Contexts and 'Con-textuality' of Minae Mizumura's *Honkaku-Shosetsu*

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> An old photograph in a cheap frame hangs on a wall of the room where I work. ...it reminds me that it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time.
>
> — Salman Rushdie

Home is lost for most of us, for those who are physically and temporally displaced from the place of origin. A home, which is reclaimed and reconstructed by imagination, cannot stand alone, but exists only in a process of signification and interaction with the here and now. The novels of Minae Mizumura, who grew up and received her secondary and higher education mostly in the United States, manifest such strong longings for home and an awareness of the impossibility of its attainment at the same time. To borrow Rushdie's famous words concerning diaspora, Mizumura, 'not [. . .] capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost, [...] create[s] fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands' (*Imaginary Homelands* 10). In Mizumura's novels, homelands thus created as fiction often stay securely fixated and contained somewhere beyond, on the other side of national, cultural or linguistic borders, or in the realms of the past. In this sense, terms such as 'transnational', 'transcultural', and 'diasporic' may not do justice to the disposition of the writer and the nature of her writing, though they are frequently used to describe them. Such modifiers may well evoke the image of diminishing significance of the border, but in fact, on the contrary, Mizumura's texts indicate a strong drive and orientation for protecting apparently significant cultural differences as they are, and for inheriting lost or forgotten forms of artistic and social practice as a respectful tradition.

Minae Mizumura spent over twenty years in the United States before coming back to Japan in the 1990s. She may have tried to efface herself in the foreign environment, but more importantly, she did not wish to erase her own foreignness in the predominantly white New England. She acquired English all right, despite her sustained antagonism to it, while at the

same time growing up to be a self-confessed patriot, cultivating an exceptional passion for the Japanese language and literary classics.[1] Then she became a writer in Japanese. As a scholar she crossed the border of her native tongue into French as well as English,[2] but as a creative writer, she remained more or less loyal to the national literature of Japan.

Mizumura has so far published three novels, *Zoku Meian, Shi-Shosetsu* and *Honkaku-Shosetsu.* All of them are, on one level, attempts to locate and recover a lost home in somewhat outdated forms of Japanese literature, in the forms of themes and textual processes. Her debut novel, *Zoku Meian*, is a sequel to Soseki Natsume's unfinished novel, *Meian.* Mizumura's second novel is a semi-autobiographical bilingual novel, titled *Shi-Shosetsu: From Left to Right,* in which the characters freely switch from English to Japanese and *vice versa.* Since the *shi-shosetsu*, or the 'I' novel, is a label applied to the characteristically Japanese style of auto-biographical writing, Mizumura's version in a way functions as a critique and revolutionary experiment on the tradition. It is sometimes taken to be a sign of a new direction or internationalizing trend in contemporary Japanese literature, that is, towards a literature that can be read in both Japanese and English. Paradoxically, however, the linguistic device will work in any other language except in an English translation which would nullify the gaps in the text. This means that the bilingual feature of the novel makes it less accessible to readers who live solely in English, and consequently less appealing to publishers in the United States, in which the novel is set. In the third novel, Mizumura continues her negotiation with forms of Japanese literature, this time by tackling the notion of *honkaku-shosetsu* (the real, anthentic, or orthodox novel), a term referring to the type of novel supposedly contrastive to the *shi-shosetsu.* The category has now long been forgotten but was once ardently discussed at the dawn of the history of 'modern' Japanese literature.

This article presents a reading of Mizumura's *Honkaku-Shosetsu*, focusing on its textuality and 'con-textuality': textuality is, as Foucault suggested,[3] the way words of the text are understood and given meanings in specific socio-cultural contexts; and what I call 'con-textuality', based on John Thieme's notion of 'con-text',[4] means the textuality that surfaces particularly when the text is read vis-à-vis a pre-text, that is, a text against which it has been written. One of the pre-texts Mizumura most overtly refers to is Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights.* Therefore, the first part of the essay will be devoted to a comparison between the two novels. In the second part, I examine what position the text represents in relation to other texts and literary conventions, and discuss the significance of Mizumura's use of the *shi-shosetsu* and the *honkaku-shosetsu* as guiding concepts for the making of the novel, and also as the key device

for enabling somewhat deconstructionist approaches to the literary genres as well as nostalgia and reality. On one level, the novel is an earnest attempt to encapsulate a phase in Japan's past in a reproduced *honkaku-shosetsu* mode, practiced by someone who has been physically and temporally estranged from the novel's site of action and the literary tradition with which it intends to align itself; but at the same time, the novel's structural duality, involving disparities and disruptions in terms of time, location, language and literary convention, embodies the impossibility of such containment of the past and enclosure of the fictional world. I will discuss this point mainly in the third part of this essay, focusing on the role of Fumiko, the character and narrator in command of the innermost story and core of the novel.

The article concludes that Mizumura's *Honkaku-Shosetsu* manages to integrate opposing notions developed around literature and culture into an organic whole. Most notable of this process is the way the divides between literary genres and distinctions between fiction and reality are dissolved or destabilized, to reveal the situation of the contemporary novel in which texts are constantly exposed to potentials of other modes of expression as well as multiple viewpoints. Although this is driven home in a highly critical, tactful manner, the result nevertheless succeeds in evoking an acute sense of nostalgia for a closed, schematized literary universe made up of patterns. This is, I argue, a rare quality of Minae Mizumura, who no doubt straddles nations, cultures and languages, across borders which are inevitably unstable and porous, but on the other hand strives to construct a home verbally on the other side of an imagined and perhaps persistant borders of various kinds.

