A History of Silence:

Representations and Aesthetics in John Okada's *No-No Boy* and Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine.*

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Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven tar for seg japansk-amerikansk litteratur og den demokratiske rollen den innehar i ettermælet av den andre verdenskrig. I de litterære representasjonene av interneringen av japanske og japansk-amerikanske innbyggere i USA, drøfter denne oppgaven hvorfor deler av disse hendelsene er henlagt i historien. Som basis for å forstå dette samfunnet, har jeg tatt for meg konseptet agnotologi («agnotology) som et grunnlag for å forstå hvorfor mennesker velger å ignorere og fortrenge aspekter ved fortiden. I denne diskusjonen tar jeg for meg to romaner som fremstiller japansk-amerikansk kultur og identitet i ulike perioder.

Det første kapittelet av oppgaven diskuterer romanen *No-No Boy* (1957), skrevet av John Okada. I denne romanen fremstilles det Japansk Amerikanske samfunnet som preget av et psykologisk traume som resultat av interneringsprosessen. Ved hjelp av hovedpersonen Ichiro Yamada, males et bilde av etterkrigsperioden som problematisk i lys av de kulturelle endringene i både væremåte og identitet for de japansk-amerikanske borgerne. I sammenheng med denne romanen argumenterer jeg for en tilstedeværelse av kritikk og forhandling av rasistiske tendenser og holdninger i samfunnet i denne perioden. Gjennom teoretiske begrep av Mikhail Bakhtin tar jeg for meg hvordan uttrykk som «dialogisme» or «monologisk» er med på å forklare samfunnet i perioden både i, og etter krigen. I denne diskusjonen tar jeg også for meg «monologisk premiss» som et overførende litterært begrep for å forklare hvordan agnotologi fremstår som en grunnleggende pilar i dette samfunnet.

Kapittel to omhandler romanen *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002), av Julie Otsuka. I diskusjonen av denne romanen analyserer jeg hvordan japansk-amerikansk kultur blir fremstilt i form av fiendtlige uttrykk. Her understreker jeg hvordan japansk-amerikansk litteratur fra nåtiden strekker seg tilbake til fortiden for å bevare en kulturell tradisjon og arv.

Her argumenterer jeg for at romanen bygger på estetiske virkemidler som overfører både litterær og menneskelig historie gjennom bokens oppbygning og karakterenes oppførsel. Ved å referere til Marianne Hirsch sin teori om «postmemory» forklarer jeg hvordan interneringsprosessen fortsetter å ha en innvirkning på nåtidens generasjon av japansk-amerikanere.

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Introduction

> Once you know that your family was in camp, you own history in your guts: it's written within the body.
> Is there something ugly in the leap to ownership? – the desire to feel worthy of History's attention? The desire for pity? Maybe. Maybe. Maybe. Camp history, as much as any other history, is about the terrors and glories of the human heart.
>
> But here's what your body knows: you are charged with history.
>
> Tamiko Nimura, "How It Feels to Inherit Camp", 68[1]

Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, the U.S. government passed Executive Order 9066, which led to the imprisonment of around 120 000 Japanese and Japanese Americans in internment camps, where they were detained for two years. In the aftermath of this event, the Japanese American community avoided discussing their experiences in camp and hid their feelings toward this subject. This tendency has later been pointed to by scholars as a cultural development that came as a result of the alienation and racist notions they were suddenly exposed to. The author Marita Sturken has argued in her essay "Absent Images of Memory: Remembering and Reenacting the Japanese Internment" (1997) that the internment of Japanese Americans "…is an event for which history provides images primarily through their *absence*" (691 – emphasis my own). This sense of an "absent presence" that is visible in the history of the internees emphasizes a silence and a desire to go unnoticed in an attempt to achieve closure. The shame and guilt of being ethnically associated with articulated images of the "Enemy" haunted the Japanese Americans for the years following the war and subsequently manifested itself in their own self-perception.

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[1] The epigraphs featured in each chapter of this thesis are all excerpts from Tamiko Nimura's short essay "How It Feels to Inherit Camp", published in Kartika Review, Issue 9. Spring 2011.

The epigraph above is a passage from a short essay by the Japanese American writer Tamiko Nimura. Her text, titled “How It Feels to Inherit Camp” (2011), speaks to the continuing presence of the internment in Japanese American culture, and discusses how cultural trauma, such as that of the Japanese American internment experience during WWII, is transferred from older to younger generations. Professor Marianne Hirsch states that “Trauma, in its literal meaning, is a wound inflicted on the flesh” (*Postmemory*, 80). “Transgenerational”, or “intergenerational trauma” and its effects can then, in turn, be defined as the “…transmission of trauma […] as well as specific thought processes and behaviors that are thought to be passed down because of parental experiences…” (Bender 206). Nimura relates back to images of silence and absence that were manifested during WWII, highlighting how these are still present in the cultural ideology of the Japanese Americans in present-day U. S.

The sudden absence of Japanese American culture in the years after the war forms the basis for this thesis, examining how being portrayed as the “Enemy” came to have a cultural impact for the minority, not only in the immediate years after the war but for the generation that followed. On this basis, the two following novels have been chosen for this thesis. The first of these two works is John Okada’s novel *No-No Boy* (1957), which negotiates the role of Japanese American identity in the wake of WWII. As Okada died in 1971, the novel stands as his only work. Through the eyes of the protagonist, Ichiro Yamada, the novel both discusses and problematizes several aspects of the challenges the Japanese American population met in their re-integration back into society after the war. The story tackles not only the complex situation of the “no-no boys”, who got their nickname for refusing to fight for the U.S. army and denouncing their belief in the Japanese Emperor. *No-No Boy* has later been canonized within Japanese American literature, as it engaged with the topic of Japanese American identity when no one else would. The second novel I will discuss is Julie Otsuka’s *When the*

Emperor Was Divine (2002), which reaches back to the history of the internment, designing a visual aesthetic structure that seeks to emphasize cultural bonds to the past. The novel reconstructs the Japanese American experience of the internment told from the point of view of an unnamed family from the first evacuation order to their release approximately two years later. In its composition, the story engages with historical tropes and images of vilification, guilt, and shame that resurrects the history of the internment for newer generations. Much like Nimura, Otsuka here points to the legacy that Japanese American culture has tried to cover up and forget. I intend in this thesis to look at how the role of fictional representations speak to the internment and its cultural "aftershocks" in relation to Japanese American culture. However, in order to grasp the full extent of the psychological and transgenerational trauma that is reflected in the novels, a historical perspective of the relationship between the two cultures is needed.[2]

A historical perspective

The history of Japanese and Japanese Americans in the U. S. has followed a line of both prejudice and skepticism that increasingly built up towards WWII. The interaction between the U.S. and Japan goes back to the 1850s, when citizens of Japan were told of a prosperous future in the U.S. Myths of high wages soon became tempting to many impoverished farmers, and historian Ronald Takaki notes that "Between 1885 and 1924, 200,000 left for Hawaii and 180,000 for the U.S. mainland." (233). Most of these immigrants were men and came to form a new workforce within agriculture, however, due to this massive influx, the U.S. saw the need to protect their lands. As a result, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited the entry of new foreign laborers. The Japanese government was able to negotiate a compromise through the 1907 Gentlemen's Agreement, which ensured the admittance of Japanese women into the U.S. As a result, a number of what is called "picture brides" were able to emigrate to both the U.S. and Hawaii through arranged marriages. (Takaki 234). As a result of this, the Japanese community was able to sustain itself and maintain a sense of identity.

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[2] For this part, I will rely on Ronald Takaki's *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (2008), for a summary of this history.

By 1920, the Japanese population in the U.S. consisted of 27% Nisei (meaning second-generation), and 63% on the eve of World War II (Takaki 259). The first-generation Japanese American immigrants, called "Issei" hoped that their children, the "Nisei", would be able to secure equality and dignity in being born American citizens. Still, being born as an American citizen did not guarantee them equal treatment by their Anglo-American peers, and Takaki comments that education and citizenship did not "…immunize them from racial discrimination" (259). Unable to secure jobs, the Nisei ended up being overeducated and overqualified for the jobs they were given. Wanting to assimilate into the Anglo-American public sphere, they absorbed a cultural duality between the Japanese part and the American part of their identity. This cultural duality and the challenges that came with it in the aftermath of the war lay the foundation for the negotiation of culture and identity that *No-No Boy* offers.

During the period of WWII, the relationship between Japan and the United States quickly devolved from being a conflict of interest, to become a full-on war of racial hatred. Takaki notes that "The Japanese military denounced the American enemy as white "brutes" and "devils". For their part, the American military depicted the enemy as "yellow apes" and "yellow sub-humans" (381). The contrast between the two enemies was that whereas the "Nazis" referred to the followers of Hitler, the term "Jap" implicitly illustrates that the whole Japanese people were regarded as the enemy (Takaki 381). The problematic conceptualization of the Japanese people was highlighted when President Harry S. Truman wrote in his diary that the “Japs – savages, ruthless and fanatic” (ibid). The president’s opinion of the Japanese would be emblematic of the attitude in the years to come.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, most Americans saw the Japanese and Japanese Americans as a threat to their safety, and skepticism towards the minority grew. A national survey done in March 1942 found that 93 % approved the internment of Japanese and Japanese Americans (Okihiro 62). Stored away in deserted areas in the U.S., the internment camps were kept out of sight for the public and only portrayed through a strictly positive tone. The specifics of manipulation and the construction of representation has later been described by Marita Sturken in her essay “Absent Images of Memory: Remembering and Reenacting the Japanese Internment” (1997). Here, she states that:

> Indeed, the government attempted through censorship to control the representation of the internment: It produced propaganda films depicting the camps as a benevolent exercise in civil obedience. The federal government prohibited cameras in the camps, thus attempting to prevent any significant production of counterimages. This limited cultural representation of the camps was compounded by the protracted silence of many of the former internees. (691 – 692)

The quote captures the ground on which this thesis stands. I will issue an understanding of this type of manipulation and censorship of representation through the concept of “agnotology”, as articulated by the historians Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger in their anthology *Agnotology: The Making & Unmaking of Ignorance* (2008). The little but increasingly explored field of agnotology involves answering why we ignore or forget certain things, whether selectively, subconsciously, or even involuntarily. Its meaning derives from the Neoclassical Greek word “agnōsis”, which roughly translate into the English “not knowing”. As Proctor is the one who writes the first chapter on the terminology of agnotology, I will refer to him in relation to the usage of the concept. Proctor early on in the book makes three different distinctions when it comes to employing the term agnotology; "…ignorance as *native state* (or resource), ignorance as *lost realm* (or selective choice), and ignorance as a deliberately engineered and *strategic ploy* (or active construct)." (3 – emphasis in original). It is however here important to note that the concept of ignorance will not be the primary focus of this discussion. It will instead serve as a basis for understanding the representations in the two novels, emphasizing the cultural effects of the one-sided official representations of the internment.

The connection between "agnotology" and Japanese American literature is made explicitly clear in the author Ruth Ozeki's foreword to John Okada's novel *No-No Boy*. In the foreword, dated April 30th, 2014, she briefly mentions a new field of study, known as "agnotology". In the short paragraph, she writes that "Your novel, *No-No Boy*, almost wasn't" (Okada xvi). Ozeki mentions agnotology only in passing and does not further elaborate on the concept. However, in explaining why the book failed commercially when it was first published in 1957, Ozeki writes that the novel "…touched nerves and opened wounds. It reminded them of a past they wanted to forget, and so they rejected it. Your book disappeared over night." (viii). The comment touches on a similar notion of ignorance to that which is articulated in Proctor's theory. I will, therefore, suggest that agnotology functions in relation to the two works as an overarching system of thought and control that forced a one-dimensional representation to take hold of the historical record of the internment. In doing so, it rejected other voiced to appear. However, rather than emphasizing how and why ignorance featured prominently in the years after the internment, I will focus on the role of the literary representations I discuss as having a democratic function that counteracts this process of silence.

To illustrate how the production of silence worked in relation to the internment, I will refer to the photographer Dorothea Lange, whose representation of the internment camps exemplifies the expressed one-dimensional view of the U.S. government. Lange is familiar to most as the photographer who documented the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl, where she similarly worked to offer differing and critical representations in her photos. Through her example, we are not only able to see how the concept of agnotology manifested itself in relation to the internment camps, but also see how skepticism and alienation towards Japanese and Japanese Americans blossomed as a major consensus in the American public**.** The historian Linda Gordon comments in her book *Impounded: Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese American Internment* (2008), that Lange had previously "…tried to expose racism as a relationship and as a structure" in relation to her assignment for the Farm Security Administration in the South (15). In her work for the U.S. War Relocation Authority (WRA), she issued a similar sentiment in documenting an unspoken part of the internment process, providing a critical voice through her photography. The general skepticism towards Japanese and Japanese Americans had grown increasingly in the years before the war, and after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on the 7th of December 1941, the American public was afraid of further attacks. Spurred on by images and texts shown by the media, levels of hysteria and paranoia grew. Subsequently, as these tensions gathered momentum, few people were apt to support the Japanese Americans publicly (Gordon 6). Lange had previously seen during her work that racism was an integral part of American nationalism, and subsequently sought to challenge this notion by the way she documented the camps. However, she ultimately had little impact in determining which images were to be shown to the public (Gordon 14).

Lange's specific method of documentation focused on the life of the internees through an individualizing scope. This was done in an effort to counter the monotonous representation in the media and was met with overall disapproval from the WRA. Her documentation consisted of images that showed the horrible conditions the internees experienced, focusing more on the inhumanity of the camps rather than praising the victims of war (Gordon 30). The WRA opposed Lange on numerous accounts, and ultimately impounded her documentation for the duration of the war. When the war ended, the images were slowly and cautiously released and placed in the U.S. National archives, but neither the government nor the majority of people showed any real interest in Lange's photos of the camps. There is still a debate over why the government chose to document the incarceration in the first place. On the one hand, it may have shown a sense of transparency towards the public, avoiding questions of how the Japanese and Japanese Americans were treated. On the other hand, there was a chance that the images would document mistreatment of the prisoners, which would damage the reputation of the WRA. Gordon notes that "Lange's own retrospective explanation was that they wanted a record but not a public record" (21). In other words, the WRA wanted to control the circulation of information.

Figure 1: This image is collected from Linda Gordon and Gary Y. Okihiro (eds.), *Impounded: Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese American Internment* (2008), p. 151.

The image above is an example of how Lange focused parts of her photography on individuals. The caption underneath the photo, written by Lange herself, states:

> San Bruno, California. Old Mr. Konda in barrack apartment, after supper. He lives here with his two sons, his married daughter, and her husband. They share two small rooms together. His daughter is seen behind him, knitting. He has been a truck farmer and raised his family who are also farmers, in Centerville, Alameda County where his children were born. (Gordon 151)

In the photo, the man seems to gaze into the air, turning his head away from the camera and the photographer. He seems to shy away from being photographed, perhaps ashamed of being documented in such a powerless position. His hands resting in his lap indicates a form of passivity. He might feel shameful about being incarcerated, considering himself more American than Japanese. The small room is empty and bare, containing a single bed, a clock on the wall, and a single light above the bed. This barrenness of his private space emphasizes the displacement of his current life, being dispossessed of almost everything he owns and cherishes. Lange's specific emphasis on individuals runs as a parallel to *No-No Boy*, in which the inner psychological trauma of the protagonist is the focus. Lange's photo and this discussion of it feature as an instance of a similar type of representation, that shifts its focus from the Japanese Americans as a collective, to a stronger focus on the intricacies and complexities of the overall given image of the internment. The way in which the photography captures the feeling of displacement will also be discussed in relation to Julie Otsuka's method of representation in the second chapter of this thesis.

The “Monologic Premise” and Agnotology

As stated, I will argue that the study of agnotology and ignorance functions as a basis for describing the monotonous and one-sided representative image of the internment. In a literary setting, however, agnotology finds no direct place. Instead, I here look to argue that Mikhail Bakhtin’s discussion of dialogue functions as an apt equivalent to the concept of agnotology in literature. In his book *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1984), he argues that the concept of “monologue” in his discussion of Dostoevsky’s work, functions in the same way as the aspect of agnotology I have discussed above. He states that:

> Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other’s response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *decisive* force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue presents to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and represented persons. (293 – emphasis in original)

Bakhtin’s concept of the “monologue” captures the essence of what I will argue Japanese American literature in the immediate aftermath of the war was essentially bound to. The two novels presented in this thesis mark this “monologization” in their own distinctive ways of representing the internment in their stories. I suggest that Japanese American literature, by way of their representations, reflect on a singularity of “truth” that resided in the American public’s stigmatizing world-view both during and after WWII. One of the ways in which literary representations form a resistance to “monologism” is through what Bakhtin refers to as “the ultimate word” of the hero. This, he argues, carries a notion of the inner “unfinalizability” that is portrayed in a “polyphonic novel” (59). The aspect of unfinalizability in relation to representations of the internment goes against the overarching image that the

Japanese Americans were portrayed through. As such, the literature I will discuss seeks to reduce the effect of this “monologic” model through its counteracting representation. As a counterbalance to the process of a one-dimensional, overarching representation, the use of dialogue opens up a multiplicity of voices that counteracts the sphere of monologism, and the ignorance of alterity. Obviously, there are limitations in the transposition of Bakhtin’s terminology onto a different literary setting, and his occasionally generalizing sentiments, in turn, limit the weight of his arguments. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I find his terms helpful in the analysis of novels that discuss a cultural suppression of articulation and emotion. Even though Bakhtin’s argument is structured around the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky, and to some extent Leo Tolstoy, I argue here that these methods of analysis are applicable to the structure and history of the Japanese American internment, and therefore its literature.

