

NONFICTION AS DECONSTRUCTION: SHISHOUBETSU AND OE'S "TEACH US TO OUTGROW OUR MADNESS"

Bern MULVEY

Can a story such as Kenzaburo Oe's "Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness," which combines an obviously fictionalized narrative envelope with an internal storyline containing both real and fictionalized elements, be considered an example of creative nonfiction? Judging by most Western scholarship, the answer would be no. In an essay titled "Everything But the Truth," Fern Kupfer describes her response to learning that a former student (Chris) in her nonfiction class had falsified autobiographical detail in a submitted assignment, changing (among other things) his father from a "respected English instructor" into a "small-time hoodlum" :

Suddenly I wasn't just surprised—I was angry. I told her [Chris= girlfriend] to give a message to Chris that if he were ever back in town to watch out for me. I may have encouraged her to rethink a relationship with someone who was capable of such duplicity. (292)

Although perhaps a bit extreme in her reaction to this "lie," Kupfer's response helps underline the stakes for would-be writers of creative nonfiction. While Lehman (see also Hampl, 24; Sanders, 336) allows that "any literary text, whether fiction or nonfiction, even one's own memory of events, is arbitrated or 'crafted' in important ways, rendering impossible the simple equation of 'actuality'"(335), he also argues that nonfiction writers have specific responsibilities vis-à-vis

their depiction of that actuality. Indeed, the decision to write nonfiction necessitates that writers enter into a “transactional” relationship with their readers, one wherein “readers gain equal power in creating a text and decide through research, reading, and intuition whether the author=s presentation is adequate to what the reader can learn of the facts” (Lehman, 336). ‘Betraying’ this relationship, as Kupfer suggests through his own response, is dangerous; nonfiction writers and readers are united mainly by their “loyalty” to the writer=s project—i.e., to his or her “decision” to write about the truth (Lehman, 335-6; Minot, 2-3), and react with dissatisfaction to the slightest “wind of phoniness” (Sanders, 331). However, in acknowledging the impossibility of a complete, perfectly objective delineation of actuality, Hampl, Lehmen and Sanders seemingly leave the door open for alternative definitions of creative nonfiction, ones prioritizing a different authorial focus than the one described above.

This paper begins with an examination of a Japanese definition of nonfiction, specifically the nonfiction tradition manifested in the ‘shishousetsu’ genre of novels. As the discussion below will make clear, the shishousetsu form allows, within certain constraints, the invention of both dialogue and ‘factual’ details, not to mention the utilization of POV shifts requiring intimate knowledge to which neither the narrator—nor the author—would have access. The result, ostensibly, is a more “honest” nonfiction, one more capable of revealing subtle, yet critical, “truths” about the only character able to be completely understood by any writer: i.e., the writer himself/herself. However, as exemplified by Oe’s “Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness,” Japanese authors have increasingly reacted against this traditional form, finding it overly—indeed fatally—constrictive. By examining where, and to what purpose, Oe violates the shishousetsu

conventions, I hope to illuminate not just the nature of the conflict but the underlying cultural differences which have resulted in this differing definition of “truth,” highlighting as well the strengths and weakness of the form itself.

On the surface, Japanese shishousetsu has a number of similarities with Western nonfiction. Foremost is the shared commitment to “factuality”—i.e., to obeying the rule that all nonfiction must seek to “reproduce reality” (Hijiya-Kirschner, 174). Like their western counterparts, shishousetsu authors utilize both “direct references—including mention of recent events—and allusions to reality that the reader can check at any time” (176). The events portrayed must have neither intentional “representative, symbolic character” nor political or philosophical overtones (185-6). On the contrary, shishousetsu authors focus on the often mundane reality of the narrator’s “everyday life,” relating only “what is of immediate concern” in the depicted period of that life. Specifically, the focus is on those details that illuminate both the narrator’s “specific relationship to the world” and “resulting basic outlook” (187), with the further (echoing Hampl and Sander above) admonition that “it is not objective reality that is being described but rather the first person who is experiencing and narrating it and his relationship to it” (185). Implicit in this are the inherent limitations of such a project—space, memory, and narrative constraints mean that not everything can be reproduced. Indeed, Suzuki is recognizing these limitations in his proposed definition of shishousetsu, calling it “a first-person narrative—whether or not written in the first or third person—that does not fully explain the protagonist’s personal situation or background” (61). Suzuki asserts further that shishousetsu authors write under “the assumption that the reader already has a knowledge of the protagonist/author’s career and background,” with the