Honkaku-Shosetsu and *Wuthering Heights*

Honkaku-Shosetsu is a novel in two parts. The first section, approximately one quarter of the text, is titled 'A Long, Long Story before the *Honkaku-Shosetsu* Begins'. Here the writer/narrator, Minae Mizumura, tells of her stay in California, where she taught a semester at a college. In this section of the personal account, the reader comes to learn how the second and main part of the novel was conceived. She says it is based on a real story, a 'novel-like' story, which was miraculously delivered to her on a stormy night in California by a young man called Yusuke, a former editor of a Japanese literary journal. The second part, with no overarching title but headings for the sub-sections, is presented as if it were a stand-alone work, created by Minae in a manner of the *honkaku-shosetsu*.[5] In this second part, Yusuke is the narrator of the frame story, within which a woman called Fumiko tells him about the two families she had served as a maid.

The core of the novel is thus distanced from the reader by two frame narratives and firmly contained, it seems, in a rigid structure of a verbal construct. The structure is that of dualism, whose basic pattern embodies a contrast in terms of time, place, position, idea and style. The distinction between the first and second parts is designed so it more or less reflects contrasts between the present and the past, the subjective and the objective, the multicultural and the 'Japanese', the real and the fictional. The dichotomy, however, can never be so clear-cut or stable as it may appear. For example, the ostensible autonomy of the second part as a large-scale romantic drama reveals its undeniable links with the outside of the text, an outside not simply as the first part of the novel but also as the outer contexts besieging the book and the author. In this section I will discuss this effect of the novel's structure by focusing on its relationship with Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* as a pre-text.

The 'novel-like' story that forms the main part of *Honkaku-Shosetsu* is the love story of Yoko and Taro, which bears a striking similarity to the romance of Catherine and Heathcliff of *Wuthering Heights*. In interviews and essays, Mizumura declares her long-time admiration for the writer and her aspiration to write a novel like *Wuthering Heights*.[6] *Honkaku-Shosetsu* is a realization of this, as the writer-narrator acknowledges in the novel. It is not, however, a simple homage to Emily Brontë or a straightforward retelling of the tale. There is a twist given to the scheme in that Minae is persistent in denying that the story she has set forth to turn into a novel is in fact fiction. Thus she seems to be giving greater value to the power of the real over fiction, but at the same time she puts forth her view of literature as a chain of writers' imitating preceding texts of excellence. The story of Taro and Yoko, which Minae says was totally unexpectedly brought to her 'as if it were a blessing from Heaven', reminded her of the English novel by 'E. B.', which for her is a prototype of the novel on love. This, she thinks, is exactly why Taro's story sounded 'like a novel' when it was told to her (1: 170-171). Moreover, her act of writing in response to *Wuthering Heights* comes to acquire further significance, when it is pursued in the Japanese language by a writer who has experienced and seen changes in Japanese society and literature: the text then forms problematic relationships with Japanese literary conventions as well as its Western model, functioning to present critical comments on two sides.

> It means that what I am trying to do is nothing but to rewrite in Japanese a story in the Western novel. It may sound insolent, but I did not see any problem in the project itself. In fact, since the age of modernization where the Western civilization increasingly dominated the rest of the world and prompted Japan to produce more and more Japanese

> translations of novels of the West, a great number of Japanese novelists were swayed by the desire to rewrite stories in the Western novels in their own words: this is the desire for imitation which is the root of all forms of art, and with it the writers of the time contributed to the blooming of modern Japanese literature. This must have been true of writers who wrote in any non-Western language, not just Japanese. From this perspective, though my attempt may be part of a major movement of modern Japanese literature, it nevertheless can be regarded as an orthodox succession to the movement.(7) (1: 171)

It is confirmed in the passage that the novel-like story of Taro and Yoko, or the whole text of *Honkaku-Shosetsu*, has come into existence as a natural response to Emily Brontë, on one hand, and to modern Japanese literature, on the other. In this sense, the text exemplifies 'the desire for imitation which is the root of all forms of art', but on another level, it is suggested that the text's relationships with the preceding texts and conventions point to the issue of cultural hybridization as a form of modernization. I will address this issue by first exploring the difference between Mizumura's and Emily Brontë's texts, and then, in the next chapter, by examining Mizumura's position in relation to Japanese literary conventions.

As is suggested by the narrator, it is indeed a common practice of writers, not only those who write in non-Western languages but especially those originated in non-Western cultures, to write imitative or other responses to works in Western canon. It is also widely understood that such responses are not necessarily motivated by admiration and fascination, which literary criticism of the past two decades has illuminated in various ways. It would be worthwhile, therefore, to situate Mizumura's novel in the so-called postcolonial critical discourse to see how it positions itself in relation to *Wuthering Heights* and consider whether and how her response strengthens her tie with its pre-text, or functions as a critical re-reading of the pre-text and comments on what differentiates her own text from it.

