Corroded by Globalisation: The Image of Japanese Literature in German Review Articles

Erich Havranek

Abstract

The end of the 1980s was marked by a general interest in Japan because of the country's ongoing economic boom. Shortly after, in 1990, Japan was guest of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair and, in 1994, Ōe Kenzaburō was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. All of this led to the establishment of a good number of Japanese literature series being published in German-speaking countries and a considerable increase in the translation of Japanese literature. Furthermore, the dispute over a novel by Murakami Haruki on the TV show Das Literarische Quartett (The Literary Quartet) in the year 2000 had a remarkable influence on these developments. This dispute triggered the tremendous popularity of the author in German-speaking countries and simultaneously led to a change of attitude towards the translation of Japanese works in publishing houses. Against this backdrop, this paper investigates the image of Japanese literature portrayed in review articles of German language newspapers at the beginning of the 21st century. The main themes of these review articles will be presented in 12 categories that constitute the image of Japanese literature in the German book market. These categories will be presented and described in detail before conclusions about the tendencies of reviewing Japanese literature and about what influence these tendencies have on the image of Japanese literature are drawn.

Keywords: Japanese literature, German book market, reception, image, reviews

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Introduction

Japanese literature is in a difficult position in the German book market. The language, the writing system, and many unfamiliar cultural concepts make it a very challenging task to introduce a Japanese literary work to foreign readers. Yet, the foreignness of Japanese culture generates a certain interest in its literature among the reading public of German-speaking countries. Still, Japanese literature, in order to be recognised, needs the help of intermediaries, promoters, sponsors, and chance.

There is no other explanation than chance for the tensions that erupted between two presenters of the literature TV show *Das Literarische Quartett* (The Literary Quartet) following a heated discussion about the translation of the novel *Kokkyō no minami, taiyō no nishi* 国境の南, 太陽の西 (German: *Gefährliche Geliebte*) by the then relatively unknown author within Germany Murakami Haruki 村上春樹 (b. 1949). The argument was about the style of the work, which was unacceptable for one presenter, but only a minor matter in an otherwise brilliant novel for the other. Murakami received a lot of publicity following the controversy and it drew attention to contemporary Japanese literature as well as to the role of translators.

In a previous paper I focused on programmes, projects, and persons supporting Japanese literature in the German book market (see Havranek 2010). In this paper I am going to present the image of Japanese literature among exemplary readers, that is, reviewers of German newspapers in the early 2000s. In 1994, Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit concluded that since the 1970s Japanese literature reviewers' focus on cultural differences began to decline (1996: 709) and move away from a level of expectation that was mainly informed by translations of the works of four authors: Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成 (1899–1972), Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925–70), Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介 (1892–1927), and Inoue Yasushi 井上靖 (1907–91) (ibid.: 703). This process of moving away from a stereotypical practice of reviewing Japanese literature was still ongoing in the 1990s and was also influenced by the role of the English language in literary translations from Japanese to German: English translations were often used to check against German translations and sometimes even as source for German translations of literature originally produced in Japanese (ibid.: 709–710). This practice of translating Japanese literature via an English translation into German, however, changed after the Murakami controversy and has almost disappeared in the contemporary period. Based upon these considerations, I will investigate the image of Japanese literature depicted by reviewers of German newspapers following the Murakami controversy.

For this purpose, I selected review articles of translations of Japanese literary works that were published between 2003 and 2008 in German newspapers. This period starts long enough after the Murakami controversy for it to have had an effect on the book market and offers a manageable amount of articles. The criteria for selection were that the article had to deal with one or more recent books of an author

and the book was under central consideration in the article. Furthermore, the articles had to be available at the Innsbrucker Zeitungsarchiv, an archive that collects articles about literature from a wide range of German periodicals. In the end, there were 200 review articles for 58 works by 30 authors.¹

The following aspects of the articles were analysed:

- Statements about authors
- Comparisons between authors
- Statements about the style of an author or text
- Statements about the themes explored by an author or within a text
- Statements that connect the style and the themes with Japan
- Statements about the distinctive Japanese features of an author or text
- General statements about style and themes of Japanese literature

‘Style’ here is simply defined as ‘how an author writes’ and ‘theme’ as ‘about what an author writes’. Upon marking these various statements in the articles the following categories could be deduced: presentation of the authors; globalisation and East-West conflict; obscurity; superficiality; the metropolis and loneliness; violence; feminism; harmony and the calm stream of language; esotericism and transience; reality and fantasy; genres; mistakes. These categories are the main aspects of the German image of Japanese literature, painted in review articles of German newspapers. They will be described in detail further below, but first I offer a brief review of the situation of Japanese literature in the German book market.

Conveying Japanese literature

Between 1988 and 1994 the amount of translations from Japanese to German rose by 54.7 percent compared to the number of translations published from 1868 to 1987 (Ogasa, Puls, and Stalph 1995: xii). This can be attributed to the wide interest in Japan due to the country’s ongoing economic boom by the end of the 1980s. Shortly after, in 1990, Japan was guest of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair and, in 1994, Ōe Kenzaburō 大江健三郎 (b. 1935) was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. All of this led to the establishment of a good number of Japanese literature publish-

1 For a full list of review articles, the authors, and their works reviewed in the articles see Primary Sources: Review Articles and Reviewed Works in the References section.

ing series in German-speaking countries and a considerable increase in translations of Japanese literature. Examples of publishing series include Japanische Bibliothek (Japanese Library) (1989–2000) edited by Hijiya-Kirschner for Insel Publishing and Japan Edition founded in 1992 by Jürgen Berndt at Quintessenz Publishing and continued from 1994 on by editor Eduard Klopfenstein and since 2004 published by Be.bra Publishing.

The importance of the author Murakami from the year 2000 on cannot be underestimated. Judith Schmuck presented a M.A. thesis in 2005 investigating the German reception of Murakami in detail (2005). One aspect, however, in the history of the reception of the author's works deserves attention here because it involves the introduction of the author to the wider public. It was the controversy sparked by the heated discussion about the novel *Gefährliche Geliebte* in the literary TV show *Das Literarische Quartett*. Siegrid Löffler, one of the presenters, characterised the style of Murakami as 'literarisches Fastfood' (literary fast food) and took offence at the explicit sex scenes. Marcel Reich-Ranicki, another one of the presenters, defended the novel and attacked Löffler personally. The TV show was soon afterwards discontinued, but more important was that it raised questions about the practice of translating Japanese authors from the English version to German. This was the case with *Gefährliche Geliebte* and the Japanologist Herbert Worm showed that this in part caused the criticism of Murakami's style (2000). From this time on, however, Murakami became the best-selling Japanese author in Germany.

