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How has the Nobel Prize Affected the Canonisation of Japanese Literature?

Nobel Ödülü Japon Edebiyatının Kanonlaştırılmasını Nasıl Etkiledi?

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Abstract

From the 1950s to the 70s Japanese literature became the most widely read *non-European literature in translation* in the USA and Western Europe, as such eminent writers like Tanizaki, Kawabata, Mishima, and Ōe were discovered in English translation. This discovery encouraged and inspired new translations into other European and non-European languages that rendered Japanese literature popular throughout the planet. From the 1990s onward postmodern writers like Murakami and Yoshimoto rose also to global fame. Interestingly, the common point of all these internationally acclaimed writers is that they all have histories with the Nobel Prize in

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Literature: either they became laureates like Kawabata and Ōe, nominated like Tanizaki and Mishima; was considered as a Nobel candidate like Murakami, or merely "dreamt" of winning the prize someday like Yoshimoto. In this article, we treated the complex relations between Japanese writers and the Nobel Prize, which has become a symbol of cultural universality. We attempted to answer the following question: how have being considered a candidate, being nominated, winning, or losing the prize contributed to the universalisation of these writers?

Keywords: *Nobel Prize in Literature,* Ōe*, Tanizaki, Kawabata, Mishima, Murakami*

Öz

Tanizaki, Kavabata, Mişima ve Ōe gibi seçkin yazarların İngilizce tercümede yeniden keşfedilmeleri sayesinde, Japon edebiyatı 1950'lerden 70'lere kadar olan süreçte ABD ve Batı Avrupa'da en çok okunan *Avrupa-dışı çeviri edebiyatı* olmuştur. Bu yeniden keşif, diğer Avrupa dillerine ve Avrupa-dışı dillere yeni çevirileri teşvik etmiş ve esinlemiştir. 1990'lardan itibaren Murakami ve Yoşimoto gibi postmodern yazarlar da küresel çapta ün kazanmıştır. Dünyaya mal olmuş bu yazarların hepsi ilginç bir şekilde Nobel Edebiyat Ödülü'yle bağlantılıdır: ya Kavabata ve Ōe gibi ödülü kazanmış, ya Tanizaki ve Mişima gibi ödüle aday gösterilmiş, ya Murakami gibi ödül adayı olarak düşünülmüş, ya da Yoşimoto gibi sadece, bir gün bu ödülü almanın hayalini kurmuşlardır. Nobel ödülünün evrensel boyuttaki cazibesi, ona layık görülen yazarları "fiilen" dünya yazarı olarak kanonlaştırmasıdır. II. Dünya Savaşı'nda büyük bir hezimet yaşamış olan Japon toplumu için savaş sonrası dönemde bu "şeref," daima özel bir anlam ifade etmiş ve yenilgi sonrasında bir düzelmenin ve toparlanmanın simgesi olarak görülmüştür. Nobel'in böylesine ulusal ve uluslararası cazibelere sahip olması gerek okurlar gerekse medya nezdinde, ödüle ve ödül adayı yazarlara karşı büyük ilgi uyandırmaktadır. Bu aşırı ilgi nedeniyle 1960'ların Nobel adayı Mişima Tayland'a kaçmıştır. Günümüzde ise bir süredir adı Nobel ile anılan Haruki Murakami'nin, kendilerini *Haruki-ci* [ハルキスト] olarak adlandıran hayran-okurları Nobel ödül programlarını, Dünya Kupası final maçı izler gibi seyretmektedir. Bu makalede, Japon edebiyatı yazarları ile "Nobel Edebiyat Ödülü" adı verilen, kültürel evrenselliğin simgesi haline gelmiş fenomen arasındaki karmaşık ilişkileri ele aldık. Nobel Ödülü'ne aday olarak düşünülmenin, aday gösterilmenin, ödülü kazanmanın veya kazanamamanın adı geçen yazarların evrenselleşmesine nasıl katkıda bulunduğu sorusuna cevaplar aradık.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Nobel Edebiyat Ödülü,* Ōe*, Tanizaki, Kavabata, Mişima, Murakami*

Introduction: Kawabata's Nobel Prize and "Non-European literatures in translation" 1968, when Kawabata received the award, is a milestone in the history of the Nobel Prize for the literatures of non-Western languages as he was the first laureate who wrote exclusively in a non-Western language. Although the Bengali poet Tagore was the first non-European laureate (1913), he was awarded for his works he produced in English. This issue was clearly stated

in the Nobel Prize motivation, through an emphasis of how his oeuvre belongs to European literary canon: "… with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West" (NobelPrize.org, 2021). As the institution of the Nobel Prize has a Eurocentric tendency at linguistic level, there has always been a great asymmetry between those who write in Western languages and non-Western languages, in favour of the first. Along with Kawabata only six non-European language writers, *i.e.* Kenzaburō Ōe, Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz, Chinese Gao Xingjian, Mo Yan, and Turkish Orhan Pamuk were awarded the prize. Still, one may have high expectations: *non-European literatures in translation* is, ironically, the field that the Nobel institution has been quite successful in universalising and classifying a cluster of literary works as "world literature", as it has promoted the translations of their works into more languages throughout the globe.