Borrowing John Thieme's terms and ideas about postcolonial literature, one can see *Honkaku-Shosetsu* as one of the so-called 'con-texts' of *Wuthering Heights*. According to Thieme, 'con-texts' are 'postcolonial texts that engage in direct, if ambivalent, dialogue with the canon by virtue of responding to a classic English text'(4). 'To refer to the canonical texts to which they respond', he uses the term 'pre-text'(4). *Honkaku-Shosetsu* is not a postcolonial text in the sense that it was produced in an ex-/colony or by a writer whose direct and indirect experience of colonial history largely shaped her/him, but the term 'con-text' is still applicable to the work, because Mizumura consciously refers to Emily Brontë's text as an example of prototypical Western literature, which she admits to have a great influence on Japanese literature

in its modern development, as the narrator Minae recounts in the novel (1: 171). Like many postcolonial writers, Mizumura is also aware of various elements related to certain time, locality, socio-cultural conditions, etc., which makes her response to the pre-text far more entangled and ambivalent than a simple imitation. In this sense, too, the term 'con-text' is appropriate, for it suggests the importance of 'broader contexts than those offered by the apparently determinant pre-texts for writing provided by their English "parents"'(4-5). The term is used 'to refer also to the full range of discursive situations (contexts), many of which have little or nothing to do with the canon, from which the counter-discursive works emerge' (5). In addition, I call another aspect of the relationship between a text and its pre-text 'con-textuality': that is, a text can add or rather function as a new context for its pre-text. The 'con-textuality' of Mizumura's text resides in the fact that it demands to be read as a faraway, latter-day echo of what must have lain, hidden and alienated even from the author, behind the passion that dominates *Wuthering Heights*.

Among numerous con-texts created by postcolonial writers, it should suffice in this study to refer to Maryse Condë's *Windward Heights* as an example of a similar, though much more determined, attempt to uncover the repressed and hidden. From her position as a postcolonial subject and her site of signification in Guadaloupe, Condë writes back in French to the English centre by radically changing the narrative structure, foregrounding the multiplicity of voices, collectivity of memory, and the theme of race—a condition that emerged as a result of the expansion of European empires and of industrialization and modernization it supported, that is, a historical context of Emily Brontë's novel, which she could not perceive or articulate. Condë's text does not only interrogate such blindness implied in the pre-text. She seems more interested in drawing on and at the same time questioning the ways of representing her own people and her version of Creole culture which is already hybrid, enmeshed with elements of European linguistic and literary traditions.[8]

Mizumura shares with Condë this concern about the possibility of a new method of representation, but the con-text she constructs, in a more complicated manner, addresses the question of the text's relation with its outside. To clarify the point, it will be useful to identify some notable commonalities and differences between *Wuthering Heights* and *Honkaku-Shosetsu*, and in doing so locate the most notable characteristics of the latter, that is, the ambiguity of the boundary of the fictional world and the critical nature of the text especially as it emanates from the narrative structure.

First of all, as a conscious imitation of *Wuthering Heights*, the text of *Honkaku-Shosetsu* in

its main section follows the overall structure and plotline of the pre-text. Yusuke, the narrator of the frame story, accidentally becomes acquainted with Fumiko, the Nelly figure, who tells him the story of crazy love between Taro and Yoko. Taro is a war-time orphan who accompanied a Japanese family supposedly related to him when they came back to Japan from China. A rumour soon starts about the possible racial otherness of the boy whose appearance attracts people's attention with his 'darkness', 'subtle difference' in feature, and later on with his fine stature and striking facial features. In post-war Japan, he experiences, like Heathcliff, terrible alienation and humiliation at the hands of the people of educated and propertied class. Nevertheless, he develops an intense emotional relationship with Yoko, a member of the family to whom his 'uncle' used to serve as a rickshaw man. Taro leaves the site of oppression and impossible love seeking new life in the US, where he achieves tremendous economic success after years of studious labour, all this while still clinging to his childhood love and the memory of his past misery. Yoko marries the son of another prominent family, but somehow reestablishes her relationship with Taro despite the geographical divide, while he seems to gradually gain control of the families' properties. The strange love triangle continues for some time until Yoko dies a sudden and early death, leaving Taro in despair. His revenge seems to be complete when it turns out that he has obtained the families' most precious and dearly loved summer homes and silently bequeathed them to Fumiko, the servant woman who took care of him as a child and assisted him in many ways until his move to the US. Thus, it is certain that the novel highlights the class structure as the main source of the tragedy of the protagonists' love, as was also the case with the destructive relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff.

In *Wuthering Heights*, however, the reality of the collapsing agrarian community and the landowners' declining hegemony remains far in the background or, in other words, repressed in the unconscious of the text. In addition, the imperialist expansion of England seems to matter little in terms of the fate of Cathy and Hareton, though many critics today see such historical contexts reflected in significant ways, sometimes as gaps or interstices in the text. *Honkaku-Shosetsu*, in contrast, much more overtly concerns the economic growth of post-war Japan, the gradual integration of the Japanese economy into the global market, and the collapse of the class structure and the emergence of a 'vapid' population, as some characters put it.

