The Sea in the Literary Imagination:

Global Perspectives

Edited by

Ben P. Robertson,
Ekaterina V. Kobeleva,
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CHAPTER FIVE

THE OCEAN AS A SPACE OF MATURATION IN NAGAI KAFŪ'S CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

G. M. FOLLACO

In the two collections of stories Nagai Kafū (1879-1959) wrote during and immediately after his sojourn in the United States and France (1903-1908), titled *American Stories* (*Amerika monogatari*, 1908) and *French Stories* (*Furansu monogatari*, 1909), the author repeatedly described sea scenes and transoceanic crossings. An attentive observer of the space around him and urban environments, in particular, Kafū used the seascape as a narrative device in itself; I argue that the artistic maturation he accomplished during his five-year-long sojourn abroad is evident in the way he moved from conceiving the seascape as a reflection of one or more characters' states of mind to charging it with specific and more sophisticated symbolic meanings, a sign of the acquired ability to map, not only the emotions, but also cultural references and social critique onto this particular space.[1]

Among the recurring features of Japanese literature at the turn of the twentieth century was the thematization of the encounter with the "foreign Other," whose presence in the archipelago was felt as increasingly pervasive.[2] Soon after the Meiji Restoration (1868), the promotion of *ryūgaku* (study abroad) enabled elite Japanese men to visit countries—mostly European nations and the United States—that the Meiji State considered to be models of technological and economic advancement to imitate and possibly surpass, whereas people from a lower socioeconomic

[1] For an analysis of Kafū's poetics of the urban in English see Gala M. Follaco, *A Sense of the City: Modes of Urban Representation in the Works of Nagai Kafū (1879-1959)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017).

[2] On this subject with reference to literature, the most comprehensive contribution in English so far is *Representing the Other in Modern Japanese Literature: A Critical Approach*, ed. Rachael Hutchinson and Mark Williams (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

background migrated in search of better life conditions.[3] In both cases, travelling to unknown lands meant a comparison with otherness in its most basic, yet problematic, forms, and it was on board ships, suspended spaces and quintessential non-places, that Japanese from different regions, caste categories, and social classes met, interacted, or simply and deliberately ignored each other.[4]

Marc Augé defined the traveler's space as "the archetype of *non-place,*" claiming that the solitary traveler's experience often entails "prophetic evocations of spaces in which neither identity, nor relations, nor history really make any sense."[5] Solitude, in this context, is seen as "an overburdening or emptying of individuality, in which only the movement of the fleeting images enables the observer to hypothesize the existence of a past and glimpse the possibility of a future," and "the deck of a ship putting out to sea" represents "the ideal vantage point—because it combines the effect of movement with distance."[6] Augé's notion of solitary travel, alongside the image of the ship he suggests, helps summarize Nagai Kafū's experience.

Kafū's real name was Sōkichi. His father had been an elite government official and a gifted composer of Chinese-style poetry who also had travelled to North America and studied English and Latin at the universities of Princeton and New Brunswick. Although Kafū was supposed to follow the same path toward a high-ranking position as a bureaucrat or businessman, he proved to be more interested in theatre, literature, and traditional arts than bursting with ambition. Still determined to have him follow a more respectable path, his father decided to send him abroad; after four years in the United States, Kafū sailed to France in 1907 and stayed less than one year in Lyon before going back to Tokyo.

In the American and French stories, Kafū appears especially concerned with themes such as social advancement and uneasiness about the future—

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[3] See Ishizuki Minoru, *Kindai Nihon no kaigai ryūgaku shi* (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1992); *The Modernizers: Overseas Students, Foreign Employees, and Meiji Japan*, ed. Ardath W. Burks (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985). See also *Mutual Images: Essays in American-Japanese Relations*, ed. Akira Iriye (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[4] See Andrea Geiger, *Subverting Exclusion: Transpacific Encounters with Race, Castle, and Borders, 1885-1928* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

[5] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 86-89.