Hence, ever since Kawabata's Nobel honour, Japanese literature has had a special status in the universalisation of *non-European literatures in translation*. From the 1950s to the 70s it became the most widely read *non-European literature in translation* in the USA and Western Europe, as writers like Tanizaki, Kawabata, Mishima, and Ōe were discovered in English translation. This discovery encouraged and inspired new translations into other European and non-European languages that rendered Japanese literature popular throughout the planet. From the 1990s onward the postmodern Murakami and Yoshimoto rose also to global fame (Güven, 2019: 71-76). Significantly, all these internationally acclaimed writers have histories with the Nobel: either they became laureates like Kawabata and Ōe or nominated like Tanizaki and Mishima or were considered as Nobel candidates like Murakami or merely "dreamt" of winning the prize someday like Yoshimoto. In this article, we will treat the complex relations between Japanese writers and the Nobel Prize in Literature, which has become a symbol of cultural universality. We will attempt to answer the following question: how have being considered a candidate, being nominated, winning, or losing the prize contributed to the international acclaim of these prominent writers of Japanese modern and postmodern literatures?

A self-orientalist author longing for the Nobel prize: Yasunari Kawabata

Did Kawabata desire to win the Nobel Prize? Or was he indifferent to it? This question can only be addressed through addressing another closely related question: did he bear in mind and internalise the exotic expectations of the Western readers and those of the Nobel Committee during his creative writing activities? He himself claimed that his works' essence had never changed in pre-, during, and post-war eras (qtd. in Yamamoto, 1993, p. 310). Many critics also see a continuum in his oeuvre. For instance, Yamamoto (1993) maintains that even though he adopted various styles, his passion for "oriental nihilism" remained constant (p. 311).

Nonetheless, looking at his entire oeuvre retroactively, one would hardly fail to notice a clear-cut breakpoint in his post-war works. Two major examples of his pre-war works

are *The Dancing Girl of Izu* (『伊豆の踊子』, 1926) and *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa* (『草紅團』, 1930). As a representative of the "fresh expressionism" (新感覚派) movement throughout the 1920s and 30s, he was heavily under the influence of modernist Western literary movements such as cubism, expressionism, and Dadaism (Ōkubo, 2004). His "fresh expressionist" novel *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*, intensely inspired by European modernism, depicts a flaneur's discovery of Asakusa, the nightlife centre of Tokyo, under the guidance of a masculine teenage girl gang leader. On the other hand, *The Dancing Girl of Izu,* which does not correspond to the criteria of fresh expressionism, is a nihilistic, semi-autobiographical broken love story.

In a sense, Yamamoto's proposition that Kawabata's "oriental" overtones did not change in the course of time is accurate. However, it needs a revision: although *qualitatively* they remained constant, *quantitatively* they did change. Namely, "exotic" overtones become gradually and conspicuously predominant in his post-war works. Such an oriental atmosphere is indubitably the result of his emphasis on the representations of the "Japanese mind" and traditional arts and culture. For instance, in *Snow Country* (『雪国』, 1935-47), which relates the love affair of Shimamura, an amateur art enthusiast from Tokyo, with Komako, a geisha working in a hot spring town, traditional Japanese dances constitute the background. Furthermore, while the main story of *Thousand Cranes* (『千羽鶴』, 1952) revolves around Kikuji's –an orphaned young man, in his late twenties— affairs both with his father's ex-mistress Ōta and her twenty-two-year-old daughter Fumiko, the traditional art of *sado* (tea ceremony) is introduced to the narrative via Chikako, a *sado* master and another former mistress of Kikuji's father. Namely, these post-war novels, treat the problematic and chaotic relations of the Japanese individuals living in modern Japan, against the background of the aesthetic world of Japanese traditional arts (Güven, 2018: 286).

