

Leith Morton. *The Alien Within: Representations of the Exotic in Twentieth-Century Japanese Literature.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009. ix + 257 pp. \$56.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8248-3292-6.



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Leith Morton's recent book *The Alien Within: Representations of the Exotic in Twentieth-Century Japanese Literature* provides a fresh look at the exotic as expressed in the literature and belles-lettres of Japan. His approach, which is informed by the groundbreaking work on the alien by Marina Warner, goes well beyond an examination of the most obvious examples of the alien in literature, namely representation of foreigners and other Others. Rather, as Morton writes, "[t]his book focuses more on the inside than the outside; that is, I am concerned with how modern Japanese writers discovered the foreign, the exotic, or even the alien within themselves, in some cases within their own bodies, in some cases within their own literary sensibilities" (p. 2). In this respect, then, Morton's work examines hybridity and how the Other in this larger sense was internalized through the adoption of various modernist techniques and the use of heretofore taboo themes.

Morton sets up his work as a series of case studies, each of which show some ways in which "the notion of the alien has intruded" (p. 5) into

twentieth-century Japanese literature. He deliberately rejects the notion that his study provides a representative sample. Rather, through a rather idiosyncratic but appealing selection of case studies, he is able to provide insights into the evolving Japanese consciousness and literary expression. His examples include such notable authors as Tsuboyuchi Shôyô, the poet Yosano Akiko, Izumi Kyôka, Tanizaki Jun'ichirô, Arishima Takeo, and the contemporary writer Murakami Haruki. He also includes two chapters on Ôshiro Tatsuhiko, perhaps the best-known Okinawan writer.

Since, in essence, his work considers translation in the broadest sense, it is only fitting that he begins with a longitudinal study of Tsuboyuchi Shôyô's translations of Shakespeare. Shôyô (1859-1935), perhaps best remembered for his work on literary criticism (*Shôsetsu Shinzui* [The essence of the novel],) and aesthetics, was also a novelist, playwright, and indefatigable translator of the works of William Shakespeare. Morton examines the evolution of Shôyô's approach to translation of the Bard. In his first Shakespeare

translation (*Julius Caesar*, in 1884) Shôyô deliberately employed a style (*impontai-jôruri* style) that would be familiar to Japanese readers, thus domesticating Shakespeare's language for the benefit of the audience. By the first decade of the twentieth century, Shôyô's approach to translation had evolved. No longer deeming earlier solutions sufficient, Shôyô began to move toward an approach that blended poetic rhythms with vernacular prose. By 1910, he had formulated a series of rules for translation (pp. 23-25). In Morton's words, "at this stage in his career, Shôyô was chiefly concerned with 'naturalizing' the text so that it seems to read as if it were 'at home' in Japanese, as his admonitions against using 'translationese' demonstrate. The exotic becomes merely another version of the familiar" (p. 25). By 1916, Shôyô's approach had evolved again, as he began to translate for performance (not text). With this shift, his language choices approach the colloquial vernacular more closely, but eschew language that would falsely identify Ophelia and Juliet with café waitresses and Lady Macbeth with a brothel madam (p. 26). Writes Morton: "The translator should have available all the lexical resources that Japanese can offer--elegant language, archaic diction, argot, slang--whatever is necessary" (p. 27). With this, the exotic, as represented by alien syntax or a mash-up of Japanese theatrical traditions, is superseded by a predominance of colloquial Japanese. What follows is a comparison of selected passages from a number of Shôyô's *Hamlet* translations. The comparisons usefully show the evolution of style, and his growing concern to create good performance texts, which however, "are now almost unreadable for Japanese students.... In this sense, the alien that was once domesticated or, more properly, refigured in a different form not as alien as the original form undoubtedly is, becomes alien once again to an audience from a different age and needs refiguring and retranslating all over again" (p. 42)

Morton follows up with two chapters on the poet Yosano Akiko (1878-1942), whose poetry he