[6] Augé, *Non-Places*, 86-89.

natural concerns, given Kafū's youth and the Nagai family's expectations. One notes that, over the years, his interest increasingly turned to more universal topics and themes. In what follows, I shall concentrate, in particular, on three short stories set on board the vessels that took him from Japan to America, from America to France, and from France to Japan, respectively. These pieces testify to the transition from an individualistic perspective to a much broader horizon, a further maturation reflected in his narrative approach to space, including seascapes. I shall demonstrate to what extent, in this author's literature, the sea, as a space devoid of identity, relations, and history, engenders narratives and fosters reflections, eventually becoming a veritable function of his critique of the modern condition.

In *Night Talk in a Cabin* (*Kyabin yawa*, 1904), a young man beset by doubts meets two Japanese men with utterly different stories; textual analysis of this work will show how the author, by attributing several autobiographical details to each character, stages an oblique representation of a set of possible futures for his own self, a *mis-en-scène* that can take place only on board ship, where the endlessness of the ocean symbolizes the openness of the narrator's destiny.

The protagonist of *A June Night's Dream* (*Rokugatsu no yo no yume*, 1907) is sailing to France when he is reminded of the woman he has just left; besides this heart-wrenching love story, the main interest of the text lies in the figuration of the I-narrator as a cosmopolitan figure who, after four years in the United States, feels more American than Japanese. Throughout his sojourn, Kafū occupied an in-between position that is rendered to good effect in this deployment of the ocean as the spatial setting for multiple meditations about life and love.[7]

Finally, *Mediterranean Twilight* (*Tasogare no Chichūkai*, 1908), alongside two related stories written in the same period, re-evokes Kafū's crossing to Japan and resumes his critique of Meiji modernization, framing it within the geographical landmarks he comes across during his trip, with the ocean's becoming the textual fabric itself.

[7] Kafū's in-between position has been examined thoroughly by Rachael Hutchinson, "Positioning the Observer: Interrogations of Alterity in Nagai Kafū's *Amerika monogatari,*" *Monumenta Nipponica* 62, no. 3 (2007), and in her monograph, *Nagai Kafū's Occidentalism: Defining the Japanese Self* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

Too Vast a Sea: *Night Talk in a Cabin*

Night Talk in a Cabin is the first story Kafū wrote in the United States. The draft was completed as early as November 1903 and narrates the encounter of three Japanese men—Yanagida, Kishimoto, and the first-person narrator—who are travelling to America. Both Yanagida and Kishimoto are leaving Japan because, for different reasons, they could not fulfil their ambitions, so they decided to study in the United States with a view to pursuing more satisfactory career paths, but while the former is optimistic and self-confident, the latter seems shy and insecure. The first-person narrator, whose name never is mentioned and who refers to himself using the pronoun *watakushi* ("I" in Japanese), is a younger man whose identification with the author seemingly is straightforward; however, the peculiarity of this story is that Kafū endows not only *watakushi*, but also the other two men, with attributes that overlap, or that might overlap in the future, with events and attitudes from his own life. Being younger than his travel companions, *watakushi* never really has experienced failure, so his story may have at least two different finales. Either he might easily adapt to life in America and become an optimist like Yanagida, or he might fail, feeling as insecure abroad as he was in Japan, but he may try to set aside his anxiety and endure a few years in the United States before going back to his homeland, like Kishimoto.

Kafū was twenty-four when he embarked on the ship that took him from Yokohama to Seattle, and he must have been concerned about the future, torn between his own aspirations and his father's expectations at a time when the lives of young, wealthy men were overloaded with the *risshin shusse* (success in life) discourse.[8] His treatment of the Yanagida and Kishimoto narrative arguably is a staging of his possible future; indeed, this kind of *mis-en-scène* and simulation features repeatedly in the American stories.[9]

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[8] Although women were not explicitly excluded from the *risshin shusse* ideology, they were educated in accordance with the principles of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother), thus *de facto* estranged from this discourse of ambition and self-advancement. On women and *risshin shusse,* see, for instance, Vera Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan: Gender, Labour and Activism, 1900-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 39. *Risshin shusse* should be considered an umbrella definition for a set of discourses focusing on success, ambition, self-improvement, and social mobility that informed the social and cultural life of modern Japan.