His insistent emphasis on the exotic oriental motifs to the extent of redundancy in his post-war works, indicates how intent he was on his international reputation, which would pave the way for the Nobel. His enthusiasm for obtaining the prize can be further verified by the fact that he continued to fetishise "Japaneseness" in every sense of the word, through consistently and recurrently representing Japanese national and cultural identities in his subsequent literary texts. For example, *The Master of Go* (『名人』, 1954), which could be defined as a response to, or the "Japanese" version of Stefan Zweig's *The Royal* Game (1943), recounts the "final match" of Shūsai, one of the greatest masters of *go*. He plays it at the expense of his health, eventually of his life, and would be defeated for the first and last time. The main setting in *The House of the Sleeping Beauties* (『眠れる美女』, 1961) –a bizarre postmodern reconstruction of the Grimmian fairy tale, *Sleeping Beauty*— is an eccentric brothel exclusively designed for impotent old men, who pay to sleep passively besides drugged young and beautiful girls without any sexual act. Finally, in *The Old Capital* (『古都』, 1962), we read the identity crises of two estranged sisters after their reunion, against the backdrop of the Kyoto's traditional beauties, especially its festivals (*matsuri*).

Hence, in his later works Kawabata expressed on the one hand, the male-female

relations in Japan, with a particular focus on eroticism, which he posited as radically different from the Western ones, the exotic beauties of Japan on the other. Unquestionably, such a *modus operandi* based on a self-imposed radical alterity, corresponded perfectly to the exotic expectations of Western readers and critics. Within this frame of reference, the Nobel Committee's prize motivation: "for his narrative mastery, which with great sensibility expresses the essence of the Japanese mind" (NobelPrize.org, 2021) is quite significant. Furthermore, the three novels that the Nobel Committee cited were *Thousand Cranes*, *Snow Country*, and *The Old Capital*, are self-orientalist texts appealing to the exotic tastes of non-Japanese readers. For example, while *The Old Capital* was read widely in the West, it was scarcely popular among Japanese readers (Tomioka, 2014: 199-224).

Internationalising "National literature": Junichirō Tanizaki

Kawabata's admiration for Japanese traditional cultural and artistic "beauties," as well as his literary obsession with eroticism, are reminiscent of another great writer of Japanese national literature who had equally a history with the Nobel Prize: Tanizaki. He was nominated seven times for the prize from 1958 to 1965. Again, just like Kawabata, he is partly a self-orientalist. However, does this self-orientalism have the same motivation as that of Kawabata? Namely, is it the result of appropriating and internalising Western readers' desires? Finally, is it a product of his passion for winning the Nobel Prize?

The basic themes of Tanizaki, who had made his literary debut in 1909, did not change much. The author mostly worked on themes such as cultural nostalgia for Tokugawa era Japan, woman, and eroticism. It is quite evident that modern western literature, particularly its orientalist currents played an influential part in his thematic choices. One can see this effect at the intra-textual level in *Some Prefer Nettles* (『蓼喰う虫』, 1929), a semi-autobiographic novella describing the complex divorce process of Kaname and his wife Misako –who is having an affair with another man with the consent and even encouragement of her husband—, as a result of a prolonged marital crisis), where the protagonist, Kaname, browses through the pages of *Arabian Nights* with a desperate desire to find some "obscene content." For achieving his aim, he consults the redundant and intervening footnotes of the translator Richard Burton, which are based on an essentialist and orientalist ideology: "A slight parting between the two front incisors, the upper only, is considered a beauty by Arabs; why it is hard to say except for the racial love of variety [. . .]" (Tanizaki, 1995: 75).

As is obvious from these direct quotes from the orientalist translator, Tanizaki's self-orientalism originates from the West. Hence, it must be stressed that unlike Kawabata, who internalised the exoticist aspirations of Western readers and critics, he achieved a unique self-orientalism by imitating and even, in an ironic manner, parodying certain Western orientalists like Burton. He discovered his own "miniaturised orient" in the Kansai Region – the southern-central region of Japan's main island including such cities as Kyoto and Osaka. Namely, although he was born and raised in Tokyo, in the aftermath of the Kanto earthquake in 1923 he was forced to move to Kyoto. After he began his new life in this "old capital",

he realised that unlike modernised cities like Tokyo and Osaka, such peripheral cities as Wakayama, Sakai, Himeji, Nishinomiya located in the Kansai Region, had still preserved many aspects of Japanese traditional culture and lifestyles.

The most salient indication of his distinctive orientalism at the level of style, is his use of the Kansai dialect (*Kansai-ben*= 関西弁) *i.e.* Kyoto-Osaka dialect, in some of his works including *Some Prefer Nettles*, *Quicksand* (『まんじ』, 1930), and *Makioka Sisters* (『細雪』, 1948). Unfortunately, this feature is completely lost in E. G. Seidensticker's translation. For instance, O-hisa's (the young mistress of Kaname's father-in-law) heavy accent and frequent use of Kansai dialect expressions are assimilated into the standard English. To make the matter worse, despite the extensive use of clusters of specific terms related to the traditional *bunraku* (puppet theatre), *kabuki*, and *nō* theatres, and Tokugawa era literature and culture, the translator almost totally ignored them. This reckless strategy of *cultural translation*, probably adopted by Seidensticker for the pragmatic purpose of facilitating the reading processes of the Western reader, inevitably resulted in the sterilisation of the original text.

