

Haruki vs. Karamazov

The Influence of the Great Russian Literature on Contemporary Japanese Writers

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1. Russian Literature in Japan

Though it is perhaps hard to imagine in the American academia, in Japan I am both a professor of literature and a contemporary literary critic. As such, the question I am most frequently asked is, “Among serious contemporary Japanese writers (*junbungaku no sakka*), who is the most widely read?” My answer always varies. Trends in Japan change fast enough to make your head spin. As an undergraduate at the University of Tokyo in the 1970s, I used to answer, without hesitation, that it was definitely a tie between Abe Kōbō and Ōe Kenzaburō. Admittedly, this answer reflected my own tastes and was not wholly objective.

Today I would have to say that the two most widely read authors in Japan are Murakami Haruki and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Murakami Haruki of course requires no introduction. His new novel *IQ84*, published in May of this year, has already become a bestseller, selling over two million copies to date—a record in terms of speed. According to a recent newspaper article, his novel *Norwegian Wood* still continues to sell in huge numbers, recently topping ten million copies.

It might seem strange, then, that I paired Murakami with Dostoevsky. Yet it is an established fact that Dostoevsky’s impact (largely through translation) on modern Japan has been huge, and that he deserves to be studied alongside the great Japanese writers. In what

follows, I will attempt to answer the question of what it means that Dostoevsky is presently as popular as the international bestseller Murakami Haruki, as well as the broader questions of how the “great Russian writers” cast their influence on contemporary Japanese literature and what this means for contemporary Japanese writers.

In 2007, a new highly-acclaimed translation of Dostoevsky’s classic novel *The Brothers Karamozov* was published in five volumes. The translation has already become a bestseller, with sales topping one million. Of course, this is not the first translation of the novel. The Japanese rank among the world’s most voracious readers of Dostoevsky, and there have already been over ten different multi-volume sets of “complete works of Dostoevsky” in Japanese to date. *The Brothers Karamozov* alone has been translated at least eleven times since the Meiji period. Given this historical familiarity with the book, why has it all of the sudden become a bestseller? One reason is perhaps that Kameyama’s new translation is written in a fresh, contemporary idiom that is relatively easy to read. Kameyama’s translation was originally published by Kōbunsha as one book in the series *New Translations of the Classics*, whose stated intent was to retranslate the modern classics into new and readable Japanese. The project was a huge hit, and authors ranging from William Shakespeare to Franz Kafka and Proust have acquired a whole new Japanese readership.

The literary and historical significance of this *New Translations of the Classics* series—particularly from the perspective of translation studies—will surely be much discussed in coming years. I should also mention that a parallel phenomenon has occurred in the English-speaking world, namely, Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky’s series of new translations of the Russian classics, which includes their 1990 publication of *The Brothers Karamozov*. Like the *New Translations of the Classics* project in Japan, this project too emphasizes its differences from earlier translations and has been welcomed by English readers. It is beyond my abilities to give a detailed analysis of the qualitative differences between the various English translations, but I will say a word about Pevear and Volokhonsky’s stated methodology, which appears to be the *exact opposite* of that employed by the Japanese translator Kameyama. What Pevear and Volokhonsky attempt to do is to move the English closer to the original Russian. Their implicit reasoning: a reader-friendly version of the text already exists (as Constance Garnet’s famous translation), so why redo it? In the English-speaking world, the trend seems to have moved in the direction of fidelity to the original. Readers today demand translations that are as faithful to the original as possible, and no longer prefer reader-friendly approximations in the case of classical works. This change is reflected in the three translations of *The Tale of Genji*, which was first translated by Arthur

Waley, then Edward Seidensticker, and finally Royall Tyler. In Japan, however, it seems that the opposite is true: recent translations aim for reader-friendliness. Yet this isn't simply because previous Japanese translations have grown old with time; rather, readers demand that their translations are written in a boldly contemporary idiom. To borrow the terminology of translation theorist Lawrence Venuti, the recent transition in translation methodology in the English-speaking world can be characterized as a move from *domestication* to *foreignization*, while Japan has seen a move from *foreignization* to *domestication*.

Yet the recent unprecedented popularity of the new Japanese translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* cannot be attributed solely to the fact that it is easy to read—in fact, many of the previous translations (including those of Yonekawa Masao, Egawa Taku, and Hara Takuya) are also fairly readable. Rather, the book's astonishing popularity is due to Dostoevsky's own strengths as a writer and to those qualities in his works that make him relevant to contemporary Japan.

It is well known that the establishment and development of modern Japanese literature is much indebted to the influence of the 19th-century Russian writers, from Dostoevsky and Gogol to Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Chekhov. Comparative literature specialists have written much about how Futabatei Shimei, one of the founders of the modern Japanese novel, discovered a modern prose style through translating Turgenev's *The Hunter's Diary*, and about how the Shirakaba group, an influential literary coterie of the late Meiji and early Taishō eras, held up Tolstoy as mentor.