An overview of the situation of Japanese literature in the German book market at the beginning of the 2000s is presented in the table below. For comparison, the two most important source languages of translations in the German book market, as well as two other East Asian languages, are included.

Table 1 Number of translations into German by source languages and percentage of the total number of translations

Year	Japanese	English	French	Korean	Chinese
1999	72 (0.9%)	5461 (71.9%)	816 (10.7%)	-	13 (0.2%)
2000	51 (0.7%)	5519 (72.3%)	730 (9.6%)	-	18 (0.2%)
2001	124 (1.3%)	6924 (74.1%)	821 (8.8%)	-	12 (0.1%)
2002	23 (0.4%)	3782 (70.0%)	548 (10.1%)	-	-
2003	33 (0.4%)	3732 (49.3%)	586 (7.7%)	-	9 (0.1%)
2004	87 (1.6%)	3073 (56.8%)	543 (10%)	10 (0.2%)	-

2005	35 (0.6%)	3691 (60.2%)	575 (9.4%)	31 (0.5%)	31 (0.5%)
2006	52 (0.9%)	3785 (65.6%)	579 (10%)	-	14 (0.2%)
2007	52 (0.8%)	4130 (67.1%)	603 (9.8%)	-	19 (0.3%)
2008	105 (1.4%)	4908 (66.9%)	847 (11.5%)	-	28 (0.4%)

Source: BBZ 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009

Until 1999, Japanese literature never had a higher share than 0.5 percent of all translations. The year 1999, however, marks a noteworthy change with a record high of 0.9 percent. Although there was a drop in 2002 and 2003, there were other peaks in 2001, 2004, and 2008, and after 2003 the share was never below 0.4 percent.

Though these figures are mainly due to best-selling authors like Murakami, there were numerous smaller initiatives to present Japanese authors to a German-reading audience like the aforementioned publishing series. These initiatives are often not self-sustainable and are therefore dependent on support. The two most important institutions which offered support were the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunka-chō 文化庁) and the Japan Foundation (Kokusai kōryū kikin 国際交流基金). The Agency for Cultural Affairs operated the Japanese Literature Publishing Project (JLPP), which granted funds for the translation and publication of selected Japanese authors in foreign languages. The Japan Foundation also supports the publication of works that have a thematic relation to Japan and aids the publishing houses representing Japan at international book fairs.

Whether it is best sellers or small projects, translators always play a very important part in the reception of a foreign-language author. As the Murakami controversy shows, the status of authors in a foreign book market is closely tied to the work of translators. Their work does not only have an impact on individual authors but also on the image of the literature of a nation. Therefore their role is also essential in the process of conveying literature of different languages to the book market they are working in.

Image of Japanese literature in Germany

Overview

I have analysed 200 review articles for 58 works of 30 authors. Most articles (29) were published in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) followed by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) with 28 and the *Zeit* with 19 articles. The remaining newspapers that published ten or more reviews are *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) (13),

Welt (11), and *die tageszeitung (taz)* (10). There are four Austrian newspapers which published six articles each: *Wiener Zeitung*, *Der Standard*, *Salzburger Nachrichten*, and *Tiroler Tageszeitung*.

By taking a closer look at individual years it becomes apparent that in the beginning of the period under investigation *FAZ* published the most review articles (seven in 2003; six in 2004). In 2005, *Zeit* printed the most reviews with seven articles and from 2006 on *NZZ* took the lead (five in 2006; five in 2007; nine in 2008). Considering that these newspapers published the most review articles of Japanese literature in the period between 1988 and 1994 (Giacomuzzi-Putz 1996: 163), it is safe to say that *NZZ*, *FAZ*, and *Zeit* have been the most important print media outlets for the discussion of Japanese literary works for more than 20 years.

In 2004, 40 review articles were published. Afterwards there seemed to be a continuing downward trend. In 2007 only 19 reviews were published. However, this development came to an end when in 2008 the number of reviews again rose to 39. The number of reviews often depends on a few spectacular new releases and does not express a steady interest in Japanese literature. In 2008, 32 reviews were about only four authors: Kawakami Hiromi 川上弘美 (b. 1958) (11), Murakami (11), Ōe (6), and Ōsawa Arimasa 大沢在昌 (b. 1956) (4). In that year, 22 reviews of the 39 published were about two works: *Der Himmel ist blau, die Erde ist weiß* (*Sensei no kaban* センセイの鞆) by Kawakami and *Wovon ich rede, wenn ich vom Laufen rede* (*Hashiru koto ni tsuite kataru toki ni boku no kataru koto* 走ることについて語るときに僕の語ること) by Murakami.

As reviewers, editors prefer experts of literature in general and not of area studies because area studies experts tend to see themselves as lobbyists of a certain culture (Spiegel 2001: 94). An overview of the most important reviewers confirms this preference. The following six persons each wrote more than five of the reviews published between 2003 and 2008: Ludger Lütkehaus (15), Steffen Gnam (13), Hijiya-Kirschnerreit (9), Ulrich Baron (8), Leopold Federmaier (7), and Susanne Messmer (6). Of these only Hijiya-Kirschnerreit is a distinguished expert of Japanese studies and Japanese literature.

The most reviews were written about Murakami, Ōe, Yoshimoto Banana よしもとばなな (b. 1964), Ogawa Yōko 小川洋子 (b. 1962), and Kawakami. Therefore, it can be concluded that the articles focus on successful, established authors who are still active. There is a slight shift towards the review of younger authors compared to the beginning of the 1990s. Then, the most reviews were written about works of Yoshimoto, Endō Shūsaku 遠藤周作 (1923–1996), Abe Kōbō 安部公房 (1924–1993), Kawabata, and Murakami (Giacomuzzi-Putz 1996: 158).