Thus, in an ironic way, Tanizaki, who produced an original self-orientalist literature inspired by Western orientalism, was subjected to a *neo-orientalist linguistic violence* in the English translations of his above-mentioned works. On the other hand, the fact that he produced texts embellished with motifs and terms unique to local and traditional Japanese culture and language attests that he did not write his works with the expectation of being translated into English and other foreign languages.

Two Japanese writers who are incorporated into the canon of "global subcultural fiction" while aiming for the Nobel Prize: Haruki Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto

By focusing on his literary production process, rather than his statements concerning the topic, we revealed that Tanizaki did not write with the aim of winning the Nobel Prize. How about Murakami and Yoshimoto, the most celebrated representatives of postmodern Japanese literature? Did they want and plan to win the prize? This chapter attempts to answer these questions.

Yoshimoto is the daughter of the renowned critic and poet Takaaki Yoshimoto, one of the apostles of radical university students of the 1950s and 60s. *Kitchen*『キッチン』, 1988), is her domestically and internationally most acclaimed work, consisting of three organically linked short stories. The same titled "Kitchen" depicts the life of Mikage, who after losing her grandmother begins to live with Yūichi and his transgender "mother" Eriko, owner of a gay bar. Most of her later works published after *Kitchen*, did not meet with critical success abroad. Nevertheless, in an irony of fate, what linked her to the prize have been her comments and statements concerning her "dream" of winning it someday. Although some of her detractors had once teased her by saying she must be dreaming (Gee, 1997), she declared in a 2009 blog post that she is "not deterred from [her] ultimate dream of receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature" (Yoshimoto, 2009).

Probably, no other Japanese writer has been as outspoken as Yoshimoto about her/

his aspirations for the Nobel Prize. Nevertheless, in recent years, the most likely Japanese contemporary author to realise her dream, instead of her, has been Murakami. As is widely known, he became a best-selling author both in Japan and the world with several hit novels like *Norwegian Wood* (『ノルウェイの森』, 1987), *Kafka on the Shore* (『海辺のカフカ』, 2002), and *1Q84* (2009–10). Such a tremendous fame paved the way for being frequently tipped as an upcoming Nobel laureate (The Straits Times, 2015, para. 4). Although his nomination cannot be officially verified since the records of all nominations are not declassified for 50 years from the awarding of the prize (NobelPrize.org, 2021), it is almost certain that he was several times considered for the Nobel.

Yet did the author himself desire it? In a 2012 interview, he answered: "No, I don't want prizes. That means you're finished" (Kelts, 2012, para. 7). Can one rely upon his declaration? As clarified above, the main criterion in this article is to determine whether the author adjusts and modifies his style and process of literary production in harmony with the expectations of the Nobel Committee, rather than his/her explicit statements. In what follows we will attempt to demonstrate how Murakami was as willing as Yoshimoto to win the prize and how he acted accordingly.

One can easily observe that especially after the translation of *Pinball, 1973* 『1973年のピンボール』, 1980) –which could be posited as a vacuous and a mediocre reconstruction of Oe's *Silent Cry* (1967)- into English in 1985, he gradually modified his style and content with the aim of gaining wider international fame. This tendency became even more conspicuous, from the early 1990s onward as he strived to supervise and direct the processes of translations of his works into foreign languages. As might be expected, he was well aware of the crucial importance of translation in achieving recognition abroad and attached great importance to "translation." Furthermore, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the author, himself being a prolific translator who translated the works of such authors as Fitzgerald, Carver, Capote, Irving, and P. Theroux from English into Japanese, adopted anachronically and much to non-English language translators' surprise an "English-centric" attitude –in the broadest sense of the term- in the translations of his works into foreign languages.

According to Hijiya-Kirschnereit (2014), direct German translations of some of Murakami's short stories were published in the late 1980s before their English translations. Additionally, in 1991, *A Wild Sheep Chase*'s (『羊をめぐる冒険』, 1982) direct translation was published and welcomed by German critics "as a fresh voice from Japan with a surprisingly 'American' sound" (para. 5). Nonetheless, paradoxically, after this obvious critical success in Germany, Murakami did not allow the translation of his works that had not yet been translated into English. What is more he insisted that the German translations of his works were done indirectly from their English translations, which he considered in a very English-centric manner as the "authoritative" - in every sense of the word- "master copy." As a result of intense critical reactions to, and the commercial failure of his strategy of indirect rendering, his major works were retranslated directly from Japanese from the 2010s onward (Hijiya-Kirschnereit, 2014, para. 6-13).

