouraging action. In their accessibility the 2004 essays are slightly more trivial than the periodicals, and their call to action is slightly less compelling.

cloth bound with black silky covers, and detailed with vermillion and gilt lettering. They encourage serious engagement, and are invaluable references filled with secondary scholarship and difficult-to-find reproductions of primary materials. They ooze literary gravity, and every iota of their material being carries loaded message that these are important texts.

But the material conditions can encourage misreading. The peritext of the MYZ encourages an earnest reading, as a reader feels the desire to read a in the MYZ as something "worthy" of the binding of the book. Reading these essays in the MYZ is like drinking root beer out of a Waterford crystal chalice – it is difficult to appreciate the merits of the content when the vehicle makes such a strong argument that it should be something else.

Lastly, later editions of the essays alter one *kanji*, erasing a bit of deft wordplay Mishima had done with a well-known slogan. Beginning in the 1920s, the soft-drink Calpis advertised itself as being "the taste of first love," and in the periodicals Mishima makes a pun on this by having a character describe Calpis as having "the taste of lost love." [264] The pun here is made on the compound 初恋 ("first love" – *hatsukoi*) by replacing the first character, 初 ("first, beginning, start") with 失("to lose," or "to miss"), thus producing 失恋 ("lost love" – *shitsuren*). While this may seem inconsequential, we must remember that literary humor can often be a game of sums. In order to encourage the reader to read in a mindset amenable to regarding humor for what it is, a work of literary humor must signal the reader. It must "wink" at them.

This "wink" can take many forms. The most overt winks are like those in Nosaka's *The Pornographers*, which reaches to absurd and undeniably comic heights – it "must be joking." Others are instantaneous and subtle, of the "blink and you'll miss it" variety. Borges' *Garden of*

[264] "*Hatsukoi no aji* (初恋の味)" Old Calpis advertisement materials can be found at http://www.calpis.co.jp/corporate/history/founder/3.html

the Forking Paths winks at readers so quickly that many leave the story not appreciating its brilliant travesty of the august sinologist.[265] Other texts signal their readers through slower means, and depend upon the gradual accumulation of little quips and cracks. While these essays avail themselves of outright absurdity and cartoonish hyperbole, they can often start out subtly. Some essays develop their humor gradually, landing their biggest laughs alongside their most dramatic and outlandish statements in the end of the essay, often in the last line.[266] Seemingly minor changes like the swap from the Mishima's 失 to Calpis' 初 can slow the development of humorous tone across a piece, leading to a less dramatic denouement and negatively impacting both the rhetorical and humorous potency of a piece.

The edits to these essays across various iterations, most noticeably those in the MYZ, have effectively created a constellation of different works all of which share the title *Lessons in Immorality*. As we travel further away from the periodical editions, we find the text becoming increasingly challenging and respectable. But how has this increase in difficulty and erudition impacted the essays themselves? Humorists argue with charm and mirth – if we don't laugh with them we won't be inclined to do what they want. One could argue that satire is at its most effective when it is at its funniest. Writing about satire in Japanese newspapers, Inoue states that

> When criticizing the authorities or the government, a solemn, monotonous tone does not attract our attention. Criticisms that make the public laugh – in other words, those with a touch of irony – will actually be more successful in convincing society to change its opinions.[267]

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[265] When the German spy, a Chinese man, arrives at the Sinologist's countryside home the Sinologist meets him at the gate: "'I see that the compassionate Hsi P'eng has undertaken to remedy my solitude. You will no doubt wish to see the garden.' I recognized the name of our consuls, but I could only disconcertedly repeat, 'The garden?'" Despite all his education the Sinologist is little better than those who perpetuate that old racist adage that "all Asians look alike" – he mistakes the spy for a Chinese consul. The moment is brief, but it effectively deflates the lofty sinologist's discussions that follow. Jorge Borges, *Collected Fictions*, New York: Penguin Books, 1998, 123.

[266] Though it is well beyond the scope of this project to do so, "entertainments" as a worldwide genre of literature share formal features in fascinating ways. Mishima's passion for bombastic opening lines and twists in the final paragraph are reminiscent of Western potboilers, particularly those by Mickey Spillane.

[267] Hiroshi Inoue in Jessica Milner Davis, *Understanding Humor in Japan*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006, 187.

Formal features such as typeset, binding, neighboring advertisements, dust jackets, and cover art all subtly influence readers, and the later editions present readers with a different textual experience than the periodicals. In the case of topical satire, the increased solemnity of the codex may make these less successful as works of humor, and therefore possibly less convincing as social critique.[268]

Lastly, there is enough serious Mishima available to readers who want him, both in Japanese and in translation.[269] That he critiqued contemporary Japanese society is not notable; Mishima readers from every corner of the earth know he had a bone to pick with the Japan of his day. What is notable about these essays is that they are humorous critique; in these essays Mishima tries his hand at humor and proves himself adept at making readers laugh. The ephemerality of the periodical as a publication medium demands reprinting for austerity's sake. However, we should be cognizant of the exchange that is made – in gaining some longevity and permanence, these essays lose some of the frivolity and joie de vivre that made them exemplary "entertainments."

3.3 Humor in *Lessons in Immorality*

Every essay in *Lessons in Immorality* varies in its content, object, and effectiveness. But in each, Mishima satirizes an aspect of normative Japanese morality and argues for the

[268] But while these essays may be their best in periodical form, given the rarity of *Shūkan Myōjō* citing from the periodical essays is impractical. For readers wishing to reference a source text, this study cite the 1969 Chūo Kōron edition of the essays. This version was selected as it has few meaningful rubi variations, and it contains an informative afterward written by Mishima.

[269] As of 2018, Mishima's *Kinkakuji* has been translated into Bulgarian, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, Georgian, Greek, Hindi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Korean, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish, Thai, and Polish.

adoption of his own immoral alternative.[270] His logic is fairly consistent, in that he generally argues that his "immorality" is paradoxically more "moral" than its normative counterpart. For example, in "You should go drinking with men you don't know" Mishima Mishima argues that Ginza is a safe place for children to learn the conventions of adult nightlife, and that it is actually safer for young girls to go to Ginza than to avoid it. Most of his essays follow this pattern – a moral norm is posited only to be subverted and replaced with a contrary alternative which is ostensibly more moral than that which it supplants.

The opening essay states that the series was inspired by Ihara Saikaku's *Twenty Cases of Unfilial Children in Japan*, which discusses the single moral issue of filial piety. Saikaku was himself parodying a classic Chinese text called *Twenty Four Exemplars of Filial Piety*.[271] While the original Chinese classic was a didactic text praising the efforts of one pious child after the next, Saikaku's work was the opposite. He presented twenty-four fictional cases of filial impiety. It is not entirely clear whether or not Saikaku intended for this to be a comedic work. It was published in the midst of a contemporary boom in "unfilial" stories, and was unique as an accessible (lit. "of the common people") text which instructed proper behavior through presentation of negative examples.[272] Teruoka argues that Saikaku's *Twenty Cases of Unfilial Children in Japan*'s true merit was not in its moral

Figure 1: "Mishima Saikaku" from "You should go drinking with men you don't know"

[270] While the narrative voice is subject to subtle influence, the narrator is unquestionably a Mishima proxy – "Mishima the satirist" or "Mishima the raconteur." For brevity's sake I will simply refer to the narrator as "Mishima."
[271] Mishima Yukio, *Fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*, Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1969, 9.
[272] "庶民的で反面教師的な説話集" Teruoka Yasutaka in Saikaku Ihara, Teruoka Yasutaka, ed. *Honchō nijyū fukō* in *Gendaigoyaku Saikaku zenshū*, vol. 8. Tokyo: Shōgakukan. 1976, 4.

education, but in its thrilling depictions of immoral behavior. [273] Saikaku's contemporaries may have written didactic works, but Saikaku merely borrowed the form to publish entertaining immoral stories.

But Mishima writes that in reading *Twenty Cases of Unfilial Children in Japan*, he realized that tales of unfilial people made Mishima feel that he was more filial than he previously believed. He wrote that "feeling filial is the first step towards becoming so," and read Saikaku's work as one that encouraged positive behavior by showcasing negative deeds.[274] Mishima does not try to recreate this feeling with *Lessons.* Saikaku's stories show filial impiety, but end with divine or societal punishment. *Lessons* consistently rewards immoral characters, and their immoral behaviors rarely have negative consequences. Here, Mishima deviates from Saikaku in both technique and effect. Saikaku's work may have been mere entertainment, but his immoral youths never succeeded. Saikaku may not have been as overtly didactic as his contemporaries, but his text maintained social norms and did not advocate for immoral behavior. Mishima argues against aspects of Japanese morality and custom he regards as pointless or counterproductive. So while Saikaku may have inspired Mishima, these works use humor and narrative structures which reflect different comic lineages.

Joel Cohn writes that Japanese humor originates from two traditions: the high and the low. The high comic literature of the elite affirms cultural norms and is conservative, while low comic literature was

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[273] だが「二十不幸」のおもしろさは…スリルとサスペンスに富んだ無法者たちのおぞましい不幸ぶりにあることを、説話作者としての西鶴はじゅうぶん承知していて、それでも世間体を考慮して教訓の仮面をかぶったのではないかと、今私は考えている。だから「二十不幸」の本質は、読者に衝撃を与えることを目的とした悪漢小説（ピカレスク）といってよいだろう。Ibid., 5-6.

[274] Mishima Yukio, *Fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*, Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1969, 9.

> the expression of an oppressed social group, or of disaffected drop-outs from the elite culture, it showed a marked lack of respect for authority, gleefully portraying the pretensions, vanities, and pratfalls of legendary and historical heroes, revered religious figures, and, when possible, temporal power-holders as well.[275]

Saikaku's work reaffirms the values of normative society through making a humorous object out of members of society who do not conform.[276] Saikaku's *Twenty Cases of Unfilial Children in Japan* is "high humor," if it is humor at all, while Mishima's *Essays…* is of the "low humor" tradition. Mishima "gleefully" critiques his contemporaries, endeavoring to overturn the morals of the moment and replace them with his own.[277]

But while this evocation of Saikaku is useful in situating the *Lessons* in a lineage of influence and inspiration, it is not pointing readers to a source text with which the *Lessons* will engage, à la the conventional literary parody.[278] Parody does not necessarily critique its source, but it does have to engage with it in some way. *Lessons* does not return to Saikaku's *Twenty Cases of Unfilial Children in Japan* following this mention in the opening essays. So what is the result of this citation, if any? First, literary reference is one of many devices at work in these essays which serve to create an atmosphere of erudition – we are regularly reminded that we are reading essays by a literati. But the essays also often make fun of Mishima himself; erudite references make Mishima a more effective butt for self-deprecating humor.

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[275] Joel R Cohn, *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction*, Cambridge: MA, Harvard University Asia Center, 1998, 15-6.

[276] High humor is the preeminent humor form in the famous Heian period classics *The Tale of Genji* and *The Pillow Book*. During Saikaku's day there was a greater mix of high and low humor – in fact Saikaku wrote *Twenty Cases of Unfilial Children in Japan* while transitioning out of a period of writing particularly controversial humor works which could be construed as anti-establishment in certain respects. His early Life of an Amorous Man, for example, contains numerous passages depicting contemporary lotharios who pale in comparison to their Heian predecessors. It does not demand much imagination to read these as critiques of the early-Edo period elite.

[277] There are other, less explicit ties to Edo-period literature in this opening essay. Mishima replaces courtesans with wayward schoolgirls, and he casts Ginza as the Yoshiwara district reborn.

[278] For more on parody and its definitions, see Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, Chicago, IL, University of Illinois Press, 2000; or Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

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In addition to self-deprecation, the essays use a variety of other humor devices such as travesty, burlesque, hyperbole, binary caricature, anecdote, and absurd reasoning. The various humor devices Mishima brought to bear are rarely implemented independently of one another, and can often be hard to isolate. Each has its own unique features however, and in delineating them closely we can see the ways in which these essays use humor to entertain and either support or undermine their immoral arguments. The reasoning in these essays is often flawed, or over-quick; they lack the length and clear thought we find in explications of *The Golden Pavilion*, *The Sailor who Fell From Grace from the Sea*, or the *Sea of Fertility* tetralogy. When these essays win readers over they do so with charm and humor rather than clear reason.

For clarity's sake this paper avails itself of terms which are an elaboration upon Margaret Rose's. In her discussion of literary parody Rose defines "high burlesque" as "that which treats something trivial in an elevated manner" and "low burlesque, that which treats something elevated in a trivial manner."[279] For brevity the former will be called simply "burlesque" and the latter will be called "travesty" Hyperbole is the exaggeration or overstatement of something for comedic effect, and binary caricatures are simply characters in the essays which exemplify the extreme ends of whatever issue Mishima is discussing. In the following sections I highlight some of Mishima's more outstanding implementations of these forms of humor, and discuss how his humor allows him to make his anti-social arguments palatable, and, occasionally, even convincing.

3.4 Travesty

[279] Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 60.

Some of Mishima's most exemplary travesties are in his second essay "You should disrespect your teachers." In it, he attacks contemporary education, and reminisces fondly of his raucous school days.[280] He recalls schoolboy pranks, and one stands out as an outstanding use of travesty. One day, Mishima's classmates attack their headmaster as he walks the ground "solemnly." Using air guns and firecrackers, the schoolboys drive the principal into a "meticulously placed pit."[281] Here is travesty in both its literal and figurative senses.[282] The principal is literally brought down from ground level into a pit; the principal prank is travesty embodied and implemented. But this essay is not mere character assassination – Mishima's principal was an Admiral in the Japanese navy.

