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Narrating Trauma in Takahashi Takako's *Sora no hate made*: Perverse Motherhood

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> What she relives of the past, as if it were happening now in the present, may, to a greater or lesser extent, be (or not be) an accurate enactment, reconstruction, or representation of what actually occurred in the past. It may involve distortion, disguise, and other permutations relating to the processes of imaginative transformation and narrative shaping, as well as perhaps repression, denial, dissociation and foreclosure … The ability to break this compelling frame … is an indication that the woman is not simply reliving or compulsively acting out the past but to some extent working it over and possibly working it through.[1]

Introduction

1. Takahashi Takako's first long novel, *Sora no hate made*[2] (To the Far Reaches of the Skies, Shinchō-sha) (1973) depicts two acts that seem diametrically opposed: infanticide and kidnapping. The protagonist, Hisao, violently refuses ties of blood and the norms of the family in two ways: She abandons her infant son in their home when it is fire bombed during the Pacific War; she then sends her husband to his death after the child. Ironically, the novel also represents an attempt to *recreate* the family structure in perverse form, as Hisao subsequently kidnaps the infant daughter of an acquaintance and resolves to raise her to be 'warped' like herself. Hisao describes herself as a woman with 'evil glowing in the nucleus of her soul,' and Takahashi's anti-heroine certainly appears to rank among the most nefarious of female protagonists in modern Japanese women's writing.

2. The vilification of the protagonist Hisao of *Sora no hate made* is, however, problematised by the recurring and pervasive motif of trauma in the narrative. In this study I examine *Sora no hate made* from the perspective of trauma studies, and argue that the narrative portrays multiple layers of traumatic memories: childbirth and motherhood, the Pacific War, and the trauma of losing (albeit by her own actions) her son and husband in an air raid. In other words, the protagonist simultaneously occupies the unlikely dual roles of victim and perpetrator. The text itself unfolds like traumatic memory, mimicking the symptoms of trauma through literary devices such as repetition. The narrative also constructs a dialogue within the text itself—loosely mirroring the analyst/analysand relationship in trauma therapy. By reading *Sora no hate made* as a work of trauma fiction, we will see that what appears at first to be the evil intent of the protagonist, Hisao, can in fact be attributed in part to the nature of her own traumatic wartime experiences. This reading of the novel subverts the strictures of the hegemonic family, suggesting alternative models of the family premised on bonds of shared experience rather than blood or legal ties.

3. *Sora no hate made* was written nearly thirty years after the end of the Asia Pacific War, seven years before the medical classification of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder),[3] and several decades before the rise of trauma theory in literary studies. Trauma has become a salient topic in modern Japanese literature, with studies on wartime and postwar fiction, and in recent years, on postmodern and contemporary writers such as Murakami Haruki and Yoshimoto Banana. Psychiatrist and social commentator Saitō Tamaki has provocatively suggested that from the 1980s onwards Japan

experienced a 'psychology boom' that permeated Japanese society, mass media, academia and culture.[4] Saitō argues that this so-called 'trauma and healing boom' is evident in the works of contemporary novelists such as Murakami Haruki.[5] Although Takahashi's *Sora no hate made* pre-dates this 'trauma and healing boom' by nearly a decade, it clearly demonstrates many of the issues central to trauma fiction. Importantly, the novel reveals what Anne Whitehead has described as an important development in trauma studies in recent years: a shift 'away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered.'[6] *Sora no hate made* performs the mechanism of 'working through,' which Dominick LaCapra, drawing on Sigmund Freud, regards as intimately related to recovery from trauma. After a brief summary of key events in the text, I will explore three aspects of the novel that articulate the theme of traumatic memory: (1) the narrative structure; (2) representations of childbirth and motherhood; and (3) nightmares and visions of the deaths of the protagonist's son and husband. By working through her traumatic memories the protagonist reaches an acceptance of her role as mother, albeit in perverse form.

4. *Sora no hate made* shares certain similarities with François Mauriac's novel of another murderous anti-heroine, *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (*Revue de Paris*) (1927–1928).[7] During her studies at Kyoto University in 1958, Takahashi wrote her Master's thesis on the works of this French novelist who was the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1952. Takahashi published her own Japanese translation of *Thérèse Desqueyroux* in 1963.[8] Takahashi was profoundly influenced by the 'Catholic novelist' Mauriac, whose fiction probes the darker side of human nature. In the novel *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, the protagonist Thérèse feels spiritually stifled by her roles as mother and wife in a provincial countryside town outside of Bordeaux. Inspired when she observes her husband Bernard accidentally take a double dosage of his medication, Thérèse decides to carry on poisoning him in this manner until he is near death and her crime is suspected. Like Mauriac's Thérèse, *Sora no hate made's* Hisao eschews the bonds of normative wifehood and motherhood, and attempts to radically sever these ties through an act of violence. But whereas Thérèse targets her husband in her attempt to escape the mundane world of a housewife in a respectable provincial rural family, Hisao directs her enmity not only at her husband, but also at her own and other children.