Hence, Murakami was concerned that his texts should be fully understood by Western readers and assumed that their English versions which were cultural adaptations fitting American cultural patterns would help him overcome this problem. In other words, he was concerned of getting lost in translation. Hijiya-Kirschnereit (2014) implies that in the 2000s, he started to write "culturally" more translatable works, thus deterred from imposing indirect translations from the English "master copies": "[…] Has Murakami perhaps adapted his style of writing for a global market in a way that makes these adaptations no longer necessary?" (para. 15)

The point that should be added in the context of our article is that behind his ambition to control the translations of his works, especially into Western languages such as German, and to be understood by Western readers is the author's desire to receive the Nobel Prize. In fact, if one examines Murakami's original texts closely, it will be seen that unlike the expert stylists such as Tanizaki, Mishima, Kawabata and Ōe, who have histories with the Nobel, he has not given much importance to Japanese expression and has rather focused on producing exceptionally translatable works since his literary debut. For example, it is widely known that he wrote some parts of his debut novel *Hear the Wind Sing* (『風の歌を聴け』, 1979) in English and then translated it into Japanese (Kelts, 2013, para. 3).

Especially, his major works like *Kafka on the Shore* and *1Q84* that he published in the early 21st century, are written in a style that would facilitate the English translation. Therefore, his English-centrism is not only present in the translation processes into Western languages, but also in his own creative writing. Although he writes in Japanese, this is an "anglicised Japanese" that has lost its authentic essence. One is even tempted to say that the writer writes in "English" at the discursive level.

Moreover, arguably, one of the most influential factors in Murakami's failure to receive the award so far, might be the harsh criticism by some reputable literary figures such as the 1994 Nobel laureate Ōe, literary researcher and critic Yōichi Komori, and novelist Mitsuyo Kakuta. In *Theses on Murakami Haruki - A Close Reading of Kafka on the Shore* (『村上春樹論—「海辺のカフカを精読する』, 2006), Komori criticises *Kafka on the Shore*, which is considered one of Murakami's masterpieces.

The magic realist novel consists of two narrative lines lead by two protagonists: the first line centres on Kafka Tamura - a 15-year-old boy- who escapes from his Tokyo home as well as from his father's oedipal anathema, embarking on an odyssey in search for his mother and sister. The second line revolves around Satoru Nakata, a middle-aged man, who has a mental disability and dyslexia, but who is also endowed with a spectacular skill of speaking with cats, therefore is specialised in finding lost cats.

According to Komori (2006), this novel has been *misread* by its readers living in the global metropolises, as a work that functions like an antidote against the post-September 11 bleak and unsettling *zeitgeist,* by offering them an overall cathartic relief and solace (7-16). He denounces the novel for being an anti-humanist, pro-militarist, misogynist, and destructively nihilistic text. Furthermore, he accuses Murakami of manipulating the collective unconscious

of the readers by evoking the collective trauma of a past terrorist attack that occurred in Japan in 1995, *i.e.* "Tokyo Subway Sarin Gas Attack" (Komori, 2006: 8-9) It is within this frame of reference that the novelist Kakuta condemns the novel for its traumatising effect, which she defines as "unintentional intention of violence" (qtd. In Komori, 2006: 7-8).

Finally, Ōe (2005) dismisses both Murakami and Yoshimoto, as the authors of a "global age of subculture" (pp. 208-210). He regards them as the symptoms of the "chronic decline" of "serious literature and literary readership" in Japan, implying that their unprecedentedly bestselling works are of low literary quality (Ōe, 1995: 49). Thus, as indicated above, it is highly probable that such harsh criticisms might have prevented Murakami from receiving the award until today. Furthermore, arguably, the fact that the Japanese-born British Ishiguro won the prize in 2017, might have lessened his chances.

A Tacit condemnation of Kawabata's Nobel prize (Lecture): Yukio Mishima

Undoubtedly, Murakami was the most widely read Japanese writer of all time both domestically and internationally. Nonetheless, this popularity is not the result of his high literary quality, but, on the contrary, as his critics like Ōe and Komori noted, has been enabled by the fact that he has produced "pulp fiction-style" light and easily consumable works that responded to the expectations of the global age readership. The person who became the most popular Japanese writer abroad *thanks to his refined literary quality* has certainly been Mishima. After he was discovered in English translation with his major novels such as *The Sound of Waves* (『潮騒』, 1954) and *Confessions of a Mask* (『仮面の告白』,1949) Mishima became "the first living Japanese writer to gain widespread fame in the West" (Lang, 2019). Hence, he was considered one of the strongest candidates for the Nobel Prize.

