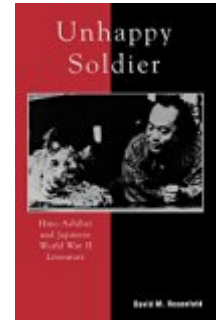


David M. Rosenfeld. *Unhappy Soldier: Hino Ashihei and Japanese World War II Literature.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002. 200 pp. \$70.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7391-0365-4.



Reviewed by Laura L. Neitzel

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Hino Ashihei (1907-60), the subject of David Rosenfeld's important new book, *Unhappy Soldier: Hino Ashihei and Japanese World War II Literature*, is Japan's most famous-turned-infamous writer of World War II fiction. Three best-selling books that he wrote during the Sino-Japanese war, titled simply and repetitively, *Wheat and Soldiers* (*Mugi to Heitai*, 1938), *Soil and Soldiers* (*Tsuchi to Heitai*, 1938), and *Flowers and Soldiers* (*Hana to Heitai*, 1939), were acclaimed by popular audiences for their depictions of the joys and travails of the noble and self-sacrificing Japanese soldier on the battlefield. After Japan's defeat, however, Hino's fame quickly became a liability: he was purged by the Allied Occupation for promoting the war through his writing and labeled a "cultural war criminal" by a prominent member of Japan's literary establishment. In the years following the end of the war, Hino and his writings were a recurring focus of writers and intellectuals in a series of debates that sought to come to terms with their own war responsibility. How Hino negotiated the divide between war and postwar, and

between fame and infamy is the subject of Rosenfeld's book.

In Japan's postwar literary history, Hino's novels, along with those of authors such as Ozaki Shirô and the poems of Takamura Kôtarô, have been dismissed by critics as belonging to "the barren years" of Japanese literature. During the war, members of the literary establishment were mobilized to support the war effort with their writing. Taken on tours of the battle fronts of China and Asia on government-sponsored trips, they then helped sell the war on the home front with their depictions of Japan's war for the "liberation of Asia." Like all other publications in wartime Japan, their writing was subjected to strict regulation and censorship. Writers were forbidden to portray enemies sympathetically or Japanese imperial soldiers negatively. They were not allowed to depict the Japanese army losing a battle or to describe war crimes.[1] Thus compromised by censorship and complicity with the wartime state, works such as *Wheat and Soldiers* have been viewed as embarrassments to Japan's literary history. Only war fiction produced after 1945—for ex-

ample, novels such as *Fires on the Plain* (1957) by Ōka Shōhei, which took a much more critical stance toward the war--have been counted as serious literature in postwar Japan.

Hino Ashihei, the man and writer, has been remembered almost exclusively for his wartime beliefs, as portrayed in his literature. Donald Keene, in his classic work on modern Japanese literature, predicted that "Hino's reputation is unlikely to improve with time. He will probably be remembered as the archetypal war writer." [2] Contributing to this reputation was an essay that Hino wrote in September 1945, one month after Japan's defeat. Unlike many other authors and intellectuals, who immediately embraced the ideals of the American victors or immediately returned to liberal or communist beliefs that they had renounced during the war, due to pressure by the wartime government, Hino responded to defeat and occupation with vehement defiance. In an essay, titled "Unhappy Soldier" and published in the *Asahi Shinbun*, Hino defended the actions of the soldiers--and by extension himself--arguing that "the hope for the reconstruction of Japan lay in the 'spirit of the *heikai* (soldiers)'" (p. 62). Hino's immediate postwar stance has contributed to his reputation in some circles as an unrepentant apologist for war; accordingly, he has been reviled by the left and, in recent years, revived by the right. But the greater tendency in the decades since the end of World War II, Rosenfeld notes, has been to absolve and dismiss Hino as a naïve supporter of the war, his involvement forgiven due to his moving depictions of and sympathy for the "common man." Rosenfeld suggests this forgiving attitude toward Hino mirrors the way many Japanese people have coped with the problem of their own war complicity--believing that *they* had been among its victims and, like Hino, had squandered their naïve yet genuine loyalty to the state and emperor in an ill-fated, misguided, and mistaken war.