Mishima attended the Peers School, the school for young emperors and aristocrats. His early works discuss his school life, and his educational lineage was fairly well known. But just in case any readers missed this bit of trivia before reading the essay, Mishima reminds readers of his pedigree in the body of the essay itself. He refers to the principal with the specialized term "secondary school headmaster" (*chūtōkachō*) rather than the conventional "principal" *kōchō,* and pauses to explain in parenthesis that "secondary school headmaster" is the term used for "middle school principal" at the Peers School.[283] His headmaster was not a senior educator, but a former admirals: either Nomura Kichisaburō or Yamanashi Katsunoshin.[284] Previous Peers school principals included the military icon Nogi Maresuke, the general that

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[280] There is little biographical evidence that the pranks he discusses in this essay even occurred at all. He attended the Peer's school (*Gakushūin*), the school for aristocrats, members of the imperial family, and the upper-crust of Japanese society. In addition to being an excellent essay for travesty, it is also a great example of Mishima doing his best to create his own legend.

[281] Mishima Yukio, *Fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*, Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1969, 15.

[282] Though physical humor is challenging in literature, Mishima uses pratfalls and slapstick in these essays to great effect.

[283] "…中等科長（中学校長のこと。学習院での呼び名）Ibid. The term *chūtōkachō* (中等科長) does not appear in common dictionaries and seems to be wholly unique to the Peers School.

[284] *Gakushūin* headmaster list available at https://www.*Gakushuin*.ac.jp/ad/kikaku/message/rekidai.html

lead the charge on Port Arthur and whose suicide captivated the nation.[285] Mishima's schoolboys are doing more than just outwitting a stuffy administrator – they are dropping a metonym for the wartime generation into a pit.

The unique double-status of the Peers School principal as both military and educational figure helps Mishima in his conclusion, where he extends his argument for disrespect from educators to all elders (i.e. members of the generation in power during the war). For Mishima, teachers are the weakest form of adults, with the adults of the real world being much worse.[286] Young people should merely take knowledge from teachers. But when it comes to problems in life, children and adults are on the same footing and young people should be self-reliant.[287] Disrespecting teachers prepares young people to overcome enemies more powerful than themselves; for Mishima disrespect for adults is a prerequisite for greatness.[288] In this logical leap, Mishima is availing himself of a second comic device, albeit one that seeks to make humor through toying with reader's meta-level assumptions about argument.

3.5 Burlesque

[285] Nogi was a Meiji period war hero whose junshi (ritual suicide done to follow one's lord in death) "virtually eclipsed" the death of the Meiji Emperor. Doris G. Bargen, *Suicidal Honor : General Nogi and the Writings of Mori Ōgai and Natsume Sōseki*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006, 14. His death reverberated across Japanese culture; both Mori Ōgai and Natsume Sōseki were profoundly moved by his junshi and it deeply impacted their writing. Nogi's influence can be seen in Ōgai's short stories like "The Abe Clan" (*Abe ichizoku*), and Sōseki's incomparable *Kokoro*.

[286] 先生という種族は、諸君の逢うあらゆる大人のなかで、一等手強くない音なのです。ここをまちがえてはいけない。これから諸君が逢わねばならぬ大人は、最悪の教師の何万倍も手強いのです。Mishima Yukio, *Fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*, Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1969, 17.

[287] 知識だけは十分に吸いとってやるがよろしい。人生上の問題は、子供も大人も、全く同一単位、同一の力で、自分で解決しなければならぬと覚悟なさい。Ibid.

[288] 先生をバカにすることは、本当は、ファイトのある少年だけにできることで、彼は自分の敵はもっともっと手強いのだが、それと戦う覚悟ができていると予感しています。これがエラ物になる条件です。Ibid.

Mishima uses travesty's partner burlesque, the depiction of something low as high, often in these essays and to great comic effect.[289] Most frequently, Mishima uses burlesque at the level of argument – he frequently contends that readers should regard the trivial as anything but. The aforementioned prank is an example of this, as Mishima asks us to regard schoolboys' play as a symbolic act of resistance by one generation against another.

The essay "You Should Slurp Your Soup" is perhaps the best showcase for this type of argument-level burlesque. The first half of the essay is devoted to etiquette, and Mishima's acquaintances who violate restaurant norms. He tells readers of two famous scholars who loudly slurp their soup in European restaurants, despite the contemporary trend in Japan to adhere to Western table manners when appropriate (ie. in Western restaurants or while abroad). For Mishima the two slurping scholars are resisting social pressure rather than simply being either ignorant or apathetic. He reminds readers that they were raised to slurp miso and tea, and proposes that to be anti-etiquette is to preserve one's self in the face of a culture-wide drive to thoughtlessly adopt Western trends.[290] At the same time that Mishima succeeds in raising some provocative questions from the humble medium of soup-slurping, he is also burlesquing table manners by treating them as lofty acts of social resistance.

The latter half of the essay is dominated by a series of comic anecdotes starring a "Mr. S," an acquaintance of Mishima's who is described as a "lone wolf." He does whatever he pleases regardless of what the members of normative society, the "social sheep," may think.[291] Mr.S's pranks vary from anodyne to dangerous – he sets off fireworks in a theatre, leads an

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[289] The term "burlesque" also refers to a non-comic set of practices which reflect a similar elevation of the low. Burlesque theatre, for example, endeavors to elevate the striptease (commonly regarded as base) to an artform.
[290] This is Mishima's bugbear in the last essay of the series, "All's Unwell that Ends Unwell," which will be discussed at length below.
[291] 一人狼 (*hitori ōkami*; lone wolf) or 狼 (*ōkami*; wolf) and 社会的羊 (*shakaiteki hitsuji*; social sheep). Mishima Yukio, *Fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*, Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1969, 86-9

elderly woman halfway across a crosswalk and abandons her there, greets his local policemen daily in an odd fashion, sneezes in a film, and scares pigeons with firecrackers. Mishima regards each of these as signs of an inherent superiority to those around him, while the "social sheep" who have to tolerate Mr. S disagree, and eventually have him institutionalized.

Every simple prank in the essay is elevated to the status of some noble antisocial action made in defiance of an establishment that seeks to oppress those who do not want to conform. The titular soup slurpers are treated as bulwarks of individual freedoms in the face of an oppressive society, rather than as two older men who cannot conform to foreign etiquette.[292] At the same time that the reader laughs at the image of scholars slurping soup somewhere in Europe, they also laugh at Mishima's treatment of lowly eating habits as lofty social resistance.

3.6 Binary Caricature

Mishima often populates his anecdotes with two comically extreme examples of some quality before proposing that readers accept what seems to be a palatable middle ground. The essays are short and generally devote little space to characterization; it can be difficult to find the line between eccentric character and caricature.[293] Sheri R. Klein writes, "Caricatures are a genre of drawings, cartoons, and prints that include images of human faces and physiques that are grossly distorted and exaggerated for the purposes of a satirical or comic effect."[294] While an eccentric may not be deviant enough to serve as a comic object, a caricature is defined by the degree of its exaggeration – a caricature is only a caricature if it can be use humorously. This

[292] Mishima refers to the men as 先輩 (lit. "my senior"), so their age is unclear.
[293] "You should be as conceited as possible," for example, uses binary caricature. But the caricatures in "conceited" are either anonymous or real-life figures like Okamoto Tarō. Mishima often avails himself of public figures for caricature, relying upon shared cultural knowledge to allow him to forgo lengthy characterization.
[294] Klein, Sheri R Klein in Salvatore Attardo ed., *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications. 2014, 104.

study uses caricature to describe Mishima's characters who have traits which are exaggerated to the point of humorous absurdity.[295]

One of the most clear uses of binary caricature in the essays is Mr. S from "You should slurp your soup." With Mr. S readers are gradually encouraged to accept increasingly bizarre behavior as Mr. S slowly transitions from eccentric to caricature. By the end of the essay Mr. S's entirely outlandish and absurd behaviors make Mishima's conclusion palatable by comparison.

Mr. S's eccentricity is presented by accretion rather than escalation. His anti-social pranks aren't presented with any kind of prevailing logic, whether in terms of increasing anti-sociality, increasing danger, or the like. Rather, they simply follow one after the next, with little commentary in between. The effect of this list is simple – readers are overwhelmed by Mr. S's tireless pranking. His last caper ends with a punchline of sorts – when he terrorizes pigeons in the park they defecate on him while flying away. This inversion is funny, but it is too perfect for us to believe it to be true. Mishima uses pigeon shit to "wink" at his readers, to let them know that the supposedly real and anonymous "Mr. S" has almost certainly been an outlandish caricature born from Mishima's imagination. After his institutionalization, Mishima contends that readers shouldn't Mr.S him, lest they are locked away as well. Better to restrain ourselves to merely slurping our soup.[296] The bizarre and unacceptable activity he advocated for in the beginning of the essay now seems like a compromise in comparison to Mr. S's antics.

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[295] It is beyond the scope of this present study to fully engage with caricature in these essays as it manifests in Yokoyama's drawings. Many of them are caricatures, and they certainly contribute to the overall humor of the series.

[296] Mishima himself was something of a wolf when it came to table manners. As Donald Keene recalls, "When he invited me to dinner, it was invariably to a fine restaurant…. While eating, we laughed a great deal. Sometimes his laugh rang out so loudly that other diners in the restaurant turned in our direction." Donald Keene, and Akira Yamaguchi, *Chronicles of My Life: An American in the Heart of Japan*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, 143.

One can imagine a reader readily assenting to this moderate conclusion: Mishima uses an outsized caricature to drag his readers to an unreasonable position from which his final assertion now seems reasonable. He's done little arguing at all, letting the unreasonable antics of his caricature prove his point for him. Following Mr. S's imprisonment he extends his discussion to arts in present-day Japan:

> Readers, this is the state of what we call arts today. Even if it isn't that anodyne music played in restaurants for sheep, at its best music doesn't get any louder than the soup-slurping which is the mark of a wolf. Even so, I'd pick the sound of a wolf slurping soup over music played for sheep. Now, slurping soup might not be exquisite music, but it is an unceasing murmur of "I'm not a sheep." It is a kind of courage, a kind of resistance, and a kind of social agitation. In other words, it is a meager example of the things that a person cannot be without.[297]

This essay is structured as though the reader has already assented to Mishima's argument by the conclusion. The essay provides no context from the world outside the essay, and so readers are left to project Mishima's argument onto their own understanding of the contemporary art world. Is he merely addressing music? Coming from Mishima Yukio, famous author, surely this comment must extend to drama and literature as well – doesn't it? Readers are left to draw their own conclusions. We are unclear as to what "resistance" and "social agitation" will yield? What does it mean to be a "lone wolf?" What's wrong with being a social sheep? The conclusion answers none of these questions, and here we see one of the ways in which Mishima struggles to use humor effectively. He seems incapable of resisting the urge to entertain, and his argument suffers for it. While this provocative conclusion is amusing, it is anything but convincing. The essay relies upon the reader's blithe acceptance of what seems by the end to be an anodyne

[297] 皆さん、これがわれわれの芸術というものの実態です。それはレストランの羊たちのためのなごやかな音楽でなければ、せいぜい狼の習性を表すスープをすする音に過ぎないのです。それでも私は、羊たちのための音楽よりも、このスープの音をえらびます。それは妙なる音楽ではないかもしれないけれど、少なくとも、「俺は羊じゃない」という不断のつぶやき、勇気の一種、抵抗の一種、嫌がらせの一種、すなわち、人間に欠くべからざるものの、ささやかな見本なのであります。 Mishima Yukio, *Fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*, Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1969, 89.

argument. As long as we aren't dragging old ladies into traffic, we may as well slurp our soup – who cares what we gain or why we do it?[298]

3.7 Absurd Reasoning

> There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions….
> "That's some catch, that Catch-22," he observed.
> "It's the best there is," Doc Daneeka agreed.[299]

Mishima uses the same comic device that Heller uses so potently in Catch-22, though he never reaches the same cartoonish heights. Mishima's absurd reasoning is more subtle, and occasionally it can be mistaken for reason.[300] Absurd reasoning is when the text uses seemingly sound reasoning to draw unsound connections between things. It's not the conclusion that's absurd, but rather the impossibly winding path that leads us there. Mishima absurdly reasons in "Soup" for example, that if he were to slurp his soup like the noisy scholars, he'd be just as intelligent and successful as they are. The reader (hopefully) laughs at this, and then dismisses it as absurd reasoning.

This device is most interesting when used within the main argument, or when an entire essay follow a line of absurd reasoning. When absurd reasoning prevails for an entire essay, it can readily be mistaken for its earnest counter-part; absurd reasoning can be a dangerous and subtle device. Many essays in this series fall into this grey area, and it is unclear whether

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[298] The answers to these questions are in an almost-throwaway line in the middle of the piece. Describing a medieval scholar who eats meat directly off of his knife, Mishima points to "lone wolf"-esque acts of resistance as meaningful because they thrill people. He hints at no greater end beyond that. If one were to argue that Mishima's provocations were gestural and merely done in order to sell copy, there would be little evidence better than this essay.
[299] Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999, 52.
[300] For readers familiar with Takeda Taijun's *Luminous Moss*, Mishima's reasoning will seem familiar. Mishima reasons in a style akin to the cannibal captain who manages to convince himself that since he has been ordered by the emperor to survive, cannibalism can be justified as an act of service to the empire.

humor is being used to serve the argument, or if the argument is itself meant to be regarded as an object of humor. To judge something as absurd requires a set of standards, standards formed by a reader who is of a particular history and present, who brings to the text a set of expectations that the text may not be suited to. How can we judge if the argument is absurd? Without a wink, how do we know if it is okay to laugh?