On the basis of the explanation made above in regard to agnotology and Bakhtin’s idea of monologism**,** I intend in this thesis to look at how the role of fictional representations speak to the internment and its cultural aftershocks in relation to Japanese American culture. The two main works that I will discuss in this thesis operates in two different periods of time, but both have an effect that transcends the temporal space in which they are written in. John Okada’s *No-No Boy* (1957), discusses the critical fragmentation of Japanese American identity after WWII. The novel explores the perception of the Japanese Americans here in terms of disloyalty and vilification which came to shape the identity of the minority**.** Julie Otsuka’s *When the Emperor was Divine* (2002) on the other hand, seeks to translate the experience of the internees to a new generation of Japanese Americans. In comparing literature from different periods, I assess the continuing relation of the internment and its trauma. Furthermore, I argue that the “living connection” between literary texts of the

Japanese American internment continues to form cultural meaning in the form of cultural testimonies.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I argue that John Okada's novel *No-No Boy* constitutes an effort to negotiate the complex psychological issues of Japanese American identity in the wake of the internment camps and WWII. Through the use of what Bakhtin refers to as "dialogism", I here argue that the novel features the self-consciousness of characters in dialogue with other conflicting ideologies as a counterbalance to the presence of monologism in the post-war American society. I suggest here that this monologism functions as a prevailing thought or notion that promotes the silence and absence of Japanese American culture to manifest itself in its members. The self-consuming and repressive concepts of "guilt" and "shame" stand as entities that absorb other impressions around, forcing the minority to form an acceptance of these labels that were placed upon them. By emphasizing the characters in the novel as "carriers of ideas" (Bakhtin 79), I argue that the story manifests itself as a representation of the inward struggles and conflicts of the post-internment Japanese American society, issuing a rejection of the "ultimate word" (Bakhtin 48), that this monologism forcibly articulates.

In the second chapter, I discuss the role of literature on a broader level, by analyzing the work of Julie Otsuka. In her novel, *When the Emperor Was Divine*, she returns from present to past in order to reassess cultural tropes and create a modern-day testimony of the internment camps for the newer generation of Japanese Americans. In what Wai Chee Dimock refers to as a state of "resonance", she explains how texts continually lose and attach new meaning as time passes, in essence showing the "generative" force of literature that continually creates itself on the basis of that which came before (Dimock 1060). In relation to Japanese American literature, this generative effect has an especially vital role, as history has come to a crossroad where the memory of the older generations is slowly fading away. Here, I argue that the stylistic approach that *When the Emperor Was Divine* carries, retrospectively engages with and represents the internment experience, casting a recollecting vision of the aesthetics of previous literary works that were forced to reflect a tone of neutrality**.** In emulating this literary aesthetic, the novel highlights not only the experience of the characters it depicts but also comments on the notion of literary censorship that pertains to the historical tropes of silence and absence.

Chapter 1

Monologism and Cultural Mediation in John Okada's *No-No Boy*

> And you are angry when people ask why you are angry, since it didn't happen to you.
>
> And you are angry when some people praise your people for not being angry or bitter.
>
> And you are angry when some people ask you why you are not angrier.
>
> And you are angry when you know that some people might like you better when you are angry.
>
> Usually, you are not an angry person. Where does this anger come from?
>
> Tamiko Nimura

Years after its release, several critics argued that John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957) was groundbreaking in its depiction of the Japanese American internment. It was the first work to offer a direct critique of the events, and also one of the first Japanese American novels written. In the immediate years after the war, however, most Japanese Americans actively avoided the discussion of the internment entirely. The few who elected to speak of their experience employed distinct methods of representation to ensure a voice of neutrality in their accounts. Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* (1953) for instance, wrote an autobiographical memoir, and operated with the use of forgiving language to describe her experiences in the years before, during, and after the incarceration. Miné Okubo on the other hand sought to use a different genre altogether in her *Citizen 13660* (1946), which traces her personal experience of the internment in the form of a graphic memoir. By working with drawings and sketches together with a defining neutral tone in her text, she was able to both visualize and implicitly comment on her experience. Both methods testify to the difficulty of representing personal experiences of the internment camps, not only in order to reach Japanese American readers, but also a wider American audience as well. In her chapter "Coded Critiques: Japanese American Incarceration Literature" in *The Cambridge History of Asian American Literature* (2016), Associate Professor Traise Yamamoto highlights this wide range of narrative strategies in Japanese American literature after WWII. She argues that both Sone and Okubo deployed a form of "coded critique" in their works, being lighthearted on the surface but at the same time covertly displaying a harsher criticism underneath (173). Discussing the political climate at the time, Yamamoto states that:

> Given the pervasive anti-Japanese climate in the years directly following the war, published accounts of the internment experience during this period tended toward a seemingly straightforward description of events, avoiding overtly negative political assessments or accusations of racism. (172)

As Yamamoto explains, these covert methods of criticism proved valuable to the works in their effort to reach a wide audience. The memoirs were laden with literary tools like coded language and masking that were fundamental in order for them to maintain a tone of neutrality in a sharpened political landscape.

As a contrast to these two works, Yamamoto states that *No-No Boy* was "… direct in its depiction of the cost wrought by the war, incarceration, and reductive, racist notions of citizenship" (179). His novel will be the main focus of this chapter, looking at how both its immediate lack of success, as well as its contextual history, reflect the importance it had for subsequent scholars and writers. I will explore how his innovative and daring style of representation came to shape the Asian American literary community nearly twenty years after its first release in 1957. In this discussion, I will argue that Okada's rejection of neutrality came to signify a voice that spoke for those who were silenced in the post-internment Japanese American society, and that the novel ultimately came to symbolize an act of cultural preservation**.** Together, these two parts, the exterior and interior level of the novel, came to echo a larger sense of silence in the Japanese American community.

By working with fiction as a method of depicting history, Okada found a way to reject the previous strategies of coding and masking that Okubo and Sone had employed in their works. The sense of neutrality towards the topic of the internment that these latter works had enjoyed, highlighted by reviewers referring to Sone's work as an "…unaffected, honest little story" (Yamamoto 174), was replaced with a stark criticism in *No-No Boy*. As Ruth Ozeki explains in the foreword to the latest edition of the novel, Okada saw fiction as a necessity in order to convey his story properly. In this foreword he is quoted stating that "This is a story which has never been told in fiction and only in fiction can the hopes and fears and joys and sorrows of people be adequately recorded" (Okada xvii). Okada's emphasis on emotionality is, in essence, a rejection of the notion of silence and absence in itself and forms a focus on personal representation and the challenges of the individual rather than the internment. This focus is already partially visible in the narrative structure of the novel, which leaves out the internment camps of the story entirely, only engaging with the imprisonment retrospectively. Instead, *No-No Boy* directs attention to the psychological trauma of the Japanese Americans in the aftermath of the war.

Following Yamamoto's argument, *No-No Boy,* therefore, introduced a shift in the portrayal of the internment camps from an implicit to an explicit mode of description and critique. By writing a fictional representation of the post-internment Japanese American community that avoided direct ties to personal experience, Okada was able to present characters that expressed the full range of emotion in a more vivid and uncensored way than the literature before him had dared to. In creating characters that embodied several sides of

Japanese American society, and a story that complicated aspects of the "post-internment" period, Okada enabled a method of portraying extremities of trauma. In his novel, the traumatic experience is essentially re-envisioned and discussed by the characters in order to open up and engage with a society marked by silence. His quote mentioned previously regarding fiction emphasizes this exact feature of literature and highlights the importance of representation, that rejects oppressive and repressive acts of silencing. Furthermore, fiction also allowed Okada to portray other stories than his own. Since Okada himself was not a "no-no boy", but instead had enlisted to work as a translator for the U.S. Armed Forces, the use of fiction granted him the freedom to transgress the boundaries of a personal testimony. Thus, he was able to compose a story and an ensemble of characters that would enable him to properly discuss and problematize notions of identity and culture in post-war Japanese American society. In other words, his novel granted him a way to express the feeling of those on the fringes of the Japanese American community; those deemed disloyal.

No-No Boy details the events that followed in the internment of Japanese Americans, and their influx back into society. The novel starts with the protagonist Ichiro Yamada returning to Seattle after spending two years in prison as a result of his "no-no" response to question 27 and 28 of the questionnaire the internees were given. Tormented by the shame of being a "no-no boy", Ichiro initially comes across as an inherently depressed and introvert character, often depicted holding long inner monologues. When Ichiro returns home, he finds that things have changed since he left**.** Both Ichiro and Freddie, another "no-no boy", come home to find that their friends are no longer friends, but rather stricken with an anxiety and a fear of being associated with disloyal Japanese Americans: "That's how it is. Either they're in a big, fat rush or they don't know you no more" (Okada 45). The Nisei "no-no boys", who for the most part already before the war identified with American culture more so than a Japanese one, were shunned for being disloyal to the American identity they already had grown up with. The novel follows his plight towards a sense of self-redemption in an increasingly polarizing society where the identity of Japanese Americans is highly convoluted.

Focusing on representations of the characters in the novel, I aim to discuss the novel's drastic representation of trauma as a narrative strategy that highlights fiction as a supreme mode for negotiating the emotional atmosphere of the Japanese American society of the time. For this, I will consult two main theorists in my discussion of culture and analysis of the characters in the novel. Alongside these two, I will engage with several other theorists to highlight the context of the novel and the literary devices within the texts itself, both of which I will emphasize as vital to the understanding and completeness of the novel. The first theorist I will consult is the literary critic Hillis Miller, who discusses the power of storytelling. Miller's theoretical insight forms the foundation of the argument that Okada specifically chose the genre of fiction as a platform for representation of the aftermath of the internment. Miller also provides a theoretical thought to the creation of literature for a purpose beyond the textual, as something that provides cultural meaning. His theory also provides valuable ideas for the consideration of literature as a platform for discussion. Second, and perhaps the most important component for the theoretical framework of this chapter, the philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin will function as the main catalyst for the discussion of characters and ideas in Okada's novel. In his work on literary theory, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984), Bakhtin introduces several key literary expressions that I will suggest open up the discussion of the representation of characters in *No-No Boy*.

In representing the post-internment Japanese American society, *No-No Boy* reflects some of the ideas Bakhtin discusses in relation to his concept of the "polyphonic novel". There are two particular points from Bakhtin's theory that the novel engages with. First, Okada makes use of dialogue in his novel as a primary tool to prove and process a clear societal and psychological problem that came as a result of the internment. I here discuss

Bakhtin’s expression “monologism” or “monologization” (9), as a literary response and to some extent an explanation to the concept of agnotology; as something that in a literary setting negates other voices to appear. As exemplified in the discussion of Miné Okubo and Monica Sone above, the two authors’ works reflect a societal singularity of thought. In their strategic use of neutrality to hide criticism, the compositions and constructions in these works are to some degree controlled by the political climate of the post-internment period and the singular “truth” that this climate inspires. Monologism, or the “monologue” thus encompasses and to some extent explains the notions of silence and absence of Japanese American culture in a literary setting. I here reiterate the explanation of the monologue as it appeared in the introduction to this thesis:

> Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other’s response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *decisive* force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue presents to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and represented persons. (Bakhtin 293 – emphasis in original)

As understood here, in a monologue setting, there is no room for alterity. Second, in his rejection of neutrality in favor of the innovative**,** Okada embeds his story with characters that are both opinionated. Bakhtin refers to this type of characters as “self-conscious” of their own existence and the world that surrounds them (48). These points will intertwine and be discussed in greater detail in several of the arguments and close-readings issued in this thesis as it progresses. The main argument of this chapter is that the novel features as a cultural negotiation where the characters and their respective ideologies are shaped to illustrate the increasing polarization and dividing attitudes in post-war Japanese American society. In doing so, I argue that Okada emphasizes the role of literature as an arena where the reshaping of culture could be executed, and where monologism in the form of a repressive reality is confronted.

“What isn’t”

The use of terminology such as “silence” and “absence” is far from new in the discussion of Japanese American postwar society. The associate professor Caroline Chung Simpson has written a cultural and literary study of the Japanese American internment history called *An Absent Presence: Japanese American in Postwar American Culture, 1945-1960* (2001). In the book, she discusses the historical presence, or lack thereof, of Japanese American culture and identity after WWII, drawing on several literary works to tracing the remnants of a historical silence. In her discussion of *No-No Boy*, she highlights the specific period of time right after the war ended as a crucial moment of crisis of the Japanese Americans. She states that the novel “…challenges the noble memory of the nation’s war efforts by suggesting how the injustices perpetuated at home during the war necessarily arraign the ultimate meaning of victory after the war” (13). Within these pages, she also problematizes the Japanese Americans’ answer to the questionnaire they were issued in the camps. Essentially being a catch-22, questions number 27 and 28 proved to be worded poorly[3]. Chung Simpson explains that:

> If they answered “yes-yes” then they were placing themselves wholly in the hands of a government that views them as second-class citizens with few if any constitutional

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[3] The two key questions in this questionnaire were number 27 and 28, which came to shape Japanese American cultural identity in the years after the war:
“Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, whenever ordered?”, and:
“Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?” (Takaki 347).

> rights. If they answered “no-no”, as Ichiro does, then they irrevocably sealed their fates as disloyal subjects who were open to punishment. (13)

Okada highlights the same problem regarding the underlying connotations of either response in his novel, illustrating the different fates in his composition of characters. This point will be further discussed later in the analysis of the characters**.**

As the novel appears in its most recent publication, *No-No Boy*’s structure speaks not only to its representative strength, but also to the societal and literary role it has been accredited with in later years. In accordance with this, I base my analysis not only on the story that the novel presents, but also what surrounds it, such as the foreword, introduction, preface, and afterword. These discuss the novel in light of recent studies and highlights *No-No Boy’s* role in relation to the political and cultural notions of the internment. The novelist Ruth Ozeki, already in the foreword to *No-No Boy*, highlights the emerging stages of the study of agnotology and effectively ties the novel to its prominent cultural and literary role in Japanese American society. She notes that:

> Agnotology is the study of ignorance, how it is produced and maintained, what is lost and forgotten, and most importantly, why. What drops – or is dropped – from the historical record. What has gone missing, and whose agenda do those gaps and holes serve? You could say that agnotology is the study of what isn’t. Your novel, *No-No Boy*, almost wasn’t. (Foreword, XVI)

By connecting the novel with the study of agnotology, the novel itself becomes a symbol of the silence it sought to reject. It is not my intention in this thesis to evoke a political discussion of the internment and agnotology. Rather, I want to illustrate how both *No-No Boy* and the contextual and publishing history surrounding it work as an early instance of narrative negotiation of this exact historical development. In other words, I want to further what Ozeki and other critics have outlined on Japanese American history and argue that the novel gains from the rejection of covert narrative strategies and by challenging the "aesthetics of absence" of the Japanese American postwar community.

The historians Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger's anthology *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* is helpful in order to understand the Bakhtin's concept of monologism, and the aesthetic absence that this enforces in the postwar Japanese American society. Proctor states in the preface to the book that "Agnotology is the study of ignorance making, the lost and forgotten", and also that the goal of the anthology is to "…come to grips with how ignorance has been understood, created, and ignored, linking these ideas also to allied creations of secrecy, uncertainty, confusion, *silence*, *absence*, and impotence…" (Proctor & Schiebinger vii - emphasis my own). In his theory of agnotology, Proctor articulates three distinct ways of looking at ignorance. The first, which will not be discussed in detail here, is what he calls ignorance "as a native state". Ignorance of this type is primitive and defined as a state opposite to knowledge (4). The second way is ignorance as a selective choice, or what he calls a passive construct. Proctor argues that "Ignorance is a product of inattention, and since we cannot study all things, some by necessity – almost all, in fact – must be left out" (7). The selectivity of ignorance is therefore mostly an absence as a result of inattention. The third, and perhaps most important to my discussion of performativity and denial in *No-No Boy* is ignorance as a strategic ploy, or "active construct". Proctor explains that ignorance of this kind is "…something that is made, maintained, and manipulated by means of certain arts and sciences" (8). This strategic ploy of ignorance constitutes a way of looking at both the internment and its aftermath and therefore serves as a notion that highlights the phenomenon of ignorance within the two literary works in this thesis.