5. Cathy Caruth explains trauma as a wound of the mind, a 'breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world.'[9] Trauma, therefore, is not something which can be located in the originary traumatic event; for Caruth, it is precisely because the traumatic event was not experienced fully that it returns to haunt the survivor in the form of nightmares and repetitions.[10] As a work of trauma fiction, *Sora no hate made* raises important critical questions: How do we remember traumatic events? How do we come to terms with traumatic memories? What if the traumatised subject is also a perpetrator of violence? What is the relationship between what Dominick LaCapra refers to as 'working through' and the historical traumatic event itself? This paper examines *Sora no hate made* as a piece of trauma fiction, and argues that childbirth, motherhood and infanticide can be interpreted as traumatic events in the narrative. The novel performs healing by 'working through' trauma and interrogating the nature of traumatic memory, testimony, and indeed, truth itself.

Summary of novel

6. Hisao is portrayed as a female protagonist who is at best an ambivalent mother and in the extreme, an infanticide mother, murderer and kidnapper. Devoid of maternal feeling and in the throes of what would today be described as postpartum depression, Hisao leaves her infant son behind in the family home in a Kobe air raid during the Asia Pacific War, while she and her husband Shinji escape to safety. Shinji realises that their child is still in the house, now completely engulfed in flames, and Hisao dispatches him to his death to 'rescue' the child, knowing that his demise is certain. Having effectively committed infanticide through abandonment, and murder by sending her husband on a hopeless suicide mission, Hisao herself escapes from the burnt ruins of her neighbourhood. She then does something most

curious: she kidnaps the infant daughter of an acquaintance. The act of kidnapping is inherently ironic as it entails the violent appropriation of motherhood, the very role disavowed by Hisao in the first instance. After the deaths of Shinji and Yōhei, Hisao meets by chance a former acquaintance Yukie and her infant daughter Masako on their way to the countryside to escape the food shortages in the city. Yukie gives Hisao her address and urges her to come for a visit.

7. Like Thérèse's decision to poison her husband Bernard in Mauriac's *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, Hisao's kidnap of Yukie's infant daughter, Masako, occurs almost entirely by chance. One day when Hisao decides to travel to the countryside to exchange her kimono for food, she happens upon Yukie's address and decides to pay her former friend a visit. Hisao arrives just when Yukie is settling Masako down for a nap. Instead of announcing her presence, however, Hisao crouches outside in the shrubbery and observes this typical mother and child scene of domesticity: 'A white light shining from outside the door filled the room. Silent, the mother and child were enveloped in this transparent globe full of light.'[11] Yukie wanders off somewhere leaving the baby alone. When the baby begins to cry with no one in the house, Hisao responds by lifting the baby off of the futon. After wondering to herself, 'What if I ran off just like this with the baby?',[12] she calls out twice to see if anyone is around, then wraps the baby in a *furoshiki* and departs.

8. Two days later Hisao abandons the infant Masako in a burnt-out factory, regarding this as the completion of her crime. She expresses satisfaction at having 'brought to fruition her long-held desire for murder as revenge against the monotony of life,'[13] implying that Hisao has yet to acknowledge her complicity in the deaths of Shinji and Yōhei. But the following day Hisao finds her carefully concocted plan thwarted when an old woman turns up at her door with the baby. Assuming that the baby is Hisao's and that she was abandoning her because of food shortages, the old woman demands that Hisao keep the child. Intending to commit murder, but instead finding motherhood foisted upon her, Hisao decides to raise the baby herself. She renames the infant 'Tamako' after the old woman's stray cat 'Tama.' Hisao pledges that she will raise Tamako to be 'twisted' like herself. After the end of the war Hisao registers Tamako as her child, claiming that the birth records were destroyed in the war. In this way, 'mother' and 'daughter' therefore legally come to constitute a family unit.

9. Far from being maternal and loving towards Tamako, however, Hisao is physically abusive. Hisao's crime then comes full circle in a most perverse manner, and this is where the novel begins: thirteen years after Japan's surrender Hisao encounters by chance Yukie with her second daughter Haruko, born after the end of the war. When she sees Yukie in the distance with her daughter Haruko in tow the experience is profoundly unsettling, and Hisao is shaken to her very core: 'From within her head, which seemed to be filled with some kind of viscous liquid, an elusive clump of memory was beginning to move. Surely the woman looked like someone Hisao knew.'[14] This chance encounter with Yukie opens a rift in Hisao's consciousness. Hisao invites Yukie and Haruko to her home to meet Tamako, who is in fact Yukie's biological daughter. Yukie explains to Hisao that her first daughter, Masako, had died due to malnutrition during the war. Hisao encourages Haruko and Tamako to cultivate their friendship. This meeting functions as the key that unlocks for Hisao the floodgates of traumatic memory.