In the last essay in the series, "All's unwell that ends unwell," Mishima argues against postwar Japan's adoption of Western morality.[301] It is impossible to tell whether this essay is absurd reasoning drawn out to essay length for amusement, or the earnest reasoning of an immoral author. It is the least funny of the essays, and for that reason it is the most dangerous – without overt comic moments, one is less inclined to read for subtle humor. "All's unwell…" lacks an undeniably comic moment to make it clear to readers that this is a humorous essay. Rather, it creates absurd humor through accumulation – while none of the steps of this argument clearly absurd, their cumulative effect is that by the end of the essay the reader feels as though they've been sent on a wild goose chase.

While not wholly opaque, the essay doesn't give the reader many hints as to how it should be regarded. The opening is intimate, as Mishima looks back over the essay series and writes briefly about his family. He quips briefly about his grandfather, but other than that the opening reads as earnest. Especially when read in contrast to some of the morally outrageous opening passages in other essays in the series, this opening encourages the reader to regard this as Mishima showing a "true self." Mishima makes use of this confessional tone to argue, seemingly earnestly, for a "kill or be killed" society.[302]

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[301] Mishima uses "西洋"("the West") to describe the body that prescribes a new morality for postwar Japan, despite the postwar occupying forces being overwhelmingly American.

[302] Mishima discusses man's killing instinct, albeit with less drastic conclusions, in other essays such as "You should shout 'kill 'em!'"

Mishima begins his argument with an absurd statement that stands in stark contrast to his earnest tone. Mishima states: "we Japanese are like plants. And, we're rebuilding this country while imitating animals. But, the rules and moral guidelines that bloodthirsty animals build for their animal countries aren't going to fit us well."[303] Mishima argues that "a cabbage hasn't got claws to begin with, and it couldn't possibly kill a rabbit," so Western "animal" moral strictures like "you shouldn't sink your claws into a weakened rabbit" couldn't possibly work in "plant" Japanese society.[304] But postwar Japanese society was a rapidly changing biosphere with new varieties of life appearing daily, such as the biker gang (*kaminari zoku*). For Mishima "they're like cabbages on motorcycles," and he points out that a motorcycle can kill a rabbit and drag a man to death.[305] Each step of this argument is difficult to accept. He doesn't support any of his conclusions, and each of his logical leaps stops short enough of absurdity to avoid being recognized immediately as absurd logic. But, each leap goes far enough beyond the reasonable as to give the reader pause. These statements are too odd to be regarded immediately as earnest, but not quite silly enough to be understood as absurdity outright. Mishima walks a delicate and ambiguous tightrope in this essay.

Mishima contrasts these biker gangs with samurai, saying that "both swords and motorcycles can be weapons. But, the difference between bikers and samurai emerges when we consider which of these groups clearly thinks of these objects as weapons." [306] A samurai understood that he held a weapon in his hands, and was able to place his murderous intentions in the weapon itself. By being able to attribute his impulses to the weapon, a samurai could separate himself from his urges and live like a plant in a plant–like morality.

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[303] Mishima Yukio, *Fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*, Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1969, 282.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Ibid., 283.

Contemporary gangs in Japan, however, did not have an object within which they could store their urges. Mishima doubts that a man's murderous impulses in the age of atomic and hydrogen bombs can be placed in a "cold white button."[307] Mishima then states "I believe that plants have the urge to kill. It's more hidden in shadow, and buried deeper than an animal's. It may even be larger and stronger as well."[308] A return to pre-Western morality (ie. Bushidō) was impossible following the war, as the old moral codes can't govern the new species of animal emerging in Japan. So, "intellectually bankrupt politicians and teachers" started promoting a new morality that did not allow for killing urges. In Mishima's mind, the 1882 Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors was the last flowering of a native Japanese morality that recognized the killing urge, and nothing like it could occur in postwar Japan.

Making some startlingly large leaps between concepts, Mishima offers up Christianity and Communism as counter-examples to contemporary Japanese morality. For Mishima, Christian morality of "being killed," and communism is a "morality of killing."[309] Both of these "animal" moralities acknowledge and direct murderous urges, which is what makes these two moral systems so strong. For Mishima, contemporary Japanese morality is not murder-focused, but suicide-focused. He argues that contemporary crime in Japan resembles suicide, and writes:

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[307] Ibid.

[308] ところで植物にも殺意がある。私はそれを信じます。それは動物よりも陰にこもった、より深い、より大きい、よろ強い殺意かもしれない。Mishima's diction hints at a method for plants to kill: "obscured in shadow (陰にこもった) reminds readers of one of the many forms of patient cruelty that occurs in the plant world as larger plants shade out and slowly kill smaller ones. Ibid.

[309] 「殺される」道徳 and 「殺す」道徳, respectively. Christian morality recognizes man's murderous impulse, and rewards death at another man's hands through martyrdom. Communism acknowledges the necessity of revolution, violence, and death in order to liberate the Proletariat. Ibid., 284.

> Maybe it's out of cowardice, but I cannot agree with the philosophy of suicide. If you're going to kill yourself, wouldn't it be better to kill someone else, or be killed? This is why we have other people; this is what the world exists for.[310]

This is the point at which the essay begins to finally become readable as an extended exercise in absurd reasoning; if there was a point in this text at which Mishima winked at his readers, this would be it. Mishima has used logic to arrive at an untenable conclusion: other people exist solely to kill Mishima when the time comes. For most, this is an absurd conclusion, and this is the point at which the essay loses its rhetorical punch. For those that regard this as absurdity, we can appreciate Mishima's well-crafted essay that has brought us all the way to the end before winking to let us know it is in on the joke. We are entertained, but we now see that he regards his argument as a punchline; here, Mishima has made his own iconoclastic philosophy into the target of humor. And by making presenting his own personal philosophy as absurd and laughable, he enervates this essay as a work of social critique.[311]

Following his thoughts on murder over suicide, Mishima puts forward his own personal "educational rescript":

> The urge to kill is hidden deep within every interpersonal connection – between parents and children, siblings, spouses, lovers, and even between friends. So it is vital to recognize this urge clearly. The most extreme form of suicide is probably killing yourself after every other person on earth has died. You are left alone, and kill yourself because there's no helping it. But, as long as there is one other person on the planet, you can either kill them or be killed. So, summarily, managing the urge to kill is the happy destiny of those living in this world, and that which lends meaning to life. This is my personal rescript on education.[312]

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[310] しかし、臆病なせいか、こんな説には賛成することができません。自殺するくらいなら、人を殺すか、人に殺された方が、ましというものです。そのために他人がいるのです。そのために世界があるのです。Ibid.

[311] Humor is subjective however, and it should be noted that this passage may have been received by many as mere hyperbole. Mishima often uses hyperbole for its rhetorical function – hyperbole makes Mishima's anti-social arguments more palatable by comparison. This is the device he uses in "You should slurp your soup," and it may very be what is at work here. Absurd reasoning comes in many forms, at its most obvious it is howlingly funny, but when it is subtle it is incredibly challenging to suss out.

[312] 人間のならゆるつながりには、親子にも、兄弟にも、夫婦にも、恋人同士にも、友人同士にも、結局のところ殺意がひそんでいるので、大切なことは、この殺意をしっかり認識するということです。自殺の極端の形は、この地上に自分以外の人類が死に絶えてしまい、たった一人で、どうしょうもなくて自

In previous essays Mishima railed against established societal norms. He asked students to rebel against their teachers, he admired a man who left an old lady in the middle of the road, and he got high school girls drunk. Earlier in this essay he states that he is against rearmament; while he may not be arguing for a rearmament and remilitarization of the Japanese state, he is asking for a rearmament and remilitarization of the Japanese spirit.

Here we are faced with a problem – this essay may not have been written following an absurd line of reasoning. Perhaps Mishima truly felt that Japanese violence was somehow different than others', and the point is being argued with humor rather than the argument itself being the joke. It is impossible to know with any certainty. There are essays in this series that use effectively use humor to advance Mishima's argument, arguing their points cleverly and comically. Some of these amuse in order to prove a point, while others amuse merely for amusement's sake. In this essay, as he as done elsewhere, Mishima gives too much ground to his impulse to amuse, and his own humor results in crafting an unconvincing argument.

Whatever the "true" reading of this essay might be, it is an infinitely valuable literary artifact in that in it one can see in it the delicate balancing act which made Mishima such an intriguing figure. This essay is an early experiment with the nihilism that dominates Mishima's late career. It is an excellent showcase of absurd reasoning at work; Mishima starts from a bizarre and absurd premise, and chases geese from there. Here he uses humor not only to argue a point in an entertaining and convincing fashion, he also uses humor to create ambiguity regarding intention. Many contemporary readers of this column may have been

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殺する場合でしょうが、一人でも他人いてくれる限り、殺すことも殺されることもできるので、それがつまりこの世に生きている仕合わせというものであり、生き甲斐というものであります。これが私の教育勅語です。Ibid.

inclined to read these essays as humorous expressions of the author's true feelings, and Mishima works with and against those feelings to create an essay that positions itself in a no-man's land of meaninglessness. Just as *Confessions of a Mask* refused those who tried to read it as autobiography, so too do the *Lessons in Immorality* frustrate those who try to consume them as Mishima's "true" opinions. They might have been. But then again, maybe he was only joking. But the ambiguity that makes these interesting literary artifacts is also part of what makes them weak works of social satire. Ultimately, in social satire humor must serve the argument. In essays of this sort, the humor amuses the reader while obscuring the argument.

3.8 All's Unwell that Ends Unwell: Final Thoughts

Following this argument, Mishima reflects upon the essay series as a whole. For him, these essays are every bit as shocking as the gossip and crime news found on the society pages of the newspaper.[313] He acknowledges the possibility that readers will disregard his essays as sensational, but evil is attractive, and sensationalism has its uses. [314] Mishima asks his readers "why is evil so beautiful" and gives an answer derived from the Neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus: For Mishima, evil is beautiful because we are removed from it, and our ability to see the beauty in evil is a sign that we may soon be able to see the "forms of the gods themselves." Putting on "beauty glasses" allows man to see beauty in evil, just as a child wearing red-green glasses can find the pattern hidden in a magic-picture book.[315]

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[313] Mishima uses the expression *sanmenkiji* (lit. third page article) to describe his essays. The term originates from the age of the four-page newspaper when society gossip and crime reports were reserved for the third page. Ibid.; *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, accessed through JapanKnowledge database.
[314] This expression of concern over disregard contradicts Mishima's own sentiments expressed elsewhere regarding the divide between his "entertainments" and serious fiction. This passage in "All's unwell that ends unwell" echoes Yourcenar's prescient comment that Mishima's "entertainments" must contain "dazzling or sharp images, episodes pregnant with truth" akin to those in his major works, and that it is "unimaginable that the two endeavors remain isolated." Marguerite Yourcenar, *Mishima: A Vision of the Void*, New York: Farrar Strauss, and Giroux, 1986, 25.
[315] Mishima Yukio, *Fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*, Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1969, 285.

Japanese language frequently doesn't require pronouns, and in this passage Mishima avoids them, resulting in ambiguity regarding who exactly finds evil attractive. Is this section an admission of personal aesthetic preference?[316] Is it an argument about society at large? It is unclear. The discussion begins in the broadest sense possible, discussing evil as it is represented in the newspaper – it is difficult to imagine a media form more invested in mass audience than the gossip page. But Mishima's philosophy about the relationship between evil and beauty and his explanation of it are personal, poetic, and not entirely convincing. This passage reads more as an expression of a particular set of appreciative tools, how one man justifies appreciating evil, than a blueprint for a society-wide aesthetic.

This passage also offers some insight into the satirist's method. For Mishima, man is good, but can be drawn towards evil if he has the sense to see what ideal is at work therein. Each of Mishima's arguments hinges upon showing the reader how some anti-social behavior is actually an act based on loyalty to an ideal. Mishima shows that his wild students were simply over-acting on their reasonable disrespect for educators, a healthy disrespect that will lead them to become stronger individuals and better adults. For his soup-slurpers their disregard for etiquette was due to their reverence for their own morals and individuality.

Mishima's metaphor muddies what could have been a fairly straightforward discussion of the appeal of the other. He mixes registers ineffectively, availing himself of the more poetic "forms of the gods" rather than "ideal," and his metaphor explaining "beauty glasses" through

[316] At the same time that Mishima was writing this essay he was working on one of his most popular plays, *The Black Lizard.* It is about a female master thief who loves youth and beauty, and a detective who loves crime. The thief is as close to a goddess of evil as one can get – she robs, kills, and taxidermies beautiful young men and women. The detective is a good man so intrigued by evil that there is not even space in his heart for the thief who is the embodiment of that ideal. Mishima is in top form for this work; most playgoers worship and then mourn the death the beautiful goddess of evil. It is as convincing a proof as these essays that evil can be made to seem beautiful if lit correctly. Good casting doesn't hurt either – in the film adaptation the master thief was played by Miwa Akihiro.

children's books only complicates his explanation. For Mishima, ideals are attractive and present in evil, but only for those who are seeking that beauty. In other words, beauty is there if you look for it. This statement reminiscent of all sorts of dangerous reading habits, from the symptomatic reading practices that plague our undergraduates, to the practice of reading for humor that endangers this study and others like it. And in the last paragraph of this series Mishima acknowledges the danger of leaving the glasses on too long.