There are 80 reviews covering 14 different works of Murakami. These are by far the most for one author. Furthermore, his novel *Kafka am Strand* (*Umibe no Kafuka* 海辺のカフカ) was the most reviewed work with 19 articles. Afterwards, however,

the interest in Murakami seemed to cool somewhat. Though his following novel, *Afterdark* (*Afutā Dāku* アフターダーク), was eagerly anticipated and reviewed in 14 articles, it received mostly negative reviews. There was no new release from Murakami in 2007, which had an obvious effect on the total number of reviews of Japanese literature, reaching a low-point in that year. In 2008, there were again 11 reviews: one each for two collections of stories (*Wie ich eines schönen Morgens im April das 100%ige Mädchen sah*,² *Der Elefant verschwindet*³) and nine for *Wovon ich rede, wenn ich vom Laufen rede*.

Four works of Ōe received 24 reviews and hence the second most. There were 13 of these that addressed *Tagame: Berlin-Tōkyō* (*Torikaeko/Chenjiringu* 取り替え子/チェンジリング) which attracted attention because of its biographic nature. The novel has been described as a *roman à clef* with the character Goro being the film director and Ōe's friend Itami Jūzō 伊丹十三 and the protagonist Kogito being Ōe himself. The high number of reviews, however, is also connected with the 70th birthday of the author in 2005, the year when *Tagame* was published. Ōe is still a very respected author but the number of critical articles is growing. In an earlier review, Hijiya-Kirschnerreit described his language as difficult and convoluted, abstract and full of metaphors, his themes as dark and tortured almost to the point where it becomes painful for the readers (2001: 50). The main criticism, however, is that the author was excessively egocentric (Hijiya-Kirschnerreit 2008b: 11). Other reviewers often assessed his works as too difficult to understand, which will be elaborated below under the section 'Obscurity'.

Works of Yoshimoto were reviewed in 17 articles. From 2005 on, however, she became less important in the German book market. There were still six reviews of two publications in 2005 but none in 2006 and 2008 while in 2007 two works were each reviewed once: the volume of stories *Eidechse* (*Tokage* とかいざ) and the novel *Federkleid* (*Hagoromo* ハゴロモ). Most of the reviewers point out how famous the author is, but at the same time raise doubts about the quality of her later works.

Ogawa enjoyed a good reputation in the early 2000s. Every year since 2001 a new work of the author was published in German. Much acclaimed was the collection of stories *Schwimmbad im Regen* ("Yūgure no kyūshokushitsu to ame no pūru" 夕暮れの給食室と雨のプール)⁴ which was reviewed four times. The book also

2 This collection of stories has been compiled for the German language book market. The title refers to one of the stories in the collection, "Shigatsu no aru hareta asa ni 100-pāsento no onna no ko ni deau koto ni tsuite" 四月のある晴れた朝に 100 パーセントの女の子に出会うことについて (On Seeing the 100% Perfect Girl One Beautiful April Morning) first published in July 1981 in the magazine *Torefuru* トレフル (Trefoil).

3 The title refers to one of the stories in the collection, *Zō no shōmetsu* 象の消滅 (The Elephant Vanishes) first published in August 1985 in the magazine *Bungakukai* 文学界 (Literary World). Although there is a Japanese collection of stories with the same title (*Zō no shōmetsu*), there are different stories compiled in it.

4 The Japanese collection of the same stories is named after one of the other stories in this collection: *Ninshin-karendā* 妊娠カレンダー (German: "Tagebuch einer Schwangerschaft").

gained attention because the Japan Foundation awarded the translators, Ursula Gräfe and Kimiko Nakayama-Ziegler, the prize for best translation of the year 2003 for this work.

The big success story of 2008 was Kawakami. Her German debut *Der Himmel ist blau, die Erde weiß* received 11 reviews. These were predominantly positive and none was explicitly negative. Furthermore, *Die Umarmung des Todes* (*Out* [=Auto] アウト) by Kirino Natsuo 桐野夏生 (b. 1951) deserves mention which was reviewed seven times and mostly praised enthusiastically.

The mentioned authors gained the most reviews and, therefore, occupy a dominant position in the market in that period. Much less attention was paid to famous authors whose works are considered 'modern classics' like those of Inoue, Akutagawa, or Tanizaki Jun'ichirō 谷崎潤一郎 (1886–1965) and who were still very important in the German literature of the 1990s. For Inoue's 100th birthday, *Der Tod des Teemeisters* (*Honkakubō-ibun* 本覚坊遺文) was published for the first time in German in 2007, which was reviewed six times.

The following chapter will analyse the description of Japanese literary works in German reviews. The emphasis will be on similarities and repeatedly mentioned aspects by different reviewers that are attributed to different Japanese authors. Patterns forming the German image of Japanese literature are deduced and are reflected in the names of the categories under consideration.

Aspects of Japanese literature in German review articles

Presentation of the authors

Biographical details of the authors are mostly interspersed casually in the articles or left out entirely. However, often there are allusions to the importance of an author in Japan (Messmer 2007b: vi; Hijiya-Kirschnereit 2007: 38; Gnam 2007b: 34; Schoettli 2003: 35), thereby generating interest and justifying the article about the work under consideration. The importance for foreign readers, though, is often determined by how much insight into Japan an author offers (Lütkehaus 2008f: 29, 2008b: 27).

When authors are presented they are often placed within a literary current, usually postmodernism. Murakami is sometimes compared to Paul Auster (Stüttgen 2003: 18; Detje 2005: 16) and the postmodernist characteristics of his works are criticised because of the arbitrariness often associated with postmodernism (Gauss 2004: 48). Nevertheless, the term 'postmodernism' is used neutrally when applied to other authors such as Ogawa (Gnam 2004b: 38), Yoshimoto (Messmer 2004b: 17), or Tsutsui Yasutaka 筒井康隆 (b. 1934) (Hijiya-Kirschnereit 2007: 38). For Ōe the term is used as proof that the author and his style are already outmoded (Schulz 2003: 34).

Overall the presentations of the authors in the reviews are neutral and no certain image of a Japanese author materialises. Murakami and Ōe are exceptions because of the high number of articles devoted to them. Murakami is sometimes used as a measure for less-known authors (Messmer 2005: 17, 2007a: 15) and his relationship to US-American culture is often highlighted (Körte 2003: 8; Albath 2006: 14; Hijiya-Kirschner 2006: 40). Ōe, in contrast, is described as an intellectual with a close connection to European culture, influenced by Western intellectual history because of his engagement in Romance studies at the university level (Baron 2005a: 18).