Narrative structure

10. The story begins in the narrative 'present' (1958), and evolves over six chapters that alternately recount events both present and past. Structurally, odd numbered chapters (one, three, five and seven) take place in the present, whereas even numbered chapters (two, four and six) recount events that occurred in the past. As the story unfolds, the text mimics the form of trauma itself: it is disjointed and fragmented, and shifts between narrative past and present. Within the odd-numbered chapters factual information such as events relating to the war are generally relayed in the past tense (or past perfect tense), and Hisao's experiences are narrated primarily in the present tense. This has the effect of highlighting 'the

traumatic nature of the memories described, which are not so much remembered as re-experienced or re-lived.'[15] Chapters recounting events from the past unfold in chronological form, enabling Hisao to first remember and re-live the events, process them, and ultimately come to terms with them.

11. While many of Takahashi's fictional works are told in the first person, from the perspective of a character referred to simply as 'Watashi' (I), *Sora no hate made* employs a third-person limited narrative structure in both 'present' and 'past' chapters. The narrator is not omniscient; rather, the story is focalised through the perspective of the protagonist, Hisao, meaning that the reader is privy to her internal thoughts and emotions. This has important implications for the reader's perception of the potential verity of the narrative, as the very nature of traumatic experience renders truth itself problematic: 'Here, the frames of third-person and first-person narrative are conjoined, the former providing the basic grammatical features (third person and past tense), the latter accounting for the character perspective (limitation in scope, potential unreliability).'[16] That is, while the novel offers a degree of authority as a third-person narrative on the one hand, that authority is tempered by what Dan Shen refers to as the 'potential unreliability inherent in free indirect thought.'[17]

12. Though narrative focalisation is mediated via the protagonist Hisao, the text also employs internal monologue and character speech. This means that in addition to narrating her own story, the protagonist on occasion participates in a dialogue with herself and indeed with the reader.

> Encounters with a person that lay bare the very flow of one's blood invariably leave a mark somewhere in the depths of one's heart. And so, scenes you have forgotten and scenes you were going to forget suddenly appear at unexpected moments. They lie concealed somewhere in one's heart for many, many years – yes, that's it – they do not disappear; they are simply hiding somewhere where we cannot see them.[18]

In the passage above, for example, the text reads as though Hisao is thinking aloud to herself; her realisations are simultaneously communicated to herself and to the reader, thus emphasising the dialogic nature of the narrative. Indeed, as Hisao tells her tale, she at times interjects with commentary, expresses disbelief, engages in self-remonstration, and even calls into question the verity of her own recollections. For example, when Hisao meets Yukie after a thirteen-year period, the encounter opens a 'fissure from the past,' and she has a vision of herself running away from the aftermath of the firebombing of her home that took the lives of her son and husband.

> In Hisao's mind the image arose of herself running away all alone across the scorched earth, hair all wild and panting for breath. She kept tripping over the burnt, dark red rocks. The rocks were still hot. Then, all the rocks split apart and were sharp. The surface of every rock she touched was itself a site of carnage. It was as though someone had taken an enormous wheelbarrow from high up in the empty sky and scattered trash all over the surface of the earth. As she ran away, the corners of the stones pierced Hisao's bare feet. They pierced her body; they pierced her heart.
>
> No, thought Hisao, that was not what really happened. I did not run away with my hair wild like that.[19]

The text implicitly draws our attention to the very nature of memory—it can be fleeting and is not necessarily always reliable. Hisao 'tried to grope about for what really happened from that far away time,' and then she says to Yukie, 'For me, that time already feels like it was just a fairy tale,'[20] emphasising her sense of dislocation from the traumatic events of the war and her past.