The closing of the essay is warm and familiar. Mishima dons the mask of a bartender sending his customers home for the night, and compares the individual essays in the series to "cocktails."

> All of the cocktails I served you tonight in my bar have shocking titles, but I don't make any of them with bad liquor. I haven't mixed any methyl alcohol into them, so you're not going to go blind. I just wanted to show you that, with my bartending skill alone, I could make good liquor taste like a product of black magic.[317]

Here, Mishima presents himself as a medium, a man capable of showing the beautiful in evil to others. He claims he hasn't used "methyl alcohol," in other words that he has not written anything truly dangerous. Rather, these have all been thought experiments – he's "only joking." But in this final gesture, Mishima erodes the critical potency of these essays as satire.

With this, Mishima absolves himself of all responsibility for the anti-social arguments he's made through the series. His contention that he hasn't "blinded" his readers resonates with his previous concerns regarding readers dismissing his essays as sensationalist and trivial, and he states that their triviality was a conscious choice. He writes as if in anticipation of some critique, likely from readers upset at having just been encouraged to embrace violence as a moral value. In 1959 and '60 Japan was rocked by protests over the renewal of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between the United States and Japan (*Nichibei anzen hoshō*

[317] Ibid.

jōyaku).[318] Protesters feared that signing the agreement would lead to greater involvement in US wars in Asia, and many of Mishima's readers doubtless held strong pacifist beliefs. Reminding readers that this was an experiment allows this essay to present itself as palatable to a wider audience.

> For Mishima scholars, the lines of "All's Unwell" are particularly interesting:
>
> I've gotten sleepy too, I think I'll shutter the shop. I'll just stay here behind the bar, and nurse a bit of methyl alcohol. I'm different than you, so there's no worry about me going blind.[319]

Here Mishima presents himself as Wilde's provocateur Wotton, by "never say[ing] a moral thing, and never do[ing] a wrong thing. [His] cynicism is simply a pose."[320] Was this series a testing ground for the nihilism and fascination with death that became central to his later works? And, to mix Mishima's metaphors, did drinking his own draught and wearing his glasses inside the bar blind Mishima to the dangers of his own arguments? Were his later philosophies born in this series, a collection of essays filled with antisocial posturing used to shock readers and sell weeklies? The last lines in "All's Unwell" certainly allow readers and scholars to take these essays as more than mere "entertainments." After all, the evils discussed in these essays are the "methyl alcohol" that Mishima stayed up to sip on in the bar, long after he'd turned off the lights and sent all of his readers home.

But, this ultimate ambiguity points to a weakness in the series, and in Mishima as a humorous critic. Mishima allows us to read these as serious satire, but he also allows us to

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[318] Commonly referred to as ANPO in both Japanese and English, the ANPO signing and its attendant protests were a major turning point in postwar Japanese culture. For a fascinating investigation of ANPO see Linda Hoaglund, Takeishi Satoshi, Nagai Shoko, Scott A. Burgess, *ANPO, Art X War : The Art of Resistance*, Harriman, NY, New Day Films, 2010.

[319] 私も眠くなったから、店はもう盾板にします。これからあとは、私一人で、メチルをチビチビやります。あなた方とちがって、私の目は、メチルなんかで失明する心配はありませんから。 Mishima Yukio, *Fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*, Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1969, 285.

[320] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2003, 13.

regard them as “entertainments” whose sole purpose is to amuse. Mishima is so invested in cultivating ambiguity and exploiting it to humorous effect that his humor ends up attacking both his enemies and allies. And as he both builds up and chips away at his own arguments with humor, we find ourselves with arguments that are humorous but not convincing. In the end, Mishima used humor in this series to entertain effectively, but ultimately failed to use it to edify. His great success as a satirist is in his virtuoso application of a plethora of comic devices; his great failure as a satirist is in his inability to know when to stop.

Chapter 4: Nosaka Akiyuki's *The Pornographers*: Travesty, Self-reflexive Subversion, and Literary Chewing Gum

Following World War II, so-called writers "of the flesh" (*nikutai bungaku),* the "decadents" (*Buraiha*), and others earnestly wrote of sex as a possible tool for resistance against authority. They wrote of men and women who escaped dire conditions and regained their lost agency by embracing decadence and single-mindedly pursuing their carnal desires. Nosaka Akiyuki sprang onto the literary scene a decade after the writers of the flesh and the libertines, subverting their view of sex in his debut novel *The Pornographers*. In this subversive and unstable text, Nosaka shows sex to be a force that is a source of momentary pleasure at best, and an oppressive force at worst. When read against works by writers of the flesh and the libertines, Nosaka's *The Pornographers* counters the view that sex can be a meaningful act of resistance. Furthermore, Nosaka's travesty and subversion are often self-reflective, undermining the form itself. By paying close attention to the self-reflexive aspects of Nosaka's humor, I will show that *The Pornographers* makes the same argument about literature that it does about sex.

The Pornographers takes place in Osaka's peripheral communities and underworld, areas Nosaka became familiar with during his youth. Nosaka spent his early childhood in Kobe, but when his adopted parents were killed in a 1944 bombing raid and he and his younger sister Keiko moved in with distant family.[321] Food was scarce, and Nosaka fled with his sister Keiko to a camp where he'd hoped they could survive. Keiko died of starvation before the war ended. After the war Nosaka lived in Osaka and worked on the black market to survive. The black market both degraded and saved Nosaka, and its ambivalence informs his depiction of the market

[321] Biographical details are from Van C. Gessel, *Japanese Fiction Writers since World War II*, Dictionary of Literary Biography, v. 182. Detroit: Gale Research, 1997*;* Nosaka Akiyuki, *20-seiki dansō: Nosaka Akiyuki tankōbon mishūroku shōsetsu shūsei.* Tōkyō: Genki shobō, 2010; and Mushiake Aromu's in Nihon kindai bungakukan and Odagiri Susumu, editor, *Nihon kindai bungaku dai jiten,* Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1984.vol. 3.

and its community in *The Pornographers*. Nosaka depicts the crime-infested underworld lightly, mixing pathos with absurdity to give the novel a darkly humorous tone.[322]

Nosaka wrote the novel long after moving away from the black market. After the war Nosaka reunited with his biological father, moved to Tokyo, and entered Waseda University. However, he was uninterested in studying and continued his dissolute lifestyle, working part-time jobs and drinking. Taking a break from Waseda University, he and Nozue Chinpei formed a Rakugo duo – Tsurumi Shunske writes that Nosaka's early stories were simply "the chitchat of those two put on the page."[323] He never graduated, and in 1957 took a job as a song and commercial jingle writer.[324] In 1961 he began publishing essays, serializing *How to be a Contemporary Son of a Bitch* (*gendai yarō nyūmon*) and *Playboy Primer*（*purēbōi nyūmon*）which popularized the term "*purēboi*" in the Japanese lexicon.

His first major novel, *The Pornographers (Erogotoshitachi)* was serialized in the *Novel Central Review* (*Shōsetsu chūō kōron*) from 1962 to 1964. The *Novel Central Review*, a short-lived off-shoot of the prestigious literary magazine *The Central Review* (*Chūō kōron*), specialized in short and mid-length works by contemporary authors such as Ibuse Masuji, Ishikawa Jun, and Mishima Yukio. [325] The magazine mixed famous authors and yet-unproven ones, and staked out a position as a "middle brow" publication. It was not quite "pure literature" and not quite "popular literature."[326] Published alongside well-established authors, the work

[322] His depiction of the Osaka underworld is reminiscent of Imamura Shōhei's depiction of Yokosuka in *Pigs and Battleships*, and it is fitting that Imamura helmed the film adaptation of *Erogotoshitachi* in 1966.
[323] "…二人の駄べりがそのままぶんになっているのだと納得できた" Tsurumi Shunsuke, "Hito to bungaku" in *Nosaka Akiyuki, Itsuki Hiroyuki, Inoue Hisashi shū, Chikuma Gendai Bungaku Taikei*, 92, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1976, 497.
[324] He was also a children's songwriter and a children's literature author; his early song *omocha no chachacha* was a hit.
[325] Nihon Kindai Bungakukan and Odagiri Susumu, editor, *Nihon kindai bungaku dai jiten* vol. 5, 167.
[326] Ibid.

exposed Nosaka to a wider audience and it was acclaimed by literati such as Yoshiyuki Jun'nosuke and Mishima Yukio.[327]

The Pornographers was published as a paperback in 1966. Alongside *Grave of the Fireflies* (*hotaru no haka*) and *American Hijiki* (*Amerika hijiki*), *The Pornographers* helped Nosaka win the 1968 Naoki prize.[328] Though it carried less prestige and cultural capital than the Akutagawa prize, the Naoki prize was quite an achievement for Nosaka and was a sure sign of things to come; by the late 1960s Nosaka was on his way to establishing himself as a major literary figure.[329] He continued writing, and was particularly prolific as a writer of short weekly essays. But he also took up singing, modeling, and even tried his hand at politics, running for office in 1974 and again in 1983. Nosaka never devoted himself exclusively to writing, and spent his career somewhat estranged from the literary establishment (*bundan*). There is a vein of literary skepticism running through *The Pornographers*, as Nosaka questions and undermines the idea of literature as a potent means for impacting reality. Perhaps, it this same skepticism that contributed to his distancing himself from the literary establishment, and seeking out other forms of expression.

The Pornographers is about a rag-tag gang of pornographers living on the periphery of society, struggling to achieve financial and artistic success. The cameraman dreams of making the perfect pornographic movie, the boss dreams of throwing the perfect orgy, and the writer dreams of composing the perfect pornographic novel. All of their dreams are unattainable, and a feeling of mirthful resignation runs through Nosaka's novel. As his characters stumble from one

[327] Ibid., vol. 3, 34.
[328] See Edward Mack, "Accounting for Taste: The Creation of the Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes for Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 64, no. 2 (2004): 291-340 for accounts of the Naoki Prize's history, and its relation to the Akutagawa prize.
[329] Ibid., 324-9.

erotic misadventure to the next it becomes clear joy is fleeting, and that sustained happiness lies beyond their reach. Sex and its associated industries provide only a momentary release, and Nosaka's pornographers are powerless to escape their dire circumstances.

4.1 Nosaka in English

Nosaka is most well-known to English language audiences for the 1998 studio Ghibli adaptation of his *Grave of the Fireflies*. *Grave of the Fireflies* is a semi-autobiographical work in which Nosaka details a fictionalized version of his and his sister's struggles to survive World War II while growing up in the Kansai area.[330] The earnest Studio Ghibli film is highly regarded, but it cannot be regarded as a representative Nosaka work. Though much of his literature is imbued with similar pathos, much of Nosaka's other work includes profane and humorous cultural critique

Despite a diverse body of cultural production in Japan, Nosaka has received scant attention from English-language scholars. Rebecca Copeland's entry on Nosaka for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography: volume 182: Japanese Fiction Writers Since World War II* is a biographical and critical overview of Nosaka and his major works. She is flattering in her assessment of his career and potential and compares him to Mishima Yukio by writing that "the two may have stood at opposite poles; but both demonstrated an inexhaustible talent that could not be confined to any one genre."[331] For English-language audiences Copeland's essay is an

[330] For a discussion of the short story, see Hiroko Cockerill's "Laughter and tears: the complex narrative of Nosaka Akiyuki's *Hotaru no haka* (Grave of the Fireflies)" in Roman Rosenbaum and Yasuko Claremont, Yasuko. *Legacies of the Asia-Pacific War: The Yakeato Generation*, Routledge Contemporary Japan Series; v. 31. New York: Routledge, 2011, 152-64.
[331] Van C. Gessel, *Japanese Fiction Writers since World War II*, Dictionary of Literary Biography, v. 182. Detroit: Gale Research, 1997, 168.

invaluable biographic resource. But it is a brief literary biography, and thus it does not sustain a lengthy engagement with Nosaka's work.

Hiroko Cockerill discusses the formal features of Nosaka's early fiction in *Grave of the Fireflies* in *Legacies of the Asia-Pacific War: The Yakeato Generation*. Cockerill examines Nosaka's unique use of dialect in the narratives of three works: *Erection Test* (*erekushon tesuto*), *Capital Punishment and Long Life* (*shikei chōju*), and *Grave of the Fireflies* (*hotaru no haka*), giving an invaluable summary of what makes Nosaka's prosody distinctive. Nosaka's dialect is almost wholly lost in translation, and so Cockerill's analysis gives English-language students of Japanese literature insight into one of Nosaka's more notable literary techniques.

The "generation of the burnt-out ruins," (*yakeato sedai*) were all children during wartime.[332] They were too young to have consented to participation in the war, and this generation is comprised of children who survived the wartime bombing campaigns.[333] The generation of the burnt-out-ruins is a chronological grouping, not an ideological one, and it is difficult to generalize about the political or social philosophies of the generation as a whole. This is a generation defined by a shared experience, but not by a common response; Ōe Kenzaburo and Ishihara Shintarō are both members of the generation of the burnt-out ruins.