The problem of how Russian literature influenced Japanese writers from the Meiji period on is of course a complex one, and cannot be sufficiently dealt with here; let it suffice to acknowledge that Russian literature has been hugely popular in Japan throughout its modern history and that it continues to play a significant role in literary circles. While Russian as a foreign language has not been as popular as English, German, or French, Russian *literature* has been at least as popular as the literatures of England, Germany, and France. Despite minimal direct contact with neighboring Russia and its people (particularly since the 1917 Soviet Revolution), and despite the fear and loathing felt toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War, Japan has remained intimate with the literature of Russia. There is a short story by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke from 1920 called “Yamashigi” in which Tolstoy and Turgenev appear; the story is so convincing that it could have been written by a Russian. Indeed, the influence of Russian literature was so great that the Japanese of Akutagawa's day felt much closer to past Russian writers and their works than to real living Russians, who remained a mostly distant and unknown presence.

After the war, the Russian classics suffered a brief decline in popularity. Yet despite this, the number of writers influenced by and well versed in Russian literature was by no means few, and this group came to form one of the major schools of contemporary literature. Most members of this school were associated with the literary magazine *Modern Literature* (*Kindai bungaku*), which was founded shortly after the war by Haniya Yutaka, Honda Shūgo, Ara Masahito, Hirano Ken, and Sasaki Ki'ichi. Although unable to read Russian, these writers possessed an astonishing degree of knowledge about Russian literature, and the critical works by Sasaki (on Chekhov), Haniya (on Dostoevsky), and Honda (on Tolstoy) have become modern critical classics in their own right.

The literary movement centered around the magazine *Modern Literature* came to be known as the “postwar faction,” and it consciously opposed the “I-novel” genre, which had been dominant in Japan since the Taishō period. This “postwar faction” continued to be influenced by Russian literature, a fact which can be seen in the works of Noma Hiroshi and Shi'ina Rinzō, two of its more prominent figures. Their interest in Russian literature was subsequently inherited by the next generation of writers, and this trend continues today.

In the 1960s, Waseda University's Department of Russian literature produced many new writers, including Itsuki Hiroyuki, Miki Taku, and Gotō Meisei, who together formed a group that may be called the “Russian faction.” There were also many writers who were well versed in Russian literature despite not having majored in the subject, including Maruya Sai'ichi, Kaga Otohiko, Ōe Kenzaburou, and Inoue Hisashi. The influence of Russian literature on the later fiction and critical writings of Ōe Kenzaburō, for example, is far more apparent than that of French literature, despite the fact that Ōe majored in French literature and wrote his graduation thesis on Jean-Paul Sartre. Also, in his recent novel, *Good-bye, My Book!*, Ōe draws parallels between today's terrorism and the revolutionary terrorism of Dostoevsky's age. Moreover, this novel as a whole reveals traces not only of Dostoevsky but also of Nabokov, from whose novel, *The Gift*, Ōe borrows the title for his own novel.

Since the 1980s, however, Japan's interest in foreign literatures—including that of Russia—has waned. *The Complete Works of World Literature*, a series of foreign literature published continuously since the early 1930s ceased publication, and the last large scale project of the sort, *The Shūeisha Gallery of World Literature*, published its final twentieth volume in 1991. Seen in this historical context, it would seem that interest in Russian literature appears to have faded to the background. Yet there are still many writers who are devoted to the study of Russian literature, who continue to write under its inspiration, even if they cannot be lumped together into a particular school. Perhaps it is thanks to this solid,

hardcore fan base that the recent translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* has reached bestseller status.

At this point I would like to introduce several recent Japanese writers who either show a strong Russian influence or who have written specifically about Russia, and to examine the influence Russian literature has had on them.

2. Japanese Literature after the 1980s and Russia

Focusing on the works of six contemporary writers, I will now look at how representations of Russia have functioned in Japanese literature since the 1980s. The six writers I have chosen to discuss are Ikezawa Natsuki, Shimada Masahiko, Murakami Haruki, Kurokawa Sō, Nakamura Fuminori, and Kashimada Maki. Most of the works I will discuss have not yet been translated into English and thus are not well known outside of Japan. My hope is to go beyond the narrow framework of “influence” and introduce some unknown aspects of contemporary Japanese literature.

Ikezawa Natsuki

Let us start with Ikezawa Natsuki (b. 1945). Although Ikezawa is not as internationally renowned as Murakami Haruki, I value him highly as a writer whose works are representative of the contemporary Japanese novel. As a novelist, he first received attention after winning the Akutagawa and Chūō Kōron Prizes for Literature for his novella *Still Life*, and has since continued to write prolifically. His works are too numerous to address here in full, so I limit myself to a brief discussion of his three major novels, *The Fall of Macius Guili* (1993; winner of the Tanizaki Award), *Sister Rolling Through Flowers* (2000; winner of Mainichi Cultural Award), and *The Quiet Continent* (2004; winner of the Shinran Literary Award).