According to Proctor, ignorance can be "…an actively engineered part of a deliberate plan" (9). In most cases, this active construct is designed to control the spread of information in a certain situation, or about a certain event, such as the conditions in the internment camps. To illustrate Proctor's discussion of an active production of ignorance, I want to bring up Dorothea Lange and her photography once more to illuminate how the Japanese American internment was a critical part of the strategic ploy that the American government undertook during the Second World War. As already stated in the introduction to this thesis, Dorothea Lange was hired by the WRA to document these internment camps. Her photographs, which exposed the conditions and treatment of the internees in the camps, were seized and impounded by the government and only published in small snippets that were approved and handpicked to give what they believed to be an appropriate image of the life in camp. This specific instance stands as a prime example of how the production of ignorance manifests itself actively in order to control the distribution of knowledge. As a result, parts of the American population were only given fragments and pieces of information and were denied a large part of the overall picture of the internment of the Japanese Americans. The theory of ignorance is therefore applicable to the distribution of knowledge in a society where knowledge equals power. In such a society, those in charge of the active production of ignorance have the power to effectively control what is deemed important and what is not. In other words, they control history (Proctor & Schiebinger 16). Because of how I apply the two concepts of monologism and agnotology, the discussion of the novel not only pertains to the plot itself, but also the historical and contextual structure that upholds it.

The novel's publishing history itself is closely related to the concept of agnotology. Charles E. Tuttle, the publisher of the first edition of *No-No Boy*, has been quoted saying in retrospect that the audience of the work was perhaps not ready to read a contesting view of the internment experience to those that had come in the period before (Girst, page number unknown)[4]. Instead of having an instant success, it can be argued that in the decades following its initial publication, *No-No Boy* grew significantly to form a symbol of the rejection of a predominantly muted Japanese American society. Through the shame that had been instilled onto them during the war, this marginalized part of the population was arguably defined by a need to shut down any emittance of feeling, and instead emphasizing docility and silence. Ozeki writes in the foreword of the novel about the sense of unraveling the novel had on its readers: "It touched nerves and opened wounds. It reminded them of a past they wanted to forget, and so they rejected it. Your book disappeared almost overnight" (Foreword, viii). The importance of *No-No Boy*'s publishing history is therefore almost as symbolic and crucial as the narration itself. The latest edition of the novel published in 2014 encapsulates this importance in the way it emphasizes the contextual history, publishing history and author's note as framing devices for the text itself. Ozeki's foreword illustrates the rising importance the novel has had for the Asian American literary community, as well as introducing the central concept of agnotology in relation to Okada and his novel. The introduction to *No-No Boy*, written by Lawson Fusao Inada, co-author of the anthology of Asian American writers *Aiiieeeee*! published in 1976, captures the spirit of the rise of Asian American literature in the 70s, and illustrates the unexpected find of Okada's *No-No Boy* and its symbolic value for the Asian American literary community. In the afterword of the novel, the author and playwright Frank Chin emphasizes the importance of Okada's legacy as the writer of the first Japanese American novel.

All these included short texts on the novel and Okada frame the fictional story, giving it a more societal and political perspective, as well as illustrating its cultural and literary importance to later writers and critics. In “Introduction to the Paratext” (1991), the literary theorist Gérard Genette explains that introductions, prefaces etc. “…surround it and prolong it, precisely in order to *present* it, […] to *make it present*” (261). Surrounding the text as such, they help legitimize the novel, coalizing its inner and outer zones. *No-No Boy* is surrounded by a foreword, a preface, an introduction, and an afterword that all frame the novel. All of them, with the exception of the preface which is written by Okada himself, describe both the work and the author posthumously. By doing so, the novel gains another voice, another dimension of authority, which instructs the reader how to use the text (Genette 262). The writers of the paratext in *No-No Boy*, such as Ozeki, Inada, and Chin, all illuminate the novel’s contextual importance, explaining what effect it had on both themselves as writers, and Japanese American literature altogether. Together, these framing devices illustrate the importance of a narratological perspective, as well as a contextual and historical perspective when reading the novel. Ultimately, by way of the paratext, they extend what Genette calls its spatial and temporal dimensions in order for it to assume a similar function in the future (263). By preserving the importance of the context for future, the framing devices in *No-No Boy* create a testimony that indicates the novel’s symbolic value for current generations of Japanese Americans.

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[4] The reference here is incomplete, as Girst's book *Art, Literature, and the Japanese American Internment : On John Okada's "No-No Boy"* was made unavailable, as the UiB library's subscription for the book had run out. Instead of entering the page number I had quoted this on initially, I paraphrased his quote and wrote it down here as "page unknown" to be sure that I did not cite the work improperly.

The paratext also complicates the novel’s linear story, as the preface to *No-No Boy* links history with fiction. On the one hand, Okada in these pages refutes the historical accuracy of his narrative and never tries to persuade the reader that the novel is anything else than fiction. On the other hand, he arguably blurs the line between fiction and history by referring to his own experience, in order to frame the narrative through his own sympathetic view**.** In a conversation with “the blond giant from Nebraska”, the unnamed Japanese American man assumed to be Okada in the preface explains why he chose to join the military after being in camp for two years. His reply forms an introduction to the following story of

Ichiro Yamada: "'I got reasons', said the Japanese-American soldier somberly and thought some more about his friend who was in another kind of uniform because they wouldn't let his father go to the same camp with his mother and sisters" (Okada xxvii). By employing a type of collectively shared trauma, shown by the soldier's sympathy for his friend, Okada implies that the story in the novel is not necessarily a real one, but one that could be collectively understood as a type of symbolical narrative**.** Depicting and narrating a traumatic event from a fictitious standpoint demands a certain set of guidelines in terms of representation. Though they are not factual, the characters represented by Okada in the narrative still need to be based on aspects of reality and depict common characteristics of society, in order to illustrate the conflicting ideologies that are present in the novel. Therefore, the contextual history of the novel and the history of the Japanese American internment are both highly relevant in relation to the narrative technique of the novel, as it suggests an historical background, but more importantly, explains representations of characters as a major driving force of Okada's story.

The culture-making function of fiction

Okada's view on fiction as the supreme mode of expression and representation of trauma evokes a discussion on fictional narratives and specifically the novel as an arena for this exact purpose. Hillis Miller in his chapter "Narrative" in the book *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (1995), supports and further strengthens the notion of fiction as a key instigator in the process of dealing with trauma. Miller argues that storytelling and narratives are universal and thus fundamental to our understanding of the world around us, embedded in our unconscious minds, evoking emotion and providing us with tools of expression (66-67). His idea correlates with that of Okada, and suggests that by evoking emotion, the narrative itself forces the readers to connect with the characters and at the same time provide their own emotion in a connecting bond between the narrative itself and its readership. However, in the case of the postwar Japanese American community, this emittance of feeling and emotion turned out to be a double-edged sword for Okada. As indicated by the low number of sold copies when the novel was first published in 1957, most readers were not yet ready to openly discuss the trauma of the internment, and instead, a cultural silence prevailed.

Thus, the act of turning to fiction, and thereby emotion, may have been an altogether too daring and direct strategy for Okada in representing the events of the internment camps and the post-war world. His strategy is possibly explained by Miller's notion that the act of reading stories is a way for the reader to "detach" from the "world of real-life obligations in order to experience something that lies beyond our immediate sphere of contact" (68). If the readership then is presented with a realistic representation of past and current events in their own social surrounding, the only natural result would then in some cases be a rejection of the story. The "reality principle" of storytelling, as Miller calls it (ibid), is thus in Okada's case put in opposition to the natural foundation of narration, namely the make-believe, and instead forms an antithesis of the fundamental aspect of fiction**.** Closely connected to this idea of our fundamental need for the "make-believe" as an active part of our lives, is moreover what Miller argues to be the culture-making function of fiction: "…it can propose modes of selfhood or way of behaving that are then imitated in the real world" (69). If the aspect of storytelling as a detachment from reality fails, as in Okada's example, this could point towards a larger dilemma within the Japanese American post-internment community.

The historian John W. Dower has commented in his book *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War* (1993), that "Since ancient times, consciousness of purity and pollution combined with other attitudes within Japanese society to shape in-group behavior toward outsiders and strangers" (234). *No-No Boy*, in its representation of ethnical and nationalistic exclusion from both sides, comments on notions of the "Self" and the "Other". In its discussion of identity, the novel complicates this discussion through its meta-narrative “Momotarō”, or “Peach Boy”. In the discussion of Japanese cultural heritage, this mythical Japanese tale is introduced as a simile to the protagonist Ichiro and his relationship to his mother: “I was that boy in the peach and you were the old woman and we were Japanese with Japanese feelings and Japanese pride…” (Okada 16). The tale, in its original story, starts with Momotarō, a deity in human form, falling from the sky inside a peach. He is found floating in a river by an old, childless woman. In the tale, Momotarō claims being sent from heaven to become a part of the woman’s family, and to fight the, *oni*, which refers to the demonic Other (Dower 250). During WWII, Momotarō became a political image of the Japanese government, and subsequently was formed into a tale that related to nationalism in various wartime cartoons and magazines (Dower 253). Ichiro connects himself and his mother to the tale of Momotarō in a narrative analogy, relating them both to a story cemented in Japanese culture. The entire paragraph that entails Momotarō in *No-No Boy* is written as one of the many inner monologues Ichiro has, centering on his own confusion of what he is and what role he has in the fragmented post-internment society. The monologue shows a cultural change within himself initiated by saying “no” to the judge and then discussing the frailty of both Japanese American culture and his own identity. At the end of his process, he declares that: “But it is not enough to be American only in the eyes of the law and it is not enough to be only half an American and know that it is an empty half. I am not your son and I am not Japanese and I am not American” (Okada 16). The quote comments on the complexities of the inward struggle of the returning. Ichiro’s monologue centers around his divided identity, as he furthermore states that: “I wish with all my heart that I were Japanese or that I were American” (Okada 17).

The tale of Momotarō functions in the novel as symbol of a firm and robust cultural belonging. Ichiro’s detachment from this story underscores his fragmentation and loss of identity. In itself, the reference to Momotarō displays the importance of fiction and narrative as a culture-making function. Yet, at the same time, the tale also problematizes and highlights the complexities of cultural duality and questions the moral obligation of the Nisei. In his dismissal of the tale, Ichiro implicitly comments on his detachment from either national identity, and furthermore his exclusion from both. By referencing Momotarō in the dialogue between the mother and Ichiro, the novel comments on the internal cultural disorientation the internment had for the Japanese Americans.

This cultural disorientation is furthermore not only limited to the sense of internalization we find in the example of Momotarō. Faced with new forms of alienation when they returned home, the former internees essentially had to rebuild their identity. As discussed in numerous articles and dissertations, the Japanese American identity in the post-internment society was left in a fragmented state, where displaying ethnical belonging to Japan was an almost vilifying act of defiance towards the nationalistic protectiveness of the country. If we transfer Miller's idea of fiction as culture-making into a societal frame, we are able to argue that the traumatic events of the internment established a need for a new culture to take hold in order to repair and heal the fragmented one. I suggest therefore that the literature published in the immediate years after the war, and especially fiction such as Okada's *No-No Boy*, helped elicit what such a culture should be re-forged from by negotiating current societal and political issues through narrative representation. Once again, Miller sheds light on our need for fiction in the culture-making process: "If we need stories to make sense of our experience, we need the same stories over and over to reinforce that sense making. Such repetition perhaps reassures by the reencounter with the form that the narrative gives life" (70). As a "sense making" experience, *No-No Boy*'s representation, therefore, issues a newfound, unfamiliar understanding of the post-internment society of Japanese Americans. In terms of the novel's failure when it was first published, one might conclude that it was ahead of its time. Rather than being reassured of its representation by other similar narratives, it stood alone and was caught in a temporal space of Japanese American absence that invalidated any work that forced attention to the situation. This idea is further strengthened by the resurfacing of the novel and the symbolic value it would attain in later years. The novel came later to be a talisman for the Japanese American literary movement in the 70s and 80s that fronted the book's lack of success as a symbol that echoed both cultural and political history.

The culture-making function of literature that Miller articulates is furthermore fortified in Professor Lisa Lowe's statement regarding Asian American exclusion from national culture and citizenship. In her book *Immigrant Acts* (1996) on cultural studies, she argues that:

> Culture is the terrain through which the individual speaks as a member of the contemporary national collectivity, but culture is also a mediation of history, the site through which the past returns and is remembered, however fragmented, imperfect, or disavowed. Through that remembering, that re-composition, new forms of subjectivity and community are thought and signified. (Preface, x)

The quote further strengthens and explains Okada's choice of fiction as a method of negotiation of Japanese American culture, especially in light of the novel's particular emphasis on the notion of regaining citizenship and highlights the important role of literature as a mediator for culture. A key element in *No-No Boy*'s case has to do with characterization, and the use of characters as precisely mediators of ideas related to Lowe's statement regarding culture and its re-composition.

Narrative representation of characters

A fundamental element of the novel is connected to the narrative representation of characters and their subsequent value in creating an spectrum of voices. This point is underscored by the lasting effects the internment had on the Japanese American community in that it fragmented and shattered the identity of the Japanese American public, separating and dividing its members. In doing so, it created different "layers" of loyalty towards the American national identity. The representations of characters in the novel imagine this exact scenery, and as such the discussion of the novel not only pertains to literature but culture and citizenship as well. Miller argues in a continuation of his discussion on storytelling that literature has a fundamental culture-making function:

> The universality of this form of "the same but different" in narrative has two implications. It implies that we want stories for something they can do for us, something we inexhaustibly need. It implies that this function is not performed primarily by the characters, the true-to-life setting, or even by the "theme" or "message", the "moral", but by the sequential structure of events, the plot. (71)

Okada's novel differs somewhat from what Miller argues above. *No-No Boy*'s narrative is an instance of cultural negotiation in a specific temporal space in which fragmented characters are the main focus, not necessarily the plot. In the novel, the overarching plot is already established as the source of the psychological trauma that Ichiro is faced with. In other words, the universality of the translatable plot, as Miller suggests, is not vital to the fictional narrative that Okada displays; it is rather the development of characters and representations of them as such that function as the novel's main source of progression. In a period where most Japanese Americans wanted to forget the internment and hide the shame they felt because of it, *No-No Boy* is an instance of the opposite. Instead of masking feelings and trying to forget, Okada saw the need to openly discuss the psychological trauma that was inevitably still present in the post-war American society. To discuss why he chose to represent this complex cultural history, we need to look at the relation between facts and fiction and how they intertwine and connect with one another.

An example of a relation such as this is found in Mark Eaton's critical essay "Lost in Their Mazes: Framing Facts and Fictions in "Benito Cereno". Here, he discusses how Herman Melville in his fictional novella "Benito Cereno" employs a distinct narrative technique of framing. Here, the framing of a collectively remembered event is used to illustrate the link and similarity between history and fiction. Eaton argues that "To represent history means to construct a coherent narrative from available evidence – in effect to create a story" (215). Based on this thought we are able to argue that both history and fiction aim to reconstruct, but in different manners and for different purposes. Whereas history is based on empirical evidence, fiction is based on experience and memory in the reconstruction of historical events. This point is valid in cases where fiction deals with historically specific events, such as *No-No Boy*. In these cases, with reference to "Benito Cereno", Eaton argues that instances of narrative framing "…constitute a strategy of mediation between fact and fiction, or history and literature, and, further, that Melville disputes the authority of historical narratives…" (214). To transfer this notion onto *No-No Boy* would mean that instead of disputing the authority of history, Okada disputes the *silence* of the historically projected narrative forged by the American government, and in doing so "…asserts the power of fiction to represent the particularity of social and historical material…" (Eaton 214). By representing the post-internment society through fiction, Okada is critiquing the dominant culture's active subduing of the Japanese Americans during WWII, in addition to the lasting effects of this suppression. This point is again supported by Eaton, who states that "…Benito Cereno reveals the way history sometimes serves political interests, even to the extent of *forgetting* a particular past"

(216 – stress in original). By framing empirical history as a fictional story, *No-No Boy* is elevated to both a cultural as well as a political discussion, holding a particular symbolic function for the writers that came after. In disputing the cultural silence of the Japanese Americans, and the subsequent feelings of shame and guilt, Okada engages with fiction as a counterbalance to the political aftermath of the internment. The novel's particular focus on characters seeks to rectify a voice of reason within the minority community.