Yoshikuni Igarashi has written the most influential English-language discussion of Nosaka in his *Bodies of Memory*. Through his subtle readings of *Amerika hijiki* and *Hotaru no haka,* Igarashi shows how Nosaka used "the literary theme of repetition as a means with which to

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[332] The *Shōwa hitoketa* (昭和一桁, the Showa single-digits) generation spans from 1926 to 1934. Nosaka, born in 1930, is also a member of this generation, but the *yakeato* and the *Shōwa hitoket*a are not mutually exclusive terms as "[t]he *yakeato* generation is usually described as ranging from those born between 1929 and 1941 but is somewhat flexible and sometimes overlaps with the '*Shōwa single-digit' generation*." Roman Rosenbaum and Yasuko Claremont, Yasuko. *Legacies of the Asia-Pacific War: The Yakeato Generation*, Routledge Contemporary Japan Series; v. 31. New York: Routledge, 2011, 8.

[333] As Roman Rosenbaum writes: "…the *yakeato* generation was one of pure innocence since most of the adolescents were too young to be held accountable." Ibid., 7.

re-present the trauma of Japan's defeat."[334] Igarashi argues that Nosaka tirelessly engaged in an impossible fight to stem the ongoing erasure and aestheticizing of war memory in Japanese culture. Igarashi paints Nosaka as a noble but quixotic writer who resisted an irresistible cultural tide.

This study expands upon Igarashi's work, showing how Nosaka's "[failure] to counter contemporary social discourse," can be read as a skeptical critique of the potency of literature.[335] At every turn the novel's self-reflexive subversion critiques and undoes the novel's arguments, digging away its foundations to become a rhetorically unreliable text. It cannot be regarded as arguing anything, as it subverts everything. *The Pornographers* should be regarded as a critique of the contemporary idealized view of literature as a potent tool for resistance against conservative political and social trends. Furthermore, a closer reading of Nosaka's humor tempers Igarashi's image of him as a quixotic figure engaged in an impossible war against social discourse.

4.2 Literary Sex in the Postwar

Many postwar Japanese writers turned their attentions to sex as a means of reasserting their subjectivity after the fall of the oppressive wartime government. Newly freed from the constraints of wartime censorship and eager to please a hungry audience, publishers flooded the marketplace with pulp magazines featuring nude photos and risqué writing.[336] While not all post-war literature was preoccupied with sex, "authors such as Nagai Kafū (1879-1959), Hayashi

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[334] Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000, 164. Igarashi also contends that Mishima Yukio used repetition to a similar end.
[335] Ibid.
[336] Kōno and Sherif in Haruo Shirane, Tomi Suzuki and David Barnett Lurie, *The Cambridge History of Japanese Literature*, Cambridge: United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016, 720-22.

Fumiko (1905-1951), Hirabayashi Taiko (1905-1972) [and] novelists of all stripes were writing about sex."[337] During this period, sex was a dominant thematic feature in both mass-market and elite literature.

In mass-market literature, sex was being sold through mass-market pulp magazines (*kasutori zasshi*). These pulp magazines and their "pulp culture" (*kasutori bunka*) were named after the low-quality bootlegged liquor made from sake lees called "*kasutori shōchū.*"[338] This was "the drink of choice among those artists and writers who made a cult out of degeneracy and nihilism."[339] Just like the liquor, these pulp magazines gave their readers a temporary reprieve from the suffering of the postwar by distracting them from their difficult everyday lives. Though they often folded after a few printings, these magazines helped create a cultural movement that resisted authority, eschewed normative values, and embraced temporary pleasure. Giving little thought to the future, pulp magazine devotees gave themselves over to hedonism and self-indulgence.[340]

Authors publishing in high-literature circles had a similar preoccupation with the body, influenced by the hedonism of pulp magazine culture. Writer Tamura Taijirō (1911-1983), gave a name to this literary movement in two works: *Devil of Flesh* (*nikutai no akuma*, 1946) and *Gate of Flesh* (*nikutai no mon*, 1947). Literary critics took his "flesh" and thereafter referred to works devoted to the body as "flesh literature" (*nikutai bungaku).*[341] Tamura also wrote literary

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[337] Ibid., 722.
[338] The English "pulp magazine" is broader what is denoted by the Japanese "*kasutori zasshi,*" and is occasionally used in English language studies of Japanese literature to refer detective magazines, or weeklies. In this study "pulp magazine" will refer specifically to "*kasutori zasshi.*"
[339] John W Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986, 148. The liquor was generally distilled in people's houses out of scraps, and can be thought of as akin to moonshine or bathtub gin.
[340] Ibid., 149. In his note (#46 on page 581) Dower points out that this cultural movement is not the product of a rupture in literary or cultural practice, but rather that it had its "roots" in the prewar *ero-guro-nansensu* movement.
[341] English-language audiences may be familiar with these titles through Suzuki Seijun's 1964 Nikkatsu film "Gate of the Flesh."

criticism, and in "Flesh is Man" (*nikutai ga ningen de aru*) he theorized an oppositional relationship between thought and the flesh:

> Thought' [*shisō]* is, at this time threatening to push us down; it does nothing else. 'Thought' has, for a long time, been draped with the authoritarian robes of a despotic government, but now the body is rising up in opposition…. Only the body is real [*jijitsu*].[342]

Tamura conceived of the body and sex as tools of resistance against socio-political oppression. Flesh literature was not a one-man movement, and the movement's most clear and ambitious theorist was Sakaguchi Ango (1906-1955).

In his well-known essay, "Discourse on Decadence" (*darakuron*), Ango argues that readers should wholeheartedly embrace their carnal desires. In "Discourse on Decadence, Part I" Ango writes "To live and to fall into decadence – that's the proper process. Is there any path to true human salvation outside of it?"[343] And in "…Part II" he concludes that "while it is our fate to be forever trapped within this cycle [of oppression by arbitrary government], humans will always slip through the cracks. They will be decadent, and the systems will thereby get their comeuppance."[344] Pulp magazine readers sought only momentary refuge in their bodies, but Ango went further by theorizing the body as having utopian potential. For Ango the body was the means to break the individual out of cyclical patterns of oppression and constraint. For him, serving the body's desires liberates one from the state.

In his *Literary Mischief: Sakaguchi Ango, Culture, and the War*, Doug Slaymaker summarizes the body-centered philosophies of the flesh literature group adroitly:

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[342] Translated passage from "*Nikutai ga ningen de aru*" in Douglas Slaymaker, *The Body in Postwar Japanese Fiction*, Asia's Transformations, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004, 3.
[343] Ango in James Dorsey, and Douglas Slaymaker, *Literary Mischief: Sakaguchi Ango, Culture, and the War*, New Studies of Modern Japan, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2010, 181. Both parts of his "Discourse on Decadence" were published with the same title; the first was published in *Shinchō* in April, 1946, and the second was published in *Bungaku kikan* in December of the same year.
[344] Ibid., 194.

> The intertwined strands of protest and celebration so pervasive in postwar Japanese society come together in the flesh writers' conceptualization of individual identity.… They were convinced that the mistakes of the past war were attributable to the wartime state's undervaluation of the body…. The flesh writers suggested that renewed emphasis on the physical could offset the disastrously mistaken focus of the militarist past and help avoid another lapse into militarism.[345]

Tamura, Ango, and others promoted this emphasis on the body, and the flesh literature group dramatically influenced the depiction of sex in post-war Japanese literature.

Nosaka's work is superficially similar to works of the flesh literature school in its preoccupation with bodies, but he holds a different view of sex and its potential. Flesh literature authors "believed that literature was "omnipotent" (*bannō*), the ultimate vehicle for the exploration of our humanity," plumbing the depths of decadence as an act of resistance against an oppressive system of government. [346] As I will discuss further below, Nosaka does not recognize sex as a tool for resistance. In his works sex is an irresistible drive that occasionally gives pleasure but ultimately subjugates his characters. And even when it appears sex has allowed for meaningful resistance, Nosaka inevitably undermines it with his subversive humor.

4.3 Travesty and Self-reflexive Subversion

The Pornographers fits comfortably within the genre of dark humor. The narrative itself is comical, as the piece is written in a conversational style that makes the reader feel as though they are being told one long and crude anecdote at a party. One rarely goes a whole page without a good laugh; the work is comedically dense. However, it is broken by the occasional poignant moment. Readers may be struck at how similar *The Pornographers* is to *Catch-22* in terms of tone and comic pacing.

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[345] Ibid., 4.
[346] Ibid., 7.

Nosaka uses humor techniques productively in this novel, and directs his humor at a broad range of targets. His two most frequently implemented humor devices are travesty and burlesque. Burleseque is the more well-known term, and it is a comic tool in which something unvalued is treated as valuable to comic effect.[347] With travesty the humorist does the opposite, taking something valued or respected and treating it as valueless or unworthy of respect. At the risk of over-simplifying: burlesque makes humor by lifting something up, and travesty makes humor by pulling something down. These terms can often be applied to the same comic scene to represent different comic perspectives. A novel depicting a monkey as the president can be regarded as both a burlesque of a monkey and a travesty of the presidency.

These two tools have different potentials. Burlesque can highlight a burlesqued figure's unseen qualities and can potentially elicit sympathy or respect. Because it is a comic ennobling, it is difficult to use burlesque to critique an object substantively. But burlesque's other half, travesty, is a potent critical device. It debases, and in so doing, exposes the flaws of the travestied object. Burlesque can empower, and travesty can subvert.

Subversion is achieved when the travesty is cutting enough to actually undermine of the power of the travestied object. The difference between travesty and subversion is often one of degree; if subtle or inconsequential enough, travesty can show a powerful figure in a weakened position without undermining that figure's authority.[348] But subversion must result in either putative or factitive enervation. Travesty can be harmless, while subversion by its definition must do harm.

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[347] The following definitions come of Margaret A. Rose's analysis of the historical evolution of the term burlesque in her Margaret A Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-modern*. Literature, Culture, Theory; 5, New York: NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993, particularly her chapter "Distinguishing parody from related forms." My uses of the term "travesty" and "burlesque" correspond to Worcester's conception of "high" and "low" burlesque as works in which the high is compared to the trivial, and the trivial to the high.

[348] The grand American educational fund-raising tradition of teachers and administrators getting in a dunking booth is a travesty of the teacher, but it results in no meaningful subversion of their position.

The Pornographers is a fascinating comedic work because it directs its humor at a wide variety of targets, including itself. But this self-reflexive joking is more than self-deprecation, a common and very popular form of benign comedy. *The Pornographers* travesties itself to such a degree that it constitutes a meaningful subversion of its own rhetorical potency. This self-reflexive subversion turns the narrative back in on itself. It undermines its own arguments through humor, and subverts its own assertions. In addition to its satirical critiques of sex and the body, *The Pornographers* mounts a potent critique of literature itself.

Before discussing *The Pornographers'* content, attention must be given to the texts themselves. Self-reflexive subversion is a meta-fictive humor, and the object matters. *The Pornographers* has been reprinted a number of times, but I will only discuss two editions here: the 1970 Shinchōsha bunkōbon and the Knopf translation first edition. The Knopf is printed on heavy paper stock, with the edges dyed red to match the red binding and hardcover. The title has been impressed into the cover in gold, bearing all the markings of a work of high literature and the high hopes its publisher must have had for it.[349] The bunkōbon is small enough to fit in one's back pocket, flimsy enough to sit on without discomfort, and its cover is of a paper only marginally thicker than the pages within. It is one in a series that includes works by Sōseki, Kawabata, Ōe, and even Sakaguchi Ango himself. Though it superficially resembles any other mass-market paperback, the *bunkōbon* similarly presents itself as a work of high literature by listing its associated publications. Each edition in its own way encourages readers to regard *The Pornographers* as a novel worthy of study and earnest engagement. But with every crude joke

[349] "Mishima took Nosaka under his wing for a time and saw that Knopf in New York: which had marketed Mishima's works for the West, undertook a translation of *The Pornographers.* It was highly unusual for a writer so little known in his own country to be represented by such a well-known house in another country. But thanks to Mishima's efforts, the translation by Michael Gallagher appeared in 1968." Van C. Gessel, *Japanese Fiction Writers since World War II*, Dictionary of Literary Biography, v. 182. Detroit, Gale Research, 1997, 166. This work was Nosaka's English-language debut, and judging by the opulent first printing, Knopf saw a place for Nosaka in the realm of high literature.

the novel resists this and travesties its own form. *The Pornographers'* self-reflective subversion is rooted in its own refined print and intertextual associations.

In between the covers, *The Pornographers'* humor undermines its own rhetorical potential as Nosaka repeatedly builds arguments only to subvert them with punchlines.[350] But for all he does to undermine his own arguments and turn the text back upon itself, *The Pornographers* is not without an argument. The argument is for impotence.

4.4 The Pornographers[351]

The narrative follows a pornographer, Subuyan, as he and a slowly growing cast of employees embark on ever-increasingly ambitious pornographic escapades. By the end of the story they've gone from surreptitiously recording strangers' sex with hidden microphones to producing full-length pornographic films and staging lavish orgies for celebrities and wealthy business people in rented villas.[352] While Subuyan is on a quest to become a master pornographer, the following (and more) occurs: his wife dies, he becomes impotent due to a failed attempt to sleep with his step-daughter, he serves a short stint in prison, and a member of his crew masturbates himself to death. The novel is dense, obscene, but there are moments in

[350] A common reaction to humor is to regard the butt of the joke as somehow less-than: this effect of humor is at the root of the Superiority theory of humor, advocated by many from Aristotle to Hobbes. Superiority theorists contend that laughter arises once the audience has realized that they are somehow superior to the inferior comic object – perceived superiority/inferiority being the cause of humor and not an effect. While this study disagrees with superiority theorists in that they regard a feeling of superiority as an effect of humor and not its cause, this study does agree with their assertion that laughter and trivialization of the comic object go hand-in-hand.