Globalisation and East-West conflict

Especially Murakami is often criticised for his detachment from Japanese culture and the internationality in his themes and settings. Reviewers disapprove of the lack of authenticity and criticise his effort to position himself as an international brand (Form 2003: 10; Körte 2003: 8; Albath 2006: 14). Similar remarks are made about Yoshimoto: she conveyed too little about typical Japanese culture and life. Works that take a critical stance toward globalisation are much more positively reviewed than works that integrate symbols of globalisation naturally (Messmer 2007b: vi). Ikezawa Natsuki 池澤夏樹 (b. 1945) is praised for his vivid tableau of life in the era of globalisation (Hijiya-Kirschner 2003a: 34) and Kirino for depicting a violent Japanese society corroded by globalisation (Gohlis 2003: 50).

One important aspect of the complex of globalisation is the clash of Eastern and Western culture. This is something reviewers often seem to expect in a work of Japanese literature, and it is an important issue in the articles (Löhrndorf 2003: 35; Dotzauer 2004: 27). It is frequently discussed as a conflict between tradition and modernity. The journey of self-discovery against the background of this conflict between tradition and modernity in the times of transition from old to new values and lifestyles, for example, is seen as the main theme of Uno Chiyo's 宇野千代 (1897–1996) *Die Geschichte einer gewissen Frau* (*Aru hitori no onna no hanashi* 或る一人の女の話) (Lütkehaus 2004a: 48). The subject of Higuchi Ichirō's 樋口一葉 (1872–96) stories collected in the book *In finsterer Nacht*⁵ is described in similar terms (Gnam 2007b: 34). The conflict is also referred to in a review of Akutagawa's collection of stories *Dialoge in der Dunkelheit*⁶ (Gnam 2004a: 34). Tellingly, a

5 This collection of stories has been compiled for the German language book market. The title refers to one of the stories in the collection, “Yamiyo” 闇(やみ)夜 (Dark Night) first published from July to November 1894 in the magazine *Bungakukai*.

6 This too is a collection of texts that has been compiled for the German language book market. The title refers to a fictional dialog in this collection, “Anchū mondō” 闇中問答 (Dialogue in Darkness), published in the year of the author's death, 1927, in the magazine *Bungeishunjū* 文藝春秋 (Literary Spring and Autumn).

reviewer is surprised about the missing description of a culture shock in a story written by Ōe where a Japanese character travels to Germany (Thuswaldner 2005: 16).

The influence of Western culture on Japan is often described as a loss of traditions caused by modernisation. On the one hand, works of some authors, like Murakami, are described as a result of this loss, where only a few aspects of traditional Japan can be found. On the other hand, some works are praised for being critical toward Western influence and globalisation as can be seen in the mentioned reviews of the works of Ikezawa or Kirino.

Obscurity

Works of Japanese literature are often depicted as difficult to understand, and reviewers usually blame the cultural differences between Japan and Europe. One reviewer describes Western readers as excluded from the world of Ōe's *Tagame* (Tauber 2006: 14). Another one accepts defeat confronted with Ōe's *Sayonara, meine Bücher* (*Sayōnara, watashi no hon yo!* さようなら、私の本よ!), as he concedes that the cultural context is simply not transferable (Müller 2008: 16).

Reviewers often hesitate to criticise the obscurity of the texts they are confronted with. They tend to attribute their difficulties in understanding to their insufficient knowledge about Japan and its culture. The complexity can be understood as a glimpse into a mysterious world and can therefore be assessed positively, according to one reviewer (Dotzauer 2007: 22). In some cases reviewers would abstain from evaluating a work, as they cannot find relevant criteria for an evaluation due to the big cultural differences (Müller 2007: 16).

Hence, the assumed peculiarities of Japanese culture are often mentioned as the reason for difficulties of understanding Japanese literature. It is the culture—not a deliberate act of the author—that produces an obscure text; it is the context and not the text that is incomprehensible for the authors of these review articles. However, critics still prefer these works to texts that are presumably too easy to understand, because in their opinion, typical Japanese characteristics are missing.

Superficiality

The notion of superficiality or shallowness is the antipode to obscurity in this context. While obscurity is seen as rather positive, because it is attributed to high complexity and cultural differences, works that are easy to understand are thought to lack complexity and depth and are therefore seen as superficial. This critique is frequently directed at the popular authors Murakami and Yoshimoto (Kunisch 2003: 16; Scholz 2003: 14; KC 2005: 113).

It follows that literary works, which transcend the immediate political, social, and cultural surroundings of their authors, are often deprecated for being shallow. Authors of such works are criticised for making too many concessions to a ‘homogeneous readership’ (*homogene Leserschaft*) of a ‘global literature’ (*weltumspannende Literatur*), as one reviewer described it (Form 2003: 10). ‘Global literature’ reiterates the accusation of detachment of the Japanese cultural context and the ‘homogeneous readership’ seems to be the cause of the supposed superficiality. However, as the subjects here are works that became worldwide best sellers, ‘homogeneous’ readership simply seems to mean ‘large’ readership, as uniformity among so many readers cannot be assumed. In other words, literature that is removed from the context of the national culture that produced it can appeal to a big audience beyond national borders but is often lacking in quality.

Another reviewer puts the blame for the emptiness of Murakami’s works on the emptiness of Japanese society and the limitless wealth and lack of passion of the Japanese people. It is the shallowness of contemporary Japanese culture that results in the shallowness of its literature for this reviewer (Federmaier 2003: 37). The mentioned review also traces the superficiality back to the issue of globalisation and the accusation of its negative influence on Japanese society. Thus, the reviewer describes superficiality not only as a characteristic of Murakami’s works but of the globalised era in which they were produced.

Metropolis and Loneliness

Life in a metropolis, mostly Tōkyō, and all the problems it entails, is often depicted as an important theme in contemporary Japanese literature. For Murakami’s works the term ‘metropolis’ is used as generic term for the loneliness of its inhabitants and the shallowness of human relations (Stüttgen 2003: 18); as a setting, the big city is important for the mood of mystery and suspense (Huber-Lang 2005: 21; Baron 2005b: 23). In the works of Yoshimoto, the big city is also depicted as an important theme (Ertl 2004:9), as well as influencing her writing style (Weissmüller 2005: 14; KC 2005: 113).