[9] Gala M. Follaco, "L'illusione autobiografica. Focalizzazione e scrittura drammatica negli *Amerika monogatari,*" in *Nuove Prospettive di Ricerca sul Giappone*, ed.

In *Night Talk in a Cabin*, the narration of *watakushi*'s anxiety unfolds against the backdrop of a vast ocean, constituting a pre-condition for the process of "emptying of individuality" that will make the staging possible. The *incipit* of the story is an example of the author's tendency to "map" the characters' emotions onto space and, at the same time, to inscribe the very structure of the narrative into the landscape. Evidence of this technique is seen as *watakushi* finds that "[c]rossing the seas with no land in sight anywhere is almost unbearably tedious, and the voyage between Yokohama and the port of the newly developed city of Seattle is no exception."[10] The narrative unfolds when *watakushi* is on board, so the departure from Japan, here rendered through reference to the mountains, ("Once the passengers have parted with the mountains of their homeland on the day of sailing"), has taken place several days before.[11] *Watakushi* has been a "wayfarer" for ten days, and this condition places him in a liminal, indefinable position.[12] He is distant from Japan, but also from America; he is not in his native land nor in a foreign one. The journey from Yokohama to Seattle, the mountains the passengers have parted from, and the vast expanse of water separating the two countries, confer a physical dimension to the I-narrator's sense of dislocation and uncertainty. Having become acquainted with the two possible endings of his story as embodied in Yanagida and Kishimoto, he realizes he has two options, but the ocean is too vast—and "tedious." Tedium, like boredom, is a keyword in Kafū's literary world. It foreshadows resignation. A central motif in *fin-de-siècle* literature, whose reading had been absorbing him over previous years, *ennui*, in his work, would come to represent the state of mind of the individual who is about to become aware that reality does not meet his, or her, expectations, so all one can do is accept it; analysis of his opus, starting with the American and French stories through more mature writings such as *Rivalry* (*Udekurabe,* 1917) and *A Strange Tale from East of the River* (*Bokutō kidan*, 1937) has shown that describing characters as bored, tired, or weary when they acknowledge that they are powerless over

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Giorgio Amitrano and Silvana De Maio (Napoli: Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale," 2012), 255-56; Hibi Yoshitaka, "Amerika ni samayou zaibei Nihonjin toshite no Kafū" in *Tokō suru sakkatachi*, ed. Kanda Yumiko and Takahashi Tatsuo (Tokyo: Kanrin shobō, 2012), 51.

[10] Nagai Kafū, *American Stories*, trans. Mitsuko Iriye (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 1.

[11] Nagai*, American Stories*, 1.

[12] Nagai*, American Stories*, 1.

their own lives is a recurrent pattern in Kafū's works.[13] Unable to control or influence the events affecting their lives, Kafū's characters inevitably opt for renunciation either by withdrawing from society or choosing to stay and conform to what society demands of them. Though it is not yet clear what *watakushi*'s fate will be—Yanagida's, Kishimoto's, or neither of them—the reference to tedium suggests that it will most likely be one of quiet resignation or resilience rather than true happiness.