[351] The discussion of humor and theorizing about whether something functions effectively as humor entails speculation about readers' expectations. There is always the possibility that certain readers will not agree and find passages to be simply obscene, disturbing, and un-funny.

[352] The English title to this work is somewhat limiting. *Erogotoshitachi* (エロ事師たち) literally means "the masters of erotic affairs," and includes a broader range of activities. If we regard a pornographer as one who only creates pornography, then Subuyan's decision to organize sexual liaisons and pimp seems quite dramatic. However, if we understand him simply as a purveyor of all things erotic, given his ambition to create erotic products that are as real as possible, this move away from film and into reality is perfectly natural.

which the novel "uses pathos and humor" to "close in upon the essence of humanity."[353] Ultimately, it is a work of dark humor which celebrates the human life force – our inalienable urge to live on despite dire circumstances.

Long, cyclical, and vulgar, *The Pornographers* moves forwards in half steps, and the narrative progresses through theme and variation. Each new misadventure is informed by the one previous, and in this fashion the novel slowly moves away from realistic and slightly deviant comic moments towards extremely exaggerated obscenity and unbelievable absurdity. This slow development makes the novel's exaggerated extremes more palatable, allowing Subuyan to remain a somewhat sympathetic character despite his increasingly objectionable pornographic practices.

4.5 Subuyan's "Reality"

The novel opens with Subuyan and his employee Banteki sitting in Banteki's squalid apartment as they sample recordings of Banteki's neighbors having sex. Banteki has filled his apartment building with recording devices, snaking mics through ceiling holes and hollow laundry poles. Subuyan sells Banteki's recordings, and they are now listening to samples hoping to hear one with "reality."[354]

Subuyan's customers have become more sophisticated, and he believes that tapes with a sense of "reality" will be able to grab their attention. "Reality" is the metric by which Subuyan measures a works success. Subuyan has become obsessed with "reality" after an encounter with

[353] "野坂の処女作「エロ事師たち」には、猥雑に見える描写の中に、ペーソスとユーモアを武器にして人間性の本質への肉迫が随所に見られた" Yoshiyuki Junnosuke, "Nosaka Akiyuki / Inoue ni taisuru dokudan to henken" in *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 19(15), 9.
[354] In the original the English word "reality" is written in the text in katakana, spelled "*reariti*." Gallagher translates this as "the smell of reality;" I will use "reality" for brevity's sake. Nosaka Akiyuki, *Erogotoshitachi*, Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1968, 7.

a customer who refuses to purchase Subuyan's "Rainy Night." "Rainy Night," is a half-an-hour scenario during which a man says to his victim that "people mustn't resist their fate." This prompts Subuyan's customer to exclaim "Is there anyone dumb enough to say this kind of thing when seducing a woman? This smells fake."[355] Subuyan's customers have become more sophisticated, and are developing a sense of taste. Customers want something new, but also something familiar. They want Osaka dialect, not stiff and "fake-smelling" Tokyo dialect. They want language they can sympathize with, language taken from their own lived experiences. For the customer "Rainy Night" fails not because of what the man says, but how he says it.

This opening vignette is a metacommentary on art; for Subuyan, here playing the part of a Nosaka proxy, art must mix the incongruous and the familiar in order to create a sense of "reality" which will resonate with audiences. As far as plot is concerned, it is trite to say that nothing in the real world goes according to plan, but it is trite for a reason. Truisms become truisms because usually apt. To achieve the "reality" needed to move a sophisticated audience, both Nosaka's novel and Subuyan's tapes must have plots and language are less than ideal.

In terms of plot, Banteki's newest recording has promise: a couple of Osaka natives pause their love-making to order tofu. They shout the order out the window, a delivery man brings it to the door, the woman discusses payment details, and once he leaves they go back to having sex. The pillow talk and the tofu purchase all are in Kansai dialect. Listening to this, Subuyan laughs; this recording has the "reality" he seeks.

But what of Nosaka's narrative, and its use of dialect? For the reasonably literate reader, Nosaka's use of Kansai dialect is jarring; conventions which encourage literary language lead to

[355] The Tokyo-dialect line in "Rainy Night" is "*ningen wa unmei ni sakaratte wa ikenai yo,*" and the customer's response, in Osaka dialect, is "*naa, onna kudoku toki, konna koto iu aho oru kaa. Inchiki kusai de*." Translations are my own. Nosaka Akiyuki, *Erogotoshitachi,* Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1968, 11.

an irony in that quotidian dialect becomes surprising. This dialect also creates an ambivalent response in the reader. At the same time that dialect reflects "reality," as it is the language of the real world and not the literary one, it also challenges readers who expect literary language on the page. We can identify with Subuyan as his language is familiar to us from the everyday, but we feel a sense of alienation from the text itself as it is challenging and does not conform to convention. This alienation is an essential element of the comic, as "the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart."[356] This irony creates the distance necessary for this to function successfully as a comic text. We care enough about Subuyan to laugh alongside him, but not so much that we cannot laugh at him. Opening with Subuyan's meta-discussion of dialect, the novel winks at the reader letting us know that it is in on its own joke. This is an essential element of the novel, as Nosaka makes other meta-fictive jokes in *The Pornographers* that comment not just on this novel but also on literature itself.

4.6 Banteki's "Special"

After listening to the sample tapes, Subuyan takes Banteki to the "Turkish bath" (*toruko*). A Turkish bath typically entails male customers paying a fee for a bath, a massage, and an opportunity to grope a female attendant. While waiting for their turns, Banteki waxes philosophical to Subuyan about the Turkish bath. Banteki's thoughts on the Turkish bath are idiosyncratic, and Nosaka gives Banteki space to express his thoughts at great length. As Banteki's absurd monologue stretches on and on, the overwhelming length of the passage may

[356] Henri Bergson, "Laughter," in *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956, 63-4.

give readers the impression that he novel is advocating Banteki's earnest and idiosyncratic philosophy:

> Well, I mean, these women, they ought to be skilled operators, working in a Turkish bath the way they are. They're supposed to get those fingers working and stir a man up, in those erogenous zones, you know. This is the way the pleasure ought to be given, according to the fundamental idea of things. But what do the women do? They get felt up themselves, that's what they do. They've got no skill at all, but they cover it up this way. Just like in cooking nowadays, instead of having a stew made out of real fish or vegetables, they can fool you now with some kind of synthetic crap. And then once a guy does cop a feel, the next time he wants to go further, and the next time further yet, and so on, and the upshot is that everything pretty soon just gets into the sex category as a matter of course. No, I want the Special just like it should be with nothing ersatz about it. If that's not the way it is, then the whole principle of the Turkish bath gets lost somewhere along the line. Why, you might just as well go down to Tobita or Imari and get laid proper while you're at it. No, the right thing is to stretch out on the rubbing table – maybe like a baby, huh? – and while you're laying there, you just hand yourself over to the woman completely. You close your eyes, and you don't think about a thing. What kind of face's she got? What's she thinking about? It doesn't matter one bit. With those fingers her job is to get to that real special spot – that one the guy himself doesn't know about, the one even his wife doesn't know about – and give it the tender treatment. That for me is what makes the Special. That's the real thing of it. The man's the one that's supposed to be on the receiving end, not the woman. Why, you know, you ought to feel just like you're getting it from your mother.[357]

Much of this novel violates taboo, and is generally obscene, so content-wise this is not a particularly incongruous passage. The topic of the passage is certainly obscene, but as it goes on the very length of the passage itself begins to challenge a reader's sense of what is a reasonable amount of digression for the narrative of a novel.[358] We doubt whether or not this is a digression, but rather something important to the narrative and the story itself. This is meta-fictive humor. There is something incongruous in the form of the novel itself, creating humor by defying the reader's expectations for the narration of a novel.[359]

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[357] Nosaka Akiyuki, *The Pornographers*, Tokyo: C.E. Tuttle, 1970,11-12. Due to its extreme length, I will not include the full Japanese text here. It can be found in Nosaka Akiyuki, *Erogotoshitachi*, Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1968, 10-11.

[358] This passage also goes against a readers' expectations for dialogue, as a monologue of this length is somewhat unexpected for a dialogue in a novel.

[359] This technique should be familiar to those who have read Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, though Nosaka uses a much less exaggerated form of it here.

Moreover, the passage itself takes the form of a joke, and Nosaka masterfully builds tension until we reach the punchline. When Banteki makes the (socially and culturally) unacceptable leap that the "Special" ought to feel like "you're getting it from your mother," the reader realizes they may have been taken for a ride.[360] Until this point, Banteki has been arguing for a "Special" that seems reasonable, perhaps even ideal. Banteki desires a perfectly nurturing and indulgent idealized sexual experience. Given the nature of the transaction his argument is easy to accept. The customer pays the professional, so one would naturally expect the customer to receive service. Banteki uses simple consumer's logic to critique the "Special." But, as he talks through his thoughts in the passage, his logic leads him back to his mother and to a sexual ideal that is both absurdly funny and utterly unacceptable.[361]

The exaggerated leap of the final sentence threatens to undermine Banteki's entire argument. But he holds his ground against Subuyan's counter-arguments, and finally Banteki ends the argument by concluding that the "Special" entails "something an awful lot like a mother-baby relationship."[362] This humorous and transgressive exchange closes with another joke, as Banteki says "I'm going off for a frolic with Mama" when his number comes up.[363] Here, the novel turns to Subuyan's memories of his mother and his childhood during the war. But Subuyan's flashback does not comment on Banteki's "Special," nor does it cause him to reject Banteki's ideas. Despite this somewhat somber interlude, the Banteki "Special" keeps its position in the text as a potential utopian alternative to the real "Special."

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[360] Nosaka Akiyuki, *The Pornographers,* Tokyo: C.E. Tuttle, 1970,12.
[361] There is an added layer of incongruous humor here, in that Banteki has developed his argument on a completely different set of expectations than readers do. We expect the Turkish bath to serve as a site of sexual gratification, not nurturing affection. And while the mother is the ideal site for succor, Banteki's proposal would amount to dressing her in the costume of a bathroom attendant and paying her for sex. This runs so far afoul of cultural taboos that one cannot help but laugh at his mad idea.
[362] Ibid., 13.
[363] Ibid., 13.

The attendant's call rouses Subuyan, and as he takes his turn in the bath we find that Banteki has won Subuyan over. He pleads with the attendant: "Hey, just a minute! I want none of that. *You're* the one's supposed to do it, not me."[364] His desire surprises the attendant, but she indulges him: "The woman rubbed a generous amount of cream into her palms and then, with a rapid lunge, she seized Subuyan violently, her icy fingers provoking a shriek."[365] And with Subuyan's shriek, the novel subverts the idiosyncratic philosophy to which it devoted so much space. This shriek is followed by a section break, and then an abrupt transition to Subuyan returning home from the bath.[366] The "Special" is not referenced again, and Subuyan's shriek remains the last word in the argument. The novel undermines its own rhetorical power by fostering a sense of uncertainty in the reader; it is unstable as it presents an earnest-seeming argument which it later comically undoes.

And, in a less complex and self-referential vein of humor, this shriek subverts sex itself. Readers are reminded that sex cannot realize an ideal form, as Banteki's dream of a perfect and nurturing sexual encounter is dashed by a pair of cold hands. While this passage is an important piece of self-reflexive subversion, by subverting sex it also contributes to *The Pornographers*' refutation of the views of flesh literature authors.

Nosaka repeatedly uses punchlines to subvert earnest seeming passages. This self-reflexive subversion is a central comic device in this work, and is key to creating the novel's theme of impotence. By repeatedly subverting its positions, the reader gradually comes to doubt everything the text argues. This humor technique enervates the novel as a rhetorical object.

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[364] Ibid., 19.
[365] Ibid., 19.
[366] The Japanese-language original unfortunately does not have a section break here. The section break emphasizes this shriek as a punchline ending a movement, and the comic moment is slightly punchier in the translation.

Nosaka subverts shorter pieces like Banteki's "Special," but he also subverts movements that have developed over the length of the whole novel. In the closing moments, Nosaka finishes Subuyan's character arc and the work with a comical punchline that completely subverts Subuyan's character arc and the novel's idealized conceptualization of sex.

4.7 Subuyan's "Way of Pornography"

As the story progresses the narrative comes to focus on Subuyan's adventures as a pornographer and his "Way of Pornography."[367] Subuyan introduces his "Way" in the middle of the novel when giving a new member of his crew "an elaborate and unprompted exposition of the pornographic profession and its ideals."[368] This conversation is reminiscent of Banteki's "Special," in that one character expounds upon a topic exhaustively and amusingly, while an overwhelmed listener gives in and accepts the proposition. Subuyan's "Way" entails creating an idealized sexual experience for men who are cursed with "pitiful, unsatisfied yearnings." At the end of an increasingly exaggerated and comical series of assertions, Subuyan concludes:

> the pornographer should not forget for a moment that he may well boast that what he does in the line of pornographic service is done for the benefit of all mankind… the purpose of it all is the salvation of men… this is the vocation of the pornographer! *The Way of Pornography*.[369]

The newcomer makes a snide remark to himself, but tentatively agrees nonetheless.[370]

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[367] Given the novel's setting in Osaka and its engagement with merchant culture and the world of sex-as-commodity, there are clear lines that one can draw to connect this novel to Edo fiction. It is particularly reminiscent of Ihara Saikaku's *Tales of an Amorous Man* and Santō Kyōden's parody of Saikaku, *Edo Umare Kabayaki*. For a comparative discussion of Nosaka and Saikaku, see Ozaki Hotsuki, "Nosaka Akiyuki to Saikaku" in *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū*. 15(6), 107-112. However, Morimoto Kazuo argues that the Nosaka's similarities to Saikaku are superficial. Morimoto discusses Nosaka's time living in a Zen monastery, and contends that his writing often shares a removed point of view with Kamo no Chōmei's *Hōjōki* or Hiraga Gennai's writings. Morimoto Kazuo, "Nosaka / Inoue ni okeru yūtopia shikō," in *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 19(15), 16-21.
[368] Nosaka Akiyuki, *The Pornographers*, Tokyo: C.E. Tuttle, 1970, 177.
[369] Ibid., 177-8.
[370] Paul, a college dropout, regularly attempts to undermine Subuyan's more extreme philosophical statements as his conception of "The Way" develops. And though he never succeeds in completely subverting or undoing Subuyan's

Again, Nosaka creates meta-fictive humor by having a character philosophize at length about an object seemingly unworthy of its space on a page. But unlike Banteki's "Special," Subuyan's argument remains unrefuted for chapters on end. Though no other characters wholeheartedly adopt Subuyan's philosophies, no cold hands reach out and utterly subvert Subuyan's "Way." Subuyan continues to develop his "Way," and it becomes a driving force in the novel, pushing Subuyan from one erotic misadventure to the next. Banteki's "Special" was undone and never visited again, but Subuyan's "Way" becomes an essential element of the narrative.