reader=s willing “contextualization” of the work the key to its full understanding (Suzuki, 61). Hijiya-Kirschnerit argues similarly :

As a result, factuality does not depend on the actual relationship between literature and the reality portrayed, which would involve the consideration of many other factors, but on an agreement in the process of literary communication—the trust which the reader places in the textual version of reality created by the author’s use of certain textual ‘signals.’ (Hijiya-Kirschnerit, 174)

In other words, and similar to Leman’s description, Japanese shishousetsu writers, by describing themselves and their work as ‘shishousetsu,’ enter necessarily into a transactional relationship with the reader, one where “the reader plays a major role in completing the work” (Suzuki, 61). These authors provide textual “signals” of their intention to enter into such a relationship, usually by weaving overtly personal, autobiographical details into the early parts of the narrative. These details include, though are not limited to, allusions to particular localities (with which the reader is familiar at least in name) as well as to real people, particularly the friends, family members, and/or writer colleagues of the authors. The names of these people are often given obvious codes; as Hijiya-Kirschnerit notes as well (176), one of the attractions of the genre, besides the ability to “check” the authors’ facts (which, again, Lehman and Sanders see as a draw for Western readers as well), is the challenge of decoding of these names, finding their real life correlations.

However, there are a number of fundamental differences between shishousetsu and Western creative nonfiction, the most important one being the stipulation that the narrator/protagonist of a shishousetsu work must be “the author himself” (185). Superficially, this may not

appear to be much of a difference; indeed, as both Hampl and Sanders also note, autobiographical nonfiction (including the memoir) has many practitioners in the West as well. However, Japanese shishousetsu authors and critics assert a far more extreme point: that non-autobiographical—i.e., non-shishousetsu—writing cannot be considered nonfiction. In his study on the early development of the genre, Suzuki documents how Japanese writers came to see the shishousetsu form as not just another medium but the “ultimate medium,” the only tool adequate to the task of directly representing ‘true reality’”(32). Suzuki’s quote from Masao Kume (a famous Japanese writer and literary critic) is revealing:

In the final analysis, the basis of all art lies in the self [watakushi]. It follows that the form that expresses this “self” directly and frankly, without pretense and disguise, that is to say, the shishousetsu novel, should become the main path, the basis and essence of the art of prose. (Suzuki, 51)

Kume, along with a number of other Japanese writers of the period (1900-1950), was a strong supporter of Japanese Naturalism. These writers held revelations of “Truth” to be “the life and the motto” (Suzuki, 86) of the movement, and accordingly, rejected any “narrative contrivance” that impeded the delineation of this “Truth” (Fowler, 108). As Fowler also notes, they felt that the most “natural@ subject, the only possible source of honest revelation, was necessarily one’s own life, plainly described. For if nature was synonymous with personal experience, it “followed that the writer=s task was to observe himself. Writing, then, was an experiment in self-portraiture, and the author became his own hero” (Fowler, 108).

Interestingly, both Suzuki and Fowler see this impulse towards

glorifying an indigenous, ostensibly “superior” literary form as part of the overall Japanese trend towards nationalism in the period leading up to World War II, beginning as it does after Japan’s initial military victory over the West in 1905 (with the publication of Katai’s “Futon”), with the evolving codification of the shishousetsu form mirroring the development of a standardized Japanese language (Suzuki, 31, 43). Nationalism perhaps explains the extreme nature of some of claims of the movement. Suzuki, for instance, shares the famous anecdote of Naoya Shiga’s criticism of Rousseau, who was judged insufficiently self-referential:

I don’t know how great Rousseau is. I don’t believe that he is that great. I thought that even now I was no worse than Rousseau, and that I was more interesting than he in many ways. It is sufficient if a man [ningen]—or at least oneself [jibun]—commits one’s life to exploring what is in oneself. To mine what is in oneself—that is everything. (95)

Fowler relates how many shishousetsu writers considered their form to be the ultimate extension of not just naturalism, but all types of literary expression. Writers like Katai claimed they could intuitively sense breaks, no matter how subtle, from the reporting of autobiographical experience:

What struck me most was the futility of imagination. None of the stories spun from fantasy have any authority or any power to move the reader. Whenever I came across a fine passage in one of them, I had no difficulty surmising that here the author was not writing from imagination at all. The ability to write the truth untainted by fabrication, no matter how slight—or should I say, to achieve a state of mind in which it becomes possible to write in such a way—

this is the source from which a new literary spring shall well. (Fowler, 108)

Implicit in these comments is how, from an early period in the development of the genre, >non-autobiographical= came to equate 'fabrication,' in the most negative sense of that word. Given this, it is perhaps understandable that shishousetsu was felt to be the only form capable of revealing the subtle, yet critical, "truths" so necessary to art, mostly because of the honesty ostensibly inherent in the autobiographical focus.

Whatever the source, shishousetsu's rigid adherence to an autobiographical narrator/protagonist has a number of other stylistic consequences. As much as possible (the following is condensed from Hijiya-Kirschner, 174-190), the world of the individual work must be identical with the narrator's world, isolated and cut off. Unlike the memoir, no self-observation or self-criticism, nor any implications of either a past predating or a future beyond the confines of the narrative, are permitted, for including such details would destroy "the illusion that the work has been created parallel to the events described, that the active and narrative first person are identical—something that is not possible in practical terms" (182). For similar reasons, the tone must be egocentric and even arrogant, without an overt desire to entertain or enlighten the reader. This entails that there be no "discursive explanations of the first-person narrator's character, his appearance, or the motives for his actions," for such details "would betray to the reader that the author and first-person narrator was aware of him, that the narrator was not spontaneously putting down his experiences on paper but processing them" (187). Likewise, though perhaps less understandably, there can be no trace of a process of development in the plot; indeed, the idea that a hero

could experience significant personal growth over the course of a short story (or even a novel) seemed absurd to many Japanese—hence, Hijiya-Kirschner's observation that the shishousetsu hero must seem “to ‘learn’ nothing at all from his story” (283). Not following these precepts risked alienating the readers, who would sense that the details presented in the story were fictionalized and therefore “falsified.”

Given the autobiographical requirement, not to mention the need to avoid all appearance of fictionalization, the fact that both narrative invention and the inclusion of POV shifts are also permissible will seem, on superficial examination, to be contradictory. However, deeper analysis shows that these become acceptable, within certain constraints, only because of the differing nature of the transactional relationship enacted between shishousetsu authors and their readers. While, as delineated above, shishousetsu shares with Western nonfiction a similar commitment to “truth,” the focus in Japan is never on the “objective reality that is being described” *per se*; rather, shishousetsu's readers read in order to learn more both about “the first person who is experiencing and narrating” that reality “and his relationship to it” (Hijiya-Kirschner, 185). Moreover, reader expectations *vis-a-vis* that narrator necessarily focus more on the sincerity and veracity of the personal revelations made by the author than on what is revealed about either the physical setting or time period of the story in question. Hence, fictionalizing details and/or utilizing multiple points of view—as long as this usage does not contradict the “system of order” (i.e., as long as it “support[s] the point of view and the value judgments of the focus figure”)—are not only allowed but encouraged (Hijiya-Kirschner, 272; see, as well, the critical reaction to examples of this practice on pages 279-80 and 288-89).