Several conspicuous characteristics set Ikezawa apart from other contemporary Japanese writers. First, he is well versed in the natural sciences, which infuse his worldview with a highly analytical perspective; his novels are filled with characters who share a similar knowledge of the sciences. Second, before writing novels, Ikezawa began his career by working as a poet and translator—an experience which seems to have taught him the importance of concise poetic expression and a clear, logical structure. Third, his life and works reflect the attitude of an adventurous world traveler, unconstrained by Japan’s borders. In the second half of the 1970s, he lived for three years in Greece, where he picked up the language, and in 1993 he left Tokyo to live in Okinawa. He has been living in France since

2005.

Ikezawa's works, like his travels, are multi-faceted and numerous. Yet here I shall focus on the relatively unknown work *Ya Chaika* (1988). The title of this work in Russian means "I am a seagull," a phrase recognizable to any Russian as that spoken from space by Valentina Tereshkova, the famed Soviet astronaut and world's first female traveler to space. Incidentally, this line is also famous for being spoken by the character Nina in Chekhov's play *The Seagull*. (I should note that Tereshkova did not have Chekhov in mind when she uttered those words, but was rather merely mouthing a prearranged call sign.)

As is implied by Ikezawa's title, the motif of Russia echoes strongly throughout the novel. The story develops along two lines. The first is the realistic storyline, about an engineer named Takatsu Fumihiko and his high school daughter Kanna. Years ago, Fumihiko divorced his wife, taking his daughter with him to raise. The other storyline involves a fantasy world envisioned by Kanna, a world in which she keeps a pet dinosaur. The novel is structured so that the two storylines intertwine and develop along parallel lines.

Fumihiko happens to befriend a Russian named Kukin, who is a representative at a Soviet lumber exporting firm. Though born in Irkutsk, Kukin has lived in Tokyo for over ten years and has become fluent in Japanese. Though he gives the impression of the stereotypical "Russian bear," we also discover that he is an accomplished figure-skater, who has been giving regular lessons to Fumihiko's daughter. Thus the Russian Kukin becomes personally intimate with Fumihiko and his daughter in a sort of transnational relationship that was no doubt rare at the time.

However, one night while Kukin is drinking with Fumihiko and his daughter, Kukin tries to convince Fumihiko to divulge the details regarding a secret project he is working on. The stereotypical motif of "Soviet-as-spy" is thereby introduced into an otherwise non-stereotypical story about international friendship. (I should point out that the inverse motif of the Japanese-as-spy was also a major theme in Stalinist Russia.) Yet Ikezawa's originality as a writer lies in the way that he incorporates philosophical arguments regarding world peace and nationalism in order to obfuscate intentionally the spy storyline, all the while skillfully playing with the various cultural stereotypes. By the end of the story it is still not clear to what extent there occurred any spying, and Kukin and Fumihiko are still hanging out together as regular pals. In the end, Kukin returns to his homeland.

In addition to the spy storyline, there is another Russian motif that warrants our attention. While the female astronaut Tereshkova is orbiting Earth, Fumihiko, still a child, feels a strange sensation. To the young Fumihiko, Tereshkova appears as a kind of goddess,

blessing the Earth as she gazes at it from the heavens. Although originally conceived on the basis of scientific materialism and a rejection of religion, the Soviet Union is here imaginatively transformed into both a scientific *and* religious source of cosmic perception. Here Russia functions as a stage that enables a kind of cosmic perception that is lacking in Japan.

Shimada Masahiko

Born in 1961, Shimada Masahiko made his debut in 1983 with the novella *Divertimento for A Gentle Leftist*, a work which secured his reputation as *enfant terrible* of the *bundan* (literary scene). The novella was written while Shimada was still an undergraduate at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. As I mentioned, after the war many Russophile writers fresh out of Waseda's and other university's Russian Literature departments made their literary debuts in quick succession. Shimada forms the tail end of this group: he too majored in Russian at university, where he developed a deep love for the Russian classics and wrote his graduation thesis on the Soviet novelist Evgenii Zamyatin, best known for his novel *We*. Shimada's deep knowledge and interest in Russian literature is apparent too in his collection of essays *Don't Talk, Sing* (1987).

Given this background, it is natural then that Shimada should end up actively employing Russian motifs. His debut *Divertimento for A Gentle Leftist*, for example, takes place at an unspecified university that recalls his own alma mater. Here the students start an extra-curricular club called "Socialist Buffoons" to help support anti-establishment Soviet dissidents who have come under persecution. Given these Soviet themes, Shimada's debut work can thus be compared with that of Itsuki, who made his literary debut in 1966 with his novel *Farewell to the Moscow Hooligans*, which is set in Moscow and whose Japanese protagonist encounters the group of *stiliyagi* or "mods." We must bear in mind that, at the time, the Soviet Union was still a riddle to much of the outside world, and was therefore a natural and attractive setting for an "encounter-with-Russia" adventure story. Yet by Shimada's generation students had grown disillusioned with political movements and political ideologies (of whichever species), and to these students Russia was no more than the remaining fragments of a shattered ideological grand narrative. Hence, any work about Russia was bound to be a loosely-stitched postmodern parody of Russia and the political representations associated with it. Such parodying of Russia and its political ideology subsequently became important fodder for Shimada's later fiction.