The review “Im Land der einsamen Großstadtwölfe” (In the Land of Lone Wolves of the Big Cities) deals with four works of four different authors: Kanehara Hitomi’s 金原ひとみ (b. 1983) *Tokyo love* (*Hebi ni piasu* 蛇にピアス); Murakami’s *Blinde Weide, schlafende Frau: Erzählungen*;⁷ Murakami Ryū’s 村上龍 (b. 1952) *In der Misosuppe* (*In za miso sūpu* イン ザ ミソスープ); and Tsuji Hitonari’s 辻仁成 (b. 1959) *Warten auf die Sonne* (*Taiyō machi* 太陽待ち) under the

7 This collection of stories has been compiled for the German language book market. The title refers to one of the stories in the collection, “Mekura yanagi to nemuru onna” めくらやなぎと眠る女 (Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman) first published in December 1983 in the magazine *Bungakukai*.

topic of the metropolis. The reviewer argues that life in a big city like Tōkyō is an important subject matter not only for the mentioned works but also for Japanese literature in general. This kind of life is normally used as a metaphor for loneliness. For example, in a review of Kawakami's *Der Himmel ist blau, die Erde ist weiß*, the loneliness of the life in a big city is described as an important motif for the actions of the female protagonist (Neidhart 2008: 55).

Hence, many articles highlighted the feeling of being isolated or alone that comes with the life in a metropolis, which, in the view of the respective reviewers, frequently is conveyed by Japanese literary works. Above that, in a review of Kirino's *Die Umarmung des Todes* another factor comes into play. The reviewer connects the corrosion of Japanese society by globalisation with the theme of loneliness and ultimately with madness and violence (Gohlis 2003: 50). These associations are frequently used in the review articles.

Violence

On the one hand, violence is described as an important part of Japanese aesthetics. For one reviewer there is a typical Japanese relation between innocence and cruelty (Winkels 2003: 42), and another one sees a characteristic connection of lust and death in Japanese art (Sperl 2003: 7). On the other hand, violence is interpreted as a consequence of problems within Japanese society. Many reviews adopt this view and attempt to explain these problems with the help of the literary works they are concerned with:

In *Made in Japan* (*Meido in Japan* メイ ドイン ジャパン) by Kuroda Akira 黒田 晶 (b. 1977), the violence of the teenagers is a symptom of the crisis of Japanese society according to one reviewer (Mensing 2005: vi). In the same article, Japan is described as a devastated nation with no self-esteem after the burst of the bubble economy at the beginning of the 1990s. This allegedly produced a violent-prone lost generation. The naturalistic depiction of the socio-economic background of the violence in the novel is considered to be the reason for its quality. Furthermore, the novel is twice compared to *American Psycho* (Wedler 2005: 18; Mensing 2005: vi). It is, however, rated higher than its US-American counterpart by its reviewers on the grounds that it is based on real social and economic problems in Japan.

It is teenagers in *Made in Japan* and middle-class women in *Die Umarmung des Todes* by Kirino who are driven to violence by society according to most reviewers. *Die Umarmung des Todes* is characterized as a case study about how the economic crisis affects the weakest of society (Neidhart 2003: 91; Sperl 2003: 7). It is described as a dark novel about the cruelty of Japanese society (Sperl 2003: 28), providing precious insight into the values of this society (Schoettli 2003: 35). Again it is the background of these perceived problems of Japanese society that helps the

reviewers to explain the violence in this novel and adds value to it. The same argument is employed by a critic for the *Der Hai von Shinjuku* (*Shinjuku zame* 新宿鯨) series⁸ written by Ōsawa (Stäude 2008b: 38).

By contrast, Tsutsui's *Mein Blut ist das Blut eines anderen* (*Ore no chi wa tanin no chi* おれの血は他人の血) causes slight irritation for one reviewer (Hijiya-Kirschner 2007: 58). The reviewer cannot see the point of the depicted violence, because it does not educate the readers about Japanese society. This is how violence is treated in the reviews: it is accepted as a part of Japanese aesthetics, but it is expected to provide a better understanding of Japan. If it has no obvious relation to real social problems in Japan, it is a reason to deprecate a literary work as lowbrow and lacking depth.

Feminism

The depiction of the problems for women in Japanese society is an important issue for reviewers of Japanese literature. Women are understood to have a low status in Japanese society. One critic summarises the situation in a review about *Die Umarmung des Todes* by Kirino:

Bis heute findet eine Mehrheit der Japanerinnen nur Teilzeitjobs. Und dort werden sie drangsaliert und nur ausgenutzt, als ganzes Geschlecht an den Rand einer Gesellschaft gedrängt, deren Mitte zusehends verrottet (Neidhart 2003: 91).⁹

Kirino is characterised as an author who depicts female characters standing in stark contrast to the official Japanese concept of women in *Die Umarmung des Todes* (Sperl 2003: 7) and who creates authentic female characters (Schoettli 2003: 35). The violence in this novel is said to be caused by the humiliating living conditions of Japanese women (Sperl 2003: 28). Furthermore, the author is also praised for breaking taboos with the novel and thereby risking to cause the resentment of Japanese literary critics (Neidhart 2003: 91; Händler 2004: 6).

Die Geschichte einer gewissen Frau by Uno is also described as dealing with the status and problems of Japanese women. The conflict for women in this work comes from the changes during the period of modernisation. The novel is understood to be slightly subversive, because the female protagonist does not choose a life appropriate for her gender (Lütkehaus 2004a: 48). Another perspective on gender relations is seen in Kurahashi Yumiko's 倉橋由美子 *Die Reise nach Amanon* (*Amanon-koku*

⁸ Two novels have been published in German: *Der Hai von Shinjuku: Sodom und Gomorra* (*Shinjuku zame* 新宿鯨) and *Der Hai von Shinjuku: Rache auf Chinesisch* (*Shinjuku zame II: Dokuzaru* 新宿鯨 II: 毒猿)

⁹ 'Until today, the majority of Japanese women can only find part time jobs. And in these they are harassed and only exploited; the whole female gender is being pushed to the fringes of a society whose centre deteriorates increasingly' (translation by author).