13. In his work on trauma and memory, Sigmund Freud drew a contrast between the related states of 'melancholia' and 'mourning.' He suggested that melancholia was characterised by ambivalence, self-reproach, compulsion and repetition; with the melancholic self, the *ego* identifies with the lost object. In Freud's words, it is through this process of identification that an 'object-loss' becomes an 'ego-loss'[21] Mourning occurs once the traumatised self begins to engage with the traumatic event and becomes reinvested in life.[22] LaCapra's work on the Holocaust and trauma theory identifies two inter-related but distinct processes central to dealing with trauma, 'acting out' and 'working through.' In 'acting out,' the traumatised subject is caught in the mechanism of trauma, often compulsively engaging in repetitive

behaviour, repeating the past. It is related to what Freud referred to as 'transference.' 'Working through' provides the traumatised subject with a means for release from the cycles of repetition associated with acting out and trauma, and re-integration into the present world. As we shall see in the discussion that follows, LaCapra argues that 'memory-work' enables the traumatised subject 'to distinguish between past and present and to recognize something as having happened to one (or one's people) back then that is related to, but not identical with, here and now.'[23] Mimicking the analyst/analysand relationship, the mode of narration in *Sora no hate made* resembles LaCapra's 'working through' traumatic memory. Through the process of narrating her own story Hisao is able to 'work through' her traumatic experiences and make the transition from melancholia to mourning.

Childbirth and motherhood as trauma

14. Once Hisao begins to unlock her past she reveals that she suffers from recurring nightmares and visions. Whilst many of these relate to the trauma of losing her family, others include images of flowing blood, fecundity and foetuses. For example, when she brings Yukie and Haruko to her home for the first time she recounts in her mind what she refers to as 'not a memory, but perhaps a nightmare.' She imagines herself in an old, slaughterhouse-like building, surrounded by darkness. Completely silent, there is no one in sight, except for an old woman who is selling goat's milk. The old woman laughs in a shrill voice and grabs Hisao's breast, saying, 'you haven't had any baby.'[24] The wrinkled woman then exposes her chest with its two breasts, unexpectedly plump for her advanced years, and says, 'This here is the body of a woman who has had babies. I have had ten of them. I gave birth to the tenth child the day before yesterday.'[25]

15. Hisao has a similar flashback about infants when she returns to the site of her former home. She discovers the books her husband Shinji had hidden in a well for safe keeping during the air raids. Shinji had forbidden her from touching his books, and this had created a profound rift between them. For Hisao it seemed that Shinji valued his books more than his family. The books operate as a conduit for Hisao's distant memories. As Hisao opens the books for the first time, it awakens in her a feeling like 'a separate past' that had existed before.[26]

> Outside the window she could see the night. The thick, velvety ink-like darkness of the night spread out endlessly. In that strangely abstract void a large basket was floating, scarlet red with flames. Inside the basket was a dead infant. The entire night turned into an enormous river, and the solitary shape of the basket engulfed in flames faded away slowly into the dark black surface of the water. It floated off into the distance, growing smaller, but without disappearing from sight.[27]

It is significant that Hisao has nightmares about foetuses and babies, as she had been indifferent about the prospect of motherhood. Although she became pregnant very quickly after her marriage, this was only because of her fear that 'fissures' were developing between herself and her husband a mere eight days into their marriage. For the altogether un-maternal Hisao, pregnancy and childbirth constituted something of a mystery: 'The decision to give birth to her own child was perhaps fuelled by some kind of pathological curiosity. No, that wasn't it. From the other side of the crack that formed inside Hisao's little universe, there was a sticky, viscous liquid dripping. It was perhaps a tremendous living thing.'[28]

16. Although initially ambivalent about Hisao's pregnancy, husband Shinji quickly becomes enamoured of his infant son after the birth, doting on the child endlessly. Hisao, on the other hand, seems unable to feel anything resembling maternal love and feels increasingly alienated from her own child. When she and Shinji quarrel about what to name the baby, Shinji strikes Hisao and she storms out of the home. She thinks to herself, 'there was nowhere for me to be.'[29] Unable or unwilling to conform to her role as mother, Hisao is effectively displaced within the family structure. When her husband demands she return home, she assumes it is because he needs her to nurse the baby. Her role as a wife has been superseded by her role as mother, a role in which she feels her individual subjectivity well effaced. When her husband strikes her again and urges her to come home, Hisao withdraws from consciousness: 'She

heard the sound of flesh being hit as though it was another person being hit by a stranger.'[30] Van der Kolk writes as follows on Pierre Janet's theory of traumatic memory:

> when a person experiences emotions which overwhelm his [*sic*] capacity to take appropriate action, the memory of this traumatic experience cannot be properly digested: it is split off from consciousness and dissociated, to return later as fragmentary reliving of the trauma, as emotional conditions, somatic states, visual images, or behavioral reenactments.[31]

17. Hisao's sense of dissociation is further exacerbated by the physical act of nursing her child, at which time she is a subject divided: emotionally she remains devoid of maternal feeling, but, irrespective of this, her physical body responds to the nutritional needs of her child, even producing more milk than he can drink. Hisao feels discomfort and pain at her distended breasts, a pain that ironically is alleviated when Yōhei nurses. As he meanwhile grows fat and healthy on her breast milk, she begins to view the infant in an antagonistic light:

> But, when she looked at Yōhei clinging to her breasts, she was unable to feel anything resembling love. When Yōhei would drink milk with his face all red, there were even times when she felt as though he was a dark red-skinned monster draining the life out of her. For Hisao, this new life was nothing more than a nuisance.[32]

Images of blood recur throughout the novel, drawing attention to the trauma of childbirth and motherhood. After Hisao's attempt to leave home, she suddenly notices that she has begun to bleed again:

> Hisao touched her hand to her leg. Something sticky clung to her palm. She held her hand up to her eyes in the darkness; her entire palm looked black. This blood – what on earth was it? It was not the blood from me having flung a knife at someone. I would enjoy that kind of blood. This blood was unmistakably blood that flowed from my own body – from a knife having been thrown at me; I had flung a knife of self-mockery at myself. Hisao felt that her own blood would fill up the darkness of the night.[33]

Hisao imagines herself tossed about on a sea of warm, viscous blood. These images reflect her regret at her decision to become pregnant in order to save her marriage: 'The notion that Hisao, who realised that she could not completely own Shinji, had imagined a child as her own possession was probably not particularly unusual.'[34]

The deaths of Shinji and Yōhei: Re-appropriating motherhood

18. Hisao suffers from recurring nightmares and visions relating to the death of her family. These nightmares are intimately related to Hisao's relationship with Tamako, and it is only once Hisao accepts this connection that she can begin to heal. In her early recollections the protagonist sends Shinji into the burning house to 'save' Yōhei:

> 'Hurry hurry! You have to help him!' She pushed his rigid back. She pushed him, thrusting him forward. Just before he leaped into the house all ablaze, he turned around and gazed back at her. His smile was a nebulous grimace, as though he could see to the very depths of Hisao's heart. In the next instant that smile was distorted by the reflection of the flames, and appeared to be an expression of profound pain.
>
> 'Hurry, hurry, save Yōhei!' Hisao shouted cruelly.[35]

19. In her later visualisations of the same incident, however, the protagonist is clearly 'working through' trauma; the images are characterised by a sense of urgency, as though Hisao is reliving the traumatic event in order to bring about a different outcome. Hisao imagines attempting to rescue Yōhei, dousing him with water to extinguish the flames. She runs desperately through acrid black smoke and flames, pleading with a fireman to throw water on her son, but the water evaporates immediately from the heat of the wind. Gazing into the well where he had suspended his precious parcels of books, Shinji ignores her cries for help. She fights her way through the flames to help Yōhei. Hisao scoops up muddy water from a

ditch and tries to wet Yōhei's air raid mask, but the infant's body remains limp and unmoving. Hisao shakes him, but when he opens his eyes from inside the air raid mask it is Tamako's sad eyes she sees staring back at her. A neighbour cries out that her husband is gravely ill, and the two discover his corpse in a field where the family home once stood. Although Shinji had died in the fire and his body had lain there undisturbed for over a decade, curiously it seemed only to have weathered and looked as it had when he was alive. When Hisao touches his face, however, it seems to be made of earth and crumbles. At the plaintive cry of a bird screeching, Hisao's gaze is drawn upward: 'Yōhei had wings and was soaring through the empty sky. Only the bird's face resembled Yōhei; the body was that of a bird. The bird kept crying out in a sombre tone, 'Kii-kii, Kii-kii' and without swooping downward or rising up it circled slowly over and over above Hisao and Shinji's body.'[36]

20. Here the portrayal of the traumatic event is not limited to historical accuracy; rather it constitutes a metamorphic process subject to, as LaCapra suggests, 'imaginative transformation and narrative shaping.'[37] In the dream Hisao conflates her deceased son Yōhei with her kidnapped, adopted daughter Tamako. As she gradually comes to terms with her loss, she is no longer, as Freud suggests of the state of melancholia, engaged in 'narcissistic identification with the object.'[38] Hisao finally acknowledges the deaths of Yōhei and Shinji and recognises that Tamako serves as a substitute for her lost son. This final representation of Hisao's traumatic loss inaugurates the commencement of the mourning process and acceptance of her maternal role. It should be emphasised, however, that just as Hisao's opportunity to kidnap Masako occurs in part by chance, there is a similarly serendipitous element to Hisao's decision to 'mother' Masako. Hisao's initial plan to abandon (and therefore kill) the infant Masako is thwarted when the old woman returns the baby to her. Hisao therefore decides to accept the (forced) role of motherhood, but to carry out her 'maternal duties' in aberrant fashion, performing 'perverse motherhood.'