Here I would like to turn to the use of Japanese *katakana* in the title of his novel

Divertimento for A Gentle Leftist. The word for “left-wing” (*sayoku* 「サヨク」) is written in *katakana* rather than with the usual two kanji for “left” and “wing.” (「左翼」) This might seem a minor notational error, but for a native of Japanese this difference is remarkable, if hard to explain. Written in kanji, the word *sayoku* (“left-wing”) has all the traditional and grave ideological connotations, but as soon as the word is written in *katakana*, it is hollowed out, as it were; its serious ideological implications are dissolved and the remaining fragments are left to float about in the simulacrum. We might see this novel as an early pioneering work that helped to destroy the traditional intellectual and ethical system that Chinese characters had previously sustained. The fact is that when you trace the evolution in writing that occurred after Shimada’s novel, you will see that the number of words written in Chinese characters diminished greatly, and the number of words written in *katakana* (or in some cases *hiragana*) increased.

When discussing the theme of Russia in Shimada’s works, one must not forget to include his 1984 novella *Cries and Murmurs of Defecting Travelers*. It describes a short vacation to Russia by two Japanese men pretending to be defectors. The first is a young civil servant named Kitō; the second is a student named Watashi, who majors in Russian and likes to pretend that he is not Japanese. Moscow is depicted in the novel as a confused and stagnating city in its pre-perestroika days.

One day, as the two foreigners are walking through the city, they come across a black marketeer who wants to buy jeans and Seiko watches and prostitutes who want to earn foreign currency. Admittedly, the Moscow presented here is the stereotypical “vulgar Moscow,” seen superficially through the filter of a young and inexperienced writer. Nevertheless, there are certain elements in Shimada’s description that go beyond the usual images of the city.

First, despite the superficial vulgarity of Shimada’s Moscow, there is a kind of psychological depth that the city oozes, and it is this depth that compels the protagonist on his spiritual journey. In one scene, while having sex with a high-brow Russian prostitute who reads Edgar Allan Poe and Richard Brautigan, Kitō has a vision: he lets out a wild scream, “standing in the middle of the universe,” and in response to the scream “a throng of people wave to him.” Although in Japan he is “no more than a civil servant,” Kitō’s yawp reaches to the corners of the universe, and he grasps for the first time that he is not a machine but a real, live human being. Thus, Russia—though herself in a state of chaos and confusion—functions in this work as a positive force for salvation that reinvigorates the Japanese protagonist, who has been cut off from that very life force.

Second, there is another theme reverberating throughout the work, a theme which will

become increasingly important in Shimada's later works. That theme is the very identity of contemporary man, and is centered around the other main character in the novel, Watashi. (This name, incidentally, is a kind of pun, as it is identical in pronunciation with the Japanese first-person singular pronoun "I"). Not happy about being Japanese, he goes out of his way to learn many other languages, including Russian, in an attempt to escape his predicament. While in Russia, he pretends not to be Japanese. This kind of behavior is, of course, rather unnatural and childish, and in the end when he is arrested by a police officer for looking suspicious, he must rely on the authority of his Japanese passport to secure his release. In this way, Russia (or the Soviet Union) functions as a kind of warped mirror that reflects the anxiety Japanese feel over their ethnic identity and roots. In the novella's concluding scene, Kitō, having returned to Japan, remarks with bitter irony: "The Japanese are good at metamorphosis. Even if you were a war criminal yesterday, today you can become a pacifist. This is how the Japanese race survived to this day." To which Watashi responds: "This means, of course, that from the beginning we Japanese never had any fixed identity. Hmmm... I guess I was right. There's no need for me to be Japanese, after all." And his conclusion is that "to be Japanese is to be a prisoner." Shimada Masahiko seems to have sought a kind of liberation from such captivity through the artifice of fiction, and, by extension, through this fictional construct of Russia.

Murakami Haruki

One of the most widely read Japanese writers in the world at present, Murakami Haruki (b. 1949) is generally regarded as "American-esque." He is a great admirer of American literature, whose influences show conspicuously in his works. He is so well versed in English that his Japanese sentences often look as if they are literal translations from English. He is also an accomplished translator of various American writers, including Raymond Carver, Scott Fitzgerald, J.D. Salinger, Raymond Chandler, and Truman Capote. For a writer of Murakami's stature to spend so much time and effort on translations is indeed a rare phenomenon. When his debut novella *Hear the Wind Sing* first appeared, many critics pointed out possible influences of such American writers as Vonnegut Jr. and Richard Brautigan.