ōkanki アマノン国往還記). Her playful handling of gender roles demonstrates the irrationality of stereotypes according to one article (Gnam 2006b: 34).

Feminism is an important issue for reviewers when the reviewed works are written by women. Often very dire living conditions for women are assumed for Japan and are described in the articles. Many critics had a strong reaction to the connection of the description of women's lives and the violent story in *Die Umarmung des Todes*.

Harmony and the Calm Stream of Language

It is striking how often the mood in the reviewed works is described as harmonious and the style is compared to a calm stream. The tone of Murakami's writing is described as flowing (Teuffel 2008: 28). The styles of Uno (Lütkehaus 2004a: 48) and Ogawa (Gnam 2004b: 38) are similarly presented and many reviewers portray Kawakami's style as smoothly flowing (Messmer 2008: xi) or with comparable attributes like quietness (Neidhart 2008: 55); described as very slow (Krekeler 2008: 5); a quietly whispering language which provides contemplative pleasure with simple sentences (Winkels 2008: 53). Yoshimura Akira's 吉村昭 (1927–2006) *Unauslöschlich* (*Karishakuho* 仮釈放), in comparison, is described as structurally composed to give the reader the impression of a slow cruise on a river (Fokke 2007: 14).

Therefore, reviewers sometimes find a harmonious flow in the language and sometimes also in the structural composition of a literary work. No review article expresses surprise about the language of the considered Japanese literary works, the progression of the stories, or the structural composition of the works that are frequently described as smoothly or quietly flowing. This 'smoothness' measures up to the reviewers' expectations and contrasts the theme of violence but also corresponds to the issues of esotericism and transience raised in many reviews.

Esotericism and Transience

The term 'esoteric' is used for the works of very different authors. The difficulties in understanding the works of Ōe are sometimes explained by an alleged Japanese esotericism and Asian spirituality (Federmaier 2004b: 4; Cavelti 2005: 61). The characters in Ogawa's *Museum der Stille* (*Chinmoku-hakubutsukan* 沈黙博物館) are said to have mysterious connections to nature and invisible forces (*Echo* 2006: 83) and Murakami is described as creating a mysteriously spiritual mood (Albath 2006: 14). According to many reviewers, esotericism is particularly characteristic of Yoshimoto and part of her formula of success (KC 2005: 113; JDL 2007: 26).

Yoshimoto is also said to create a pathos of transience (*Vergänglichkeitspathos*) in her works (Gnam 2004d: 40).

The notion of transience derives, similar to that of esotericism, from a vaguely assumed Asian spirituality. It is described as an important motif in the works of Tanizaki (Gnam 2003: 36), whose works are also said to correspond with *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵 (Lütkehaus 2003b: 15), Japanese woodblock prints of the floating world (floating meaning transient), hence placing the theme of transience in a Japanese tradition. Likewise, it is identified as a motif of the works of Higuchi (KOS 2008: 34).

The term ‘esotericism’ is especially used to criticise popular contemporary authors, whereas the motif of transience is described as part of Japanese tradition. In the sense that both are associated with the notion of ‘Asian spirituality’, they are also related to the realm of fantasy, which is another important aspect in the review articles.

Reality and Fantasy

Switching between reality and fantasy within one story is depicted as characteristic of Japanese literature. One reviewer attributes the origins of this aspect in Yoshimoto’s stories to Shintōism (Ertl 2004: 9). The phenomenon is also ascribed to works by Akutagawa (Gnam 2004a: 34) and Ogawa (Federmaier 2005: 37, 2006b: 28). It is, however, mostly associated with Murakami and referred to as an inherent part of the mood in his works (Kospach 2003a: 7; Körte 2003: 8), as a crucial element of the composition of his stories (Baron 2005b: 23; Wiegandt 2008: 14), and as a characteristic aspect of his style (Löhndorf 2006: 27).

This literary device of switching between reality and fantasy is explicitly connected to the influence of Latin American magical realism in one review article about Murakami and Ikezawa (Hijiya-Kirschner 2003a: 34). This indication of influence contrasts the widely spread opinion that having elements of reality and fantasy in the same text was a typical quality of Japanese literature. It still emerges, however, as a common trait of Japanese literature in most of the review articles.

Genres

Reviewers very rarely write about Japanese literature and its history in general. Only when they want to emphasise the importance of an author do they explain the status of this author within the history of Japanese literature. However, sometimes certain genres are mentioned. One typical Japanese genre which is frequently described by reviewers is the so-called *shishōsetsu* 私小説.

The generic term ‘*shishōsetsu*’ is explained in a review about Ōe’s *Tagame*. The reviewer describes the genre as consisting of autobiographic essays, starting with a personal experience and involving intense self-scrutiny by the author, which comes close to exhibitionism (Cavelty 2005: 61). Such novels are seen as outmoded. Therefore the term is used as a criticism of Ōe’s works, whose style is described as annoyingly self-centred by another critic (Hijiya-Kirschner 2008b: 11).

Mystery stories from Japan, in contrast, are widely praised. Many reviewers like that these stories go beyond the typical confines of the genre (Hijiya-Kirschner 2003c: 34; Schoettli 2003: 35; Wörtche 2008: 16). Works of Edogawa Ranpo 江戸川乱歩 (1894–1965) are especially lauded and his significance for the development of the genre in Japan is stressed (Gnam 2006a: 38; Mensing 2006: vi). Several contemporary mystery novels have been released by Cass Publishing with some success. Higashino Keigo’s 東野圭吾 (b. 1958) *Mord am See* (*Reikusaïdo* レイクサイド) is praised for its connection to an authentic background and suspense (Hijiya-Kirschner 2003c: 34), as are volume one and two of the novel *Der Hai von Shinjuku* with the addition of an action-packed story (Staude 2008b: 38; Wörtche 2008: 16). The above-mentioned series *Die Umarmung des Todes* is also one of the successful works that are praised particularly for their authentic socio-economic background story. The realistic insight into Japanese society is stressed as a point that makes a mystery story praiseworthy. Works that have mystery elements but do not offer such insight are much less well received. Examples are Mizukami Tsutomu’s 水上勉 (1919–2004) *Im Tempel der Wildgänse* (*Gan no tera* 雁の寺) and Tsutsui’s *Mein Blut ist das Blut eines anderen*.