Night Talk in a Cabin is a fairly linear story, characterized by unity of time and place, a sort of *tranche de vie* that nonetheless encapsulates the possibility of a larger *Bildungsroman* narrative. It has been observed that Kafū, especially during his sojourn abroad, manifested a Romantic attitude that accounts for his giving greater value to processes than their completion; further, in the United States, he juxtaposes with his "Naturalistic" approach, partly inherited from the French authors he had been reading fervently since the late 1890s, a tendency to see and describe space as an outward projection of inner emotions—another "Romantic" turn.[14] These competing dispositions find a synthesis in the American stories, and *Night Talk in a Cabin* is an early example of it because the author, here, frames a *Bildungsroman* trajectory within a *tranche-de-vie*-like sketch focusing on the topic of emigration. The illusion of self-completion around which the *Bildungsroman* narrative is structured represents the core of Kafū's story, but as soon as we catch sight of *watakushi*, who is bored with the vastness of the Pacific Ocean before him, we understand that the illusion already has been dismantled. How, then, is the narrative grammar of the *Bildungsroman* articulated? If the time-span that readers witness amounts only to a single night in *watakushi*'s life, where do we find the "development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage [. . .] through varied experiences—and often through a spiritual crisis—into maturity, which usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world," that is the standard pattern of this kind of narrative?[15] It is precisely in the seascape, in its details and variations, and the emotions it

[13] On Kafū's acquaintance with European—but mostly French—literature, refer in particular to: Akase Masako, *Nagai Kafū to Furansu bungaku* (Tokyo: Aratake shuppan, 1976); Mitsuko Iriye, "Quest for Literary Resonance: Young Nagai Kafū and French Literature" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1969); and Kanno Akimasa, *Nagai Kafū junreki* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996); Follaco, *A Sense of the* City, 159.

[14] Nakamura Mitsuo, *Nakamura Mitsuo Zenshū*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1971), 60.

[15] M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th ed. (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999), 193.

evokes and reflects, that *watakushi*'s coming of age—his attempt at self-definition—takes place. The excerpt below describes the scene outside the cabin where the three men are conversing.

> In the far distance the forlorn sound of a bell tolling the time could be heard. Just then, the waves seemed to swell higher and higher until we heard them hitting the round porthole above the bed with a crushing sound and dashing against the deck area, while the wind sweeping by the tall masts sounded just like the dry winds of February in Tokyo. The grating sound of something creaking somewhere began [. . .]. As we drew the curtains over the porthole and door so that the tiny cabin would be warmed by steam and reclined on armchairs, listening to the storm outside, all this somehow recalled the comfort of a fireside on a winter night. Yanagida seemed to feel the same way, as he said, putting down his whisky glass, "Don't you think that once you believe in your own safety, even raging storms outside somehow sound attractive?"[16]

This is the seascape as it looks, or more correctly as it sounds, just before Yanagida and Kishimoto begin to tell their stories to *watakushi*. The author here manipulates the aural elements of the scene to set a stage that reflects the mood of the narration. The bell is the acoustic signal that something is about to start. Just as if *watakushi* (and the reader) were in a theatre, the sound of the bell prepares him and draws his attention to the words his travel companions are about to pronounce. The waves, described previously as "giant" and "undulant," are beating against the ship now, enhancing the pathos of the scene. Kafū's writing in this section is particularly effective in the evocation of the sense of anxiety and emotional distress that *watakushi* must have felt while attending the twofold *mise-en-scène* of his potential future, and he accomplishes this effect by setting the scene in a way that privileges acoustic rather than visual effects. This kind of rendering conveys an overall sense of disorientation. Although the sea, in the first scene, already was vast and lacking any landmark ("[i]t was all ocean yesterday, and so it is again today"), its width and the visual reference represented by the shape of the waves were *per se* a sort of handhold, albeit an ephemeral one; in the second scene, set inside the cabin at night, with the aural coming to the fore in the absence of any visual aid, the sense of anxiety and disconnectedness is enhanced.[17] To be sure, as the men draw the curtains, definitively screening out all visual interference, an impression of comfort

[16] Nagai, *American Stories*, 4.
[17] Nagai, *American Stories*, 1.

indeed emerges, but only in preparation for Yanagida's story, which is characterized by a sense of optimism from the first sentence.