In light of all this, it may seem a bit odd that I am discussing Murakami Haruki in terms of his relation with Russia. Yet the fact of the matter is that Russian literature has had played a significant role in Murakami's works. In numerous interviews and talks, Murakami has pointed out that long before he had heard of American literature he was reading the

nineteenth-century Russian classics, and that he even read *The Brothers Karamazov* at least five times. In a 1985 dialog with Nakagami Kenji, for instance, Murakami remarked: “My first experience with the novel was mainly with Russian novels. There was a time when I read nothing but Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and the likes. That was the beginning of my affair with the novel. I didn’t start reading American novels until I had become fairly fluent in English.”

It is therefore not surprising that many of his novels relate in some way to the Russian classics and share an important symbolic relation with them. Many readers will remember that, for instance, “The Rat” (Nezumi), one of the characters from his debut novella *Hear the Wind Sing*, was writing a comic novel about a band based on *The Brothers Karamazov*. (One cannot help but wonder what they sounded like!) And in his next novel *Pinball, 1973*, the topic of Dostoevsky comes up again in a conversation between the protagonist and two twin girls—a conversation which determines the atmosphere of the whole work.

“So you’re saying that you’re incapable of befriending most people?” asked 209.

“That seems to be the case,” I replied. “I’m incapable of befriending most people.”

That pretty much summed up my lifestyle in the 1970s. Dostoevsky had predicted, and I confirmed.

Such persistent referencing of Dostoevsky no doubt reflects what books Murakami was reading at the time—books including Kurt Vonnegut Jr.’s *Slaughterhouse Five*, in which one of the characters remarks, “‘Everything there [is] to know about *life* [is] in *The Brothers Karamazov*, but that isn’t *enough* anymore.’”

References to Dostoevsky and other writers from the Russian canon appear mainly in Murakami’s longer novels, two of which are particularly relevant. The first is *A Wild-Sheep Chase*. In this novel, “The Rat” explains in a letter his perverse love for nineteenth-century Russian literature. “I should have been born a nineteenth-century Russian. [...] Had I been born in those times, I could have become a great novelist. Or even if not as great as Dostoevsky, at least a decent second-rate writer.” The second example is from *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. Toward the end of the novel, the narrator, just as he is about to leave this world, asks the librarian if she has ever read *The Brothers Karamazov*. She replies that she had, many years ago, and only once. He tells her she ought to read it once more, as there is much to be learned from it. He then parts with the librarian and, resting at a park, closes his eyes and recalls the names of the Karamazov brothers—Dmitri, Ivan, Alyosha, and the bastard Smerdyakov—wondering how many people there are in the world who can recall those four names.

A thorough analysis of the significance of each of Murakami's references to Dostoevsky is beyond the scope of this paper. But let it be said that these references are not chosen arbitrarily, nor are they mere accessories. Rather, his referencing of Russian literature is a persistent and deliberate motif that is repeated throughout his works. For Murakami, Russia is not the Russia of today, or even of the Soviet era; it is that nineteenth-century nation that produced the great writers Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev. Notably, there are very few (if any) contemporary Russian characters in his works.

Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1994-1995), however, marked a turning point in his career. The original Japanese version was released in three parts, and the third volume tells the harrowing story of a man named Mamiya Chūi. Mamiya was illegally interned as a war prisoner in the Soviet Union (it is estimated that around one million Japanese were similarly interned), where he spent years of forced hard labor in the Siberian coal mines. To briefly summarize, the story, narrated by Mamiya, is about one "Boris the Skin Peeler," a savagely cruel NKVD officer who orders the torture and murder of prisoners by having their skin peeled off. I am not sure whether there was a real prototype for this Boris character, but we do know that Murakami spent years carefully researching the history of the Soviet forced labor camps and the fate of those detainees after the Second World War. Murakami, who had hitherto avoided such heavy historical subjects and acts of barbarity, was no doubt venturing into new territory in an attempt to confront the cruelty that lurks at the bottom of the human heart. This cruel NKVD officer, who seems to be the embodiment of pure evil, is of course a kind of stereotype; yet through this stereotype, Murakami is not singling out the Soviet Union for criticism, but rather using it as a method to peer into the depths of human cruelty and evil. After all, Murakami is not Solzhenitsyn.

Murakami's recent novel *IQ84* is another turning point in terms of his relation to Russia. In this novel, a motif involving not Dostoevsky but Chekhov is brought to the fore, and Chekhov's famous axiom—"If a gun appears in a story, it had better shoot!"—bears a special relation to the development of the plot. Also noteworthy are the book's numerous references to *Sakhalin Island*, Chekhov's collection of observations taken during his research on the Sakhalin Island. In 1890, at the age of thirty (roughly the same age as Tengo, the protagonist of *IQ84*), Chekhov was struck by the crazy idea of setting out for the island of Sakhalin. Risking disease (it was practically a suicidal expedition, as he was already ill), Chekhov proceeded to investigate the conditions of the prisoners living on the island, recording his findings and impressions in this reportage. As Tengo explains Fukaeri, the mysterious young girl, in *IQ84*, *Sakhalin Island* was "an attempt to radically suppress all

literary elements in order to give a clear and practical record of my findings.” As it turned out, the work was not so widely read. Why, then, did Murakami Haruki specifically single out this work for use in his story?