Such courses of change that Japanese society saw in the 50 years up to the 1990s are presented with so much reality and such abundance of detail that they no longer stay in the background. As the story proceeds, every reader will come to a fuller understanding of, say, how

the privileged class, however homogeneous it may appear contrasted with Taro's and Fumiko's realm, in fact contains hierarchical gradations within it: Yoko's family represents a slightly lower level, living in a newly but cheaply built house located in a less prestigious area of Tokyo than the other families, while still connected with the propertied upper class her mother is from. It is her father's inconspicuous family background and his personal prominence as a research-oriented medical doctor as well as his liberal democratic mind that conditions Yoko to be situated on the periphery and in relative freedom in terms of the social norms of the propertied class. Another factor contributing to her alienation and relative mobility is her mediocre appearance which falls short of the expectations of her more highly ranked relatives whose pride resides in their shared facial features, which they take as a sign of nobility.

The inclusion of such specificities of time, place and people has the effect of constantly placing the relationship of Yoko and Taro in perspective, and so neutralizing to a certain degree the cursed, nightmarish nature of their relationship, a feeling that absolutely dominates the text of *Wuthering Heights*. The 'novel-like' story as it is recounted in Mizumura's novel uses the supernatural elements in a similar way to its pre-text, and without doubt succeeds in creating echoes of the hopelessness and the sense of no redemption which Brontë's text so miraculously evokes. And yet, it nonetheless lacks the intensity of the other-worldliness and the sense of absolute asocial occlusion enveloping Catherine and Heathcliff.

This sense of occlusion of *Wuthering Heights* is recognized by critics as one of the most striking features of the novel. Many of them argue, as John Thieme does, that the novel is about 'an enclosed environment that was a world away from the social milieu of most of the other major novels of the period' and relates it to the Brontës' 'isolated and inward-looking upbringing'(72). Terry Eagleton, in his thorough analysis in *Myth of Power* of the class structure that divides Catherine and Heathcliff, discusses the sense of closure in a wider perspective, addressing the question of why the implied change in society, that is, the intervention of the industrial bourgeois in the agrarian community, cannot be a solution for the lovers. He maintains that the situation is tragic because 'the industrial bourgeoisie is outside the farming world of both the Earnshaws and the Lintons; but it is no longer a revolutionary class, and so provides no sufficient social correlative for what Heathcliff "metaphysically" represents'. In this sense, the novel's 'outside' is an 'inside', Eagleton remarks (116). In comparison, the 'novel-like story' that Mizumura weaves, despite the fact that it is securely set within layers of narratives, nevertheless refers to a world that exists in close relation to the outer world that unmistakably expands beyond the setting of the love story. The dual structure of the novel is,

in this sense, a reflection of this interconnection between the inside and outside. It would be appropriate to recall in this context how the first part of the novel not only provides a first-person narrative of Minae's life on the West Coast as a lecturer of modern Japanese literature, but introduces the character of Taro, whom the narrator recalls as a solitary young man in a sort of apprenticeship with a friend of her father's and later with her father himself.

The 'novel-like story' part is in a mutually complementary relation to the first part. The line between the *shi-shosetsu* and the *honkaku-shosetsu* is blurred in many ways: the period in history and the details of material reality presented in the 'novel-like story' suggest that it is a recreation of the Japan that Mizumura knew as a child before she moved to the United States; the names of the unforgettable three sisters in this section resonate with the author's and her sister's names which are often used as they are in Mizumura's novels. The text is also suggestive of certain similarities between Yoko and Minae: Yoko's child-like arrogance and temper, for example, remind the reader of the unexpected boldness the teenaged Minae showed Taro when she insisted he should dance with her on one occasion. Minae, in fact, has another parallel in the second section, that is, with the narrator Fumiko. In the scene where the former editor Yusuke visits Minae and spends the night in her apartment, taking shelter from the storm and telling the story of Taro, one may find the scrutinizing gaze that Minae casts on Yusuke is not unlike that of Fumiko on Taro. The episodes, in turn, correspond to the scene in the second section in which Yusuke meets Fumiko and stays over in the cottage in her charge. In this way, one can see that Minae's version of *honkaku-shosetsu* has already begun in the first part, a part which appears to be not only set aside but governed by another principle, presented in the *shi-shoetsu* mode.

The split in time and place, though marking the dual structure of the text, in fact does not indicate a gap in narrative. It, instead, functions as a kind of double-sided mirror, which sheds light on the characters and events in the two parts from the other side, providing a fresh viewpoint: sometimes news is brought from across the national border; at other times an insight is given across the split in time from younger or older Minae's point of view. Most significantly, the device in the narrative structure, works to fill the greatest gap in the 'novel-like story', that is, how Taro establishes himself in the United States. While the corresponding fissure in Brontë's book enhances the sense of closure of the world presented in the novel, Mizumura's text fills the gap with additional information as well as a reversed view of the situation from another perspective, and thus forbids the second part a closure in formal completion or self-contained signification. It opens up the fictional space to the real world of

Japan in a specific historical and international context, opening the possibility of reading the love story with extraordinary emotional intensity as a parable of the rapid economic growth, the expansion of capitalism and a form of democratization, as well as the internationalization, which Japanese society saw in the 1950s and on—the very situation that involved and conditioned the experience of the Mizumuras, as well.

Shi-Shosetsu / Honkaku-Shosetsu

Given the mutual permeability of the two parts constituting Honkaku-Shosetsu, it is intriguingly paradoxical that Mizumura repeatedly mentions the structure as an effective device for enclosing the 'novel-like story' within and apart from the seemingly autobiographical narrative in the first part.[9] In interviews and in the novel Mizumura emphatically expresses her wish that the core of the novel be read not as autobiographical in any way. She intends the frame story to function as a barrier that prohibits the reader from believing that the content of the 'novel-like story' has reference in the personal experience of the writer except that Minae may have a brief and non-emotional encounter with Taro.