As alluded to early, another constraint of the genre was that the ideal narrator/protagonist of a shishousetsu work must be egocentric, often to the point of arrogance. This “arrogance,” however, should not be confused with elitism; on the contrary, the typical narrator is obviously flawed, for “honesty” in the shishousetsu genre—as noted by Fowler, Hijiya-Kirschner, Oe, and Suzuki as well—quickly became equated with revelations of both imperfection and maladjustment. Obsessive in his irrationality, the author/narrator is generally depicted as a “lachrymose narcissist,” a “maladjusted egoist” caught in an act of defiance (Hijiya-Kirschner, 278). Often unlikable (or at least pitiable), this unlikely hero “presents himself as the victim even when he himself has created the situation that makes him suffer” (188). Indeed according to Fowler, Hijiya-Kirschner, Suzuki and Yamamoto, one of the pleasures of reading the genre is the voyeuristic thrill, the feeling of superiority received from encountering individuals so blissfully unaware of their own flaws. Hijiya-Kirschner quotes Toyama Shigehiko in detail:

There may be some people of poor taste who find it interesting to eavesdrop on anybody at all, but in the long run we look for our opposite [...] Take a person who has grown up in a wealthy environment, whose career has run smoothly, whose life has contained no setbacks and who has become an important personality in the course of his life [...] Such a person cannot write a shishousetsu anyway, but even an autobiography would not be interesting to read. This does not mean that we enjoy another’s misfortunes, but, on the other hand, it would be impossible to live if we thought others were happier than ourselves. It is the case that we can live because we think,

however badly off I may be, there are people who are even unhappier. (288)

As these comments illustrate, successful shishousetsu stories typically elevate the readers to a position of moral or ethical ascendancy over the author; conversely, the author gains respect from the readers for having the courage to surrender this moral/ethical ascendancy publicly. Finally, it is important to note that respect for these acts of authorial "courage" was not only measurable in book sales (which continue to be substantial) but in literary awards as well. Indeed, until the mid-1980s, writing in the shishousetsu form was "the best way to get a literary award," with young writers operating in other genres typically admonished to switch over if they wanted to have a chance to win prizes or other forms of public recognition (Hijiya-Kirschner, 124).

However, the preeminent position of shishousetsu in Japanese letters, never completely unchallenged, has in recent years become the target of increasing criticism from both authors and literary critics. First, the Japanese fixation on the shishousetsu is seen as having "distorted" the proper development of alternative forms of storytelling, whether in fiction or in nonfiction (Oe, 99-100; Suzuki, 4-5, 64). Oe relates how he, looking in the late 1960s for Japanese literary models which would enable him discuss his relationship with his handicapped son, found that "Shizen na yarikata ha, iwayuru shishousetsu no houhou datta deshō" [For writing in a natural voice, only what was called the shishousetsu method was available] (99). This is not a new observation: as early as the 1930s, Yokomitsu was arguing that the shishousetsu novel, which "had been widely recognized as 'genuine literature,' had led the Japanese novel into a cul-de-sac, a deformed, abstract world" (Suzuki, 56). However, Oe's prominence

in the literary community (both domestic and international)—i.e., his status as a successful insider—gave his comments greater weight. Indeed, his bold declaration in 1985 that “Shikashi boku ni ha (jitsu no tokoro konrinzai, to tsuyoi kotoba wo tsukaitai kurai ni) shishousetsu wo kaku ishi ga nakatta no deshita” [However, for me (and to be honest I want to use stronger language than just “never”) there was never an inclination to use the shishousetsu form] (99), was a major event in Japanese letters (e.g., Hijiya-Kirschnerreit alludes to it on 123-24).