Characters and ideas

So far in this chapter, I have directed attention to different approaches and modes of reading *No-No Boy*, as well as emphasizing the history and publishing of the novel as well. Now I want to shift this attention towards the characters in the novel, which I suggest constitute contrasting and distinctive ideologies used to negotiate the societal and political challenges in the aftermath of WWII. By dissecting and exploring these differing viewpoints, I argue that that each character in *No-No Boy* constitutes a different mode of critique that is developed in the use of dialogue in the novel**.** I further here Bakhtin's notion in relation to the works of Dostoevsky that the characters in the *No-No Boy* are "carriers of ideas", and as such have their own specific meaning for the message the novel conveys. Bakhtin explains that "All of Dostoevsky's major characters, as people of an idea, are absolutely unselfish, insofar as the idea has really taken control of the deepest core of their personality" (87). He argues further that "This merging of the hero's discourse about himself with his ideological discourse about the world greatly increases the direct signifying power of a self-utterance, strengthens its internal resistance to all sort of external finalization" (Bakhtin 79). My argument comes as an extension of his, in that the novel's most prominent characters all reflect in their own way on a "monologic" ideological point of view that controls them. Their individual points of view, however, come to visualize different partitions of Japanese American society, together forming a multiplicity of voices that on a collective level critiques the post-internment society.

Through his deployment of characters, Okada creates a narrative that depicts a black and white society where there is no middle ground. Stan Yogi, in his critical essay "'You had to be one or the other': Oppositions and Reconciliation in John Okada's *No-No Boy*" (1996) argues that the novel works with polarization and opposites as key themes as Okada himself continually explores that gray area in between. Furthermore, Yogi argues that the characters in the novel have no concept of an identity placed at the center of the opposite sides: "Neither can conceive of a transformed "Japanese-American" identity, instead embracing mutually exclusive definitions of "Japanese" and "American"" (64). The plot of the novel shows a complex inward dilemma of the Japanese American community, as other members of the minority group felt that the disloyal "no-no boys" brought shame on the entire group, essentially afraid of being racially tied to each other's appearance (Yogi 67). Okada, who himself went to fight for his right as an American citizen, makes a case for this marginalized group in an already marginalized, highly politicized minority. The narrative intertwines character narration and the use of an authorial voice in a way that resonates with parts of Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and creates a theoretical bridge that enlightens Okada's novel and its narrative function.

Bakhtin introduces a discussion of the relationship between the author of a text, and the ensemble of written characters. He argues that there is a clear shift that Dostoevsky partook in which signified the alteration from what he calls a "monologic design" (Bakhtin 52), to a form of "dialogic discourse" between characters. What this entails is that instead of the authorial voice taking over the narrative, shaping it through his one-dimensional point of view, the characters themselves are more present than the author through a clear composition of elements which allows the “hero” independence and freedom in his expression of himself. (Bakhtin 48) A vital part of the dialogic aspect that Bakhtin illustrates is bound in the “self-consciousness” of the hero. In other words that the hero is aware of his own existence. As a result of this existential awareness and delimitation of the author, Bakhtin states that “… the hero interests Dostoevsky as a *particular point of view on the world and on* oneself, as the position enabling a person to interpret and evaluate his own self and his surrounding reality” (47 – emphasis in original). It is exactly this theoretical bridge that establishes the narrative power of Ichiro in *No-No Boy*, and to some extent helps to understand his role in the novel. In bringing Bakhtin’s concept of “truth” and meaning into the reading of the novel, we are able to question the “completeness” of ideas manifested in monologist creations and compositions (Bakhtin 98). Okada’s fundamental belief in dialogue as a means to establish a form of artistic “truth” is therefore in complete opposition to the monologic premise of neutrality and silence that featured in the literary text that came before *No-No Boy*. It is on this dialogic rebellion that the novel offers its critique. His transition from the previous monologic works, such as Okubo’s graphic memoir and Sone’s autobiographical memoir mentioned previously, towards a fictional novel, is a profound one**.** By aggressively tapping into a political sphere and engaging with a racist ideology, Okada highlighted challenges in the Japanese American cultural terrain that no one before him had done.

In addition to the “polyphonic novel”, which contains dialogue and multiple points of view as its main sources of progression, the other main concept that Bakhtin discusses is the self-consciousness of the protagonist. By enabling the characters to contemplate their own existence and not being bound by a static image of themselves, Bakhtin opens up a new dimension of narrating. He states that “…what the author used to do is now done by the hero, who illuminates himself from all possible points of view…” (49). He goes on to say that: “Not only the reality of the hero himself, but even the external world and the everyday life surrounding him are drawn into the process of self-awareness, are transferred from the author to the hero's field of vision (Ibid). This transferal from the author to the protagonist is an important aspect of *No-No Boy,* as the narration of the novel deals with a state of limbo of the Japanese American public, focalized through the voice of Ichiro. By enabling Ichiro to be aware of himself, similarly to what Bakhtin argues in relation to Dostoevsky's works, Okada also enables the narration to open up a previously undisclosed discussion regarding the state of postwar Japanese American society. The narration itself is not dependent on Ichiro's traits or appearance, but instead his ability to reflect and be aware of what he is, and what he has done. Okada's subsequent use of dialogue and juxtaposition of self-consciousnesses are key tools to shape Ichiro into the carrier of his own unfinalized sense of selfhood.

Kenji: the voice of reason

The novel presents numerous characters that all participate in Ichiro's contemplation of his life and the state of the society around him. The main source of progression in this regard is Kenji, who functions as a voice of clarity for Ichiro in his crisis of identity. After a brief period back in Seattle, Ichiro meets Kenji on the university campus. A crippled war hero, tormented by the permanent and eventually fatal injury to his right leg, Kenji is in several ways seen in complete opposition to Ichiro. His physical injury is contrasted to Ichiro's psychological agony several times where they imagine swapping places. Even as Kenji tells Ichiro that his leg is rotting and that he has limited time left to live, their physical and psychological pain respectively is constantly compared: "Kenji had two years, maybe a lifetime if the thing that was chewing away at him suddenly stopped. But he, Ichiro, had stopped living two years ago" (Okada 58). In Kenji, the novel issues an understanding of the overwhelming sensation of ostracization that Ichiro feels from his own community. Kenji ultimately states that he does not want to swap places with Ichiro, implying that he would rather die a hero than live a life in shame. This sentiment underscores the challenges of emotional trauma and desperation in Ichiro, along with his loss of self. Still, despite being inherently different in both their outlook on life and the type of injury in itself, they still find solace in the other's presence.

In their friendship, Okada portrays not only how trauma manifests itself in different forms in the Japanese American community but also opens up a channel for the essential dialogue in which Ichiro is able to express his feelings and juxtapose his position to that of others. Kenji thus becomes the catalyst for Ichiro's self-consciousness and a vital narrational tool used by Okada in order to allow Ichiro the freedom to express himself. In Bakhtinian terms, Ichiro becomes the carrier of the ideology of the author. However, the idea itself can only be expressed through the interaction with others, as the nature of the idea is dialogic (Bakhtin 81, 87). Kenji's primary function in the novel is thus one that continuously engages with the ideology that stems from Ichiro's self-consciousness, ensuring its development. Bakhtin stresses the necessity of such a role in relation to the idea and its carrier:

> The idea *lives* not in one person's *isolated* individual consciousness – if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. The idea begins to live, that is, to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*. (87-88 – stress in original)

Working as a second protagonist, the character of Kenji has a specific dialogic function for Ichiro, enabling him to escape the monologism that imprisons his words. Without Kenji, Ichiro's ideas would be isolated, and in the words of Bakhtin "…degenerate[s] and die[s]". This sentiment speaks not only to "no-no boys" and their sense of shame and guilt but also to a broader sense of the Japanese American society. Without dialogue and infusion of negotiation, cultural silence would be continually repressed by a monologic way of thinking.

Central to the novel's plot is the portrayal of a family torn apart by the war and the internment, and Okada's representation of the crucial family drama is vividly depicted by the complex characters of Ichiro's mother and father and his brother Taro. In this portrayal, Okada distinguishes between each family member's different reactions to the war and negotiates the role of the Japanese Issei and the Japanese American Nisei through opposite ideologies. In the novel, all members of the Yamada family qualify as fragments of the overarching idea that Okada composes. Ichiro symbolizes the "prodigal son" returning home. When he returns to Seattle, he is met by his parents and little brother who are, in their own individual ways, torn about the aspect of a post-war Japanese American identity. His mother, a strong-willed and hard-headed woman, utterly refuses the fact that Japan was defeated in the war, denying every fact she is presented with. His father, an exhausted character marked by passivity and alcohol abuse, remains neutral to Ichiro's disloyalty, seemingly happy to forget and get on living. Describing his appearance, the narrator states that "He sat there looking at his son like a benevolent Buddha" (Okada 10). Taro, on the other hand, is fueled by shame at his brother's decisions, and in an effort to distance himself from him is determined to join the military when he turns eighteen. The plot of the novel is in part fixed on these four characters, and together the ideologies and multiplicity of voices of Japanese American society are mediated through them. "Ma" will be the main focus of the characters within the family, as she epitomizes the antithesis to Ichiro and is thus more heavily emphasized in the novel as a source of confliction for Ichiro.

In writing the character of the mother, Okada has created a character whose Bakhtinian principles are completely opposite in terms of freedom of expression and ultimate change. "Ma", as she is referred to in the novel, stands for the features of Japanese culture that

Ichiro has come to loathe. Troubled by accepting the outcome of the war, the mother has come to be dependent on propaganda that denounces the Allied victory of WWII. When Ichiro confronts his mother with the fact that Japan lost, the mother replies: "'You believe that?' It was said in the tone of an adult asking a child who is no longer a child if he really believed that Santa Claus was real" (14). Her sense of nationalistic pride overrides facts and enables her to manufacture her own sense of ignorance to protect it. She even argues against the photographic evidence given to her by the neighbor Watanabes' son, who shows her pictures of his stay during the war:

> Oh, yes, the pictures of Japan." She snickered. "He is such a serious boy. He showed me all the pictures he had taken in Japan. He had many of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and I told him that he must be mistaken because Japan did *not* lose the war as he seems to believe and that he could *not* have been in Japan to take pictures because, if he were in Japan, he would *not* have been permitted to remain alive. (Okada 22, emphasis my own)

Her denial of the actual events of the war is supported by her friend Mrs. Ashida (Okada 23), in a form of collectively "manufactured ignorance". The novel here aesthetically portrays the disillusions caused by the traumatic event of the war by letting characters embody and reflect on existing ideas concerning denial and denouncement. The repetition of the word "not" in the citation above shows exactly how the narrative aestheticizes the act of denial through the mother's speech. In this case, her words come in a form of monologue, as the Watanabes are not there to participate in the conversation, thus giving the quote a one-way form that denies other voices to appear. The mother's presence in the novel exemplifies both the way Okada stresses monologism as a negative presence, and also how the author himself is able to distance himself from the ideas of his characters through fictional representation. The former point argues for a dichotomy in the novel that contrasts and opposes the mother with Ichiro, as two characters that display two completely different notions of ideology. The second point clarifies the role of the author, as he is able to "…represent someone else's idea, preserving its full capacity to signify as an idea, while at the same time also preserving a distance, neither confirming the idea nor merging it with his own expressed ideology" (Bakhtin 85). The mother thus conforms to the monologic ideology that Okada forms a critique of through the use of dialogue, and she is as such an absolute necessity in the novel to illustrate the polarizing effect of the monologic premise and its counterpart.

Consequently, the mother is consistently throughout the novel seen as an antithesis to Ichiro. In his description of her, he states that she "…was only a rock of hate and fanatic stubbornness and was, therefore, neither woman not mother" (21). Ichiro's hate for her is essentially manifested in his role as a "no-no boy", as he blames her for his actions. Both characters are aware of the fact that the relationship between the two of them made Ichiro say no to questions 27 and 28. The mother's pride of her son's actions is reflected as a hatred and despise in Ichiro:

> "I am proud that you are back," she said. "I am proud to call you my son."
>
> It was her way of saying that she made him what he was and that the thing in him which made him say no to the judge and go to prison for two years was the growth of a seed planted by the mother tree […] (Okada 12)

The connection between the two characters is crucial for both Ichiro and the mother, as they in the novel define themselves by one another, and constantly strive to oppose each other. Yet, even though Ma is presented as an antagonist of sorts in the novel, the antagonistic aspect is mostly felt by Ichiro himself. Okada shows through his representation of the mother that she is a victim of the internment as well. Her Japanese heritage and unwillingness to assimilate is a noticeable trait in most Issei represented in the novel**,** and only through denial is she able to hold onto those nationalistic feelings that are cemented in her identity and which structure her world.

Ultimately, the mother’s extreme perception of the world is negated by a truth she cannot bear. After the father reads her a letter from her sister that describes the horrific conditions in Japan, the Ma goes into an almost symbolic state of silence, and subsequently takes her own life. Her moment of death is not further portrayed in the novel, as it only refers to Ichiro coming home to find her in the tub (Okada 165). In relation to the characters as points of view on the world, Bakhtin refers to this type of engagement as “the final word”. He writes that the key element of a character is “…not the specific existence of the hero, not his fixed image, but the sum total of his consciousness and self-consciousness, ultimate the hero’s final word on himself and the world” (Bakhtin 48). By denying the mother her final word, the novel directs focus to her silence. In the characterization of her, *No-No Boy* does not critique the mother’s extreme denial as something negative in itself. Instead, the novel comments on the underlying reasons for her inability to gain access to her own self-consciousness. Related to Okada’s structure that polarizes ideologies, her death comes as result of the novel’s insistence on cultural extremities. The mother ultimately comes to symbolize the destructiveness of a “singular truth”, which the novel focalizes as a negative state that preserves the “cultural silence” of the Japanese Americans.

As a similarly complex character, the father is considered a gentler version than the mother, and more aligned with Ichiro in the novel. He is seemingly driven by the opinion of others more so than his own, playing second-string to his own life. At the beginning of the novel, he seems utterly controlled by the mother, obeying her every action, trying to please and understand her. His lack of agency and his docile neutrality to the world around him is propelled through the power relations between him and his wife.

> She won’t let me send money or food or clothing because she says it’s all a trick of the Americans and they will take them. I can send without her knowing, but I do not. It is not for me to say that she is wrong even if I know so. (Okada 35)

Ichiro’s father is presented as a character who tries to balance his ideology between two ends of the spectrum, caught in the chaos between the mother and Ichiro. His presence here serves as a parallel or symbol of the struggle between Japanese and American culture, and the increasing polarization caused by the war. The matriarchal rule and the role of the mother works as a catalyst for the father’s eventual change towards the end of the novel**.** Prior to her death, the father is seen in close resemblance to her, avoiding assimilating and always assuming that they are someday going to return to Japan.

After her death, there is a distinct shift in his attitude**,** as if a weight has been lifted off his shoulders. Through the death of his wife, the father’s agency is regained, symbolically shown through his decision to send packages back to Japan: “Ichiro watched his father, detecting an insuppressible air of enthusiasm and bubbling glee as he scratched in the names and addresses in *both English and Japanese* in several places on each package” (Okada 188 – emphasis my own). His liberation from his wife and newfound sense of agency displays a shift in his perception. As he is no longer forced to hold onto his cultural belonging to Japan, the father is finally able to form personal ties to the American community around him. The quote symbolizes this shift, by having him write addresses and names in both languages. The balance between the languages symbolizes an end to the polarization that Stan Yogi discusses in the previously mentioned article about opposites in Japanese American culture.

Although Ichiro becomes the primary mediator for the novel’s negotiation and critique, there are a number of other characters that give the dialogue additional purpose in ways of juxtaposition and additional layering. Ichiro’s brother Taro is marked with the sense of shame he feels in being associated with his brother. Taro symbolizes the part of Japanese

American society that worked to actively disassociate itself from Japanese nationality and culture. Therefore, wanting to atone for Ichiro's "mistake", Taro signals that he intends to join the military on his eighteenth birthday. His shame also extends to being affiliated with his own family, who desperately tries to hold on to traditional Japanese values, and makes no great effort to assimilate into American society. The novel explains and rationalizes this reaction in Taro through Ichiro's inner monologue: "It was not Taro who was rejecting them, but it was he who had rejected Taro and, in turn, had made him a stranger to his own parents forever" (Okada 61). The novel is thus reluctant to place any blame on those who did not volunteer to fight for the American forces, nor those that did but rather shifts the blame to the choice that led to trauma.