Conversely, everything about the character that is Kishimoto conjures up unease and self-doubt. After Kishimoto tells his story, one of disillusionment and resignation that contrasts markedly with Yanagida's, the fireside-on-a-winter-night-like atmosphere fades out while the electric lights, previously overlooked, brighten up the stage, and "the clanging of the bell could be heard once again," signaling that the *mis-en-scène* is finished.[18] Once the story is over, light does not manifest itself as a suffused glow, but as all-pervading—and all-disclosing. The men "had grown a little weary of talking and, as if for the first time, looked at the electric lights that were brightening up every corner of the cabin."[19] Roles are no longer confused as the two men go back to their rooms, Yanagida's saying "Good night" in English and mumbling an English poem while his footsteps resonate along the corridor, and Kishimoto's drawing his bed curtain with a "faint sound" before "lying down in his lonely bed," leaving *watakushi* alone in his cabin, still uncertain about the future.[20]

In *Night Talk in a Cabin*, the sea provides an occasion for the first-person narrator's attempt at self-definition in various ways. First of all, its vastness and changeability reflect the unlimited host of possibilities characterizing his condition; further, as a non-place and a transitional space, the ship calls into question social relations, class categories, and other identitarian factors, enhancing the sense of openness (conceived optimistically as hope and pessimistically as anxiety) of his destiny. Ultimately, the space and time of the story (the ship, a closed space able to champion diversity within a reduced horizon, and the night, impeding vision and thus downsizing the effect of appearance and landmarks) emphasize the disorientation of the I-narrator and blur the edges of his and his travel companions' conditions. Thus, the story is a telling example of how the young Kafū inscribed in the landscape themes and concerns that, at the time, he considered of crucial importance. Alongside the juxtaposition of the three characters with the author's personal experience, the interest of *Night Talk in a Cabin* lies, also, in its implicit criticism of the *risshin shusse* discourse. Rather than addressing this powerful ideology directly, Kafū chooses to expose its limits by representing its effects upon the most important thing of all—the lives of men and their states of mind.

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[18] Nagai, *American Stories*, 8.
[19] Nagai, *American Stories*, 8.
[20] Nagai, *American Stories*, 8.

Favoring Intimate Confusion: *A June Night's Dream*

After four years in the United States, Kafū left for France in July 1907, reaching Le Havre on the 27th. *A June Night's Dream* is the narrativization of this crossing; the "wayfarer" of *Night Talk in a Cabin* became, in the short story Kafū wrote while on board, a "wanderer" who, after saying goodbye to the familiar cityscape of New York, was heading toward France, a land that held a complex position in his mental geography.[21] Kafū had loved French literature deeply since the days of his youth in Tokyo and during his sojourn in North America. For him, it represented a land that was both known and unknown at the same time. France is known to Kafū because of his acquaintance with its literature and unknown because he never actually had been there. Thus, one would assume that his journey to France had a twofold status as a (poetic) homecoming and a journey abroad. Indeed, Kafū's experience of France was underpinned by his potent imagery of the country—that made him recognize, rather than acknowledge, places seen for the first time—and a strong tendency to "construct" the West in ways that could fulfil his exoticistic desire.[22]

However, after four years, Kafū did not leave America unchanged. It has been argued that his attitude toward the real France might have been influenced significantly by his stay in the United States, and that sometimes, in his first-hand experience of Europe, he might have felt closer to Americans than to the Japanese.[23] After all, the I-narrator himself claims, "America has now become my second home."[24]

In this story, Kafū displays a Romantic attitude in at least two ways. He implicitly attributes to the ocean the faculty of fostering self-understanding and makes use of natural elements of the seascape, such as mist, haze, and murk, to favor intimate confusion and blur the boundary between dream and reality. As in *Night Talk in a Cabin*, the suspension of the ship enhances this mood and underpins the narrative which, in this story, is one of reverie. In writing *A June Night's Dream*, Kafū was keen to carry over a

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[21] Nagai, *American Stories*, 210.