considers revolutionary on multiple overlapping levels. Akiko came of age as a poet at a time when Japanese poets were actively engaged in a debate about the merits of old-style vs. new-style poetics. Reformists found nothing "novel or interesting" (p. 45) about "old school poetry," rather seeing it as trite. One of the most notable figures in this reform was Yosano Hiroshi (Tekkan), a married poet who would soon become Akiko's husband. He insisted that poets not simply follow the old rules, but publish new-style "poetry about our own egos" (p. 47). What Morton demonstrates in the remainder of the chapter is as revolutionary as the changes were, as represented by Akiko's mature verse, namely that they did not spring into being *sui generis*. Rather it is in the complex way that Akiko incorporates past and present motifs and themes, and foreign and domestic models that her poetry is most revolutionary, and indeed, most conventional, as this process is continually invoked. Morton calls this the "process of renovation and recreation" (p. 61). In close readings of Yosano Akiko studies and of her poems, Morton reveals the rich palimpsest of image and influence, including Christian imagery, Victorian imagery, conventional *waka* motifs, and re-readings of each through the other, in what Morton states convincingly is "an explicitly ideological agenda, the agenda outlined by Yosano Tekkan when he founded the Tokyo Shinshisha (Tokyo New Poets Society).... We read with pleasure the poetry of the past, but we will not resile from cultivating anew the ground opened up by the ancients" (p. 71). In other words, Morton believes that the poets of the Shinshisha wrote poems such that the "intricate web of allusion spun by traditional waka poetics is augmented by a new web of allusion and reference" (p. 71).

Morton's second chapter on Yosano Akiko relates how she further revolutionized poetry by thematizing her own experience of giving birth. By giving voice to that formerly taboo theme in a series of essays Akiko furthers the redefinition of the female subject. Her blunt presentation of this

experience likens it to a form of battle, and a risk solely taken by women. In another collection, *Seigaiha* (Blue ocean waves, 1915), Akiko reflects on one difficult pregnancy, her second with twins, in which one of the twins was stillborn. In this collection, pregnancy itself is presented as a kind of demonic possession. Morton cites the following from the collection: “This time / my life in danger / burning mother / two fire gods / dwell in my womb” (p. 85). Or again, this time from the perspective of the stillborn baby: “The weak baby / was without strength / and died in the womb / fighting mother / fighting elder sister” (p. 89). Morton’s analysis of Akiko’s writings on childbirth and motherhood reveals how through her poetry Akiko was able to expand “the single self of Akiko into a much larger panoply of selves who challenged traditional taboos of self-defilement” (p. 90). As with the poems discussed in the previous chapter, these works employ this new kind of *honkadori*, or poetic response. Morton also reveals how this was in line with developments related to the ideological concerns with Japanese Naturalism.

The next two chapters take up the topic of the Gothic in twentieth-century Japanese literature. The first examines Gothic writings by Izumi Kyôka and Tanizaki Jun’ichirô, whose works easily fit the Gothic paradigm. The second looks at writings by Arishima Takeo, whose Gothic “cred” comes not from dark castles, madness, or evil spirits, but from the use of what Morton calls “melodramatic excess” or “overwrought language.” The Gothic mode varies but often has at its core an attempt to understand the uncanny, or those parts of the self that are ultimately unknowable. Morton’s discussion of Izumi Kyôka includes a lengthy discussion of “*Kôya hijiri*” (The holy man of Kôya, 1908), which is characterized ultimately as a terrifying journey as well as one towards Buddhist enlightenment. When discussing Tanizaki, Morton focuses on sadomasochistic irony and doubled narratives, two elements that characterize much of Tanizaki’s fiction. He first analyzes Tanizaki’s ear-

ly short masterpiece, “*Shisei*” (The tattooer, 1911), in which a famous tattoo artist who secretly loves causing pain, tattoos an elaborate dragon on a young girl’s back. Upon its completion, the master becomes the slave, and Seikichi becomes the slave to his own creation. The sadomasochistic irony of this reversal also includes an exoticized appraisal of Japan’s Edo era. In this respect, Tanizaki makes the familiar foreign by treating it as the exotic Orientalist Other. Morton then discusses “*Jinmen-so*” (The carbuncle with a human face, 1918). This story features an elaborate embedded story (of a movie) about a cruel woman who discovers on her leg a carbuncle with a human face. The face is that of a beggar who kills himself and curses the woman who tricked him. Eventually the carbuncle reveals itself, driving Ayame mad after which she kills herself, the carbuncle “still cackling” (p. 121). The realistic frame story features a conversation between an actress Yurie (the one featured in the film, though she doesn’t remember making it) and a translator about how the film is considered haunted. Morton demonstrates how the doubled narration of the story permits an ironic exploration of the human psyche. He writes, “In a very real sense Ayame is the alien within the real self of the famous actor Utagawa Yurie (who is of course, a fictional character created by Tanizaki)” (p. 124). In this respect, Yurie/Ayame embodies both the “monstrous-feminine” and its polar opposite, the “healthy neurosis-free woman of 1920s Japan” (p. 124).