Generations and cultural identities as images of polarization

No-No Boy problematizes the situation of the Issei through a number of characters that represent the older generation in the novel. Having an entirely different outlook on the war and having a more concrete national identity than their children, the Issei were put in a difficult situation during the internment. Forswearing their allegiance to the Japanese Emperor would mean to give up their entire identity, as well as denouncing their citizenship and effectively become stateless (Chung Simpson 13). The problematic rift between the Issei and Nisei is presented through the generational gap between the parents and their two sons. In his inner monologue, Ichiro remarks after a discussion with his father that

> …the reason why Taro was not a son and not a brother was because he was young and American and alien to his parents, who had lived in America for thirty-five years without becoming less Japanese and could speak only a few broken words of English and write it not at all… (19)

With this passage, the novel highlights the reasoning the parents had when they moved to America. The economic prosperity and the opportunity immigration could give them was all they had in mind, and planned to stay there only for a limited period of time: “Did you ever think about staying here and not going back?” “No” (Okada 20). What Ichiro deems to be stubbornness and fanaticism in his mother is contrasted to other families to seemingly illustrate a form of critique of the parents’ unwillingness to assimilate. Their sense of transience is emphasized by Ichiro when he sees the Kumasakas’ new-bought house. Being friends of the parents and coming from the same village, the Kumasakas are visualized as similar to Ichiro’s parents but have proven to be more willing to assimilate into the American culture. When visiting them and seeing their house, Ichiro states that they:

> …continued to maintain their dreams by refusing to learn how to speak or write the language of America and by living only among their own kind and by zealously avoiding long-term commitments such as the purchase of a house. But now, the Kumasakas, it seemed, had bought this house, and he was impressed. It could only mean that the Kumasakas had exchanged hope for reality and, late as it was, were finally sinking roots into the land from which they had previously sought not nourishment but only gold. (25)

In Ichiro’s mind, therefore, purchasing a house is a symbol of commitment and becoming assimilated into American culture and becoming a solidified part of American society. The economic prosperity of assimilation is thus symbolized in the capital of buying a house. The image of sinking roots is here being equated with ownership and capital, completely opposite to the image of Ichiro’s parents. Instead of creating a solid income, they seemingly barely get by, exemplified by buying bread several blocks away and selling it on for a minimal profit (Okada 10). Instead of living on the fringes of American society like Ichiro’s parents, the Kumasakas’ ownership is a symbol of how wealth is achieved by assimilation to American culture. The economic aspect of ownership relates to the discussion of post-war fragmentation, where polarization defined the Japanese American identity. Wealth and ownership become then another way of identifying the increasing differences between minorities and the dominant culture.

Together, the parents play a vital role in the representation of a historical societal void. In an effort to explain and understand these almost theatrical performances of absence and denial, I turn here to Professor Andrew Sofer in his book *Dark Matter: Invisibility in Drama, Theater, and Performance* (2013). Sofer explains similarities to this performativity in relation to theater, as he states here that what he calls “dark matter”, which

> …refers to the invisible dimension of theater that escapes visual detection, even though its effects are felt everywhere in the performance. If theater necessarily traffics in corporeal stuff (bodies, fluids, gases, objects), it also incorporates the incorporeal: offstage spaces and actions, absent characters, the narrated past, hallucination, blindness, obscenity, godhead, and so on. (3)

Though transposed, Sofer’s explanation and emphasis of the invisible dimensions of theater give insight in the processing of the mother and father in *No-No Boy*. In their active denial and unwillingness to deal with the situation in the postwar Japanese American society, these characters become pivotal as unique points of view in the negotiation of a muted community and as symbols of what Bakhtin refers to as the “monologic”, or static entity of literature (52). This becomes truly apparent in the mother’s denial and refusal to accept the outcome of the war and what she feels to be a threat to her identity. The alternative view of the war, in her mind, becomes unbearable and unrealistic. Thus, the “dark matter” is represented in the mother’s negotiation of the result of the war, as something that is always present in her mind, but that her self-consciousness is unable to process and thus cannot accept. The performativity of her role thus relies on a continuing denial of other voices than her own. Contrastingly to the fanaticism and stubbornness of the mother, the narratological representation of the father's character displays a different method of suppressing facts and reality. Together, these two characters represent distinct features of performativity that are closely reminiscent of the cultural performance of tropes such as "silence and "absence. In relation to the previous discussion of the reality principle of storytelling (Miller 68), the performative notions of denial featured in *No-No Boy* feature as a natural reaction where the realism of the situation becomes too strong to accept. Instead, the make-believe becomes a relief for the mother, illustrating our fundamental human need for it. Her denial also points to the Japanese American community in the aftermath of the war as a sphere where detachment from reality is impossible, and thus partially explaining the cultural silence that is manifested there. Thus, in the novel there are two polarizing forces that work against each other, displaying the tension between monologue and dialogue in the novel. Ichiro on the one end of the spectrum signifies a force that works for negotiation of cultural identity, issuing a clear ideology that is represented through dialogue. The parents on the other hand, and especially the mother, symbolize the monologic entity that in the novel performatively denies and obstructs communication and signifies the muted Japanese American society in the aftermath of the war.

In its story, *No-No Boy* portrays not only the periphery of the periphery, but also illustrates the faux victory of those who went to fight for the Armed Forces. The novel depicts several characters that are made out to despise the returning "no-no boys". Eto and Bull, who both signed up to fight for the U.S. army, are instances of such characters, primarily function as mediators of a dawning collective recognition that the underlying racist notion of American society did not stop when the war ended. Whilst the "no-no boys" struggle with an internal form of shame, both Eto and Bull struggle to not be associated with their Japanese heritage and accordingly wish to prove their right to be American citizens. Towards the end of the novel, after a fight between Bull and Freddie, where the latter dies, Bull realizes that he is still judged on his ethnical features and that racism still holds strong outside of the Japanese American community:

> The words refused to come out any longer. Mouth agape, lips trembling, Bull managed only to move his jaws sporadically. Suddenly, he clamped them shut. His cheeks swelled to bursting, and the eyes, the frightened, lonely eyes, peered through a dull film of tears and begged for the solace that was not to be had. (Okada 220)

The eventual outcome points to an epiphany and acceptance that they, despite having fought in the war, will be perceived as the “enemy”. The effort of those who were drafted to try to regain their citizenship after the internment camps is exposed by Okada to be a constructed lie, as racism still held strong in the years after the war. This continued skepticism and undermining racist attitude towards the Nisei that was present in the American public created a feeling of uncertainty in the Japanese American culture in the immediate years that followed the war, where they “...existed both as citizens in fact and as aliens in treatment” (Chung Simpson 20), often regardless of whether they actively participated as soldiers in WWII.

This racist ideology against specifically the Japanese Americans is further negotiated through Kenji’s character, who states that the only way to escape it is to wash out the visual features:

> Go back and stay there until they have enough sense to leave you alone. Then get out. It may take a year or two or even five, but the time will come when they’ll be feeling too sorry for themselves to pick on you. After that, head out. Go someplace where there isn’t another Jap within a thousand miles. Marry a white girl or a Negro or an Italian or even Chinese. Anything but a Japanese. After a few generations of that, you’ve got the thing beat. Am I making sense? (Okada 147)

His statement foreshadows the event with Bull, as he implicitly states that those that pick on the “no-no boys” will soon enough realize that their vilification is not a result of those that were disloyal, but instead a, racist notion that generalizes an entire minority. The quote also points to the fragility of the Japanese American society, as Kenji actively encourages ethnic erasure as a means to an end. The erasure that he discusses would thus ensure that the minority would continue to stay out of sight, further underscoring the shame and guilt associated with their vilification.

In the last days before his death, Kenji issues a similar sentiment of cynicism, where he shows a sense of bitterness towards the permanence of racism. Here, he details the events during the war where he killed a German soldier. His tone enforces the notion that the characters in the novel are bound to their ethnicity, unable to escape the labels that are bestowed on them:

> Drink to wherever it is I’m headed, and don’t let there be any Japs or Chinks or Jews or Poles or Niggers or Frenchies, but only people […] I see him all the time now and that’s why I want this other place to have only people because if I’m still a Jap there and this guy’s still a German, I’ll have to shoot him again and I don’t want to have to do that. (148)

Kenji’s illustration of the unbreakable bond between Japanese Americans the tone of their skin also issues an idealist and hopeful view of a different world. His statement also points to the obligation to kill, implicitly criticizing the racial undertones that defined the Second World War.

Together, both the form of the novel and the character of Ichiro himself become pillars for Okada in his revolt against the monologism of Japanese American literature before him. As already stated, Ichiro is placed in a state of limbo, questioning himself and those around him as to what they really are. His motivation is founded on the judgment he faces, with those he meets only assessing his appearance as "the enemy" and a "disloyal" Japanese American instead of his behavior and inner convictions. His self-awareness is written to illustrate the vital need for dialogue to seek what Bakhtin refers to as the ultimate "truth" (55). Through the narration of his inner dialogue, Ichiro gains almost no solid answer in his seek of truth, but rather ends up questioning the world around him:

> Why is it that, in my freedom, I feel more imprisoned in the wrongness of myself and the thing I did when I was in prison? Am I really never to know what it is to be American? If there should be an answer, what is it? What penalty is it that I must pay to justify my living as I so fervently desire to? (Okada 76)

Okada cleverly juxtaposes these segments of inner dialogue and Ichiro's feeling of futility to his dialogue with Kenji where he finds true knowledge and comes to terms with the questions he has. The ending of the novel resonates with Bakhtin's concept of the hero as "unfinalized". He states that: "As long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word" (Bakhtin 59). As Ichiro walks through the alley in the last paragraph of the novel, he remains unfinalized, still driven by his self-consciousness as he "…chased that faint and elusive insinuation of promise as it continued to take shape in mind and in heart" (Okada 221). The ideological consciousness of Ichiro thus gives new hope, embedded in the embrace of dialogue in order to explore what lies beyond the established notions of monologism.

Conclusion

In his fictional representation of the post-war Japanese American society in his novel *No-No Boy*, Okada has enabled himself to speak for a marginalized part of society. In his representations of characters, some realistic, some absurd, he focuses his narrative on discussing and negotiating the current political atmosphere, in addition to highlighting racial undertones of American society. The ensemble of characters functions as the main mediation between the underrepresented Japanese American society and American national culture in his discussion of the traumatic outcome of the internment camps. The novel's emphasis on polarization not only in the characters but also in the omniscient narration, stresses the critical issue Japanese American identity in the immediate aftermath of the war, as well as the years to come. Okada's use of polarization thus creates an unspeakable "dark matter" in his use of opposites, where the notion of a Japanese-American identity seems just out of sight as the novel ends with Ichiro chasing "…that faint and elusive insinuation of promise as it continued to take shape in mind and in heart" (Okada 221).

By writing in a style that is reminiscent of what Bakhtin calls a "polyphonic novel", Okada was able to create a protagonist that "revolts" against the fixedness of reality. Through his argument of the polyphonic novel, Bakhtin illustrates the key aspect that the protagonist remains unfinalized (59). The struggle against the fixedness of society that Bakhtin describes in relation to Dostoevsky's novel is reminiscent of the society surrounding *No-No Boy***,** as it tries to escape the silence of monologism. In composing a work that deliberately voices opinions and consciousnesses, the work questions a censored society through Ichiro's quest for "truth." Okada took a unique stance on post-war Japanese American society, starkly contrasting and questioning the monologic nature of the works that preceded him. The effort to negotiate a reinvigorated cultural ideology and the complexity of the societal situation makes in retrospect a compelling point for the novel's canonization, propelling it to take a historical literary role in the years after Okada's death. By rejecting the neutrality towards the topic afforded by others before him, Okada's use of fiction not only helped preserve subjectivity and emotion as a testament to the challenges in the aftermath of WWII. It also connects the literary to the role of cultural mediacy, emphasizing its culture-making function as well as its critical one.

Chapter 2

Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine*: Postmemory and Generative Processes of Japanese American Literature.

> You weren't there. So what?
>
> When someone mentions camp, you vibrate like a plucked string. You sit up straighter: heart beating faster, fight and flight. Your gut clenches into fists. You overflow with everything you know about camp, which is too much and not enough at the same time.
>
> Yes, you know about "this shameful episode in American history."
>
> Yes, you know about "the day that will live in infamy."
>
> Tamiko Nimura

In the introduction to the anthology *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future* (2002), the editors Jacob Lothe, Susan Rubin Suleiman, and James Phelan, pose a question regarding the preservation of the historical memory of the Holocaust. They ask: "How will filmmakers who may have no personal connection to the event engage with that history: what kinds of stories will they tell, and will they succeed in their effort to keep the public memory of the event from being lost?" (1). A similar question can be raised in relation to the representation of other historical traumas, such as that of the Japanese and Japanese Americans in the U.S. during World War II. Following a period of cultural silence, how will the next generation of Japanese Americans relate back to the internment, and how will representations of this history partake in reflections of that particular culture?

The need to express and testify to the events of the internment has gone through periods of instability. Tropes such as “silence” and “absence”, as mentioned in chapter 1, marked the immediate years after the war, both in Japanese American culture and in representations of the internment. In both cases, the need to stay unnoticed was a prominent characteristic. In the late 1960s, however, the Asian American literary movement gave traction to a wave of renewal of past literature within the Japanese American community. This rejuvenation canonized several literary works that represented the internment and highlighted the importance of these works as testimonies that spoke when others kept silent. The newfound interest issued a need to culturally preserve the history of the internment, translating its history into tangible terms for present readers. As discussed in the previous chapter, the resurrection of John Okada’s novel *No-No Boy* epitomizes this act. The novel, which was initially published in 1957, went practically unnoticed until it was republished in 1976. In its latest edition, the novel is surrounded by what I explained in Gérard Genette’s terms as “paratexts” that emphasize its cultural and literary value for the new generation. Since the 60s and 70s, the new generation of Japanese Americans called Sansei has struggled to enter this literary domain in a way that treats the topic of the internment both with respect and historical accuracy. The constant reappearing and disappearing image of Japanese American literature has thus been a noticeable trait and the recent trend is perhaps been best described as a cultural generational interest. Speaking in general terms, for every new generation of Japanese Americans, there is issued a need for renewal, a need to stabilize the memory of the internment, hinging on the past in order to preserve and manifest cultural heritage in the present.

In the current chapter, I will focus on this new wave of Japanese American literature that in recent times has chosen to return to the previous literature that represented the internment. Within Sansei literature, there are numerous examples of works that in different ways reaches back to the internment camps in order to preserve its cultural history. For instance, Stewart David Ikeda's fictional novel *What the Scarecrow Said* (1997), and memoirs such as David Mura's *Turning Japanese: Memoirs of a Sansei* (2005), that revisit and engages with the markings of the internment and the cultural impact it had. To exemplify this return, I want to first relate back to the short essay "How It Feels to Inherit Camps" by Japanese American Sansei writer Tamiko Nimura, which I briefly discussed in the introduction to this thesis. In her essay, she draws attention to the timeless sensation of trauma that the internment had and points to an underlying sensation of cultural trauma that the Sansei themselves have no direct relation to. Her discussion questions the degree to which the emotional bond to the past is actually severed, and whether the events still continue to have a lingering effect on Japanese American culture. Professor Marianne Hirsch explains this notion of generational continuity as part of what she calls "postmemory". In her book, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012), she directs attention to newer generations' connection to the past and argues it to be a "…guardianship of a traumatic personal and generational past with which some of us have a "living connection", and that past's passing into history or myth" (1). Hirsch thus refers to writings such as Nimura's text as an instance of a "living connection". She explains the subsequent relationship between the new generation and the previous generations in the following terminology:

> "Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they "remember" only by the means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up […] Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. (*Postmemory* 5)

Hirsch here emphasizes literary texts as mediators for newer generations to connect with the past, both as a receptive form of memory, and as an ensuing projective creation of history. In this sense, literature seeks to mediate this history while at the same time commenting on it. In relation to the previous chapter of this thesis, I discussed the "culture-making function" of fiction as something that promotes "…modes of selfhood or way of behaving that are then imitated in the real world" (Miller 69). In the case of postmemory and literature, this culture-making function is rather a culture-preserving function, that connects the past with the present in order to accumulate memorial values that are slowly fading away with time.

A literary approach that traces the cultural impact of texts over time is also that of Professor of English Literature Wai Chee Dimock. In her essay "A Theory of Resonance" (1997), she discusses the interesting behavior of "words across time"; how time alters the fabric of a text and has the ability to prescribe new meaning (1060). She states that "Texts are emerging phenomena, activated and to some extent constituted by the passage of time, by their continual transit through new semantic networks, modifying their tonality as they proceed" (1061). Her argument here reflects the rejuvenation and increased attention to Japanese American literature in newer times and issues a way of noticing and understanding literary responses to previous texts. If we consider John Okada's *No-No Boy* as an example, Dimock's text issues an understanding of the newfound importance the novel in the 70s; as a symbol of the rejection of cultural silence.