21. Yonaha Keiko has suggested that for female protagonists in Takahashi's fiction, consciousness of their unhappiness is intimately related to an animosity towards motherhood.[39] In *Sora no hate made*, the protagonist's enmity is not fixed on Shinji or Yōhei *per se*, but rather on the institutions of motherhood and the family. Indeed, when her husband realises that Yōhei has been left behind and confronts Hisao, she expresses irritation at his presence, but this is not targeted at Shinji himself: 'Even though I told him that people close to me incur my hatred simply by being near me, no matter who they are.'[40] Hisao describes herself as 'living a solitary spiritual existence, surrounded by a deep, empty precipice.'[41] The protagonist vehemently rejects the bonds of the family and blood relations, and this is precisely what renders possible her 'warped' family unit with Tamako. Hisao registers the birth of Tamako and finds a job as a seamstress, thereby enabling her to work from home with Tamako; she then borrows money from her landlord, builds a house, and repays the loan with interest. Several important factors distinguish Hisao's 'perverse family' from the normative family she so vehemently rejected: first, it is a matriarchy rather than a patriarchy; secondly, 'mother' and 'daughter' are not blood relations; and thirdly, it represents a contestation of both the *ie* system and the nuclear family as this new family unit is effectively premised on violence against two 'normative' families, Hisao's and Yukie's.

22. The motif of the Doppelgänger is frequently cited in studies of Takahashi's work, and it has resonance in *Sora no hate made* as well. As Tamako grows older Hisao comes to regard her adopted daughter as another version of herself. One day when Tamako is about ten years old she fails to return home; Hisao discovers Tamako at the home of the old woman who returned Tamako after Hisao had abandoned her as an infant. Tamako at first refuses to come home with Hisao, declaring that she 'has no home,'[42] poignantly echoing Hisao's own attempted escape from the spiritual confines of her domestic life. Hisao recognises in Tamako a kindred spirit, as Tamako too is a refugee from the family. In stories by Takahashi such as 'Byōbō' (Boundless Void) and 'Natsu no fuchi' (The Edge of Summer)[43] female protagonists radically resist motherhood on the one hand by attempting to escape from the family structure, yet seek out female communities based on difference. The protagonist's resistance to family bonds based on blood relations is clearly demonstrated in her attitude towards Tamako's newfound

friendship with her half-sister Haruko and her biological mother, Yukie. Having accepted her role as mother to Tamako, Hisao expresses no concern that the girls may someday notice that they share certain physical similarities; Haruko and Tamako, for example, have the same ear shape. Evidently bonds forged amidst trauma and by choice supersede any form of biological destiny or biological truth.

23. Hisao's journey to overcome trauma begins as she makes the connection between her traumatic memories and her role as surrogate mother to Tamako. The past increasingly converges into the present, and in the final chapter (chapter seven), Hisao's traumatic recollections cease and she begins for the first time to engage fully in the present, completing the transition from melancholia to mourning. As LaCapra suggests, 'Mourning brings the possibility of engaging trauma and achieving a reinvestment in, or recathexis of, life that allows one to begin again.'[44]

24. This transition is enabled by Hisao's recognition of a trauma that lingers in the background of the narrative: the violence of the Pacific War in Japan. In the odd numbered chapters events of the war are employed in two ways: first, as a means of marking time and second, as background to the stories from Hisao's past. Undoubtedly the protagonist's fate is linked closely to events from the war: she meets Yukie whilst conscripted to work in a wartime munitions factory; her first fiancé dies on the battlefront in Manchuria; the deaths of Shinji and Yōhei occur during the firebombing of her home; her kidnapping and subsequent adoption of Tamako are enabled by the chaos of the immediate post war period. Nonetheless, the protagonist systematically denies any relation of causality between the war and the events of her personal life. Hisao's oft-repeated chorus throughout the novel is that her evil actions have 'nothing to do with the war,' as though repudiation of that relationship is necessary.

25. Throughout the novel Hisao is plagued by two inter-related images: the *yakeato*— the burnt ruins of the city and a painfully bright white light: 'Other than the dark, rusty, large steel frame of ruins and the crumbling concrete walls protruding here and there, at ground level the desolate plains were absolutely bare. Then, there it was, the summer sun—so cruelly bright.'[45] Just before Hisao decides to abscond with Tamako she is similarly disturbed by a vision of a brilliant light. When she arrives at Yukie's home, as noted above, she watches from outside as Yukie tries to put Masako down for a nap. Hisao describes in detail 'a white light,' and sees Yukie and Masako as wrapped in a 'transparent globe full of light.'[46] After Yukie leaves, Hisao is annoyed by the sound of the crying baby, who has wriggled halfway off of the futon. She lifts the still-sleeping baby to re-position it on the futon; the baby feels heavy and warm in her arms. Holding the baby in her arms Hisao sees the wide, vacant lot adjoining the garden bathed in the sun from directly above, shining brightly like mineral rock. It suddenly occurs to her that she could just walk off with the child in her arms into the space that she describes using terms such as 'bright,' 'desolate,' 'expansive' and 'burnt.'[47] Hisao's descriptions of burnt ground and wide, open spaces vividly evoke the devastation of the *yakeato* following the fire bombings of the city.