[22] This happened in Paris especially, where his previous knowledge through literature was enough to activate what Hutchinson has termed a "recognition effect" (Hutchinson, *Nagai Kafū's Occidentalism*, 64). Conversely, his impressions of Lyon are more immediate thanks to lack of information about this city. See also Follaco, *A Sense of the City*, 108; On Kafū's orientalization of the West see Ken K. Itō, *Visions of Desire: Tanizaki's Fictional Worlds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 42-43.

[23] Nakamura, *Nakamura Mitsuo Zenshū*, 49.

[24] Nagai, *American Stories*, 211.

pattern of self-figuration based on the love/art binomial, identified with America and France respectively, which he had established earlier in his sojourn. In addition to Rosalyn, the young lady loved by the I-narrator, another woman, the prostitute Edyth Girard, sustains the self-figuration by featuring prominently in Kafū's American works—which include a travelogue.[25] Kafū's relationship with Edyth often is presented in terms of competition between love and art. When his family finally agreed to let him go to France, Kafū expressed his torment for having to choose between love (Edyth and the U.S.) and literature (France).[26]

The textual rendering of the seascape in *A June Night's Dream* is reminiscent of *Night Talk in a Cabin* because it displays a notion of the *paysage* as a projection of the I-narrator's emotions; at the same time, however, it correlates the atmosphere of suspension with the engendering of narrative in a more sophisticated way. The story has a circular structure, beginning and ending with the unmooring and docking of the ocean liner *Bretagne*. The I-narrator tells the story of his romance with Rosalyn, a short-lived, ephemeral, and yet deep love, whose re-enactment is characterized by continuous movement back and forth between sleep and waking, night and day, dream and reality. Everything, in his narration, emphasizes the overall mood of incertitude and evanescence, and the *paysage* plays a significant part. The narrator comments, "the scorching heat of the July morning was covering sea and sky with a lead-colored vapor, blurring not only the woods and the houses but even the prominent hills like a cluster of trailing clouds."[27] The woods, houses, and hills he is so eager to see are those of New York. It is noteworthy that the fundamental elusiveness of the narrator's romance with Rosalyn is anticipated by the vapor's blurring the scene, whereas until then, the description of the bay had been extremely precise. The transition between the two modes of representation is evident particularly in the following passage:

> High in the July sky, the buildings of New York soar like a strange ridge of clouds; the Brooklyn Bridge, which lies across the sky, is larger than a rainbow; and the Statue of Liberty stands erect in the middle of the water—the familiar scenery of the bay to which I have become accustomed during these years is steadily disappearing between the sky and the waves [, . . .] and soon the ship glides along the deep green shores of Staten Island and is

[25] And, if we believe Hiraiwa, by the author himself: Hiraiwa Akizō, *Saiyūnisshishō no sekai. Nagai Kafū yōkō jidai no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Rokkō shuppan, 1983), 254.
[26] On this subject, refer to Follaco, *A Sense of the City*, 76-77.
[27] Nagai, *American Stories*, 210.

> about to float out into the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean from the strait of Sandy Hook.[28]

Repeated reference to the physical landmarks in the bay area is a strategy to enhance the realism of the description by stressing its materiality; this tendency contrasts sharply with the vagueness of the subsequent narration. The buildings of New York, Brooklyn Bridge, the Statue of Liberty, as well as Staten Island and the barrier spit of Sandy Hook, are architectural and geographical landmarks that stand firmly before the narrator until the sky, the waves, and the "lead-colored vapor" cover them. At this point, as the *Bretagne* sails into the Atlantic Ocean, the displacement begins, bringing with it the occasion to wander through memories and thoughts.

This mode of description that builds on the opposition between realism and reverie is consonant with the I-narrator's ideal of love; he confesses that he eschews marriage because it is so embedded in reality. As the I-narrator divulges, "Reality is my greatest enemy. I long for love, but rather than hoping for its fulfilment, I instead pray that it fails. At its moment of fulfilment, love disappears like smoke, so I hope to spend my whole life just dreaming of true love by means of unattainable or lost love—this is my wish."[29] And this is, indeed, the way Rosalyn, with the city of New York and its material landmarks, disappears from his horizon. The equation between America and love thus is confirmed.