I will introduce Julie Otsuka's novel *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002) in an effort to show the resonating effects of Japanese American literature, clarifying the continuing role of the aftershocks of the internment in present-day society. In her argument, Dimock makes an analogy that translates to the present rise that I have discussed in relation to Japanese American literature. She states that "background noise", such as the contextual basis of a text, is able to boost a weakened signal, reshaping and forming it again more audibly

(1063). In this chapter, I will thus argue that *When the Emperor Was Divine* is a direct response to the "background noise" in the form of the cultural aftershocks of the internment**.** As such, the novel's style and content work not only to preserve a moment in history but also to cherish the pioneering literary works that represented the internment. On this basis, I will argue that Otsuka recreates a literary space of the past by emulating the stylistic and thematic strategies of the authors before her to form a greater and stronger understanding of the "living connection" that resides between old and new generations of Japanese Americans.

Dimock's formulations in her essay both echoes and underscores this argument, as she states that:

> For every language resembles an echo chamber, the tones and accents of former users interacting with those of subsequent ones. And so meanings are produced over and over again, attaching themselves to, overlapping with, and sometimes coming into conflict with previous ones. […] This semantic transience makes texts not timeless, not ossified, not proof against the influx of new meanings. Mikhail Bakhtin calls this interactive process a "dialogic" phenomenon. The dialogue, I want to emphasize, is above all temporal, an interaction between texts and their future readers, complicated by the dynamics of historical change and by interpretive energies thus released. (1062)[5]

This process of resonance between texts and future readers captures the essence of the intergenerational relation between Japanese American past and present and is especially visible in the recent development of Japanese American literature that tries to reach back to the moment of trauma. As a response to this development of resonance and reading past literature in light of the present, contemporary literature also connects with these texts in a meaning-making reflection, in what Dimock's argues to be a desirable effect of context:

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[5] The "dialogic" phenomenon that Dimock refers to in this quote is slightly different from Bakhtin's theoretical approach that I discussed in the introduction and previous chapter of this thesis. Whereas in chapter 1, I employed his use of dialogism as an antithesis to monologism. Here, Dimock instead emphasizes the "dialogic" as a temporal interaction issued by the text to its future readers. The present chapter will issue an understanding of both, clearly separating the two usages as two different approaches to the function of Otsuka's novel.

> This shift of emphasis from original to interpretive context suggests that resonance is a generative […] process, one that remakes a text while unmaking it, that pays tribute to time both as a medium of unrecoverable meaning and as a medium of newly possible meaning. (1062)

The idea of resonance as a "generative process" can thus be said to be a literary process that generates other voices to appear on the basis of older texts, preserving and helping to uphold a cultural voice by establishing new creation that upholds it. The generative aspect of literature, therefore, gives the new literature a sense of urgency to take the place of the old that is slowly fading, issuing a continuity of meaning. Dimock's claim of "newly possible meanings" would in the case of Japanese American literature refer to the notion of renewal and the "noise" that supports this generative force. In reaching back, new texts thereby also associate themselves with past literature as testimonies of representations of history, as well as the literature itself.

It is thus my intention here to argue that Otsuka's novel *When the Emperor Was Divine* resonates with the voices of the past as a reaction and reflection to the new "noise" of postmemory. By drawing on various literary styles, the author generates renewed and translated meanings to newer generations by aesthetically portraying the past through distinct literary tropes that have been connected with previous literary representation of the internment of Japanese Americans. I will argue that Otsuka in her novel establishes a form of dialogue to the past, functioning as a carrier of past voices within Japanese American literature**.** In doing so, she aesthetically portrays and captures the emotions of the internees. By "remembering" the internment in relation to Hirsch's "living connection" between generations, the novel composes a reflection of history, essentially emulating the same tendency that past narratives had in their representation of the incarceration procedure. In other words, I will argue that Otsuka both represents and "re-enacts" the internment through the distinct *visual* aesthetic that she manifests. The aesthetic entails making the characters in the novel into "performers of silence" that essentially embody the alterity that is placed upon them by the "monologism" of society.

A "living connection": tropes of past literature:

In *When the Emperor Was Divine* (from now on referred to as *Emperor*), Otsuka readdresses the historical past as she writes the story of a family that experiences the evacuation and internment of the Japanese Americans. By forging a narrative representation of the internment based on the "living connection" of Hirsch's notion of "postmemory", Otsuka is able to treat the story through ideas and cultural impressions that generate new meanings in an effort to bridge the temporal distance between past and present. The novel is broken down into five chapters, with each having a specific focus on one of the members of the family. As the protagonists are unnamed in the novel, the discussion here will refer to them as mother, father, daughter, and son. The first chapter involves the mother, visualizing the preparation and relocation of her and her two children. The second chapter focuses on the daughter, with the novel portraying the everyday life in the camp, reflecting on images known from photographs and recreating the landscape of the internment camps. The third chapter focuses on topics of shame and guilt, visualizes through the eyes of the son. Here, reflections of alterity and the act of being the "Enemy" is portrayed through his self-perception, as something he ultimately doesn't quite understand. The fourth chapter closes in on the challenges of returning to society after spending years in confinement, furthering the discussion of alterity from the previous chapter. Finally, the last chapter of the novel titled

“Confession” issues a fascinating series of listed responses to charges in a voice that embodies a collective Japanese American culture**:** “I’m your florist. I’m your grocer. I’m your porter. I’m your waiter.” (Otsuka 142), and at the same time plays on stereotypical notions of Japanese and Japanese Americans: “I´m the slant-eyed sniper in the trees. I’m the saboteur in the shrubs. […] I’m the traitor in your own backyard.” (Otsuka 143). This section of the novel breaks out of the format that is found elsewhere, and in a way functions as a voice from the present that embodies a collective experience and engages with the racist notions in Japanese American internment history.

The novel creates a natural comparison to Okada’s *No-No Boy*, as both texts are fictional works that represent a cultural testimony of their respective connection to the internment. As mentioned in the previous chapter, for Okada, the choice of genre enabled him to step out of his own identity and experience in order to comment on the problematic issue of marginalization within the Japanese American community. For Otsuka, however, the arguably only conceivable method of writing about the internment is precisely through fiction. Whereas Okada and other Nisei writers were able to write memoir and biographies manifested in the experience they had lived through, Sansei writers such as Otsuka would need to resort to other narrational structures in order to re-create a historical experience they had not witnessed in person. Fiction as such therefore presents challenges in this regard, as Otsuka engages with the topic based on second-hand information. At the same time, however, fiction can also be argued to enforce the novel in terms of the literary tools that are employed in it. These, in turn, work to underscore and emphasize certain features of the text. For instance, *Emperor* features a distinct style that imitates more factual genres like the memoir by tracing previous literary works and recreating their style within the sphere of a fictional narrative. In addition, the novel engages its characters in performativity, as Otsuka imbues them with a self-inflicted notion of alterity that reflects the image of the “Enemy” that is forced upon them. The characters then "act out" these images in a visuality that comments and critiques generalizing sentiments of Japanese ethnicity. Fiction thus empowers the novel through what can be described as a memorial sphere, in which Otsuka reconnects with the history in order to issue critique through the performative elements in the characters she writes.

In a distinctive style of representation, *Emperor* captures the retelling of the internment through a "collective lens" which shifts the perspective from one member of the family onto the next throughout the novel. In the previous chapter, when discussing *No-No Boy*, we could point out the particular role that the individual had for Okada. In expressing the opinions and dilemmas of the protagonist, Ichiro Yamada, the novel accessed the emotional structure of Japanese American trauma. In *Emperor*, on the other hand, no individual is deemed more important than the next, as we get a shifting, balanced view of the whole family. The novel here represents a collective state of narration on several levels in the story. First of all, she employs a clear narrative structure that details the journey of the central family members from different perspectives, while balancing different thematics for each point of view. Each chapter belongs to one of the family members, beginning with the mother, then on to the sister and brother, both individually and collectively, and finally, a collective voice led by the father in the last chapter. Secondly, the novel's method of representation involves anonymizing the members of the family by withdrawing their names from the novel entirely. The characters remain unnamed throughout the novel and are only referenced to as "mother, "father", "girl" and "boy". Even though the story is based on her grandmother's journey during the Second World War, Otsuka thus deliberately censors the names of these particular characters in order to reduce their individual presence[6]. In the same way as the identification numbers did in the internment camps, the literary censorship in the novel echoes a historical feeling of dispossession of Japanese American culture.

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[6] In an interview with AsianWeek, Otsuka states that: "My grandmother never saw it, although the book is actually about her and dedicated to her." https://bookdragonreviews.files.wordpress.com/2009/07/asianweek-2003-10-24-julie-otsuka-emperor.pdf

The outcome of this censorship is in one way an aesthetic one, as names are an essential part of individuality**.** By taking away this individuality, the family becomes lost during the internment process, unable to properly connect with their emotions, and at the same time becoming unable to articulate them. In Bakhtinian terms, the members of the family that Otsuka represents are no longer able to negotiate their own self-consciousness and are thus denied any ability to articulate their own reality within the constraints that are placed on them (Bakhtin 52). The idea of their names as a vital part of the characters self-consciousness is thus tied to their identity. Anonymization, therefore, comes to symbolize a literary act of dispossession in the novel. This act is especially notable in a scene where the young girl in the novel is portrayed in transit on her way to camp. Here, as she slips cards out of the window, an act of resignation itself, she remembers a vivid and comforting memory of the family's stay in Yosemite. At the end of the paragraph, it is stated that: "She wrote down her name across the six of clubs and slipped the card out the window" (Otsuka 40). The act symbolizes releasing her name, and thus her identity, from the coming captivity at the same time as it foreshadows the restricting atmosphere of the camp, where the essence of her identity would be reduced to a number.

Through this reduction, the novel emphasizes an aesthetic monologic design in the structure of the story, which highlights and underscores the dire situation of the internment by limiting the possibility for the articulation of the characters. In the discussion of the first chapter of this thesis, I argued that *No-No Boy* drew on similar notions of ideology as Mikhail Bakhtin did in his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics.* The tendency in Okada's novel to favor dialogue as a literary authority that resisted monologue thought, is similar to what Bakhtin discusses in his work. Okada's emphasis on "dialogism" in his novel works as a critique of previous internment literature that did not dispute the problematic postwar Japanese American society. With *Emperor*, it is precisely this monologism that Otsuka seeks to aesthetically recreate. In the novel, the internment camps themselves function as restrictive spheres for the internees, not only physically but mentally as well. The act of imprisonment creates a figurative wall that separates the characters from both the outside world, but also from each other. In this state, they are unable to process and reflect on their experiences and essentially bound to a monologic premise.

Whereas the deprivation of names symbolizes an act of dispossession in itself, their inability to communicate signifies a self-enclosing act that fences off the outside world. The foremost instance of this aspect is the dislocation of the father, who is placed in a different camp than the rest of the family. His correspondence with the other characters is heavily censored, and the letters he gets in return from his children reflect and manifest this inability to articulate:

> At the bottom of the card there was a P.S: and then a line of text that had been blacked out by the censors. She wondered what it was her father had wanted to tell her. She had not written back – every day was like every other day and she could never think of anything new to say… (Otsuka 42)

As a result of the monologic premise of the internment camps, and the subsequent inability of the characters to articulate their own self-consciousness, the novel instead argues for a reliance on symbols and symbolic gestures to embody the voices of the characters**.** By doing so, the novel reflects the inability of articulation by concealing the emotionality and inner feelings of the characters. The act of anonymizing not only speaks to dispossession but also to the notion of collectivity, letting the family in the novel effectively stand in for every family that experienced the internment. As a reflection of this, the narrative takes the form of a cultural testimony more than a personal one and speaks to the collective trauma of the internment as something that is manifested in the soul of Japanese American culture. The aesthetic effect of inarticulation thus distills a noticeable sense of distance to the narrative itself, where the characters feature as slightly hidden behind a veil. This effect in one way echoes the "living connection" previously explained between the Issei / Nisei, and the Sansei, and marks the temporal distance of transgenerational fiction, and at the same time comments on memory as a fragile carrier of history that needs continuous renewal in order to survive.

In "On Remembrance and Forgetting in Julie Otsuka's novels" (2015), Lena Ahlin highlights the topic of silence and absence, arguing that both form and the content of *Emperor* point towards a narrative reimagination of the racialization and subsequent silence of the Japanese American people (87). Additionally, she goes on to highlight instances of forgetting as a coping mechanism for both the Japanese Americans and the Anglo Americans. Much like the aspects of agnotology that I have discussed previously in this thesis, the type of forgetting that she discusses has the trait of what she calls "manipulated memory" (Ahlin 94). Much like the aspects of agnotology that I discussed previously in this thesis, Ahlin here comments on ignorance as a source of healing. Her discussion would relate to Proctor's definition of "selective ignorance" (6). However, instead of bringing up agnotology in the discussion of the novel, I suggest that Hirsch's explanation of "postmemory" and the "living connection" are more tangible terms in relation to the text's fictional elements, such as performativity and the clear visual aesthetic that it conducts.

Additionally, Hirsch's theory connects better to the temporal distance between the events themselves and *Emperor,* and thus underscores the effective value of the aesthetic representation in the novel. In a different theoretical article, Hirsch notes that: "Postmemory is a powerful form of *memory* precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through *repetition* or *reenactment* but through previous *representations* that themselves become the objects of projection and recreation." ("Marked by Memory" 76 –

emphasis in original). Her quote here highlights the role of representations as temporal connections of past and present, as an extension of memory. The latter part of the quote hinges onto my argument that the aesthetic form of *Emperor* draws on the fundamental modes of representations that are found in the texts following the years after the internment. In other words, the previous representations become the schematics on which *Emperor* is based on. Instead of reenacting the events, Otsuka thus bases her novel on tropes of Japanese American culture, such as silence, absence, and performativity as an effect of alterity. I will therefore focus on the generative force of fiction to show how *Emperor* embodies the aesthetics of previous narratives.

Emulation of existing literature

In connection to the cultural images of silence and absence that the novel portrays, *Emperor* withholds information from the readers. Through a similar aesthetic that Okada employed in *No-No Boy* of "not knowing", this aesthetic signifies a strategy that enshrouds the perception and emotionality of the main characters of the novel. *Emperor* envisions a situation where the lack of knowledge shines through as a major foundational element of the story, functioning stylistically as something that emphasizes parts of the novel that are not articulatable by the characters and thus stay hidden[7]. For instance, the constant repetition of the word "not" underscores this point, as the girl tries to remember where she is after waking up on the train headed for camp: "…and the girl, who still could *not* remember where she was, remembered that her mother had *not* called her baby for a long time, *not* since the summer White dog had run away and *not* come back home for a week" (Otsuka 44 – emphasis my own). The lack of information in the novel shows the effective disorientation of the internees, and furthermore functions as a veil that distorts the perception of the reader. Another instance that echoes the cognition of the protagonists is embodied in the image of the father. In the early stages of the novel, his presence is only available to the reader as an image reflected from his children's act of reimagining, in addition to the instances of censored letters he sends to his family (Otsuka 59-60). Thus, for the reader, the father's absence in the story is in this way felt more heavily than his presence**.** In her narrative, Otsuka therefore not only recreates the internment camps but also effectively echoes the same feeling of silence and absence that culturally surrounds the historical sentiment of the internment camps. The novel emulates a similar aesthetic that masks the characters in the novel. This aesthetic encompasses elements that both honor and at the same time enforces the powerful history of the internment.

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[7] Abigail G. H. Manzella argues in her article "Disorientation in Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine*", that Otsuka's novel is shaped to echo the disorienting effects the internment had for the internees. Though working with similar tropes as I do in this thesis, I argue that the aesthetic of the novel works as a generative process of resonance, highlighting cultural heritage and postmemory as key fractions.

The novel draws on previous literary works of the internment in order to generate a similar type of aesthetic. The notion of "masking" is discussed in Traise Yamamoto's "Coded Critiques: Japanese American Incarceration Literature", which I referred to in chapter 1 in relation to hostile political climate in post-war American. Her chapter highlights the specific literary strategies that were employed by authors as a result of this political tension. She argues that many of the texts that were published in the immediate aftermath of the war had "…an overt description or narrative of the camp life and a covert critique of the racism and failure of an espoused U.S. democracy. Scholars have referred to this use of subtextual strategy as "muting" or "masking"" (172). This coded discourse thus became a manner of avoiding an overt conflict with readers, even though the texts themselves had a specific didactic and moral purpose (Yamamoto 172-173). The connection between *Emperor* and previous works is implied by Otsuka, as she at the end of her novel acknowledges the work of, among others, Miné Okubo as an inspiration for the writing of the novel. *Citizen 13660*

(1946) is noted by Yamamoto for having a specific strategy of masking, where the text and the illustrations in the graphic memoir were almost antithetical in terms of representation. Whereas the text has been argued by critics to form an "objective" and "unbiased" opinion of the internment, the images that Okubo presented in her memoir stood in stark contrast to her textual retellings, issuing what Yamamoto refers to as an implicit and hidden cultural critique (174). The strategy of masking that Okubo deployed in her memoir can thus be said to be a visual strategy that contrasts two differing opinions, one that is voiced and neutral, the other more critical and hidden (Yamamoto 174). This neutral strategy is comparable to the style that we find in *Emperor*.