In *IQ84*, Tengo ponders over why Chekhov must have felt so compelled to travel to Sakhalin Island, a question that has been a riddle to scholars for over a century, and we don't know the answer to it yet. We can, however, speculate about why Murakami suddenly felt such a strong sympathy with *Sakhalin Island*. In order to go the island and write about it, Chekhov had to set aside his usual literary pursuits and, as a doctor, he concentrated on investigating the conditions of the island. Was this not precisely what Murakami too tried to do through his own investigations into the 1995 Sarin Gas Attack on the Tokyo Subway? After the Sarin Gas Attack, Murakami wrote two works of nonfiction, *Underground* and *In The Promised Place: Underground 2*, which were based on his interviews with both Aum Shinrikyō followers and their victims. The project was Murakami's attempt at a kind of social commitment, and the incident served as his own Sakhalin Island. Perhaps it is due to this experience that Murakami sees a bit of himself in Chekhov.

Kurokawa Sō

We can count among the fruits of recent Japanese literature Kurokawa Sō's (b. 1961) novel *The Day of the Seagull* (2008). This novel was praised highly by the 2009 Yomiuri Prize for Literature selection committee (on which I had opportunity to serve), and is important because it offers a new perspective to the question of the Russian influence on contemporary Japanese letters.

Based in Tokyo, *The Day of the Seagull* tells the story of a thirty-five-year-old man who works in a high-rise FM radio station. Interspersed within this story are episodes about Tereshkova, who, you will recall, was the first female astronaut to travel to space. When Tereshkova cries “I am a seagull” down to earth from space, this is again a reference to Chekhov's comedy. Another character in the novel, a writer named Setoyama, describes his own novels as “single and complete units which at the same time contain elements that connect organically to those of my other works, the whole series of which is like the universe itself.” One might even say that *The Day of the Seagull*, too, is a work which harbors such ambitions.

The Day of the Seagull is narrated from an overarching perspective that tries to grasp the whole by reconfiguring its various and complex parts. But this perspective is not the omniscient kind as found in traditional realistic European novels of the nineteenth century, but

rather a kind of “a man-made satellite perspective” or “seagull perspective” that Kurosawa himself seems to have invented. As the title implies, the motif of the seagull reaches into every part of the novel. As if to throw the reader off guard, the first section of the novel is concerned with the Soviet development of space. References to Chekhov pervade the work: beginning with Gagarin, the first man in space, who is succeeded by Tereshkova, the first female in space, who cried “I am a seagull” from space, ending up with Chekhov’s famous comedy recalled by the coincidence of the phrase “I am a seagull.” There are other connections to Chekhov that can be made; yet more importantly, the very idea for the work’s multi-perspective, mosaic-like structure—which converges not upon a single perspective but is diffused evenly throughout all of the characters—seems to have been inspired by Chekhov’s plays.

The seagull motif is indicative of Kurokawa’s high regard for Chekhov, and the man-made satellite owes its conception to the panoramic perspective from above. It is also significant that the character Hideo is researching “light clouds which are barely perceptible from earth,” and which are visible only with the aid of satellite observation and laser beams. We might say that this perspective—which allows Hideo to see the whole from a distance and each element as part of a diverse mosaic—is the very perspective taken by the Kurokawa in this work.

I have hitherto examined various representations of Russia in contemporary Japanese literature, focusing on the works of Ikezawa Natsuki, Shimada Masahiko, Murakami Haruki, and Kurokawa Sō. This list, of course, can be expanded to include many more writers, yet I will conclude my paper by discussing Nakamura Fuminori and Kashimada Maki, two writers who truly stand out among the younger generation.

Nakamura Fuminori

Nakamura Fuminori (b. 1977) won the Akutagawa Prize for Literature in 2005, securing his name as one of the most promising contemporary writers in Japan. After making his debut, Nakamura began to address the darker social problems that plague Japan today, from crime and suicide to child abuse and neglect. His 2007 novel *Last Life* is a first-person narrative about a young man with deep traumas. This young man, a recent college graduate, has of late become a psychologically unstable *hikikomori* or “social hermit” who spends his days alone in his room translating Sartre’s existentialist philosophy into Japanese, with no hope of publication.