By contrast, there is a further allusion in this story that makes the analogy regarding France and art waver. When he describes his first encounter with Rosalyn, the first-person narrator introduces her in a scene of sonorous self-revelation, as the intermittent sound of piano-playing and a young woman's singing voice.[30] Likewise, when the *Bretagne* is about to reach France, his fantasies are interrupted suddenly by "clamorous voices [. . .] saying they can see the lights of Le Havre," while someone else announces "Nous voilà en France" and, "[i]n the deck area, men and women were beginning to sing 'La Marseillaise.'"[31] France, like Rosalyn, manifests herself aurally rather than visually, suggesting a sense of disorientation (absence of visual references) and ephemerality (sound is inherently transient) and appearing as the "unattainable" love the I-

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[28] Nagai, *American Stories*, 210.
[29] Nagai, *American Stories*, 218-19.
[30] I borrow this definition from Adriana Cavarero's reading of Italo Calvino's "A King Listens" ("Un re in ascolto," 1984). Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 3-4; Nagai, *American Stories*, 215.
[31] Nagai, *American Stories*, 225-26.

narrator wishes for rather than the country the author systematically had opposed to it, considering her the embodiment of his literary aspirations.[32]

A June Night's Dream should be read as a further example of Kafū's romantic attitude and, at the same time, the work that marks its overcoming. The blurred, dreamlike sights of the seascape foreshadow the end of the narrator's delusion that reality can be described and identified through solid categories and definitions, for it no longer matters whether he is Japanese or American, in New York or in Paris, asleep or awake, in love or pursuing his artistic ambition. Everything is transient; the effort at self-definition that was a primary concern at the beginning of his travels four years earlier no longer is the core of his apprenticeship.

An Ocean Full of Landmarks: *Mediterranean Twilight*

After ten months in France, Kafū embarked on the ship that finally would take him from Europe to his native land. The stories *Mediterranean Twilight*, *Desert* (*Sabaku*, 1908), and *Bad Feeling* (*Okan*, 1909), later included in the French collection, recount his itinerary through the Mediterranean and South-East Asia toward Japan and share a common feature: they display the ability Kafū had acquired to interweave original narratives and physical displacements, always remaining balanced between the two. In these pieces, and in the first one in particular, the seascape itself constitutes the textual fabric, with geographical coordinates serving as reference points and marking the edges of the intimate cartography of an author who has reached full maturity and an intellectual awareness of his own position and duties. We might say that *Mediterranean Twilight* summarizes his life and the development of his *écriture* thus far, precognizing his choices and the attitude he would adopt once back in Japan. Some of his former tropes still find a place in the seascape descriptions, with the ocean—sometimes deep, sometimes clear and calm, sometimes rough—encouraging self-reflection or disorienting with its vastness and lack of landmarks. Nonetheless, each "famous place" seen along the way triggers an intertextual reference, and this layering shows just to what extent Kafū, while in France, perfected his ability to "read" space; in other words, now he was capable of fully recognizing landscapes—and aware of the intrinsic value of recognizability. While

[32] Following Hans Jonas: "Sound exists in sequence, every *now* of it vanishing into the past while it goes on [. . .]. Transience is thus of the very essence of the *now* of hearing" (Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* [New York: Harper & Row, 1966], 144).

sailing back to Japan, he recognizes each landscape, and his reflections are framed within a literary, rather than visual, system of reference.

These intertextual references, however, do not follow solely the line established in his earlier reading of space that was influenced by French literature. One of the accomplishments of his French sojourn was the acquired ability to manipulate the symbolic meaning of iconic sights and spaces to inscribe the narratives he cared for in those very sights and spaces.