Mistakes

My analysis of review articles of Japanese literature has shown that reviewers are prone to making mistakes. The attention here shall not be directed to typing errors but to incorrect information and/or misconceptions that are often part of these review articles. Sometimes book titles are confused. One review cites *Naokos Lächeln* (*Noruwei no mori* ノルウェイの森), translated from Japanese into German, instead of *Gefährliche Geliebte*, translated from English into German, as the novel by Murakami that caused the argument in the literary TV show *Das Literarische Quartett* (Kastura 2003: 4). In another article the reviewer refers to a book by Murakami allegedly titled *Beben von Kobe*, which is in fact called *Nach dem Beben* (Kaufer 2004: 7).

Other mistakes are that the name ‘Edogawa Ranpo’ is said to be an acrostic (Lütkehaus 2006: 28),¹⁰ that Mishima is mistaken for a winner of the Nobel Prize for

10 This is incorrect. Rather, ‘Edogawa Ranpo’ is a phonetic approximation of the name ‘Edgar Allan Poe’, using the Japanese readings of Chinese Characters (江 e 戸 do 川 gawa 亂 ran 歩 po).

literature (Müller 2008: 16), and that one reviewer explains that the name ‘Kafka’ is written ‘Kafuka’ in transliteration because ‘a Japanese cannot pronounce the word Kafka’ (Müller 2004: 16).¹¹ The most frequent mistake however is the misspelling of names. This did not only occur once as a typing error but every time when the name was mentioned in the same article: ‘Yakoi’ instead of ‘Yayoi’ and ‘Natsuro’ instead of ‘Natsuo’ (Fischer 2003: 28); ‘Takeshi’ instead of ‘Takashi’ (Ballhausen 2003:8); ‘Kanahara’ instead of ‘Kanehara’ (ABN 2006: 26); ‘Satoru’ instead of ‘Satoru’ (Neidhart 2008: 55).

Conclusion

Japanese literature is in a stronger position in the German-language book market than it was in the 1990s. This is partly due to the impact of best-selling authors like Murakami, but it is also partly due to the support of Japanese institutions as well as smaller initiatives by literature conveyors in German-speaking countries. The controversy around Murakami’s *Gefährliche Geliebte* helped to strengthen the position of Japanese translators. It is agreed that the controversy arose at least to some extent from the fact that the German version was translated from the English version. It is now common to translate from the original Japanese into German.

Japanese literature is most frequently discussed in the Swiss and German newspapers *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Zeit*, *Welt*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *taz*. The reviewers are mostly experts of literature in general but not of Japanese literature. Of the six reviewers who wrote more than five review articles in the period under investigation only one (Hijiya-Kirschner) is a distinguished expert of Japanese studies. As Hubert Spiegel relates, editors fear that Japanese studies experts would be biased (Spiegel 2001: 94). It is assumed/suspected that they would be keen to dissolve stereotypes and advocate an ‘authentic’ picture of Japanese society or literature. Therefore, they might overstate the value of works that depict an accurate socio-economic background story or constitute a representative example of Japanese literature and dismiss works that offer no such insights. This reluctance to employ Japanese studies experts, however, leads to frequent mistakes concerning facts about Japan and Japanese literature and culture in the review articles.

The image of Japanese literature, created by the reviewers, is that of a literature that deals, thematically, with the collision of traditional Japanese culture and West-

¹¹ To render the name ‘Kafka’ in Japanese, a syllabary has to be used, in this case the katakana, which only allows the combination of syllabograms plus the coda ‘n’ (ン). There is no ‘f’ available in the Japanese writing system, only a syllabogram for ‘fu’, which has to be used to render the name ‘Kafka’ in Japanese writing. This writing convention, however, says nothing about the ability of Japanese citizens to pronounce foreign names.

ern culture; that is sometimes difficult to understand for Western readers, if the themes and motifs are too foreign, but that also is superficial if the themes and motifs are too far detached from the Japanese context; that addresses the manifold problems of a high-tech society, the loneliness in the metropolises, and the oppression of women; that has a tendency toward esotericism, and in which fantasy elements are common; and, finally, that has many interesting and exciting aspects to offer in the mystery genre.

These various themes, which the reviewers in German print media attribute to Japanese literature as main themes, attest to a broadened level of expectation among most of the reviewers. Uncritically adopted stereotypes of Japanese society and Japanese literature have become rare in reviews of translated Japanese literature. The use of stereotypes, however, has not disappeared completely but has become subtler. Experienced readers of Japanese literature have expanded their expectations. Previously these expectations consisted mainly of 'subtle aesthetics', now they also include the 'aesthetics of the broken' (*Ästhetik des Kaputten*', Hijiya-Kirschneireit 2003c: 34). These 'aesthetics of the broken', which still shocked reviewers in the early 1990s (Hijiya-Kirschneireit 1996: 706-7), are now expected by most reviewers: they are perceived to attest to problems of Japanese society. The crucial point, however, is that in the opinion of many reviewers something true and authentic should be conveyed about Japanese society in the work of a Japanese author. It seems that reviewers, as the knowledge about Japanese society has increased significantly among them, confidently focus on elements of literary texts they perceive to be confirming their knowledge about Japanese society, culture, economics, or politics. If reviewers feel that a Japanese work of literature does not convey the reality of life in Japanese society, it is described as lacking quality. This is illustrated by the reviews of Tsutsui's *Mein Blut ist das Blut eines anderen* where the depicted violence allegedly does not attest to the reality of Japanese society or by the reviews of the works of Murakami that are supposedly intended for a global audience and therefore perceived to be lacking a quality that could be called 'Japaneseness', as well as the reviews that describe the works of Ōe as either too obscure or too self-centred and therefore far detached from real (Japanese) life.

The conclusion therefore must be that while on the one hand the expectations of Japanese literature have broadened and reviewers are not as easily shocked as they were in the past, on the other hand even experienced readers still expect Japanese literature to paint a truthful picture of the state and the problems of Japanese society. Literature can be a source of information about a foreign culture, but it cannot be the main duty of authors to act as cultural mediators. Furthermore, the authenticity of information cannot count as a viable criterion for the evaluation of a work of (literary) art—unfortunately it is, however, still used by many reviewers.