Otsuka's novel similarly employs a distinct visual style of writing that relies on highly detailed and comprehensive portrayals of objects and landscape. An example of this particular style is visible when the family arrives in camp and walk into their assigned room:

> Inside there were three iron cots and a potbellied stove and a single bare bulb that hung down from the ceiling. A table made out of cratewood. On top of a rough wooden shelf, an old Zenith radio they had brought with them on the train from California. A tin clock. A jar of paper flowers. A box of salt. Tacked to the wall beside a small window, a picture of Joe DiMaggio torn from a magazine. (Otsuka 50-51)

The style of writing in this example is reminiscent of a list. By using short and concise wording, Otsuka describes the contents of the room with a bareness and exposedness that speaks to the visual and creates a distinct minimalistic imagery. The listing functions as a form of literary signature for Okada, that follows her in her most recent novel, *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011). Her way of approaching the setting in this scene emotionally distances the characters, placing them in the background, and instead focusing on the bare and simplistic furnishings in the room. The novel's way of portraying the room is an instance of the neutrality which is commented on in relation to Okubo's graphic memoir. In the quote above, there is no explicit commentary on the scenery outside of the listing, barren style of writing. Instead, the visual quality here takes control of the implicit critique, emphasizing the room's emptiness. In this sense, there is a clear similar aesthetic strategy between Okubo and Otsuka that issues a connection between them, where the latter draws inspiration from the former in terms of the neutral and distanced style of writing that at the same time implicitly states the meager conditions in camp.

In addition to alluding to Okubo's memoir, the style in which *Emperor* portrays its scenery and environment is reminiscent of Dorothea Lange's photography. In the introduction to this thesis, I discussed Lange as an example of what I referred to there as agnotology. There, I highlighted her distinct method of not only capturing the bareness of the scenery but also her simplistic comments on them. I shall here reiterate her text that features underneath a photo of a Japanese American man sitting in his room in camp:

> San Bruno, California. Old Mr. Konda in barrack apartment, after supper. He lives here with his two sons, his married daughter, and her husband. They share two small rooms together. His daughter is seen behind him, knitting. He has been a truck farmer and raised his family who are also farmers, in Centerville, Alameda County where his children were born. (Gordon 151)

By juxtaposing Lange's comments with Otsuka's description of the room, there is a noticeable similarity between the two in terms of their short and simplistic way of describing the scenery. The visual quality in *Emperor* speaks to the distinct way Lange captured the despair of the internees. One could thus argue that the way Otsuka emulates, or nods, to Lange's work, indirectly comments on the way in which the internment has been remembered. Dimock emphasizes this type of connection between texts, aligning the process with the reworking capabilities of the palimpsest.[8] As a continuation of the generative process of literature, the palimpsest works as an inscription of new texts over the remnants of past ones (Dillon 4). In this way, the “palimpsestuous” nature of *Emperor* proves Otsuka’s intention to re-negotiate a reflection of the internment, aspiring to project and reflect on the creativity and cultural importance visible in the works before her. The effect of *Emperor’s* emulation not only nods at the existence of the preexisting works of representation but also comments on their cultural and historical importance. The novel thus creates a form of compositional continuity that reflects on the new generation of Japanese Americans and their own connection to cultural heritage.

Other than the mentioned aspect of masking, *Emperor’s* style and theme are noticeably related to each other. Otsuka presents her work minimalistic in this regard, letting the text focus attention to detail rather than force explanation and elaboration. Additionally, she does not apply framing devices such as the preface and introduction in *No-No Boy*, but instead starts directly and quite abruptly with her first chapter titled “Evacuation Number 19”. Without what Gérard Genette refers to as “paratext” (262), and by not engaging with contextual matters, the work is bestowed with a barrenness, minimalizing explanations and instead focusing on the imagery and visuality that the story operates on. For this reason, I suggest that Otsuka’s minimalistic style of narration plays a vital part in the aesthetic structure of the story. By letting the characters themselves gravitate towards the center of narration, we as readers are given the same lack of informational privilege as the characters. Otsuka does in this sense go further than Okada in relation to the aesthetic measure of her novel. What this means is that the characters embody a sense of “muting”, that has as a self-censoring effect on them, preventing them from being able to articulate an understanding of their own situation.

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[8] I here refer to representations as well, and not only texts in order to include Lange’s photographs in the discussion.

This “masking” of the characters works as a feature that implies aspects of the story rather than explicitly state them. In this way, the “trope of silence” infects the narrative style of the novel by having symbols such as animals and objects become mediators of articulation instead of the characters themselves. *Emperor* highlights not only what is stated directly and clearly visible, but more to the point what is implicitly stated and what is *not* there, illustrating the “dark matter” that Andrew Sofer argues for in his book, *Dark Matter: Invisibility in Drama, Theater, and Performance*: “Dark matter is, quite literally, the secret ingredient whose mass holds our visible world together…” (3). Thus, instead of focusing on dialogue as a tool for progression of the story, Otsuka turns to performativity in what is “not said”. Where in the previous chapter I emphasized Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue to defeat the “monologue” of the post-war years in Japanese American society, I instead here discuss how *Emperor* aesthetically emulates that precise monologic premise.

Sofer argues furthermore for what he describes as a “spectral reading” of theatre and drama, which he states “…traces the effects of those invisible forces at work in the world of the performance…” (5), which in turn “…opens up a phenomenology of the unseen” (6). Otsuka’s use of fiction as a postmemorial mediator opens up for the unseen and implicit elements of the novel to align with Sofer theatrical argument, enabling the analysis here to focus on tropes such as silence and absence. These tropes come into play especially in relation to the father in the novel, as Sofer states that: “If theater necessarily traffics in corporeal stuff (bodies, fluids, gases, objects), it also incorporates the incorporeal: offstage spaces and actions, absent characters, the narrated past, hallucinations…” (3). Additionally, the two latter aspects of the narrated past and hallucinations also are visible in the novel, but not as prominently. Precisely because of the aesthetic strategy that Otsuka employs, Sofer’s argument highlighting the invisible shows the underlying aspects that reflect on the monologism that is present in the novel. The acts of displaying this invisibility thus reach back to previous texts in order to generate a dialogic embrace that remembers these texts. The characters embody a silence through their inarticulation and become performers that Otsuka shapes to illustrate the mentioned tropes of past literature. This point also shows how the novel employs a specific mimicking of visual aesthetics of previous representations of the internment, like the works of Okubo and Lange.

Otsuka not only emulates and compares previous literary works in her aestheticization of the novel but also parts of Japanese American history**.** By using metaphors and symbolism, the imagery in the novel becomes more powerful precisely because the narrative tools echo the historical sensation of silence and absence. In the novel, articulating emotions is almost inconceivable for the characters. Instead, *Emperor* lets their actions, thoughts and symbolic gestures speak for them. One instance of this reserved notion of articulation is visible in the characterization of the mother. As she prepares for the evacuation, she feels an emptiness in the house:

> She swallowed once and looked at the place on the wall where *The Gleaners* had hung. The white rectangle was glowing in the moonlight. She stood up and traced around its edges with her finger and began to laugh – quietly at first, but soon her shoulders were heaving and she was gasping for breath. (Otsuka 20)

The painting, by Jean-François Millet, visualizes three working-class women gleaning in the foreground of the landscape, performing a distinct bending motion. The imagery addresses both contrast and separation in the divide between the foreground and background of the painting. The social class of the gleaners is opposed to the supervising man on horseback in the distance, who represents the rule of the upper class. The quote from *Emperor* above thus stands out both for its symbolic reference and the parallel between the Japanese American people and the imagery of the painting in mind. First of all, the three women in the field show a striking resemblance to the "picture brides" who were brought to the U.S. mainland to, among other, help their husbands with agricultural labor (Takaki 236). Secondly, the mother feels an eerie sensation by the painting's absence, shown by her tracing the edges of the remaining white rectangle it left behind. The novel here foreshadows and implicitly comments quite strikingly on the almost invisible remnants of Japanese Americans; as something that is not there anymore except a fading trace of its previous presence. The painting features as another instance where the novel incorporates symbolism in the narrative in order to make sense of the characters' feelings, as well as foreshadowing the coming events in the novel**.** In a narrative that withholds information like *Emperor* does, the literary tools become essential for unpacking meaning that is left unstated by the characters.

As in the example of Millet's painting, the novel issues a clear intention of separating and contrasting opposites in order to emulate the internees' sensation of confinement and isolation. The train ride to the camp, in particular, makes this separation clear, where the girl in the novel looks out to see a reality completely different from her own: "They were still in Nevada and it was still Sunday. Somewhere in the distance church bells were ringing, and the streets were filled with people in the Sunday clothes walking home from the morning service" (Otsuka 26). The visual quality of this scene highlights two sides and blurs the sight of anything in between, enforcing the feeling of disparity and isolation. While a regular Sunday takes place on the outside of the train, pointing at almost mundane events, quite the opposite is happening inside it. The separation between the inside of the train and the outside is reminiscent of the fences in camp, with the windows working as an extension of the barbed wire, and comes to foreshadow the family's experience, both while incarcerated and after their release. The distance between the girl and the outside is made apparent when a soldier taps her on her shoulder and issues a sentence that is repeated multiple times in the novel: "shades down, shades down" (Otsuka 27). The quote becomes a symbol of an immovable barrier that the girl and her family are placed behind, effectively becoming a veil that enshrouds them.

This barrier thus involves visual and audial perceptions, as the Japanese Americans become figuratively invisible from the outside world, hidden inside the train cart: “Now she could not see anyone at all and no one outside the train could see her. There were the people inside the train and the people outside the train and in between them there were the shades” (Otsuka 28). The scene continues with the train also depicted from the outside as a man is walking along the tracks. The girl imagines him noting that “There goes the train, and then he would not think about the train again. He would think about other things. What was for supper, maybe, or who was winning the war. She knew it was better this way” (Otsuka 29). The novel here portrays a “trope of invisibility” quite interestingly, as it represents the girl imagining her own invisibility. In this case, it is not what we saw Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger referring to as the production of ignorance, but rather the perceived imperceptibility of the Japanese Americans that the girl imagines. This means that *Emperor* represents this “trope of invisibility” as something that is projected by the family onto themselves instead of by others around them. Ultimately, the self-projection comes as a result of the confinement and sense of restriction that is placed upon the internees. This point supports the incapability of discussing the internment in relation to a sense of self-censoring, in this case exemplified by a sense of guilt that the girl feels but is not quite able to comprehend or explain.

In a similar juxtaposition between the inside and outside, the boy in the novel captures a tortoise and keeps it trapped in a small box:

> The boy did not have a best friend but he had a pet tortoise that he kept in a wooden box filled with sand right next to the barrack window. He had not given the tortoise a name but he had scratched his family’s identification number into its shell with the tip

> of his mother’s nail file. At night he covered the box with a lid and on top of the lid he placed a flat white stone so the tortoise could not escape. Sometimes, in his dreams, he could hear its claws scrabbling against the side of the box. (Otsuka 60)

In a haunting parallel, the tortoise becomes a symbol of the Japanese Americans’ own state of imprisonment. The resemblance is striking in the boy’s choice to not give the tortoise a name, but instead engraving his family’s identification number in its shell. The tortoise furthermore speaks to aspects of both silence and absence. Firstly, the boy’s act of imprisoning the animal comes as a result of not having a friend in camp. Instead, he finds consolation in the company of the tortoise. Secondly, the inability to articulate becomes evident in the boy’s secrecy around the animal: “He did not mention the scrabbling claws to his father” (Otsuka 60), and after the tortoise is found dead, the boy thinks to himself: “My fault, the boy thought, but he had not told a soul” (Otsuka 82). By confining the tortoise to the tiny box, the boy in a sense symbolically isolates himself as he keeps quiet about the animal, and the imprisonment thus becomes his own. The guilt he feels for caging and killing the tortoise is similar to the self-guilt he senses concerning his own incarceration, lacking both an understanding and explanation for these actions. In this sense, the coded discourse in terms of symbolism adds an underlying critique, underscoring the historical notions of prejudice and injustice without explicitly marking the novel in those terms. The “scrabbling claws” illustrates the wrongness of the situation, haunting the boy in his dreams. Yet, the muted response that prevails in the boy speaks to a larger notion of silence in relation to Japanese American culture that is left unexplained.

Memory and culture

The acts of imagining and reimagining become vital narrative tools for the novel to visualize how the internment came to dispossess the internees. For both the girl and the boy, physical objects are made into symbols that enable them to remember and connect with their father in his absence. In the instance of the girl, her first memory of her father is made apparent when a stranger on the train comments on her scarf: “My father gave it to me. He used to travel a lot” (Otsuka 33), the girl responds. She considers it at first to be plain and without meaning and states that “The thing is, I already *had* a blue scarf. He bought me one the *last* time he was in Paris […] This isn’t really what I wanted” (Otsuka 34). After the stranger comments that “Someday it might be” (ibid), her perspective on it changes, and the scarf becomes a memorial embodiment of her father. Towards the end of the chapter, the scarf represents protection in the form of a physical remnant of the father, as the brother and sister step off the bus in the desert: “The boy began to cough and the girl untied her scarf and shoved it into his hand and told him to hold it over his nose and mouth (Otsuka 48). Memory in this example features as a physical connection that appears as a result of the enabling process of trauma. This physical connection functions as a sense of healing to the trauma itself, and the symbolic effect of the scarf shows not only what is left and the affection that it has, but also delineates what has gone missing and been lost in the process.

In the same vein, the boy is troubled by the image of his father being taken away, and his memory, like his sister in the previous paragraph, fixates on physical objects to account for that absence:

> He had never seen his father leave the house without his hat on before. That was what had troubled him the most. No hat. And those slippers: battered and faded, with the

> rubber soles curling up at the edges. If only they had let him put on his shoes then it might have turned out differently. But there had been no time for shoes. (Otsuka 74).

Seeing his father in a state of dismay and disarray upon his departure has left a lasting impression on the boy. The vivid memory of the strong, polite, and handsome man (Otsuka 62), is overtaken by the destructive image of his father in a feeble state wearing slippers while being taken away. The slippers themselves become a symbolic comparison to status, all the while connected to shame, as the boy later in the novel relates types of footwear to different degrees of shame: "Sometimes the boy comforted himself with the thought of Tommy Tanaka's father, who had been wearing white toe socks and an old pair of wooden *geta* when the FBI had caught him […] *Geta*, the boy decided, were worse than slippers. Much worse" (Otsuka 84 – emphasis in original). The inclusion of "geta", Japanese slippers, in this quote points to a discussion of culture as well as status. Geta in this instance signify something explicitly Japanese and is therefore associated with a more extreme version of shame. The boy feels shame as an extension of alterity; as an extension of being associated with the image of the "Enemy". In addition, we learn that the boy found a few strands of hair after his father's arrest and placed them in an envelope under the floorboard. His memory of his father relies in this instance on physical objects in order to both re-create and visualize an image of him in his absence:

> He worried that the FBI had returned to the house to search one more time for contraband. *We forgot to check under the floorboards*. He worried that when he saw his father again after the war his father would be too tired to play catch with him under the trees. He worried that his father would be bald. (Otsuka 79 – emphasis in original).

Whereas the act of reimagining images from memory becomes a manner of symbolizing a dispossessed culture**,** the boy's imagination, on the other hand, shows the emotional trauma that is inflicted by the internment, and the subsequent shame it instills on the internees. The act of worrying is noticeably repeated in the quote above, showing how the absence of the father leaves a void that is repetitively filled with negative images. For the characters in the novel, the original basis they have for understanding their own culture is withdrawn from memorial possession and instead substituted with twisted imagery that mirrors the traumatic response of the internees. The boy's realignment of his father with the image of his memory is a response to the physical presence that has been taken away from him, and effectively comments on the cultural dispossession of the internment, while also critiquing the negative image of being portrayed as the "Enemy".

As mentioned, the family's emotionality and ability to remember both become visible through symbolic measurements, such as the scarf and the slippers, and articulate what the characters are incapable of expressing for themselves. The same problem of articulation is evident for the mother as she explains that she lost one of her earrings on the train: "It fell off somewhere between Provo and Nephi. I haven't felt right ever since" (Otsuka 86). In a somewhat ambiguous statement, her loss of the earring forms a parallel to the overall poor state that she is in: "She pulled out a gray hair from her head and let it fall to the floor" (Otsuka 85). The loss of one half of the pair of earrings could also symbolize the fragmentation of her identity and sense of self, or even the physical detachment from her husband, but is in any case caused by the notion of dispossession. In relation to the previous paragraph's argument that the internment process dispossessed the internees of Japanese and Japanese American culture, the instance of the mother and her earrings prove to be a more concrete example of how absence inflicts wounds and leaves a noticeable void. In terms of remembering, the example here shows similarities to the previous paragraph, where I argued that the void that the father leaves behind is filled with negative images. In the case of the mother and her earrings, Otsuka accounts for the emotional trauma through the resigned tone of the mother instead of the act of imagination. The worrisome state of the boy is thus replaced in this instance by the mother's active sense of silence, caused by an absence she cannot entirely explain.