The same concern is voiced in the text by the narrator, Minae. She considers that the problem she faces in dealing with the 'novel-like story' can be attributed to the historical development of modern Japanese literature. For one thing, the proliferation of the so-called *shi-shosetsu* as a standard and popular form of Japanese literature makes it difficult to achieve 'what should be called the power of truth'(1: 172) without presupposing the existence of a real person narrating. This, it dawns on her, is a conflict of the same nature as the one that used to concern the modern writers in the Taisho and Showa eras of Japan ; namely, the debate on the *shi-shosetsu* and the *honkaku-shosetsu* (1: 173).

'*Honkaku-shosetsu*' (the orthodox novel), according to Sei Ito, had become a commonly used term in the Japanese literary milieu since Murao Nakamura used it in 1925 in his discussion about the contrast between the first-person and third-person, or subjective and objective, novels (Ito 237). Nakamura, for whom a prime example of *honkaku-shosetsu* was Ana Karenina, understood the genre as a superior mode of writing which accommodated a spectrum of subjectivities in a single work, as if containing a number of *shi-shosetsu* in it, without revealing the presence of the author as a person; whereas another critic of the time, Masao Kume, contested the idea and devalued novels by Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Flaubert, saying they were 'grand and high-quality works, but nevertheless, no more than mere popular fictions' (Ito 237-8).

Sei Ito himself became a central figure mainly as a defender of the *shi-shosetsu*, when such a debate on the types of novels was revived shortly after World War II (Ito 3). He was highly ambivalent about this position imposed on him at the time, because he was aware that there were incongruities in the critics' assumptions about the *shi-shosetsu*, as well as that historical change and contemporary variety that the genre had seen and represented were mostly disregarded in the debate (3-4). The formula of the *shi-shosetsu* versus the *honkaku-shosetsu*, too, was hardly functional for him as a means of discussing the situation of the Japanese novel. In his argument he clarifies, in a self-consciously materialist manner, how the writer's or reader's choice of or preference for one mode of writing or another is conditioned by various socio-economic realities and historical contexts surrounding the production and consumption of the novel. Nevertheless, he acknowledges in some examples of so-called *shi-shosetsu* the full potential for providing a unique vehicle for expressing the ideas of the writer (5). As to aspirations for the *honkaku-shosetsu*, on the other hand, he would not hide his skepticism, arguing that they are based on an undismissible but misleading assumption about the novel; that the novel must be essentially fictional (14). His contention is that the presence of the author's 'I' is fundamental to any literature, whether in *shi-shosetsu* style or not, Japanese or Western.[10] To stress his point in argument, Ito quotes Kiyoshi Jinzai's comment on confessional tendencies prevalent among Western novelists including Tolstoy: 'Throughout Tolstoy's works, one can trace the writer's way of life and incidents related to his thoughts and ideas [. . .]. To be oneself in the real sense means to discover others' (10-11).[11]

Mizumura shares with Ito and Jinzai their awareness about the impossibility of defining the *honkaku-shosetsu* as a totally and inherently independent category separate from autobiographical modes of writing. Then, a question remains as to what issue she means to address by naming her novel by that name, '*Honkaku-Shosetsu*', which she says must have turned into a mere category by now, 'forgotten and buried under the dust in a corner of a library' (1: 172). An explanation given by the writer and narrator, Minae, is this: her attempt in writing the text is parallel to the Japanese modern writers' aspirations for writing the *honkaku-shosetsu* in that her trouble 'is not unrelated to the fact that [she] was attempting to make a novel out of a "novel-like story", distancing it from [her] own life and also from the modes of "shi-shosetsu" and the like' (1: 173). The *shi-shosetsu/honkaku-shosetsu* dichotomy is not a validated distinction she falls back on in her argument, and yet, it cannot be ignored as insignificant here, for the oppositional format potently illustrates the existence of a barrier, the barrier which the Japanese writers in the past must have faced as she does now, and which makes it

rather difficult for the writers to establish subjectivity as a writing self, not as a living, empirical 'me'. In other words, Mizumura believes in 'the presence of the author's "I"' as fundamental to the novel, but also knows the extreme difficulty in 'discovering others' in the self.

Therefore, instead of engaging in reexamination of predecessors' debates or making judgments as to the superiority or rightness of whichever viewpoint, Mizumura, or Minae, the writer and narrator, muses once again on the notion of *shi-shoetsu* and in so doing addresses the problem of subjectivity.