Then, did he target and act accordingly to win the Nobel, as Kawabata, Murakami and Yoshimoto had done? According to Flanagan (2015): "No writer coveted that award more than Yukio Mishima who in the early 60s seemed determined to land this ultimate accolade, when he was still only in his 30s" (para. 5). Hence, he not only desired to receive this award, but did almost everything to get it. He was initially encouraged by the influential translator and literary critic Donald Keene, "who actively lobbied for him to be awarded major international awards such as the Formentor Prize." Mishima's name was printed on lists produced by Euro-American "newspapers of deserving writers for the Nobel Prize." He even visited "home of the Nobel Prize and its judges, Stockholm, on a reconnaissance mission" (Flanagan, 2015, para. 5-7).

He was not alone in longing for the Nobel, his fervent readers, friendly critics, and the media were also very enthusiastic about it. As the time of each award announcement approached, the Japanese media took him into a blockade. Such a frenzy was stressing him out, so much so that in 1965 he travelled to Thailand to escape media attention. In recent years, such a "will he or won't he win?" furore has been also experienced in the case of Haruki Murakami's Nobel "adventure," as his fans *aka* "Harukists" (ハルキスト) gather in various parts of the country to watch the announcement of the prize as though watching a

World Cup final. In the background of this passion is the fact that the prize has had a special significance to Japan ever since the early post-war years, provided that it was regarded "as a symbol of rehabilitation in the aftermath of the nation's defeat in World War II" (Flanagan, 2015, para. 3).

Because the Nobel had such a special meaning for the post-war Japanese public, the common feature of the candidates in the 1950s and 60s was that they were generally seen as agents of "cultural diplomacy" obliged to "introduce" Japanese culture to the world. In that respect although Mishima is a cultural nationalist and self-orientalist, his orientalism is very different from that of Kawabata and only slightly similar to that of Tanizaki. Just like Tanizaki, he was also an avid and careful reader of Western literature and an enthusiastic admirer of its culture. He discovered Japan from this firmly internalised Western perspective. Yet the crucial difference of him from Tanizaki is that his orientalism was imbued with heavy "occidental" overtones on the level of the plot structure and narrative action. Namely, whereas Tanizaki endeavoured to move gradually from a Western style narration to a more authentically Japanese style one and construct literary works that were radically different from European novels, he attempted to combine Western narration techniques with exotic far-eastern motifs. For instance, in his late works like *Patriotism* (『憂國』, 1960) and *Runaway Horses* (『奔馬』1969), he successfully amalgamated romantic heroism unique to Western literature with the motifs inspired from Japanese samurai tales and the romanticised nihilism of bushido (the code of honour of the samurais) ethics. It should also be noted that he was a great adorer of Tanizaki, so much so that he wrote a letter of recommendation in support of his Nobel nomination, in which Mishima praised him as "a writer who succeeded in fusing classical Japanese literature and modern Western literature at the highest level" (Mishima, 2009). He was not then aware that they would be rivals for the 1964 Nobel Prize.

Another question to be addressed is the following: how did his desire for the Nobel and his official nomination three times from 1963 to 1965 affect Mishima's literary production process? Especially after he was discovered in the Anglophone world thanks to the translations of *Sound of the Waves* and *Confessions of a Mask* in the late 1950s, he began to be neurotically concerned with the translation of his works. Although at first glance this appears to be like Murakami's attitude to control the translation process, what mattered for him who had a morbid obsession with time, was not from what language and how the translations were done, but rather their "speed." It is a common knowledge that he personally chose his translators and asked them to finish the translation as soon as possible. For instance, Keene (qtd. in Macintyre, 2012) reminisces how Mishima was disturbed by the "slowness" of his translation of a novel and asked if he might find someone else to do it. This is quite strange when one considers that his Japanese was not an easily translatable one unlike that of Murakami. Indeed, according to Keene his "sentences are full of complexities, involutions [and] unusual words… He knew the exact name for everything" (qtd. in Macintyre, 2012). Then, why did he give priority to the speed of the translation rather than its perfection?

Such a hysterical hastiness evoking that of "the White Rabbit" of *Alice in the Wonderland* is directly linked with his two strong passions: winning the Nobel Prize, which he regarded

as a means of being recognised throughout the world, and his romantic intention of dying young (Keene qtd. in Macintyre, 2012). In a sense, these two passions were also inextricably intertwined as he wanted to be renowned throughout the world at the time of his self-imposed and bizarre "martyrdom," *i.e.* his dramatic and shocking suicide action in the headquarters of Japanese Self-Defence Forces, which he enacted on November 25, 1970. One is tempted to think that he had perhaps intended to commit *seppuku* that day as a Nobel laureate, which would have even increased the dramatic effect of his extravagantly performative act of self-destruction.