Oe's emphatic refusal to write shishousetsu arises out of his rejection of the “narrator = author” construct, especially the additional requirement that the narrator-author be revealed as somehow deformed or maladjusted. Again, this also is not necessarily a new criticism: Nakamura in 1950 criticizes the elevation of a “deformed I” as the Japanese literary ideal (Suzuki, 4-5), and even proponents such as Ito admit that their “positive view of the shishousetsu novel is based on the premise that the essential core of the human self, whether it be that of a Japanese or a European, is ‘ugliness’” (Suzuki, 60). However, by the late 1960s, the inflexibilities of the form—i.e., that the subject matter had to be not just autobiographical, but confessional in the worst sense of that word—had led to an absurd one-upmanship among shishousetsu authors. Subtly poignant revelations of character—intensely personal yet somehow universal at the same time—of the type seen in Katai's “Futon” (generally considered to be the first shishousetsu story) were no longer possible, replaced instead by disclosures of an increasingly idiosyncratic and objectionable nature. Discussing this phenomenon, Oe describes how one popular shishousetsu novel of the 1960s opens with the author relating how he brutally beat his misbehaving little brother with a

stick until the blood ran from his head, adding "Soko made ha nihon no shishousetsu ni mo ooi ni ariuru ke-su desu ga" [this, of course, is just the kind of case you see too often in Japanese shishousetsu now] (99). Oe feels that shishousetsu authors were running out of topics; the "mine of oneself" nearing exhaustion, they were turning perforce to bizarre, even deviant, revelations. Furthermore, an unhealthy pattern was emerging, one which saw the author almost invariably assume the role of 'recalcitrant-sinner' to the readers' "father-confessor." As Hijiya-Kirschner also writes:

The problem that remains with such confessions is that they become ends in themselves and not the means of personal development; public posturing as one's own prosecutor guarantees pardon. (275)

In other words, the shishousetsu story too often was becoming a confessional box, where the author asked forgiveness for sins both real and imagined.

However, as Oe admits in his acceptance address upon receiving the Nobel Prize (see also Oe, 100), complete rejection of the shishousetsu tradition is impossible; instead, what he hopes to achieve through his rebellion is an amalgam, a forced evolution of the nonfiction form which combines the best of the traditional elements with a new focus, not to mention a greater flexibility in handling the subject matter. Tachibana, writing about this speech, offers the following analysis:

Oe's image of "clinging to the very end of the line" ("saikoubi ni tsuranaru") is significant in several ways. At one level, it implies a customary Japanese expression of modesty; he feels honored to join this line of writers, to whom he attributes great value for their sincerity and humility, their willingness to bear pain, their sense

of international responsibility, and their desire for reconciliation (...). At another level, and more significant here, Oe's concept of clinging to the "end of the line" acknowledges that a postwar literature that derives from direct memory must inevitably be approaching its termination. (250)

In other words, Oe recognizes that a number of shishousetsu conventions—specifically the utilization of a sincere narrator who is not economically, morally or ethically superior to the readers—retain value. Moreover, as Hijiya-Kirschner notes as well, Oe does not reject writing from direct memory *per se*:

Even Oe Kenzaburo declares that the effect of a work is totally dependent on whether it deals with real experiences when remarking on a shishousetsu by Kusaka Naoki, in which the author writes about his leprosy, that the book would mean little for him without factuality, would amount to only "mundane syntax" and be unable to stimulate any emotion: "The emotion would not arise if the author were not identical with this 'I' and did not suffer from the Hansen disease." (290)

However, Oe does hope to create a new nonfiction, one which will retain the above elements yet allow for more of a separation between author and narrator, enabling the author to closely examine several characters simultaneously (99). Furthermore, and indeed most importantly, Oe wants to escape from the "narrator = author = maladjusted individual" paradigm, hoping instead to focus on personal growth, on characters who can and do change, however humble their beginnings and incremental their improvements. Doing so, he argues, will allow even nonfiction authors to address what he feels should be

the “key note” of all works of literature:

Ningen ha kueki shinakereba narazu, kanashimaneba narazu, soshite narawaneba narazu, wasureneba narazu, soshite kaette yukanakereba naranuBsoko kara yatte kita kurai tani e to, kueki wo mata atarashiku hajimeru tame ni.
(101)

[Human beings must suffer hardship, yet they must also be able to mourn, and they must be allowed to learn, to not forget, and finally, they must be allowed to return—from the dark valley they have just come, so that they can begin the process anew.]