Years ago while in elementary school, he and his best friend Saeki witnessed the shocking gang rape of a young retarded girl by several homeless men. Unable to do anything, the two boys fled without helping the girl. Several years later, the boys encounter one of the rapists, now an old dying man pleading for help. The boys decide not to call for help, preferring instead to watch the man die. The experience traumatizes both boys: Saeki eventually becomes a sex criminal, and the narrator develops depression and anxiety disorder. Their shared guilt of watching a man die and the resulting retribution—it is this heavy, somewhat old-fashioned subject that serves as the major theme of the novel. The narrator is plagued for years by the thought that he must live out the rest of his days as a coward who once let a man die in front of him. *Last Life* seems to reformulate for a contemporary audience some of the main themes of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

The Night The World Turns to Black (2009) deals with a similarly heavy theme. The young protagonist works as a prison guard in a provincial detention house, where he meets with prisoners each day. Raised in an orphanage himself, he struggles with his own dark past and often has thoughts of suicide. But thanks to a certain well-meaning orphanage director, the young guard finds the hope needed to live. Yet just as things appear to be improving, one of his friends kills himself, leaving behind only the cryptic message, “The night the world turns to black . . .” There is also a minor offender at the detention house who is awaiting the death penalty, yet who shows no desire to appeal. The protagonist is haunted by various ethical questions: Why doesn't he try for an appeal? Should he be executed? Should there even be a death penalty?

Finally, Nakamura's most recent novel, *The Pickpocket* (2009), is about a professional thief who becomes involved in more dangerous crimes after receiving instructions from a certain shady, unidentified figure. The thrilling, crime-novel-esque plot no doubt makes for enjoyable reading; yet, more importantly, there is another storyline that is initiated when the protagonist sees a mother forcing her toddler to shoplift at a supermarket. As revealed in this intense yet subtly described scene that combines criminals, prostitutes, and children, Nakamura is clearly a writer who possesses a talent that can only be described as Dostoevskian: “I am a pickpocket,” declares the protagonist. “Is a pickpocket in any position to laugh at a whore?” Surely these words could have been written by Dostoevsky himself.

Kashimada Maki

Kashimada Maki (b. 1976) is another contemporary writer who merits our attention. Though best known for her avant-garde prose that is heavily influenced by the French

nouveau roman, her works also show a deep familiarity with Russian culture and literature. In fact, she herself is a follower of the Russian Orthodox Church, for which her husband serves on the clergy. Many of her works—including most prominently her full-length novel *The Kingdom of Zero*—can be regarded as an homage to Dostoevsky.

The Kingdom of Zero is an across-the-board adaptation of Dostoevsky's masterpiece *The Idiot*. Yet it is more than that; it is also a parody of it. It is well known that when the Russian writer conceived his plan for *The Idiot*, his initial intent was to depict the protagonist Prince Myshkin as a kind of Christ-like “positively beautiful man (положительно прекрасный человек).” Yet he soon realized that creating such a perfect character amounted to “too difficult a task—indeed the most difficult task in the world,” for such a perfect man is just that—an ideal, i.e. that which cannot be actualized anywhere in this world. *The Kingdom of Zero* can thus be thought of as Kashimada's attempt to complete the task that Dostoevsky had been unable to accomplish. The protagonist of the work, the naïve youth Yoshida, is a contemporary version of Dostoevsky's *yurodivy* or “holy fool,” who by mere virtue of trying to divide his love equally among everyone finds himself unable to love anyone. Dostoevsky's influence can also be detected in the many characters that surround this protagonist. Close readers of *The Idiot* will note that certain scenes and figures in *The Kingdom of Zero* correspond to certain scenes and figures from Dostoevsky's novel. For example, in a famous scene from *The Idiot*, Nastassya Filippovna throws a large sum of money into the fireplace in a spurt of anger. In Kashimada's novel, the female character Eri—who, like Nastassya, is constantly surrounded by suitors—throws a wad of money into the pizza cooker.

But this is not to say that *The Kingdom of Zero* is merely an epigone or a parody of Dostoevsky's novel. Kashimada's method of writing is so old-school that it comes across as avant-garde, and she brilliantly exploits her peculiar and original prose style to create a world that brims with a unique metaphysical reality and eroticism. Her works, while drawing heavily on Dostoevsky, are also a bold attempt to carve out a new direction for the future of Japanese literature. Her old-fashioned prose with its highly unrealistic dialogues is another unique feature of her novels. In fact, this feature too might be seen as an “adaptation” (*kankotsu-dattai*) of that peculiar prose style that Japanese writers first encountered years ago in the early translations of nineteenth-century Russian literature.