Whether as victim or villain, Rosenfeld insists that none of the prevailing understandings of Hino and his work do justice to their complexity. He argues that a broader reading of Hino's writing across the divide of 1945 is necessary to understand this complicated man. He focuses especially on the novels Hino produced after the war and on the copious "paratexts" accompanying his writings--the forwards, afterwards, and commentaries to his wartime and postwar novels which were revised with each new edition. Rosenfeld's close readings of paratexts are especially fascinating as they trace Hino's changing interpretations of his works and their meanings over time, and create a much more nuanced understanding of Hino's attitudes toward the war and his own participation in it. Rosenfeld presents a Hino Ashihei who spent the fifteen years between the end of the war in 1945 and his death by suicide in 1960, critically re-examining the war and his role in it, and struggling to come to terms with the radically changed intellectual environment of postwar Japan. Rosenfeld's introductory chapter also suggests that a rereading of Hino can lend insight into the making of postwar national memory. Memories of the past, Rosenfeld reminds us, are constantly reworked in the present in response to new social, cultural, and political contexts. Hino's paratexts offer an intriguing way to trace this process of subtle but constant reinterpretation as it was undertaken by this controversial literary figure.

In his analyses of Hino's novels and paratexts, Rosenfeld returns often to two issues which were of obvious concern to Hino: his position as a writer and the "proper" readings of his work. In his novels, especially, Hino employs what Rosenfeld calls a "doubled consciousness." Most of his works of fiction include a novelist character, a thinly disguised Hino who constantly comments on his own position vis-à-vis other characters or looks at himself through the eyes of others. Rosenfeld describes a scene from *Soil and Soldiers* in which the Hino character listens to the soldiers sing a

song about home as they sail toward the front in China. He self-consciously notes that "it might seem inappropriate for the novelist to join in," but in the end he cannot resist the sentimentality of the moment among the soldiers and finds himself singing, tears streaming down his face (p. 1). Rosenfeld suggests that Hino uses scenes like this one to try to resolve tensions between his own position as a privileged literary persona and his project of writing about ordinary soldiers. Fighting against prevailing impressions of novelists and literary figures as either leftist or "alienated aesthetes," Hino's self-positioning, Rosenfeld suggests, was necessary to establish himself as the authentic voice of the soldier. Although Hino came from a working class background and wrote "proletarian fiction" early in his career, there was still no denying that his position as a writer afforded him certain privileges—including being removed from active duty in order to write about the war in the safety of his study.

Another striking example of Hino's "doubled consciousness" is from his last novel, *Before and After the Revolution* (*Kakumei Zengo*, 1960). This time Hino describes an encounter at the end of the war between the novelist character, Shôsukey, and a soldier who suddenly asks him if he feels any war responsibility: "'We read your books enthusiastically, but now that I think about it, it was all rubbish; you swindled us. You wore a soldier's uniform, but you were just a tool of the militarists. What about it?' Shôsukey couldn't answer" (p. 131). This fictionalized incident is perhaps a response to the criticisms that Hino faced after the war, some of which he responded to with defiance. But the fact that Hino places this indictment in the mouth of a soldier supports Rosenfeld's argument that he also experienced self-doubt and guilt about his wartime writings and their effects.

Hino was also concerned with how his texts should be read and attempted to control those readings through the commentary in his paratexts. Rosenfeld notes that he was especially con-

cerned during the war that his "soldier trilogy" not be read as *shosetsu*, or works of fiction, but as *kiroku*, or *records of events just as they happened*. This lent an impression of these works as *authentic and unmediated—not the creative work of a novelist, but the transcriptions of a soldier in the field*. Hino would reverse this position after the war when he insisted on the fictional nature of the works. Rosenfeld interprets this reversal as Hino's attempt to distance himself from the wartime project by insisting that the stories he wrote were largely products of his imagination. After 1945, Hino distanced himself from the wartime state in other ways as well—insisting that his work had been subjected to censorship and contending that he had been critical of the military command during the war. Especially notable is a long passage that Hino claimed was excised from *Wheat and Soldiers*—that described the brutal execution of three Chinese soldiers. No written versions of the censored passages survived the war, but Hino reinstated them from memory into postwar editions of his books. Rosenfeld is more willing to take Hino at his word concerning the authenticity of the reconstructed passages and Hino's claims of criticism during the war than this reviewer. Rosenfeld's desire to redeem Hino is the primary weakness of the book.