Yet to his, the literary critics', as well as to his domestic and international readers' shock and chagrin, it was Kawabata who won the prize. This is a widely known fact, but what was not known then is that Kawabata had coerced Mishima to write a recommendation letter to the Nobel Committee, "in exchange for Kawabata's support in a legal dispute" in the early 1960s. Additionally, it came to light that "Mishima had also partly ghost-written *House of the Sleeping Beauties*" (Flanagan, 2015, para. 12). Hence, Mishima, who enthusiastically longed and strove for winning the Nobel Prize, was forced to pave the way for Kawabata's success.

On the other hand, Kawabata appeared to be deeply aware that in fact Mishima had deserved this award more than he had. For instance, he declared in a press statement that he was awarded the prize only because Mishima was too young (Isoda, 1983). He also stated on a TV interview held by Mishima and Sei Itō, that he was embarrassed to be perceived as the representative of Japanese literature in the world. Yet, all these remarks were interpreted by the critics as mere modesty and politeness. Meanwhile, Mishima immediately praised Kawabata's achievement in an article he wrote for a newspaper. He then paid a visit to Kawabata's house to felicitate him (Flanagan, 2015, para. 11).

In all his public statements he expressed his joy and pride for Kawabata. However, such a warm response was nothing but simply a "mask" that he (who was always posited as the faithful friend, even some sort of pupil of Kawabata in the discourses of Japanese literary history and criticism) wore to dissimulate his true feelings and thoughts. He was especially dissatisfied with Kawabata's Nobel lecture. In his speech Kawabata constructed an "esoteric and nihilistic metaphysical discourse" by citing obscure lines from works of medieval Zen poetry, emphasising how effective Zen Buddhism had been in the formation of Japanese culture's "beauty" (Güven, 2018: 278). What disturbed Mishima was that such an overwhelmingly self-glorifying nationalistic representation of Japanese culture built around the image of "beauty" was not restricted to premodern times, but it was through an implicit ambiguity and vagueness connected to contemporary Japan.

How can one verify Mishima's critical reaction? For understanding it, one should carefully read his posthumously published latest work, *The Decay of the Angel* (天人五衰』, 1971), the fourth and last book of *The Sea of Fertility* tetralogy (『豊饒の海』四部作). In this work, Mishima tacitly criticised Kawabata's vision of Japan and Japanese culture, that he presented in his Nobel speech, particularly, almost in all episodes of Kinué, who suffers a "delirious depression," which was triggered by an "unfortunate love affair." She is constantly under the delusion that she is the most "beautiful" woman in the world, while she is in fact very "ugly":

Kinué was the daughter of a wealthy landowner. She had been somewhat strange since an unfortunate love affair, and she had been in a mental hospital for six months. She had a curious syndrome described as delirious depression or depressed intoxication or something of the sort. There had been no serious outburst since, and it had settled into a conviction that she was the most beautiful girl in the world (Mishima, 2001: 34).

Mishima, who thought that the post-war Japanese society betrayed its cultural roots and sold its soul to the devil called materialism (Güven, 2020: 58), found Kawabata's embellishment of Japan around the image of "beauty" in his speech, ridiculous and abstract. Kinué was the perfect tool for ruthlessly satirising Kawabata's aestheticisation of Japan, as it was to Mishima nothing but a delusional self-deception.

Hence, we can conclude that in his last work, *The Decay of the Angel*, Mishima sublimates his wrath of losing the Nobel Prize to Kawabata, whom he thought had only a shallow understanding of traditional Japanese culture, as well as his discontent with his Nobel lecture entitled "Japan the Beautiful and Myself" into the level of art. Furthermore, losing the prize inspired him to write his last and one of his most "beautiful" works of non-European language world literature canon.

The Nobel Laureate who critically classified "internationalised" Japanese writers: Kenzaburō Ōe

Thus, in his latest novel, Mishima so skilfully concealed his satire on Kawabata's Nobel speech that it has not caught the attention of critics so far. In stark contrast, Ōe lambasted the same lecture explicitly, what is more, he did it quite unexpectedly during his Nobel speech. Even the title of his speech is an explicit parody of that of Kawabata: "Japan the Ambiguous and Myself," which is formed by replacing the adjective "beautiful" with another adjective, "ambiguous." As his title implies Kawabata's text consists of many ambiguities which are deftly veiled through the romantic image of "beauty." Although they have completely different political stances, both Ōe and Mishima disagreed that post-war Japan and the "contemporary" Japanese national identity could be blurred and aestheticised by virtue of the image of "beauty." Yet, while Mishima accused Kawabata of not knowing Japanese culture enough, Ōe (1995) on the contrary, denounced him for not knowing the "world" and being disconnected from it (111-112).