To summarize, Oe seeks to combine the shishousetsu author’s sincerity and commitment to relating “truth” with the fiction author’s ability to address universal themes and explore the psyche of multiple characters. This project—which Oe calls the most difficult he has ever undertaken or imagined (100)—has as one of its fruits the novella “Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness.”

“Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness,” which tells of the close relationship between a somewhat obsessive father and his mentally handicapped son, employs a number of shishousetsu conventions. First, and in the best traditions of the shishousetsu genre, Oe provides the classic signals of a desire to have one’s work read autobiographically: both the real name (“Mori”—symbolizing ‘forest,’ ‘darkness’ and ‘death’) and nickname (“Eeyore”) of the handicapped child are clearly plays on the names given to Oe’s actual son (whose real name—“Hikari”—means ‘clearing,’ ‘light,’ and ‘life,’ and whose nickname is “Pooh”). Second, as would have been known by most Japanese readers, large sections are completely autobiographical. Oe’s son in real life is mentally handicapped. He was born under the

conditions described in the story (see 176), down to the wording of the choice given to him by the doctor (Nathan discusses some of the biographical connections in his introduction, pages xvi-xviii; see also Oe, 1985, 97-99). Again in keeping with to the story, Oe's real life relationship with his son is exceedingly close, down to the detail that Oe apparently slept in the same room with him until a comparatively late age. The incidents relating to the hospital visits (186-196) are also based on fact. Finally, Hijjya-Kirschner's observation that a shishousetsu narrative generally focuses on an "act of defiance" by a "narcissistic" and "maladjusted" protagonist-hero appears very appropriate to this story as well. The protagonist's obsessive narcissism, revealed in both his fascination with appearance (note his reaction to seeing their reflections on 198) and need for his son's complete dependence on him, combines with a misplaced and almost delusional arrogance (e.g., his encounter with the police officer—see 180-81) to render him incapable of functioning constructively in society. These flaws, for instance, are what drive him to defy the doctor's verdict—i.e., that his son is unable to experience the outside world—and go to the zoo, with serious consequences.

However, and in a break unreconcilable to the shishousetsu form, Oe does not end the story with the incident at the zoo; instead, the narrative continues, ending with a series of long, reflective passages where the hero mourns, analyzes, and then appears to learn from the different events in the story (e.g., 213-14, etc.). A related, non-shishousetsu structural element is the conflict between the narrator and his mother, with which the story both begins and ends. This frame to the main narrative is obviously fictional (the bizarre letter from the mother, for instance, makes this very clear—see 174), contains several forays into the mother's mind (e.g., 173, 215) which

offer neither support for nor illumination of the psyche of the narrator, and indeed, these asides present information which challenges both the point of view and the value judgments of that narrator. Other departures from the shishousetsu convention include multiple intrusions by an omniscient narrator who is separate from the hero (e.g., 186, 208, etc.), and a fictionalized encounter with hoodlums at the polar bear exhibit in a zoo (203-208).

Unfortunately, documenting structural and stylistic similarities and differences between Oe's novella and the shishousetsu form does little to answer the difficult question of why—i.e., why does Oe appear to signal that he intends the work to be read as shishousetsu, only to undermine that impression with repeated departures from the form? Tachibana suggests that Oe's motivation is to shock, parody, and even criticize:

By presenting untrustworthy narrators who live in grotesque worlds, Grass and Oe shock readers and distance or estrange them from the narrator and the story. Moreover, by parodying traditional literary forms such as the Bildungsroman and shishousetsu, they criticize both the modern world and an unthinking acceptance of the past. (162)

Certainly, examples in the story of apparent parody of the form can be found. Indeed, while shishousetsu heroes can be grotesque and untrustworthy, they must also be accurate reflections of the author; that the physical description (i.e., an enormously fat man who dwarfs the doctor, see 191) of the hero doesn't just differ from but is the opposite of the (short and somewhat slight) author suggests a conscious decision on his part to mock the forms of the genre while appearing to follow them. Similarly, while care is taken to portray

the narrator as a maladjusted individual, it is important to note that the most damning details—e.g., those provided in the letter from the mother (174), not to mention the revelations of character seen in the incident at the polar bear exhibit—are also the most obviously fictionalized elements of the story, completely negating the value of these revelations (as well as highlighting, perhaps, the artificiality of the shishousetsu convention itself). Finally, it seems clear that many of the more poignant moments in the story, such as the hero's repeated attempts to get hospital care for his son, can be read as social criticism as well.