First, the problem is explored as that of the reader's expectations. 'What is the novel in the *shi-shosetsu* mode?' wonders the narrator, Minae. The *shi-shosetsu*, she thinks, 'is based on the premise that its reader, in one way or another, expects to find in it the novelist's self, regardless of whether the novelist writes of her/his real life or not'. She continues, 'The writer of a novel in the *shi-shosetsu* mode is not a metaphysical idea of 'the being who writes' as much as a particular novelist with such and such names—an individual novelist, whose face is well known to the public, let's say, by means of photography'. From this viewpoint, it is understandable that the fragmented form of writing with neither a beginning nor an end is received with greater appreciation, because, she reasons, as such, the text resembles the shapelessness of real life. 'The appearance of having no will towards totality is valuable for the reader of the *shi-shosetsu*'(1: 174-175). What is most notable about this argument is that it works in a way that places Mizumura's own works in the specific historical and social contexts which will determine their reception. It is thus implied that how the writer hides or expresses her 'will towards totality' is not simply a matter of her choice but also conditional on the kind of audience she aims at and gains. In this sense, Mizumura cannot be totally free from the idea of dichotomy between the *shi-shosetsu* and the objective, 'orthodox' novel such as the 19th century British novel, though at the same time her argument brings to the fore that it is this very notion and convention of the *shi-shosetsu*, and the socio-historical contexts for its construction that her writing seeks to critique, as in her previous novel, *Shi Shosetsu: From Left to Right.* However, it is also true that the credibility of the critique given of formal and conceptual assumptions of the *shi-shosetsu* depended largely on the use of the autobiographical 'I', a subject to be associated with the real life experience of the author, Mizumura, as the site of enunciation.

Her consciousness that the text she produces inevitably constitutes a part of the literary milieu and the body of literature in the Japanese language leads her to another question: Why in Japanese the *shi-shosetsu* mode works better in generating the power of truth? Her

hypothesis is that there is a functional difference between the 'I' in Japanese and the equivalent in English; that is, the Japanese 'I' is consistent in signifying a real person and not 'a subject that transcends individual human beings' to which the 'I' in English refers (1: 175). The Japanese language, which was featured in *Shi-Shosetsu* as an imagined home for Minae, is in this novel problematized as a discourse enveloping and at times working as a determining force for one's subjectivity and ability for expression:

> Was it not probable that the 'I' that functions in Japanese continued to signify the 'I' as a particular person and could not acquire the meaning of the 'subject' which transcends individuals? So, the case may be that the novels written in Japanese, including the third-person narratives could hardly prevent the reader from superimposing the concrete 'I' of the novelist, and for this reason they were seldom regarded as a microcosm constructed by the subject as 'a being that writes'.[12] (1: 175).

This meditation about the problem of the Japanese 'I' and the *shi-shosetsu* tradition is immediately followed by the second and main section of the book, that is, the 'novel-like story' presented as an independent work in itself. This structure along with the content of the argument is effective in underlining Mizumura's intention of critiquing modern Japanese literature. It is this scheme that facilitates her challenge against the idea of conceptualizing the *honkaku-shosetsu* as opposed to the *shi-shosetsu*, a distinction which used to engage many writers' and critics' interests as a key to the modernization of Japanese literature. In a way, this book with the highly self-conscious, metafictional title, '*Honkaku-Shosetsu*', is Mizumura's revisionist attempt to re-do and re-define the *honkaku-shoestsu* through creating 'a microcosm constructed by the subject of the being that writes', which she claims was once hardly possible in the Japanese literary tradition. It addresses the issue of how a novel like *Wuthering Heights* written in Japanese can be written and read without being encroached on by the assumptions surrounding the *shi-shosetsu*.

I have argued in this section that the two-part structure of the novel paradoxically relieved Mizumura from the tension between two modes of writing: She could transcend the concretizing, personalizing effect of the Japanese 'I', not by separating the *shi-shosetsu* from the *honkaku-shosetsu*, but by revealing that the two modes are in fact interdependent and complementary. The voices of the 'I' s in the novel echo and multiply, and thus the individuality of the 'I' in the first part starts to dissipate, giving way to what she calls a writing 'subjectivity' and a picture of complex patterns of 'other' lives emerging from the subject position.

In passing it would be useful to note that Mizumura's method of foregrounding the *shi-shosetsu/honkaku-shosetsu* dichotomy and then destabilizing the distinction is reminiscent of the critical practice of deconstructionists. In this light, it would be hard not to relate Mizumura's creative/critical practice to her research as a PhD student, for she specialized in French literature and critical theory, and has published an essay on Paul de Man, the central theorist who made an enormous contribution to the shaping of poststructuralist literary criticism in the United States. 'Renunciation' is her analysis of a turning point in de Man's career and its ambivalence, an essay that appeared in 1985 in *Yale French Studies*, the citadel of American deconstructionism of the time. Focusing on de Man's dismissal of the notion of renunciation that marked the midpoint of his career, she re-reads it as a version of 'the familiar story of the death of the subject' (94). Then, with impressive dexterity she makes a judgment that it was in fact an act of ultimate renunciation of 'his own status as a knowing subject' (93). What is most memorable of Mizumura's analysis, however, is not the precision in handling the evidence and developing her argument using the deconstructionist techniques but her analytical but nevertheless emotional defence of what de Man tried to eliminate. She writes, 'De Man himself certainly had no idea [...] that what he calls here "the barren world of ontological reduction" would seem incomparably filled with "the wealth of lived experience" when juxtaposed to the barren world of rhetorical reduction that we find after the "turn"'(96). The words certainly exert an echoing effect to our ears, as a celebration of what she successfully saved from the nearly renounced *shi-shosetsu* tradition of Japanese literature.