The most crucial ambiguity in Kawabata's speech was that although he had been awarded a prize celebrating the ubiquitous universality of culture and humanist values, he had articulated a self-isolationist, nihilistic cultural nationalist ideology that posits Japanese culture as "unique" and radically different from those of the whole world. This ideology was underpinned by his quotations from opaque, inaccessible medieval Zen poems. Ōe was not only discontent with Kawabata's such self-orientalism, but also with his indifference to foreign literatures (Güven, 2018: 283-284) and to the socio-political actuality of the world. Therefore, he accentuated that he felt "more spiritual affinity with the Irish poet Yeats," (Ōe, 1994, p. 114) the 1923 Nobel laureate, rather than his compatriot. So even his decision

to conduct his lecture in English, can be interpreted as a reaction against Kawabata's self-isolationist/nationalist attitude, in favour of a more extroverted/internationalist one.

Ōe is not only a writer who became a distinctive member of world literature canon through his works, but he also embarked on the task of critically categorising Japanese as well as Korean and Chinese writers who were and should be considered world writers. Hence, acting like a literary researcher, he contributed greatly to introducing or emphasising the importance of literary figures like Japanese Kazuo Watanabe, Shōhei Ōoka, Kenji Nakagami; Korean Kim Chi Ha, finally Chinese Chon I and Mu Jen to the foreign readership, in his lectures and conferences including his Nobel speech, throughout the 1990s. These lectures are published in the form of a book under the title of *Japan the Ambiguous, and Myself- The Nobel Prize Speech and Other Lectures* (1995).

Furthermore, in another lecture entitled "Can World Literature Become Japanese Literature?" (世界文学は日本文学たりうるか?), Ōe (2005) divided Japanese writers who were and should be considered world writers into three major categories: 1) the writers who segregated themselves from Asian Literature: Tanizaki, Kawabata, and Mishima; 2) the writers who learned from "world literature": Ōoka, Abe, and Ōe himself; 3) the authors of a global age of subculture: Murakami and Yoshimoto (pp. 208-210). Thus, through a counter-orientalist attitude, Ōe dismisses Tanizaki, Kawabata, and Mishima, —whom we defined in this article as "self-orientalists"— as writers who are not worthy of being canonised as "world writers," on the grounds that they are cultural nationalists indifferent to associating with Asian literature. As previously mentioned, he also disagrees to classify Murakami and Yoshimoto, as Japanese writers contributing to world literature, due to their low literary quality.

For Ōe, among these three categories the ideal is exclusively the second one, which consists of Abe– the creator of such existentialist masterpieces as *Woman of the Dunes* and *The Box Man*—, Ōoka –whose *magnum opus*, *Fires on the Plain* could be considered the Japanese version of Remarque's anti-war classic *All Quite on the Western Front*- (Güven, 2012, pp. 244-245), and himself. In Ōe's (2005) words, they are the writers who developed their own novel writing methods by learning from world literature (209).

Ōe was awarded the prize for creating with poetic power "an imagined world, where life and myth condense to form a disconcerting picture of the human predicament today," (NobelPrize.org, 2021). Yet did he want to win the Nobel Prize? Did he adjust his writing methods with the aim of receiving it? It is common knowledge that Ōe is not enthusiastic about winning prizes. For instance, he refused the prestigious *Order of Culture* (文化勲章) conferred by the Emperor to artists and scientists for their contributions to Japanese culture, for political reasons. Furthermore, *A Personal Matter* (『個人的な体験』, 1964) which was specifically praised by the Committee, had been translated into English by John Nathan 1968 namely much earlier than his Nobel honour in 1994. This fact clearly indicates that Ōe's creative writing activities was not influenced by a "passion for the Nobel."

Conclusion

Hence, provided that the Nobel Prize has had a special meaning for the post-war Japanese society and is endowed with the *de facto* function of "officially" canonising the laureates as "writers of world literature," not only winning the Nobel Prize, but also desiring it, winning it, narrowly missing it, losing it to another writer, and even reacting to those who won it, have been efficient factors that galvanised and vitalised Japanese literature contributing substantially to its internationalisation. Not only the Japanese Nobel laureates (Ōe and Kawabata), official nominees (Tanizaki and Mishima), "presumptive" candidates (Murakami), and "dreamers" (Yoshimoto) but also -although he does not belong to Japanese national literature-even the Japanese-born British laureate Ishiguro can also be seen as the fruits of this dynamic universalisation process.

Evidently, the Nobel Prize in Literature, which has been criticised for being a Eurocentric institution, has the potentials to enrich not only the national literatures produced in non-European languages, but also and especially the world literature canon into which they are incorporated, as seen in our case study of Japanese literature. Hence, the Nobel Committee should decentralise its (linguistic) Eurocentrism and consider more authors writing in non-European languages as potential laureates, since it would rejuvenate and variegate the world literature canon.

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