26. Images of the aftermath of the air raid recur in the closing chapters of the novel, and it is only when Hisao is able to see the connections between her own trauma and her violent appropriation of motherhood through the kidnapping of Masako/Tamako that she can begin the process of what LaCapra refers to as 'working through.' Recalling the *yakeato*, Hisao draws the relationship between her own war trauma and her act of violence:

> The ruins from the fire – they were not the result of the air raids. It was I who burned them. Tamako – who I snatched by chance when I ran away in desperation from the fires. Tamako – who I dragged around with me over the hot, burnt ground. Tamako – who suffered the brunt of my madness. Tamako – who was reared by my madness. For those reasons Tamako and I will never part.[48]

The final pages of the narrative indicate that Hisao has attained closure on the events of the past, affirming that she and Tamako are, at last, 'mother and daughter.' Hisao imagines that she is witnessing the departure of her past self, and she bids this creature farewell with a degree of nostalgia. She remarks to herself that it has been a long and difficult journey, and that she is tired. Hisao then ominously

wonders to herself to what extent it is possible to truly leave the past behind, suggesting that traumatic events continue to impact the present.

Conclusion

27. As trauma by definition suggests a psychological disjuncture with the actual event, studies of trauma fiction emphasise the complexity involved in dealing with traumatic events. Anne Whitehead's comments on trauma fiction as increasingly focusing on 'how' rather than 'what' is remembered prove instructive; she argues that with respect to trauma fiction, the act of remembering trauma is by no means a straightforward process that inevitably leads to an inalienable truth. Indeed, according to Pierre Janet, memory, and traumatic memory in particular, exist only in relation to other memories and experiences. Memory requires action, as memories must be organised, relativised, and ordered so that they can fit into a coherent narrative.[49] As readers, we must be conscious of the fact that in *Sora no hate made* Hisao's own recollections are subject to possible 'distortion, disguise, and other permutations relating to processes of imaginative transformation and narrative shaping, as well as perhaps repression, denial, dissociation and foreclosure.'[50] In a similar vein, Carol Gluck has persuasively argued in her work on postwar Japan and the writing of history that individuals 'construct and reconstruct their memories in much the same way as nations do their histories, creating what Jorge Luis Borges called a "fictitious past" that they can live with.'[51] This point is emphasised in chapter five, when Yukie writes a letter 'confessing' to Hisao that she had lied when she told Hisao that her first-born daughter Masako had died from malnutrition at the end of the war. Yukie explains that Masako had been kidnapped and was presumed dead, but that she and her husband decided that it would be easier to tell people that she had died from malnutrition. This 'confessional' letter demonstrates that no one, not even Yukie, who is by all accounts a victim, is above reproach. In her version of the events of the war, Yukie too has constructed her own 'fictitious past.'

28. Takahashi's narrative of trauma set during and after the war functions as a sustained interrogation of the nature of traumatic memory, healing and, indeed, the nature of history itself. As the chronological past of the even-numbered chapters converges with the narrative present, trauma is gradually assigned its proper place as history, subsumed into narrative—that is, into the past. Accordingly, Hisao is gradually released from the clutches of traumatic memory and the ghosts of the past are assigned to their proper place: 'As traumatic memory is resolved into narrative, the characters gradually cease to be haunted by the past.'[52] The act of 'working through' trauma implies that traumatic memory is transformed into narrative memory, what Janet referred to as the 'traumatic cure.' As Whitehead explains of Janet's 'traumatic cure,'

> Janet contends that the traumatic cure comprises a transformation of traumatic memory into narrative memory, so that the event is integrated into a chronology of the past and into the individual's life history. Where traumatic memory repeats the past without consciousness, narrative memory recognises the past as past.[53]

As a work of trauma fiction, *Sora no hate made* draws attention to the process of 'working through' trauma, yet simultaneously raises an awareness of the potential unreliability of traumatic recall and testimony. The final pages of the story do not bring about a sense of justice; to be sure, the protagonist's psychological 'closure' is premised on perpetuating the fiction of her 'family,' a unit formed through violence and deception. If anything, the conclusion calls into question the very nature of memory and of history. As Borges asserts in *Ficciones* of the power of fiction: 'Now, in all memories, a fictitious past occupies the place of any other. We know nothing about it with any certainty, not even that it is false.'[54]

Notes

[1] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma (Parallax: Re-Visions of Culture and Society)*, Baltimore: The Johns

Hopkins University Press, 2000, pp. 88–89.