In the novel's portrayal of different response to dispossession, *Emperor*, much like *No-No Boy*, comments on the psychological trauma of the internment. Whereas Okada starts his story at the point of release displaying the post-war stigmatization of Japanese Americans, Otsuka writes her novel as a continuous process of imprisonment and dispossession. By continuing the narrative beyond liberation, she shows the devastation of returning home and the coping mechanisms that were developed as a result. As mentioned previously, Manzella argues that the characters of Otsuka's novel become "disoriented". In short, the internment camps become the start of an identity crisis, a crisis that does not end when they are released from imprisonment**.** She argues that the latter part of Otsuka's story shows the injustice and devastation of the internment: "Because of the commutatory practice of disorientation that they have endured, their sense of place, self, and community has been altered, even though the place and the people outwardly appear very much the same as they did before the family's internment." (Manzella 153). Their inability of articulation thus continues to function in the novel as a muted presence for the family. After their release from imprisonment, their inability to express themselves becomes apparent through their own self-censoring, and performance of invisibility:

> …across the windows she hung some split rice sack curtains so no one could see inside, and in the evening, when it began to grow dark, she wandered through the front rooms of the house turning off the lights one by one so no one would know we were home. (Otsuka 119)

In the paragraph that follows this quote, the novel describes the homecoming of American soldiers and shows the noisy presence of the victory parades that are held to honor them. The returned soldiers' ability to express their experiences and the town's celebration echoes the dichotomous nature of the narrative: “We kept up with the stories in the papers. More rescued Prisoners Tell of Japan’s Torture Camps…” (119). By placing the two mentioned paragraphs next to each other, Otsuka juxtaposes and contrasts the act of articulation of the soldiers returning from war and the performative element of the silence of the Japanese American family. The result is a clear aesthetic contrast that displays the perceived cultural notions of “silence and “noise”, essentially comparing the two as similar yet different: “They shoved bamboo splinters under our fingernails and made us kneel for hours […] We didn’t even have names. I was 326. San byaku ni ju roku. […] If we go easy on the Japs we’re crazy” (Otsuka 119). Otsuka here highlights the enforced “noise” of the returning American soldiers as a deafening mechanism that renders the “silence” of the Japanese Americans complete. The Japanese phrase “San byaku ni ju roku”, which translates into the number 326 contrast this ability of articulation quite strikingly, as the American soldiers not only have the capability to express and voice their experiences, but they are also rendered with the capacity to speak Japanese without being stigmatized for it. In contrasting this ability of articulation, the novel implicitly critiques the injustice of the situation by contrasting and emphasizing the polarizing and alienating cultural effect of the internment, and the alterity that it endorsed.

The family’s inability to express themselves in the wake of the internment camps allows a dominant attitude to control the representation of the Japanese Americans, and effectively projects an image that they eventually come to believe: “We looked at ourselves in the mirror and did not like what we saw: black hair, yellow skin, slanted eyes. The cruel face of the enemy. We were guilty” (Otsuka 119-120). Whereas the first part of *Emperor* emulates a neutral strategy of previous internment literature, the latter part of the novel features a more explicit type of criticism that engages with the racist notions and discrimination that the Japanese Americans experienced both during and after WWII, epitomized in the last chapter, which functions as a false confession of guilt. Whereas Okada places his narrative somewhere in-between the confusion and the self-blaming effects the war had for the Japanese American population, Otsuka here focuses on the racialized aspects of that particular history. As a result of the perceived notion of being the enemy, feelings of alienation become tools for the Japanese Americans to distance themselves from their past selves. This growing process of alienation is evident throughout the narrative, beginning while they are in camp. The family members here start to become distant to each other, even though the spatial limits of the camp should prove otherwise:

> His sister left the barracks early in the morning and did not return until long after dark. She was always in a rush now. […] One day he saw her standing in line at the mess hall in her Panama hat and she hardly seemed to recognize him at all. Their old life seemed far away and remote to him now, like a dream he could not quite remember. (Otsuka 92-93)

In the quote, the estrangement the boy describes is not only limited to familial bonds but also comments on the fading memory of the life they were forced to leave behind. *Emperor* portrays the internment as an alienating process in itself. The family in the novel is consistently described as assimilated, inclining towards American culture while at the same time respecting their Japanese heritage. This is exemplified several times throughout the novel, for instance in the picture of Jesus on their wall that comments on religious inclination (Otsuka 8). Additionally, when asked whether they would fight for the armed forces and forswear any allegiance to the Emperor in the loyalty questionnaire, the mother comments "What allegiance? […] She said she had nothing to forswear" (Otsuka 99). The novel here implicitly comments on the notion of identity in the aftermath of the internment, and more specifically how the American identity became unobtainable for Japanese Americans after the war.

After their release, the cultural ties to America are forcibly severed through the public prejudice that is placed on the returning Japanese Americans. When the family returns home from camp, they struggle to release themselves from the stigma of being perceived as the enemy. At the arrival at their house, they immediately begin a performance of guilt and invisibility as a result of the shame they feel, similar to the previous example of the returning soldiers:

> Without thinking, we had sought out the room whose dimensions – long and narrow with two windows on one end and a door at the other – most closely resembled those of the room in the barracks in the desert where we had lived during the war. (Otsuka 112)

Their act of restructuring their house to look like their old room in camp ensures a sense of security for the family but also underscores the questioning attitude that met the returning Japanese Americans. However, because Otsuka's text issues an understanding of the world around almost exclusively from the point of view of the Japanese Americans, their own perception of themselves comes into focus in this part of the novel, highlighting the action of hiding that the family takes as a result of perceiving themselves as the enemy. In addition to commenting on the racist notions the Japanese Americans had to essentially accept, the last part of the novel also emphasizes the historical notion of self-enclosing and the internalizing process of trauma in Japanese American culture.

Conclusion

By resonating the voices of previous writers in a dialogic embrace, especially those who employed forms of coded discourse in their texts, *Emperor* adds another layer to the Japanese American literary history in this fictional work based on memory. The literary critic and theorist Sarah Dillon explains in her book *The Palimpsest: Literature. Criticism, Theory* (2007), that “The palimpsest is thus an involuted phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupted and inhabiting each other” (4). Furthermore, she argues that the notion of “palimpsestuousness” refers to “… a simultaneous relation of intimacy and separation […] preserving as it does the distinctness of its texts, while at the same time allowing for their essential contamination and interdependence” (Dillon 3). Otsuka’s novel works as a new layer in a palimpsest that writes over existing Japanese American literature. At the same time, however, it also infuses this past literature with an aesthetic that underscores the restricting political climate of the past. Rather than completely erasing the original texts, Dillon comments that the new texts are “…still haunted by, the other texts in that palimpsest’s history.” (9). In the same vein, Dimock states that: “Across time, every text must put up with readers of different wavelengths, who come at it tangentially and tendentiously, who impose semantic losses as well as gains” (1061). Furthermore, as she argues, over time, the literary texts lose their individual and authoritative power, and semantic meaning is taken over by a “democratic readership”. In relation to *Emperor*, the democratic readership of the newer generation of Japanese Americans requires a new approach to the internment and its cultural legacy. The novel thus becomes a symbol of the need to refresh a fading past and create new meanings for the present generation of Japanese Americans based on the memories of the previous generations.

In addition to illustrating how the generative process of literature finds continuous new meaning, *Emperor* also becomes a symbol of the “living connection” that Hirsch argues resides between the newer generations and a traumatic past (*Postmemory* 1). By way of “remembering” the internment, Otsuka thus rejuvenates cultural history in a different light, arguing for both the element of dispossession and the lasting cultural mark the internment had for Japanese American heritage. Working as an extension of memory, *Emperor* functions as a belated testimony for the previous generations of Japanese Americans that informs and infuses the newer generation with cultural meaning. In her novel, Otsuka not only emphasizes the importance of memory in relation to cultural identity but also highlights the traumatic history of Japanese American citizenship. In this sense, what I referred to previously in this thesis as the "culture-making function" of literature (Miller 69), provides meaning also for Otsuka, who generates new meaning by creating a form of dialogue to the monologic premise of the internment. Rather than issuing a multiplicity of voices, such as *No-No Boy* does, *Emperor* instead engages in a literary setting that endorses singularity. Marita Sturken in her essay "Absent Images of Memory: Remembering and Reenacting the Japanese Internment" (1997), supports this sentiment in relation to memory as a carrier of history:

> When personal memories are deployed in the context of marking the anniversary of historical events, they are presented either as the embodied evidence of history or as evidence of history's failures. Survivors return to the sites of their war experience; they place their bodies within the discourse of remembering either to affirm history's narratives or to declare them incomplete, incapable of conjuring their experience. (688)

By emphasizing the repressive racist and political notions of the internment on both a narrative and stylistic level, Otsuka comments on the active and forcible delimitation of the Japanese American public during WWII. In the novel's representation of memories, *Emperor* comments on the "absent presence" of Japanese American culture in an aesthetic rework of history.

Conclusion

> To see yourself as a part of history also means that you can change it.
>
> So you must make the textbook paragraph into a poem. Saturate history with meaning like water bleeds through paper. Infuse every word, each phrase, each date, each number, each comma, each space before and after the paragraph stops.
>
> Tamiko Nimura

Early on, this thesis aligned the increasingly explored field of agnotology, as introduced by the historians Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, with Mikhail Bakhtin's literary term "monologism" as a means to understand the absence of representations regarding the internment of Japanese Americans. In doing so, the thesis explored the two novels' own distinct way of countering this absence by representing the internment's presence. In the first chapter, I introduced John Okada's *No-No Boy*. Here I discussed how the novel functions as a counter-representation that rejects previous sentiments of neutrality in favor of a stark criticism towards the monologism of the society of its time. In its portrayal of the protagonist Ichiro Yamada, the novel explores the conflicted and hostile political climate of post-internment Japanese American society. Through the application of Bakhtin's concept "dialogism" and his notion of "the ultimate word", I claimed that *No-No Boy* constitutes a forcible articulation of rejection towards the societal limitations and political representations of Japanese Americans in the aftermath of the war.

In the second chapter, I introduced Julie Otsuka's novel *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002), to illustrate the continuing trauma of the internment. In her artistic recomposition of the internment experience, I argued that the novel's use of aesthetics provides an illustration of the historical vilifying monologic representations of Japanese Americans. In the same way as Okada, Otsuka uses fiction to re-negotiate Japanese American cultural identity and history**,** but for a different purpose. Instead of challenging the societal and political limitations of Japanese American in the 1950s, as Okada does, Otsuka instead challenges the racial undertones of the internment and lays a basis for the remembrance of history for future generations. Her narrative aesthetic underscores the culturally destructive notion of the internment through implicit critique and the use of masking articulation and emotion, as well as explicitly criticizing the historical notions of prejudice in the last chapter of the novel.

In relation to the first chapter of this thesis and *No-No Boy*, *Emperor* forms an interesting opposition to Okada's prominent belief in dialogism. Instead of employing articulation and dialogue that enable the characters' self-consciousnesses, Otsuka instead works to structure her novel around the monologic premise or singular "truth" that surrounded the ways of expression in the aftermath of the internment. By using aesthetics as a visual connection to the remembered past, the novel embodies a testimony of not only the internment camps but also of the feelings of shame and guilt in Japanese American culture. The common denominator for these two novels is that they both operate on a level of social and political commentary. In both cases, the novels form both explicit and implicit critique of the damaging prejudice against Japanese Americans. Whereas *No-No Boy* emphasizes this critique through the dialogue of its characters, *Emperor* tackles these racist notions through its stylistic measures. The minimalistic approach of the novel visually portrays a past where the characters are not only silenced through their inability of articulation, but the story also engages with aesthetic tools that comment on tropes of Japanese American culture. Examples such as silence, absence, and alterity all refer to the way Japanese and Japanese Americans were portrayed in the media and historical narratives, and the aesthetics of the novel discusses these tropes as a result of the “monologic truth” that disregarded other representations of the minority.

The democratic function of literature

In both chapters of this thesis, I have argued that fiction provides the two novels the means to go beyond the represented history and form a “culture-making function” that engages with ideas of Japanese American identity and citizenship. In discussing the distinct way in which the history of the internment was remembered, Marita Sturken states that certain images were chosen to support “…the national narrative of the war, in which the United States is a triumphant and moral nation; as such, they screen out more disruptive images.” (691**).** In relation to his novel, John Okada stated that: “This is a story which has never been told in fiction and only in fiction can the hopes and fears and joys and sorrows of people be adequately recorded” (Okada xvii). His emphasis on the ability to display emotion through fictional representation speaks not only to the documentation of history but also to the power of literature. In this sense, literature speaks thus not only to artistic creation but also to democracy, as it provides voices that pose critical questions and reflections. Marielle Macé argues in her text “Ways of Reading, Modes of Being” (2013) for the infusion of literary impulses into everyday life. She states that “Literary styles offer themselves to the reader as genuine forms of life, engaging behaviors, methods, constructive power, and existential values” (214). Macé emphasizes the reader’s active presence in relation to the text, allowing impulses and nuances to take form (216). The two texts I have discussed in this thesis apply literature, and more specifically fiction, in order to access voices that speak for political and cultural purposes. Macé provides insight into the effect and force of literary practices and argues for the possible conduct it inspires. The role of the literary is therefore not only found to be artistic and individuating but is rather a medium that provides a distinct democratic function.

In both the chapters and the introduction of this thesis, I have on a fundamental level engaged the two texts with the concept of "agnotology" as an overarching theme of Bakhtin's concept "monologism". As introduced in relation to Ruth Ozeki's preface to the most recent publication of *No-No Boy* from 2014, agnotology does not only capture the ground on which Okada's story stands, as the novel was effectively ignored when it was initially published. Agnotology also plays into a larger part of Japanese American society and the socially bound themes of "silence and absence" that have been discussed in relation to this particular cultural history. Agnotology thus takes the form of monologism in the two chapters, with each novel forming a response to the notions of alterity that such ignorance endorses. In both novels, monologism gives way to a polarization that increasingly differentiates between the identity of Japanese Americans and that of America. As such, representations and images of the Japanese Americans as the "Enemy" forces them to be associated with an alterity that is deemed hostile and potentially dangerous.

The democratic function of literature does not only speak to the sense of defiance that these novels offer. It also comments on a larger feature of modern society where the need to resist and counteract monotonous and one-sided representations by expressing a multiplicity of voices is still needed. Fiction gives the authors a means to discuss and problematize challenges that Japanese Americans faced, and still face as a minority in the U. S. Both novels constitute testimonies of the internment, but each in their own unique manner engage with different aspects of cultural heritage. Whereas *No-No Boy* deals with the psychological trauma of being labeled "disloyal", *When the Emperor was Divine*, on the other hand, engages with the transgenerational trauma from the viewpoint of a Sansei. The two novels share a collective voice that articulates challenges in relation to the labels that have been put on the Japanese

American population, using “dialogism” and aesthetics to endorse a negotiation of citizenship. Professor, and literary critic Edward W. Said argues that the humanist should work as an extension of democracy, articulating a multiplicity of voices instead of a dominant singularity. In his chapter “The Return to Philology”, from his book *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004), he states that:

> For if, as I believe, there is now taking place in our society an assault on thought itself, to say nothing of democracy, equality, and the environment, by the dehumanizing forces of globalization, neoliberal value, economic greed […], as well as imperialist ambition, the humanist must offer alternatives now silenced or unavailable through the channels of communication controlled by a tiny number of new organizations. (71)

In this sense, we read that the humanist’s role, and literature itself, must act as a critical counterbalance or resistance to the one-sided narratives that dominate an antidemocratic worldview.

In present-day society, the influx of technological breakthroughs has seen a number of new forms of easily accessible media appear. But rather than meaning a multiplicity of new voices, these new forms engage in active simplification of thought itself. Professor Paul Gilroy, in his lecture titled “The Value of Antiracism” at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Bergen April 20, 2018, stated that “memetic imagery” now conducts our main sense of articulation, and generalistic representation dominates our view of the world around us[9]. In relation to this new trend, the mode of fiction, as I have argued, complicates discussion rather than simplifying it. In regard to both *No-No Boy* and *When the Emperor was Divine*, the terms of representation are founded on problematizing rather than generalization in order to reach a conclusion. Literature therefore not only has the capability to problematize events and ideologies through its representations but as Tamiko Nimura states in the epigraph above, literature also has the potential to "saturate history with meaning" through its engagement with artistic expressions.

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[9] This statement is a somewhat paraphrased and shortened part of Gilroy’s full discussion.

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