Subuyan's "Way" and its goals become more exaggerated and absurd as the novel progresses. As he becomes frustrated with making predictable pornography, Subuyan declares that he needs to make something he can be proud of. He wants to make a "pornographic atom bomb" that will "blow these sex-maniac customers… right out of their minds."[371] He engages in increasingly ambitious sexual enterprises, culminating with a lavish orgy held at a European-style villa. At this ideal orgy, his "pornographic atomic bomb," Subuyan attains enlightenment. Walking through the crowd of good-looking and virile participants, he muses, "all the gods and buddhas together haven't wind enough to whistle up a single fart… the way of the gods? The way of the warrior, the way of tea, the way of the bow? None of it means a thing. Nothing's real but the way of sex."[372] Subuyan's "Way" has become his religion. It is the lens through which he views the world, and through it his finally solves the impotence that has plagued him for half the novel. By means of his "Way," Subuyan sees that his impotence is "the culmination of sex"

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work, Paul is an important counter-balance to it – like Subuyan prodding Banteki during his idealistic discussion of the "Special."

[371] Ibid., 189-90. As the novel progresses Subuyan expands both his real-life operations and his fantasies. He acquires more prostitutes, leads a groping tour on the train, and organizes orgies, while his business goals expand to include a fantasy in which he becomes part of the reception for official state visits by foreign governments.

[372] Ibid., 299.

rather than a disease and "a tranquil, composed mood settled upon" him.[373] Here the narrative leaps back to one of Subuyan's distant memories, and the form of the novel breaks down.

Subuyan sold fish in the immediate postwar, and once used some published Waseda University literature lectures to wrap his products. At his moment of enlightenment he suddenly recalls eight erotically charged poems he'd read off of those sheets years ago. Due to Nosaka's long sentences, the prose in *The Pornographers* moves forward like an irresistible torrent. The narrative in this novel mimics Subuyan's thinking, and up to this point the narration moved forward frantically. This formal break and the slower poems that follow it correspond to Subuyan's moment of enlightenment. The text abruptly ruptures and then enters into a contemplative reverie. At this moment Subuyan transcends his mundane life as a mere pornographer to become a "master" (*shi*) of all things erotic, the ideal pornographer.

Following the eighth and final poem, there is a section break, and the next paragraph of prose starts with the word "I". As abruptly as possible, the prose has re-started with a new narrator. We no longer are in limited third-person as Kabo, one of Subuyan's underlings, narrates the final passages of the novel. Kabo is a simple young man who dreamed of becoming a comedian on television before meeting Subuyan and becoming his apprentice. Kabo informs readers that Subuyan stepped off a curb without looking, and was hit and killed by a car. Subuyan had been a careful pedestrian, but "ever since that party, [Subuyan] was going around like in a daze."[374] He was killed by his own mastery of the "Way," and this is where the novel begins subverting the philosophy Nosaka spent so much of *The Pornographers* developing.

Kabo serendipitously finds Subuyan's long-missing stepdaughter Keiko while on his way to the hospital. They go together to visit Subuyan's body and upon seeing it Keiko breaks out

[373] Ibid., 300-301.
[374] Ibid., 302.

into riotous laughter. The narration allows a page to pass before letting the readers in on the joke: "…there was the boss's dinger, pushing right up out of his shorts. And even though he was laying there dead as could be…it reminded me of one of those rockets they're sending to the moon."[375] Kabo also notes the irony of the situation, noting that Subuyan's impotence had finally been cured just as he'd predicted: "The boss was always saying that he'd be cured of his impotency if only Keiko came back. And sure enough, she was back and there it was stiff and straight."[376] Keiko covers the erection with her handkerchief, and she and Kabo begin to laugh. Subuyan's face was covered, and Kabo thinks "it and the face both covered – you couldn't tell which was which maybe, I thought all at once, and then I really burst out laughing."[377] Subuyan's death is portrayed ironically. He dies in an utterly mundane way, but his postmortem body is a cartoonish and comical caricature of masculinity with his manly virility exaggerated to an extreme. This incongruity colors the scene, and heightens the comic tone of these final moments at Subuyan's bedside. Readers cannot help but laugh alongside Kabo and Keiko. This irony also subverts Subuyan's entire character arc. The accident has made his body topsy-turvy, and an erection that will follow him to the afterlife emphatically subverts the impotence Subuyan came to embrace as proof of his mastery of his "Way." When Kabo states that "when you get your back broken in a certain way, something like that [the post-mortem erection] could happen," we are reminded that potence and impotence are simply biological functions.[378] This eternal erection is a middle finger raised to Subuyan's utopian view of sex, his "way of pornography."

[375] Ibid., 304.
[376] Ibid.
[377] Ibid., 305.
[378] Ibid., 304.

Just before his death, Subuyan embraces a utopian ideal of sex that is a comically exaggerated form of that espoused by flesh literature. Subuyan conceives of sex as more than a potent tool for resistance. Sex brings real comfort to his clients, and orchestrating the perfect orgy has brought him enlightenment and peace. Sex becomes a religion for him, a means not just to resist politics and oppression, but a vehicle for permanent release from a world of suffering. The end of the novel subverts this utopian ideal and represents sex as an overpowering physical need to which men are subject.

The novel's final word on sex is an ironic one. Sex is both liberating and constricting. It is a source of temporary release, but cannot be meaningful resistance or a way to assert agency. The characters that populate this novel are bound by the demands of the black-market economy. They have been subjected to the hardships of war and the repression of the post-war government, and sex cannot free them from these or any system of oppression. Rather, sex is just another subjugating force one bears with a smile.

Subuyan's erection was not subversion enough however, and Nosaka ends *The Pornographers* with a final line that subverts the work as a whole. The last line of the novel is spoken by Kabo, who simply exclaims "Jun, jun, jun!" As an aspiring comedian this is a sing-song affectation he'd developed to follow his punchlines.[379] Nosaka's dialect-laden narrative opened this novel with a wink, letting his readers know that the novel was in on the joke. Kabo's final-position catchphrase closes this novel with a devastatingly subversive proposition: the joke was the novel itself.

[379] English language readers may be familiar with this comic technique; a final-position catchphrase is a common feature of American standup comedy. Kabo's "*jun, jun, jun*" can be regarded as roughly equivalent to Tim Allen's grunting, or Larry the Cable Guy's "git'r done."

However, the best satire is serious, and while the novel has made a joke out of itself this does not mean it cannot be regarded as meaningful examination of the lives of those struggling to survive in postwar Japan. Furthermore, by embracing impotence, Nosaka gives dignity to his downtrodden characters. Despite their best efforts, they are unable to pull themselves up out of the black-market and the shadow economy of pornography. Banteki will never make the films he dreams of, and Subuyan dies before he can realize his dream of organizing orgies for foreign diplomats on behalf of the Japanese government. This is not regarded as failure, however, but rather as the inevitable result of conditions from which these characters are powerless to escape. Nosaka's novel does not portray these characters to make a point; rather, the portrayal itself is the point. In this novel Nosaka embraces impotence and impossibility to sympathetically show individuals failing to overcome powers beyond their control.

4.8 Imamura Shōhei's *An Introduction to Anthropology based on The Pornographers*

In 1966, Imamura Shōhei released an adaptation of *The Pornographers* titled *An Introduction to Anthropology based on The Pornographers* ("*Erogotoshitachi" yori jinruigaku nyūmon*).[380] The film varies from the novel slightly in both narrative and tone. In the film, Subuyan's interiority is given largely through montage and flashback and not through narration or voice-over. Thus, film-goers never have direct access to Subuyan's thoughts. Subuyan's relationship with Haru is more affectionate in the film, and Imamura is more concerned with Subuyan's family life than his professional one. Imamura scales back Subuyan's professional community, and introduces a grown son, Koichi, to the story. The film keeps the novel's dark

[380] Details of Imamura's film have been derived from Steve, Corbeil. "Imamura Shohei's adaptation of Nosaka Akiyuki's The Pornographers: Ethical Representations of Translating the Unwritten," *Honyaku no bunka bunka no honyaku* (March, 2015).
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comedic tone, and Imamura also retains the major plot elements of Subuyan's struggles with impotence and his "Way." While the surface of the story has changed, the heart remains the same.

Imamura also successfully recreates Nosaka's self-reflexive subversion. It opens on a wide-angle shot from above of an idle crowd at a countryside train station. We see Subuyan move purposefully through the mass, gathering his scattered team from out of the crowd. The crew are next shown in hills, walking off the beaten path and hiding from hikers as they sneak off to a clearing where they will make a pornographic film. Just as they begin to film the scene, Imamura cuts abruptly to a dark room, and we shift to an 8mm aspect-ratio while the whirring of a projector plays on the soundtrack. The opening credits are then super-imposed over this room as we watch and listen to Subuyan, Banteki, and Kabo review the film that's being projected on the wall—Imamura Shohei's *An Introduction to Anthropology based on The Pornographers*. The credits are written in an unsteady hand, replicating the poor-production quality one would anticipate in Subuyan's underground films. As the credits end, we see that Subuyan and his cronies are looking at a close-up of Haru's pet carp. This cut confuses both the viewers and the characters, as we can hear them complain about their confusion on the audio track. The film then cuts to an outdoor shot and we hear one of them comment that they recognize the location. The viewers and the characters are now looking at a shot of Subuyan's neighborhood. The aspect ratio changes as the view expands back to regular theater dimensions, and Imamura moves the film out of the projection room into the world of his film. The camera then pans left to show Subuyan in bed with Haru, visible through a door left ajar.

In this introduction, Imamura conflates the film we're about to see with the one Subuyan and his crew just sneaked into the hills to make. This opening is playful and amusing, and

functions similarly to Nosaka's early discussion of dialect in *The Pornographers* in that it makes the audience aware that this cultural object is aware of itself. Imamarua's film is a self-reflexive work which comments upon itself as a film, as well as on in film in general. Imamura's mise-en-scene also mimics pornography by recreating the feeling of voyeurism that is so conspicuous in pornographic films. The film features a preponderance of distant shots thorough windows, doors left ajar, and cage bars. Interiors in this film are cramped, and the characters are all living and working on top of each other. It is as if the characters must confine themselves to this space for fear of outside judgment, and we are spying on them from just outside. The exterior shots recreate the voyeurism of pornography, and in its interior shots it is careful to prevent its illicit contents from spilling out of its densely packed confines. Imamura shoots this film as though it was pornography itself. But, the body of the film is not as conspicuously meta-fictive as the opening and the closing. Imamura returns us to the projection room at the end of the film, ending his film with a moment of self-reflexive subversion much in the same way that Nosaka ended his novel.

Imamura's adaptation ends with a parodic recreation of the fantastic final chapter of Ihara Saikaku's *Life of an Amorous Man*.[381] By the end of Imamura's film, Subuyan is living in isolation on a small houseboat moored in the canal behind Haru's old house and single-mindedly working on making a perfect sex doll. He is so engrossed in his creation, that he doesn't notice when the boat slips its moorings and begins drifting out to sea. The final shots of the film show his little houseboat drifting, unmanned, past large frigates, the edges of the harbor, and finally out to open sea. This, we think, is to be the end of the film. Suddenly, Imamura changes the

[381] In which the protagonist, Yonosuke, exhausts the romantic possibilities of Japan and decides to remove himself from the world in the only manner befitting someone as devoted to love as he: by stocking a boat with sufficient foodstuffs, all manner of sexual medicines and devices, a copy of the *Tales of Ise*, and, along with several of his closest friends, sailing off towards the mythical island of women.

aspect ratio, the sound of the projector and the voices of the three pornographers re-emerge, and Imamura returns us to Subuyan's editing room. Subuyan, Banteki, and Kabo all comment on the end of the film, with Banteki and Kabo both expressing confusion over it. As the screen turns white, Subuyan cajoles Kabo to get the next film started. Subuyan treats Imamura's film like one of his own hastily-made pornos, and he is quick to get to work on the next picture.