The Con-Textual Function of Fumiko

As we have seen in the previous section, noticing the deconstructionist trait in the novel is not enough, to understand the textual strategy for interacting with traditions of literature. It has to be further clarified how or whether a Japanese novelist, or Mizumura, in particular, manages to construct the 'I' that transcends the individual. Also, coming back to the argument about the closure and openness of the world in the novel, we need to explore further what implications there are in the lack of the choking sense of closedness in the world and text of the 'novel-like story'. One way to approach both of these issues is to examine the key narrator and character, Fumiko Tsuchiya.

Fumiko is the most surprising and potent device in Mizumura's novel. As a Japanese counterpart of Nelly in *Wuthering Heights*, this apparently modest female domestic servant of Yoko's family seems to remain far from the central action. Her narration gives the impression

of objectivity and emotional detachment, which is most likely to be understood as a reflection of her life in service. Then, the moments of revelation arrive near the end of the novel, first with the news that she is the one who was appointed the inheritor of the families' properties Taro had purchased, and shortly after that where an aunt of Yoko's mother reveals in her conversation with Yusuke the secret that Fumiko had had an affair with Taro.

Yusuke, struck by the revelation, looks back on the way Fumiko told the story, now beginning to see it as proof of her 'cunning'. To the reader she turns out to be what is known as the unreliable narrator, a familiar literary device in the history of the Western novel. This is used to various effects, but often, as in this case, to create an illusion that the narrator is little involved in the events s/he is narrating, only later revealing the unexpected degree of her/his involvement, consequently intensifying drama in the plot. If *Honkaku-Shosetsu*, by accommodating this long-tested literary device, claims a direct connection to Western literary traditions, it is more relevant here to point out that the unreliability of Fumiko as a narrator works to shed light on the crucial difference in role between Nelly and Fumiko.

Nelly in *Wuthering Heights* is the embodiment of commonsense, with a stable, if not omniscient, point of view, and forming the framework that holds the text together. With all these aspects, her narration paradoxically magnifies the 'demonic' nature of the romance. In terms of the social hierarchy she may be a member of the same exploited class as Heathcliff, but perhaps because of her gender the change in society subtly inscribed in the hero's fortunes had not yet reached that far to affect her and bring about self-knowledge. Thus the narrator keeps a distance from the central action of the novel, and shuts down the channel that links the lovers' amazing world with the social, material reality that lies outside. In short, Nelly is the guardian of the enclosed world of Emily Bronte's novel who guarantees the novel's autonomy.

Fumiko does play the same role in *Honkaku-Shosetsu*, but only imperfectly. Or rather, she plays a double role of preserving, yet opening up the world of Yoko and Taro. One can say this, not because her involvement with Taro may serve to lessen the magical effect of his love of Yoko on the reader. Greater significance resides in the fact that the revelation, even if it is not more than a rumour, brings the sexuality of Fumiko into the picture. Nelly, whose sexuality among other elements is totally repressed in the text, is primarily a textual function rather than a human existence, whereas Fumiko is a character whose desire as well as whose physical existence is manifest throughout the text. It is especially evident in the way her narration constantly subjects Taro to her gaze as the means of desire, just as Minae's does to Yusuke.

There is no denying that Mizumura, unlike Brontë, brings into the novel the social and historical contexts in overt ways. The representation of the servant woman is part of that design: she starts out as a living example of the powerless, gradually transformed first into an independent working woman and finally into a wealthy property owner. In this shift in Fumiko's position is reflected the course of the development of 'modern' society in Japan, symbolized by economic growth, urbanization, internationalization and the formation of a massive middle class. The seclusion in which the Brontës must have lived was no way possible for Fumiko or the privileged class in this environment. It is this awareness that sets the tone of nostalgia dominant in the whole text. And Fumiko represents this side as well, not by what she says or thinks but by what she is, by her profession as well as her discreet manners and language, in which the disappearing class structure and local specificities are so tangibly inscribed.

Nostalgia—the desire to stop time, to capture the passing moments and frame the rapidly changing and disappearing scenes of the world—is to be felt also in the pages of photographs inserted in the novel. At a glance it looks as if the photos strengthen the feeling of reality and help to contextualize the story more firmly in specific time and space, but this is not enough to explain the unnatural eerie feelings that characterize those photos. They lack reality despite the sharp definition and crisp sense of realism because, for one thing, none of them contain human shadows or a sense of movement. Further, they are accompanied by titles that are descriptive but not informative.[13] The photos and words may start to look like a way of exhibiting the famous theory of the arbitrariness of language, and the hopelessness of the desire to cut out phases of reality. The words start to ring true, if they do, when we start to see what is NOT there, or could be outside of the frame. The peculiar way that the photos are used, therefore, implies the indeterminability of the names in the novel including the 'I's, and the deceit of the divide between the fictional and the real, thus precluding the direct linkage between the 'I' and the author.

One of the greatest appeals of the book is that this sort of critical awareness, which could sound passé in the 21st century is so closely intertwined with the burning feelings for the older types of literature and the acute nostalgia for the past, even if it is an imagined past. Fumiko is an epitome of this possibly conflictive combination of conscious mind and emotions. She is not just a prototype of a woman who lived the 50 years following the Second World War, but also the repository of the awareness of change and intricate emotions mingling with it.