Overall, *Unhappy Soldier* is a wonderful book. It is a welcome contribution to specialists of Japanese literature and postwar history, as well as to scholars generally interested in issues of war responsibility and memory. To scholars of Japanese literature, one of the book's most appreciated contributions will be Rosenfeld's analyses of the often arcane debates about "war responsibility" within the postwar literary establishment—discussed most recently in J. Victor Koschmann's important book, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan* (1996). Rosenfeld does a superb job of contextualizing these debates and making them relevant to the broader intellectual history of postwar Japan. To students of Japanese postwar history, this book will serve as a case-study of the way one

man negotiated his wartime past. It resonates with other recent works on postwar memory such as Yoshikuni Igarashi's *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970* (2000). Both works show that the problem of Japan's wartime past is not a question of *whether* it has been remembered--indeed, it has not been forgotten or swept under the rug as many have suggested. Rather, it is a question of *how* it has been remembered and understood over time. Both books also emphasize how memories of the war were inflected through the experience of Occupation, often producing great distortions and contributing to notions of Japanese "victimhood."

Rosenfeld argues that Hino's work, especially his postwar writing, deserves more attention and critical acclaim that it has received. Two novels, especially, merit greater attention: *Before and After the Revolution*, mentioned above, and *Youth and Mud* (*Seishun to Deinei*, 1950). *Youth and Mud* is situated in the final, desperate year of the war and describes one of the worst land battles of the war--the battle of Imphal in Burma. Rosenfeld suggests that this novel was Hino's attempt to "subvert" his wartime writings; that it was the book he really wanted to write during the war. Whether one accepts this interpretation or not, Rosenfeld convinces us of the literary importance of this book that describes a senseless battle in which almost all men were lost and no ground gained. Unlike Hino's wartime books, this one is highly critical and filled with scenes that would never have survived the wartime censors. It depicts the Japanese military command blindly sacrificing soldiers' lives to a hopeless cause. It describes war crimes committed by individual soldiers as well as homoerotic situations among the soldiers. In this and many other novels written after 1945, Rosenfeld notes, Hino abandoned the unified first-person narrative style that marked his wartime writings, writing in a more fragmented manner and from multiple perspectives. Rosenfeld reads this as evidence that Hino had

lost his "wartime confidence in transcendent truth, a national narrative that justified the war and the unavoidable cruelties that war produced" (p. 76). Rosenfeld's insightful analyses, illustrated with excerpts from Hino's texts, make one wish more of Hino's works were available in English translation. *Wheat and Soldiers* was translated by Ishimoto Shidzue in the 1930s but is no longer in print. An excerpt of *Soil and Soldiers* (translated *Earth and Soldiers*) is available in Donald Keene's anthology of modern Japanese literature and has many potential uses in undergraduate survey courses.[3]

As mentioned above, the single weakness of *Unhappy Soldier* is Rosenfeld's tendency to try to resolve Hino's contradictions. Hino's claims of wartime resistance fail to convince as do Rosenfeld's suggestions, in his final chapter, that Hino's wartime novels betrayed ambiguity about the war in their willingness to depict Chinese victims sympathetically in places. These are small gestures when measured against the overall tone and message of the wartime works. Rosenfeld's great accomplishment is showing us a man who was complex, often self-contradictory, and filled with ambiguities. Until his death, Hino defended his beloved "soldiers"--although in his postwar works he recognized the atrocities some committed and began writing of them as individuals rather than a collective unit. He was bitter until the end about being "purged" after the war and about his treatment by members of the literary establishment, many of whom he accused of "opportunistic hypocrisy" for so quickly abandoning their wartime beliefs after defeat. Yet his postwar writings suggest that he experienced profound doubts about the war and even guilt about his own participation in it. He continually defended his wartime writings, even as he reclassified, edited, and enhanced them in postwar editions. Mapping these contradictions is Rosenfeld's most important contribution and ultimately more useful for understanding how Hino Ashihei, like many people

in postwar Japan, sought to come to terms with a wartime past rendered problematic by defeat.

Notes

[1]. Donald Keene, ed., *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature in the Modern Era* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1984), p. 918.

[2]. Ibid, p. 926.

[3]. See Donald Keene, ed., *Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology* (New York: Grove Press, 1956), pp. 357-365.

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