Imamura's ending, just like Kabo's final catch-phrase in the novel, subverts the film in its entirety. Imamura's feature film has been reduced to a tawdry voyeur's 8mm film projected in some secret screening room. Audiences must now question the work, just as they did with Nosaka's novel, and re-contextualize it. Viewers must consider the possibility that Imamura has been having some kind of joke at their expense. With both the novel and the film audiences must grapple with the problem of how to regard a work which subverts itself. This final subversion of the film forces the viewer to engage with Imamura's picture as an ironic work. This irony frustrates viewer's attempts to read the film as having a singular argument, just as the final ironic ending to Nosaka's novel does. Imamura's film is best read like the ostensibly objective observations of an anthropologist, just as his title encourages us to do. Nosaka's novel and Imamura's film can be regarded as candid snapshots of (fictional) cultures. But what is the value of a work of this nature? Nosaka answers this question in his short story *American Hijiki.*

4.9 Chewing Gum Literature: *American Hijiki* and Literary Impotence

American Hijiki is about a man powerless to overcome wartime memories. The narrator, Toshio, spent his youth in a remote countryside town, before relocating to a city after the war to work at a newspaper. Playing hooky from work one day, he is roped into pimping for a young woman and he begins a career as a part-time pimp. Using his pidgin English to arrange liaisons

for the girls, Toshio supplements his newspaper pay by taking a cut out of selling the girls' cigarettes and chocolates. In the present-day, Toshio finds himself hosting an American couple that are friends with his wife. Though initially reluctant, Toshio finds himself entertaining Mr. Higgins and serving yet again as a pimp. Grappling with his feelings towards Mr. Higgins in the present, Toshio's thoughts return to his education before and after the surrender, his life on rations with his family in the countryside, and his time as a part-time pimp.

The comic structure of *American Hijiki* is similar to *The Pornographers* in that it frequently avails itself of a simple pattern of proposition and subversion. As *American Hijiki* is a short story and not a novel, the proposition-subversion pattern that was so dependent upon length in *The Pornographers* occurs here in shorter form. Most frequently, Nosaka sets the proposition in dialogue, and the subversion in Toshio's interior monologue. This passage from early in the story, when Toshio and Kyoko are discussing the Higgenses visit, is a typical example:

> 'They're really lovely people. You'll be going to America someday, too, Papa. Think of the confidence it will give you to have someone there that you know. And Mr. Higgins says he's going to get Keiichi into an American college.' A good bit of Kyoko's interest in the Higginses sounded like self-interest, he was tempted to say.[382]

Toshio keeps all these bitter comments to himself, and over time readers are likely to find Toshio to be a bit of a crank. Importantly, *American Hijiki* does not direct that subversion at itself, and it does not create the irony that complicates Nosaka's *The Pornographers* or Imamura's adaptation. The primary function of subversion in *American Hijiki* is to characterize Toshio. His constant subversion reveals the doubt, isolation, and impotence Toshio feels as a member of the burnt-out generation.

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[382] Howard Hibbett, *Contemporary Japanese Literature: An Anthology of Fiction, Film, and Other Writing since 1945*. New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1977, 437.

In *American Hijiki*, Toshio grapples with the powerless and servile feelings he expects will mark his entire generation's relationship with America. The story's climax is a private sex show that Toshio has arranged for Mr. Higgins. Promising to show Mr. Higgins "Japan's number-one penis," Toshio realizes that his efforts to entertain Mr. Higgins have been in an effort to "somehow, one way or another… bring him to his knees."[383] But, as Mr. Higgins squats on the bed to get a better view, Yot-chan, the male talent, cannot perform. He is roughly the same age as Toshio, and his impotence leads Toshio to the conclusion that:

> Yot-chan might have been in a state of personal professional detachment, but when Higgins sat down over him like a ton of bricks, inside his head the jeeps started rolling, the strains of 'Comu, comu eburybody' began to echo again, and he recalled, as clearly as if it were yesterday, the hopeless feeling of when there was no more fleet, no more Zero fighters recalled he emptiness of the blinding, burning sky above the burnt-out ruins, and in that instance the impotence overtook him.[384]

Yot-chan's failure is portrayed bluntly, with little humor or irony. Had the text built up the necessary tension to this by giving more space to Toshio's plan to use sex to overcome Mr. Higgins, then this may have become a self-reflexively subversive moment like Subuyan's erection at the end of *The Pornographers*. However, *American Hijiki* is shorter, and more to the point. It is hard to find this moment comical, and here impotence is portrayed earnestly and sadly.

American Hijiki ends with a dinner, in which Toshio and his family force-feed themselves beef they bought on behalf of the Higginses who both decided to eat out that night without telling their hosts. Kyoko is upset that Mrs. Higgins has been so rude, and exclaims that she will confront them and ask them outright to leave. Hearing this prompts Toshio to reflect one last time on his impotence. He realizes:

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[383] Ibid., 465.
[384] Ibid., 467.

> As long as I live, there will be an American sitting inside me like a ton of bricks, and every now and then this American inside me… will drag me around by the nose and make me scream 'Gibu me chewingamu, Q-Q.' because what I have is an incurable disease, the Great American Allergy.[385]

When Kyoko asks what Toshio will do with Mr. Higgins tomorrow, Toshio thinks that he'll probably end up taking him to a geisha, "for variety."[386] Despite all his efforts, Toshio is trapped in his role as a pimp. While his younger wife can voice her anger over the situation, Toshio is powerless to escape his subjugated position.

This ending weds two discourses that have been running parallel through the novel, one of sex and one of food. In the sex discourse, Nosaka contends with the issues surrounding subjugation and impotence. Its early discussions of pimping highlight the exploitative relationship between the US and Japan, and its impotent climax exposes the tragic inability of Toshio's generation to overcome their traumatic war memories. Its brevity makes *American Hijiki* read as a particularly pointed refutation of flesh literature. Toshio has been subjugated by an internalized America and sex, and sex performed by even the most talented sex workers in Japan, cannot help Toshio regain his lost agency.

But in his food discourse, Nosaka grapples with the concept of impotent foodstuffs, foods which are unable to nourish people. As Toshio and Kyoko stuff themselves with expensive beef, Toshio notes that it's just like the black tea he'd received as rations during the war. Thinking that it was an American variety of *hijiki*, Toshio and the other villagers boiled the tea leaves and ate them. His mouth full of expensive beef, Toshio thinks back to his eating tea-leaves during the war and conflates the two in his mind.

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[385] Ibid., 467-8.
[386] Ibid., 478.

The story derives its title from Toshio's childhood experience eating black tea, and it provides a tragic final image for the story. But Nosaka's discussion of impotent foodstuffs touches on more than just tea. And, in his discussion of gum Nosaka gives readers an elegant metaphor for his thoughts about the impotence of literature.

During a particularly lean period in the postwar, Toshio and his family received chewing gum as substitute rations. Seeing it, Toshio thought the gum "looked like a jewel case" and had "the feel of luxury."[387] The chewing gum bore all the outward markers of being something substantive, just as a book does. However, upon eating the gum the narrator realizes the sickening truth:

> *"I realized that we had to live for seven days on this gum, this stuff that made not the slightest dent in our hunger. Anything is better than nothing, they say, but this anything was our own saliva, and when the hunger pangs attacked again, my eyes filled with tears of anger and self-pity."*[388]

Tea and chewing gum don't nourish. They have flavor, but are ultimately impotent foods. Like gum, there is no real nourishment to be found in *The Pornographers*. Just as gum can be regarded as an impotent food, so too can the *The Pornographers* be regarded as an impotent novel. For Nosaka, literature, sex, and gum may add flavor to lives, but they cannot nourish them.

Nosaka was not alone in moving away from the utopian ideals of the body espoused by Flesh literature authors. According to Slaymaker, writers

> who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s… continued the themes of physicality expressed by the flesh writers. In contrast, sex is almost always violent and political power structures are prominent concerns… soft-focus romanticism has gone from their writing, and one finds little suggestion of utopian possibility.[389]

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[387] Ibid., 445.
[388] Ibid., 445.
[389] Douglas Slaymaker, *The Body in Postwar Japanese Fiction*. Asia's Transformations, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004, 161-2.

Sex in *The Pornographers* has no liberating potential. Just as chewing gum merely gives a temporary and insubstantial release from the desire to eat, so too does sex only serve to give us temporary release from the desire for sex. It cannot serve any broader ideological purpose: it is merely entertainment. But what of Nosaka's argument that literature itself is impotent? How does this impact our understanding of Nosaka's place within the broader literary context of postwar Japan? Again, *American Hijiki* offers a metaphor to help solve this problem.

Toshio recalls a villager who illegally acquired an American ration-drum that yielded only gum:

> …the kids, who chewed it like cinnamon and threw it away as soon as the flavor was gone. At first, everybody smoothed the wrinkles out of the silver papers and saved them for origami, but there were so many they ceased to have any value and soon the streets were covered with silver paper snow, glittering in the summer sun.[390]

Each Nosaka story is entertaining, and memorable, but stories about the war were not uncommon in the sixties. As Igarashi notes, by the sixties war memories "saturated quotidian life as white noise devoid of its original impact."[391] Nosaka knew this, and tried to create works which embrace the paradox of this illicitly acquired chewing gum: it is both impotent in that it does not nourish, yet powerful in that it leaves behind a document of itself in its own wrapper. It is difficult to incorporate Nosaka's literature into any political argument or any movement to effect real change, but his stories have power by dint of their very existence. Igarashi argues that Nosaka resisted the postwar aestheticization of war memory through repetition, and this is true. But it is repetition of a certain type: Nosaka littered the postwar landscape with glittering gum wrappers that would remain behind as evidence of a crime, waiting for a justice that never came.

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[390] Howard Hibbett, *Contemporary Japanese Literature: An Anthology of Fiction, Film, and Other Writing since 1945*. New York: Knopf, Distributed by Random House, 1977, 455.
[391] Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 2000, 167.

Coda: Humor, Censorship, and Laughing at Trauma

In his discussion of popular representations of the Holocaust, humor, and cultural memory, Eyal Zandberg proposes a "four-phase typology" for how humor evolves to treat trauma in the cultural memory. In the first phase, the Holocaust was taboo, but

> in the second phase, humor was used in order to explore and criticize Holocaust commemoration; in the third, humor about Holocaust memory was used to comment on other social fields; and in the fourth, Holocaust memory itself is being used to create humor.[392]

For Zandberg, this process reflects a shift in social collective memory, as the shared traumatic memory is normalized.

Looking closely at this quadripartite structure, we can generalize it to use it to track the development of other post-traumatic humor. In the first stage, taboo, the traumatic event is not included in humorous discourse. In the second, defense, humor is used to critique discourse which treats the trauma, policing how that trauma is addressed. In the third stage, externalization, the trauma is used in some capacity to comment humorously on an external object; the traumatic event may bring about laughter, but it is not the object of humor. And in the fourth, internalization, the traumatic event itself may now become the object of humor.

Reading and Nosaka, one wonders how other Japanese artists used humor to address the varied traumas of World War Two. Was it possible for Japanese writers to laugh at the atomic bombing, the occupation, postwar starvation and poverty, and the like? And was this four-part progression held up by occupation censorship before Japanese humorists had a chance to truly start process of normalizing their varied wartime traumas?

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[392] Eyal Zandberg, "'Ketchup is the Auschwitz of Tomatoes'": Humor and the Collective Memory of Traumatic Events" in *Communication, Culture & Critique* 8 (2015), 109.

Between occupation censors and a conservative "reverse course" which saw an increase in domestic censorship, would-be dark humorists faced stiff opposition.[393] These external challenges would have only been exacerbated by internal ones; what about those works that were never written by authors who internalized the logic of censorship and would not even put pen to paper?

In "American *Hijiki*" Nosaka Akiyuki wrote of an internalized American who plagued the male performer in a sex show, and his whole generation:

> If Yot-chan had the same sort of experience that I did in the Occupation… if he can recall being frightened by the soldiers' huge builds, then it's no wonder he shriveled up like that. … [W]hen Higgins sat down over him like a ton of bricks, inside his head the jeeps started rolling, the strains of "Comu, comu, eburybody" began to echo again, and he recalled, as clearly as if it were yesterday, the hopeless feeling when there was no more fleet, no more Zero fighters, recalled the emptiness of the blinding, burning sky above the burnt-out ruins, and in that instant the impotence overtook him.[394]

The kind of dark humor that would appear in Zandberg's normalization process would be found on the peripheries of discourse and culture; dark humor thrives on the boundary between fair and foul. How reasonable is it to expect critical and humorous responses to the war by a people subject to both internal and external censorship? And while we have Nosaka to thank for a novel that helped readers laugh in proximity to postwar starvation and poverty, is there a work that helped readers laugh in proximity to radiation sickness and the ruins of Nagasaki and Hiroshima? Does Japan have a *Doctor Strangelove*?

Perhaps it is being written today: while is beyond the scope of this project to fully examine the dark humor continuing to be written following the 3.11 triple-disaster, there are

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[393] For a discussion of the impact of the occupation censorship on the trajectory of postwar Japanese literature, see Jay Rubin, "From Wholesomeness to Decadence: The Censorship of Literature under the Allied Occupation" in *Journal of Japanese Studies 11* no. 1 (1985).

[394] Nosaka Akiyuki, "American *Hijiki*" in *Contemporary Japanese Literature*, ed. Howard Hibbett, New York: Knopf, 1977, 467-8.

promising works which seem to be using humor to help Japan exercise its atomic demons. Reading Tawada Yōko's mildly comic dystopia *The Emissary* and Takahashi Gen'ichiro's absurdist and vulgar *Koi suru genpatsu* (*The Loving Atom*), one can ask, will these treatments of one atomic disaster open to door more dark atomic humor?

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