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GLOSSARY

Abe Kōbō	安部公房	author, 1924–93
<i>Afutā Dāku</i>	アフターダーク	novel by Murakami Haruki
Akutagawa Ryūnosuke	芥川龍之介	author, 1892–1927
<i>Amanon-koku ōkanki</i>	アマノン国往還記	novel by Kurahashi Yumiko
<i>Anchū mondō</i>	闇中間答	dialog by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke
<i>Aru hitori no onna no hanashi</i>	或る一人の女の話	novel by Uno Chiyo
<i>Auto [=Out]</i>	アウト	‘Auto’ is the Japanese transliteration of the English title <i>Out</i> of the Japanese novel by Kirino Natsuo provided on the title page to clarify pronunciation
<i>Bungakukai</i>	文學界	Literary World; name of two monthly literary magazines. The first one was published from 1893 until 1895. Another one was founded in 1933 and after a change of ownership in 1938 continues publication to today.
<i>Bungeishunjū</i>	文藝春秋	Literary Spring and Autumn; monthly general interest magazine, founded in 1923 as a literary magazine.
Bunka-chō	文化庁	Agency for Cultural Affairs
<i>Chinmoku-hakubutsukan</i>	沈黙博物館	novel by Ogawa Yōko
Edogawa Ranpo	江戸川乱歩	author, 1894–1965
Endō Shūsaku	遠藤周作	author, 1923–96
<i>Gan no tera</i>	雁の寺	novel by Mizukami Tsutomu
<i>Hagoromo</i>	ハゴロモ	novel by Yoshimoto Banana
<i>Hashiru koto ni tsuite kataru toki ni boku no kataru koto</i>	走ることについて語るときに僕の語ること	memoir by Murakami Haruki
<i>Hebi ni piasu</i>	蛇にピアス	novel by Kanehara Hitomi
Higashino Keigo	東野圭吾	author, 1958–
Higuchi Ichiyō	樋口一葉	author, 1872–96
<i>Honkakubō-ibun</i>	本覚坊遺文	novel by Inoue Yasushi
Ikezawa Natsuki	池澤夏樹	author, 1945–
Inoue Yasushi	井上靖	author, 1907–91
<i>In za miso sūpu</i>	インザミソスープ	novel by Murakami Ryū
Isetan	伊勢丹	a Japanese department store
Itami Jūzō	伊丹十三	actor, film director, 1933–97
Kanehara Hitomi	金原ひとみ	author, 1983–
<i>Karishakuō</i>	仮釈放	novel by Yoshimura Akira
Kawabata Yasunari	川端康成	author, 1899–1972
Kawakami Hiromi	川上弘美	author, 1958–
Kirino Natsuo	桐野夏生	author, 1951–
<i>Kokkyō no minami, taiyō no nishi</i>	国境の南、太陽の西	novel by Murakami Haruki
Kokusai Kōryū Kikin	国際交流基金	Japan Foundation
Kurahashi Yumiko	倉橋由美子	author, 1935–2005

Kuroda Akira <i>Meido in Japan</i> “Mekura yanagi to nemuru onna”	黒田晶 メイドインジャパン めくらやなぎと眠る女	author, 1977– novel by Kuroda Akira story by Murakami Haruki
Mishima Yukio Mizukami Tsutomu Murakami Haruki Murakami Ryū Nagai Kafū <i>Ninshin-karendā</i>	三島由紀夫 水上勉 村上春樹 村上龍 永井荷風 妊娠カレンダー	author, 1925–70 author, 1919–2004 author, 1949– author, 1952– author, 1879–1959 story and title of a collection of stories by Ogawa Yōko
<i>Noruwei no mori</i> Ōe Kenzaburō Ogawa Yōko <i>Ore no chi wa tanin no chi</i> Ōsawa Arimasa <i>Reikusoaido</i> <i>Sayōnara, watashi no hon yo!</i> <i>Sensei no kaban</i> “Shigatsu no aru hareta asa ni 100-pāsento no onna no ko ni deau koto ni tsuite” <i>Shinjuku zame</i>	ノルウェイの森 大江健三郎 小川洋子 おれの血は他人の血 大沢在昌 レイクサイド さようなら、私の本よ! センセイの鞆 四月のある晴れた朝に 100パーセントの女の子に出会うことについて 新宿鮫	novel by Murakami Haruki author, 1931– author, 1962– novel by Tsutsui Yasutaka author, 1956– novel by Higashino Keigo novel by Ōe Kenzaburō novel by Kawakami Hiromi story by Murakami Haruki
<i>Shinjuku-zame II: Dokuzaru shishōsetsu</i>	新宿鮫 II: 毒猿 私小説	novel series and first part of the series by Ōsawa Arimasa novel by Ōsawa Arimasa ‘I’ novel; novel based on the authors’ own life
<i>Taiyō machi</i> Tanizaki Jun’ichirō <i>Tokage</i>	太陽待ち 谷崎潤一郎 とかげ	novel by Tsuji Hironari author, 1886–1965 story and title of a collection of stories by Yoshimoto Banana
<i>Torikaeko/Chenjiringu Torefuru</i>	取り替え子/チェンジリング トレフル	novel by Ōe Kenzaburō Trefoil; promotional magazine of the Isetan department store, which was not sold publicly but sent to members of a club of sponsors once a month. It published a series of short stories by Murakami Haruki between 1981–83
Tsuji Hironari Tsutsui Yasutaka <i>ukiyo-e</i>	辻仁成 筒井康隆 浮世絵	author, 1959– author, 1934– woodblock print, pictures of the floating world
<i>Umibe no Kafuka</i> Uno Chiyo “Yamiyo” Yoshimoto Banana Yoshimura Akira	海辺のカフカ 宇野千代 闇（やみ）夜 よしもと ばなな 吉村昭	novel by Murakami Haruki author, 1897–1996 story by Higuchi Ichiyō author, 1964– author, 1927–2006

“Yūgure no kyūshokushitsu to ame no pūru” <i>Zō no shōmetsu</i>	夕暮れの給食室と雨のプー ル 象の消滅	story by Ogawa Yōko story and title of a collection of stories by Murakami Haruki
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