However, on closer examination, it seems clear that Oe's breaks from the autobiographical narration correspond with moments of particularly high stress for the hero—as he does during his visit to the zoo (see particularly 207-8), the hero literally breaks down, becoming unable to continue the narrative under his own power. At such moments, the narrator must step in, either as interpreter or arbitrator, to help the hero—an accurate representation, perhaps, of the grieving process, mirroring the interventions that occur during moments of great emotional upheaval, when that side of ourselves still possessive of logic and reason acts to try to bring us peace. Hence, it could be argued that Oe is still keeping true, if not to the modern forms of the genre, at least to its spirit. After all, the original intention of the shishousetsu authors was to find ways to convey the 'truth' of their experiences; in "Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness," the narrative breakdowns combine with the factual departures to disorientate and confuse the readers, forcing them to share the emotional experience even as they read the physical narration of it. Finally, even the artificial frame provides important thematic contributions: while it does, in a somewhat abrupt fashion, prepare the reader for the factual

departures to follow, it serves the more important (for Oe) function of bringing thematic closure to the piece, allowing the protagonist-hero to demonstrate that he has learned, has grown as a person. Specifically, it is this hard earned knowledge, this new self-awareness that enables the hero to confront his mother again, achieving a reconciliation of sorts with her, not to mention a greater sense of peace with respects to his father's death.

Indeed, in a sense, Oe's novella is more deconstruction than parody, illuminating the limitations of the shishousetsu form while at the same time articulating the universal theme so dear to Oe. Human beings, Oe seems to be saying, do evolve, do grow both as individuals and as groups, however slowly and unevenly. Furthermore, this real-life process is sometimes neither linear nor logical, hence not necessarily amenable to representation under the constraints of a single form, even the shishousetsu. Finally, and in keeping with Oe's philosophical beliefs, this process is depicted as open-ended, eternal. For in the end, the hero experiences both loss and suffering yet transcends them, learning from both, growing ever stronger, ready to return home and face whatever new challenges await.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Fowler, E. (1988). *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shishousetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction*. Berkeley: UP.
- Hampl, P. (1999). Memory and Imagination. In R. L. Root & M. Steinberg (Eds.), *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction* (pp. 297-305). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

- Hijiya-Kirschner, I. (1996). *Rituals of Self-Revelation: Shishousetsu as Literary Genre and Socio-Cultural Phenomenon*. Harvard: UP.
- Katai, T. (1981). *The Quilt and Other Stories*. (K. Henshall, Tran.). New York: Columbia UP.
- Kupfer, F. Everything But the Truth? (1999). In R. L. Root and M. Steinberg (Eds.), *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction* (327-342). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Lehman, D. Defining a Rough Terrain: Weighing the Implications of *Nonfiction*. *Narrative* 9 (3), pp. 334-342.
- Minot, S. (2002). *Literary Nonfiction: The Fourth Genre*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Oe, K. (1977). *Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness*. (J. Nathan, Tran.). New York: Grove Press.
- Oe, K. (1985). *Shousetsu no Takurami, Chi no Tanoshimi* [Tricks of the Novel, the Delights of Knowledge]. Tokyo: Shinchousha.
- Sanders, S. R. (1999). The Singular First Person. In R. L. Root & M. Steinberg (Eds.), *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction* (pp. 369-77). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Suzuki, T. (1996). *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*. Stanford: UP.
- Tachibana, R. (1988). *Narrative as Counter-Memory: A Half-Century of Postwar Writing in Germany and Japan*. New York:UP.
- Yamamoto, T. (1966). *Shishousetsu Sakkaron* [Discourse on Shishousetsu Authors]. Tokyo: Shinbisha.