Another important aspect of the representation is that she is the key player and agent in the text's challenge to the readers' expectations. In a dramatic way, this thematizes an aspect of

the common reading practice of today, that is, the strong interest people have developed in recovering the repressed, oppressed and marginalized in the text and in culture at large. Hence, the details of Taro's success in business, the fuller representation of Fumiko as a person, and the accented upturn in her fortune. But again, Mizumura is ambivalent about such dispersal of focal points and the standardization of cultural specifics: Fumiko, for example, exits the text with no fanfare, as if Mizumura pushed her back into her past and her limited world, forbidding her participation in the society of her former masters or transformation into a figure like Minae, a contemporary woman of independence and with capabilities to cross the borders. It is also suggestive of the regressive sentiment that Taro deploringly relates to Yusuke in describing the new generation of Japanese people becoming like thin air or having a vapor-like existence. Such ambivalence, however, does not diminish the importance of Mizumura's perception of cultures as increasingly opening up to each other and people continually being transformed and displaced. On the contrary, this is the situation from which a subject, the transcendental 'I' emerges in her novel not simply as a 'being that writes' but also as a being that migrates.

In this paper I have discussed how Mizumura's *Honkaku-Shosetsu* recreates the past in Japanese history and literature with care and nostalgia and at the same time subverts the assumptions linked to the past. My contention is that the textual function as a 'con-text' of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, framed in the two-part narrative structure, brings the novel certain effects that transcend postcolonial appeals to the revision of history and also the deconstructionist impetus to refute fixed meanings, though these are subsumed, not consumed, in the emotional centre of the novel. The novel thus envisions the subjectivity of the 'I' as a 'being that writes' situated in its historical and contemporary contexts.

To underline the adroit articulation of social and critical awareness in the novel, I would like to point out in the end that the text of *Honkaku-Shosetsu* is also fraught with numerous analogies with texts and contexts, both social and literary, other than *Wuthering Heights*. Besides 'modern' Japanese novels she has adored,[14] the most significant in this context may be *The Great Gatsby*. The New York segment of Taro's life and his impossible love surely make him analogous to the prototypical hero in the book on the American dream, which in turn associates Minae with Nick, the narrator, another being who migrates and tells a story of the mutability of the world. This further brings us to another context referred to in *Honkaku-Shosetsu*, a historical context which resituates the text of *Wuthering Heights* in today's world.

The signifier for the context is Windrush, the name given to the gorgeous property in New York like Gatsby's which Taro purchases for Yoko. Windrush is a name that will ring a bell for the many readers in English, for it is the name of the famous ship which is known to have carried loads of migrants from the Caribbean to England in 1948.[15] This is an epoch-making event in British history, often seen as the beginning of the multiculturalization of Britain that prompted the transformation and redefinition of Englishness. Considering that it coincides with the post-war development of Japan and the period in which *Honkaku-Shosetsu* is mainly set, the reference to the ship's name, as many other analogies in the novel, confirms Mizumura's acute awareness of the change, in Japan and the world, towards pluralistic society, and the nature of *Honkaku-Shosetsu* as her search and construction, through fiction writing, of a lost home and imagined Japaneseness.

Notes

(1) For Mizumura's biographical information, see her own accounts in interviews as well as the corresponding details in *Shi Shosetsu: From Left to Right.*

(2) She pursued degrees in French Literature at Columbia University.

(3) See 'What Is an Author?' for the detailed argument on textuality and the author as a function. In the essay, Foucault, not unlike Mizumura, seems to be deferring the Barthean acknowledgment of 'pure' textuality and 'the death of the author'.

(4) Another term, 'counter-discourse' is often used in the discussion of postcolonial subversions of canonical texts, but the 'con-text' is preferred here for its wider implications for the kinds of relations texts can form with each other.

(5) To avoid confusion, I will refer to the author of the book as Mizumura and the writer/narrator in the first section as Minae.

(6) See, for example, her interview, 'Kanzen na "Sankaku Kankei" wo Megutte' (60).

(7) All the quotes from Mizumura's texts are translation from Japanese by Yoko Fujimoto.

(8) For detailed discussion of the work in this line, see Mardorossian, *Reclaiming Difference.*

(9) See, as an example, the interview on her publisher's website: 'Arashi ga Oka no Kiseki wo Mo Ichido'.

(10) Note his distinction between literature and the *tsuuzoku-shosetsu* (popular novel) or *fuuzoku-shosetsu* (novel of manners) as craft of pattern constituted of combination of human types.

(11) A citation from 'Shi wo Tazunete: Dokusho Nikki Sho', *Bungei*, July 1946.

(12) A similar argument is to be found in her essay, 'On Translation'. She points out that in the Japanese language 'there is no equivalent of the English "I", but that 'Japanese has many variations of the word that means "I"' which 'denotes a varying degree of culture (or the lack of culture), urbanity, femininity or masculinity, or even pompousness and humbleness'. 'These floating "I"s', she infers, 'makes it impossible for the notion of universal subjectivity, implied in the "I" of the European languages, to exist in Japanese'(1).

(13) Examples can be found in the use of all the photos. See, for example, 'A Church' (1: 248) unspecified, and 'The Kumoba-Pond in a Fog' (2: 52) with no pond visible in the picture.

(14) Mizumura confirms that references are made to Tatsuo Hori's *Utsukushii Mura* and Kan Kikuchi's *Shinju Fujin* ('Kanzen na' 69).

(15) *The Lonely Londoners* by a Trinidadian writer, Sam Selvon, is well known as a powerful portrayal of the so-called 'Windrush generation' of migrants and their struggle to settle in London.

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