Morton’s next chapter explores the “melodramatic excess” of the writer Arishima Takeo (1878-1923), viewing it as a kind of naturalizing of an alien form of writing. It was in this respect that Arishima was both Gothic and modern. Through analysis of two shorter works by Arishima, Morton is able to show how the use of overwrought metaphor and simile is integral to the works to a greater degree than one might at first think. He quotes from Peter Brooks writing on the Western melodramatic: “Within an apparent context of ‘realism’ and the ordinary, they seem in fact to be

staging a heightened and hyperbolic drama.... [T]hey seem to place their characters at the point of intersection of primal ethical forces and to confer on the characters' enactments a charge of meaning referred to the clash of these forces" (p. 131). A brief but pointed analysis of two Arishima works reveals this to be true. The use of excess and over-exaggeration creates central tensions or dissonances of various sorts. This is clearest in Morton's discussion of "*Gasu*" (Fog, 1918) a short story about a ship that finds itself surrounded by a thick fog. The fog "assumes a quality of menace, a sinister quality that points to a darkness, a deeper fear that is the source of the narrator's apprehensions.... [namely] death" (p. 136). Nothing much happens in the story: the fog surrounds the ship; it stops, and when the fog clears, the passengers see how narrowly they avoided running aground. But, within the story, the fog is the source of terrifying anxiety presented in fantastically overwrought language. The exaggerated metaphors that are used to describe the narrator's observations of the fog capture his psychological turmoil.

In the following two chapters, Morton turns his attention to Ôshiro Tatsuhiko (b. 1925), a writer from Okinawa. In these chapters he looks at how the literature of Okinawa is "Other" to Japanese literature. To do so, he explores the trope of the *yuta* (female Okinawan shaman), and the *norô* (mantic woman) as it is used within Ôshiro's work. For Ôshiro, the *yuta* "is a direct result of the anguish caused by the loss of identity suffered by modern Okinawans ... trapped in the triangle of Okinawan, Japanese, and American culture" (p. 149). The novella *Zushigame* (Funerary urn, 1986) discussed in the chapter is about the psychic struggle that a character engages in once she discovers that her husband has been unfaithful and has fathered a son with another woman. This personal struggle is not limited to her husband's infidelity, but also includes the wife's struggles with fertility, and the tension between herself and her mother-in-law. Moreover, the personal struggle is

intertwined with a larger one, namely, the family's need to locate the lost remains of the unfaithful husband's father so as to heal an illness that the illegitimate baby has. This loss is linked not only to earlier family dynamics but also to the heavy casualties suffered by Okinawans in the Pacific War. Etsuko, the wife, becomes increasingly unhinged from reality, and begins to experience something that may be called hallucinations, or perhaps divine visions. By the end, Etsuko, in response to the traumatic events, has herself become a *yuta*.

In the final case study, Morton explores the Sydney Olympics with the contemporary writer Murakami Haruki. *Shidonii!* (Sydney! 2001) provides an in-depth look at Murakami's observations of Sydney and the Olympics. As is well known, travel literature holds a respected place within the Japanese literary canon. Through the context of a journey away, the writer learns not only of the Other but also of the self. Murakami's travel writing is less a discovery of the exotic, but, in the words of Philip Gabriel, a "rediscovery of familiar through the process of defamiliarization" (quoted, p. 187). For Morton, traveling allows for change within the traveler's psyche: "It creates a border area (*henkyô*) inside oneself: a journey ... is an internal journey, exploring the alien within ourselves" (p. 187). Murakami's lengthy travel diary consists of some twenty-plus detailed entries, observations garnered from personal observations and carefully curated reading (including that of three newspapers daily). Morton reflects positively on Murakami's observations of Australia and on his self-presentation as created within the pages of the work. For Morton, however, an Australian who himself has lived most of his life in Sydney, Murakami's Australia is a variant of the exotic Other, but one that is recognizable. With this, the book comes full circle. Self and Other need each other.

Morton's work on the alien in twentieth-century Japanese literature covers this topic from an

original perspective, namely how the alien or the exotic is made familiar. His choice of examples or case studies is interesting and valuable, though his arguments for each respective work are not equally successful, though always edifying. I found the most successful chapters to be those on Yosano Akiko. He situates his argument that Akiko creates new female subjectivities on carefully rendered close readings of her poetry. Morton's discussions of the Gothic were equally fascinating, but left me wanting a more in-depth discussion. Nevertheless, this work is a significant contribution to Japanese literary history and translation studies.

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