[2] Takako Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, Tokyo: Shinchō-sha, 1973. In this article all citations are taken from: Takako Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, Tokyo: Shinchō-sha, 1983. I have chosen to translate the title as 'To the Far Reaches of the Skies' as the protagonist neither confesses to her crimes nor does she attempt to atone for them; ultimately she calls into question the very possibility of redemption.

[3] Michael R. Trimble, 'Post-traumatic stress disorder: History of a concept,' in *Trauma and its Wake: The Study and Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, ed. Charles R. Figley, New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1985, pp. 5–14. Revised from *The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology*, New York: Wiley, 1994 [1984]. See also: American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*, 3rd ed., Washington, DC: 1980.

[4] Tamaki Saitō, *Shinrigakuka suru shakai* (The Psychologisation of Society), Tokyo: PHP Editāzu Gurūpu, 2003.

[5] Saitō, *Shinrigakuka suru shakai*, p. 22.

[6] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p. 3.

[7] Yamamoto Kaoru suggests that reading François Mauriac's *Thérèse Desqueyroux* is necessary in order to fully understand Hisao, the protagonist of *Sora no hate made*. See Kaoru Yamamoto, 'Takahashi Takako "*Sora no hate made*" no Hisao,' *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* 41(11): (1989): 136–37.

[8] François Mauriac, *Tere-zu Desuke-ru-*, translated by Takako Takahashi, in *Sekai no bungaku, Ji-do, Mo-riakku, vol. 33*, Tokyo: Chūō kōrōn-sha, 1963.

[9] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 4.

[10] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, p. 4.

[11] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, pp. 250–51.

[12] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 253.

[13] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 257.

[14] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 7.

[15] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 35.

[16] Dieter Meindl, '(Un-)reliable narration from a pronominal perspective,' in *The Dynamics of Narrative Form: Studies in Anglo-American Narratology*, ed. John Pier, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004, pp. 59–82, pp. 72–73.

[17] Dan Shen, 'Unreliability and characterization,' *Style* 23(2) (1989): pp. 300–311, pp. 302, 309.

[18] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 21.

[19] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 10.

[20] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 10.

[21] Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia,' *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, London, Hogarth Press, 1953, pp. 243–58, p. 249.

[22] Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia,' pp. 243–44. See also LaCapra's discussion of mourning and melancholia: Dominick LaCapra, 'Trauma, absence, loss,' *Critical Inquiry* 25(4) (Summer 1999): 696–727, p. 713.

[23] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 66.

[24] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 23.

[25] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 23.

[26] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 125.

[27] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 126.

[28] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, pp. 169–70.

[29] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 169.

[30] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 181.

[31] Bessel A. van der Kolk, Paul Brown and Onno van der Hart, 'Pierre Janet on post-traumatic stress,' *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 2(4) (1989): 365–78, p. 366.

[32] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, pp. 183–84.

[33] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 182.

[34] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, pp. 169–70.

[35] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 33.

[36] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 262.

[37] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 89.

[38] Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia,' p. 249. See also LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 66.

[39] Keiko Yonaha, *Gendai joryū sakkaron*, Tokyo: Shinbi-sha, 1986, p. 33.

[40] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 204.

[41] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 96.

[42] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 281.

[43] Takako Takahashi, 'Natsu no fuchi,' in *Ushinawareta e* (Lost Pictures), Tokyo: Kawade Bunko, 1981, pp. 181–232. Takako Takahashi, 'Boundless Void,' translated by Amanda C. Seaman, *The Massachusetts Review* 51(3) (Autumn 2010): 456–81.

[44] LaCapra, 'Trauma, absence, loss,' p. 713.

[45] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 10.

[46] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 251.

[47] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 253.

[48] Takahashi, *Sora no hate made*, p. 282.

[49] Pierre Janet, *Les Médications Psychologiques*, Vol. 2 (1919), Paris: L'Harmattan, (reprint) 2007, p. 273, cited in Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, pp. 140–43. See also discussion of Pierre Janet and memory in: Bessel A. van der Kolk, Paul Brown and Onno van der Hart, 'Pierre Janet on post-traumatic stress,' p. 368.

[50] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, pp. 88–89.

[51] Carol Gluck, 'The past in the present,' in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 64–95, p. 76.

[52] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 143.

[53] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 140. For Janet's discussion of traumatic memory and narrative memory, see Janet, *Les Médications Psychologiques*, p. 273, also cited in Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 140.

[54] Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones,* translated from Spanish by Emecé Editores, Buenos Aires: Grove Press Inc., 1962, p. 34.

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