3. Beyond Stereotypes

In my brief description above, I have shown how the influence of Russian literature on

Japanese writers, while not always obvious, is still stronger today. Although the examples I gave might not be the mainstream of contemporary literature, they certainly represent an important one. I have also shown that, when Russian subject matters or characters appear in the works of Japanese writers, the representations are often stereotypical caricatures that reveal a deep-seated negative attitude toward Russians. Examples include: (1) Russian as spy, (2) Russian as corrupt politician or Stalin-like tyrant (or, on the flipside, those resisting such tyrannical authority), and (3) Russian as prostitute or sadistic secret police. While such stereotypes are certainly found in each of the works I have described, such stereotyping is not limited to Japanese writers, and one need only glance at the representations of Japan in contemporary Russian literature to confirm this fact. Despite the fact that Japanese culture is now more popular in Russia than ever, stereotypes still dominate the discourse. Some typical examples of this can be found in the recent series by detective novelist Boris Akunin, or in Viktor Pelevin's mystical novel *Chapaev and Pustota*. The subject of representations of Japan in these novels is surely in need of further exploration. Indeed, we can only truly understand ourselves and others by simultaneous studying representations of both self and other, in other words, by studying how we Japanese are depicted in Russian literature, and how Russians are depicted in Japanese literature.

Stereotypes are of course simplifications and are therefore dangerous. Yet I am in no way singling out the above discussed writers for censure, for they often use these stereotypes as a base from which they can manipulate, problematize, and bring depth to such representations, and thereby pioneer new kinds of literary representation. For these writers, Russia is strictly a literary device that allows them to “make strange” the often one-dimensional and depthless reality of Japan, and to breathe new life and meaning into it. And, as the case of Murakami Haruki shows, it is also possible to go beyond the mere methods of fiction and put one's entire being into another—say, Chekhov's—shoes.

To reiterate my main point, the representations of the Soviet Union and Russia in Japanese literature will always be infused with social and political biases. Yet, on occasion, writers will show that they can transcend the space of ideology and make their own voices heard in galactic overtones. Such successes will be possible precisely due to the special notion that the Japanese have of Russia. It is no coincidence that the phrase “I am a seagull” appears in both Ikezawa's *Ya Chaika* and Kurokawa's *Day of the Seagulls* as a sort of call to mankind that carries a deeply symbolic significance. Even if this “Russia” of the Japanese imagination has little to do with the “real Russia,” Russia can be said to have served its function so long as it assists in the expansion of Japan's literary imagination and broadens the parameters of the

often-cramped and stuffy world of contemporary Japanese literature.

ハルキ VS カラマーゾフ 現代日本文学における「偉大なるロシア文学」の影

沼野充義

この講演は「東大－イェール・イニシアティブ」(両大学間の学術交流プログラム)主催のレクチャー・シリーズの一環として、2009年12月8日、イェール大学において英語で行われた。私を歓迎し、講演会を主催してくださったクリストファー・ヒル(日本文学)とヴラジミール・アレクサンドロフ(ロシア文学)の両教授に心から感謝したい。

現代日本でもっとも人気のある作家は誰かと聞かれたら、私は村上春樹とドストエフスキーだと答えたい。ドストエフスキーは日本人ではなく、ロシアの作家であるということは、いかに迂闊な私でも知らないわけではないが、このところ、『カラマーゾフの兄弟』の新訳が100万部を超えるベストセラーになったことをきっかけにドストエフスキーの人气が急上昇し、いまや彼は現代日本の作家として蘇ったかのようなのである。

しかし、このドストエフスキー人気はいま急に始まったわけではない。明治時代の日本において、近代文学の形成に対してロシア文学が巨大な影響を与えたことはよく知られている。二葉亭四迷や白樺派の作家たちにとって、ロシア文学は決定的に重要だった。第二次世界大戦後は、『近代文学』に依拠した批評家たちを始めとして、「戦後派」の作家たち全般にロシア文学の影響が濃厚に感じられる。また早稲田大学の露文科はすぐれた作家たちを輩出した。またロシア文学を専攻していなくとも、ロシア文学に造詣の深い現代作家としては、加賀乙彦、大江健三郎、井上ひさしなどがいる。

ロシア文学はその後、現代にかけて影が薄くなってきたように見えるが、じつは潜在的には巨大なインスピレーションの源であり続けてきた。その素地があってこそ、今日のドストエフスキー・ブームも可能になったのである。この講演では、主として1980年代以降に活躍を始めた新しい世代の現代日本作家6名を取り上げ、彼らの作品を具体的に紹介しながら、ロシア文学が彼らの作品にどのように影響を与えているか、ロシアのイメージがどのように現れているかを検討していく。6名の作家とは、池澤夏樹、島田雅彦、村上春樹、黒川創、中村文則、鹿島田真希である。

彼らの作品に登場するロシア人に、スパイ、秘密警察、独裁者、売春婦などといった相も変わらぬステレオタイプ的な人物が多いのは事実だが、これらの優れた作家たちは皆それぞれの方法でステレオタイプを超えて、狭く閉ざされがちな現代日本文学に風穴をあけ、そこから形而上的な息吹や宇宙的な響きを呼び込むための「文学的手法」としてロシアを

使っている。そのロシアとは、現実のロシア、「プーチンのロシア」とはあまり似ていないものかもしれないのだが。