In the stories examined below, it is Meiji modernization that comes under the most severe scrutiny. *Mediterranean Twilight* deals with the topic of the harmonization of East and West, which Kafū considered impossible.[33] The I-narrator describes the itinerary from the Westernmost part of Europe ("the Gulf of Gascony, [. . .] the shores of Portugal") through the Mediterranean Sea when he finds himself "praying that, by some misfortune, the ship carrying me would be wrecked, or sink."[34] The reason he hopes for such a disaster is that it would mean being rescued by a lifeboat that would take him back to Europe, for he does not want to return to Japan.[35] He looks in the direction of Spain and wonders if over the mountains and the dazzling white houses there lies the Andalusia he knows thanks to Musset and Bizet. He then recalls Mozart's *Don Giovanni*—one of his favorite operas since the American years—and quotes a famous line from Lorenzo Da Ponte's libretto ("Deh, vieni alla finestra, O mio tesoro!") with a Japanese translation.[36] It is clear that, for the I-narrator, the mood conveyed by the words and music of these artists is inscribed perfectly in the *paysage*: the sound of the castanets, the echo of Andalusian girls dancing, and the passionate feelings at the center of Mozart's drama appear in harmony with the burning sun that illuminates the scene. In this section, the landscape seen from the ship and repeated references to pieces of musical drama he was particularly fond of conjure a composite image that reflects his mindscape in the critical moment of his departure from Europe.

This pattern of representation is employed to greater effect in the subsequent section of the story; on the second day, the shores of Algeria

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[33] As revealed also in the story titled "The Sea in Summer" ("Natsu no umi", 1905), where we find the following line: "[O]ur mission as Orientals is not to be drunk with the dreamlike illusion of harmonizing East and West, as someone suggests" (Nagai, *American Stories*, 173).

[34] Nagai Kafū, *Kafū Zenshū*. Vol. 5, ed. Inagaki Tatsurō, Takemori Ten'yū and Nakajima Kunihiko (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1992), 279.

[35] Nagai, *Kafū Zenshū,* 279.

[36] Nagai, *Kafū Zenshū,* 279-80.

come into view, and the I-narrator is so fascinated by the arcane allure of the seascape that he attempts to sing an aria from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, but he can remember only the beginning: "O Lola, bianca come [. . . .]" Thinking it might depend on his scarce knowledge of Italian, he tries with *Tristan und Isolde*, but he cannot recall the tune.[37] He feels disheartened, yet there is more behind his frustration, as he admits, "I belonged to a nation that had no music to express swelling emotions and agonized feelings."[38] The first-person narrator is uncompromising in his position that the new social order represented by the Meiji State is to blame for his frustration: "Meiji civilization has given us endless anguish but no song to convey it. Our emotions are already too far removed from the feudal past to cling to its music, yet we find, however partial our attachment to the West, that differences of climate and manners cannot be easily overcome. We are miserable people."[39] Mitsuko Iriye has rightly observed that this passage "reveals Kafū's preoccupation with the question of how to try to disentangle and reconcile two different cultures which are both true and dear to him but which cannot be artificially fused or superimposed upon one another."[40] And this certainly would be Kafū's paramount concern throughout his "returnee period," *i.e.* the years that followed his return to Japan, during which he was perceived as a sort of advocate for Western learning and lifestyle. His crossing to his homeland, as reflected in the stories he wrote while aboard ship, anticipates future reflection on this topic of intercultural conciliation.

In *Desert*, the first-person narrator is in Port Said, north of the Suez Canal, and his arrival in the Egyptian town is described with a reference to the water itself: "This morning, as I woke up and went on the deck, the beautiful purple-coloured water of the Mediterranean Sea had turned into an incredibly cloudy blue-green."[41] The shades of the water guide the reader down a pathway leading to the space the author has chosen for the textualization of his concerns regarding physical and cultural displacement. An orientalized notion of the desert, obviously influenced by French literature, colors the narrator's fantasy about this space, which he sees as a locus of true liberty, standing between two different cultures—the Arab

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[37] Nagai, *Kafū Zenshū,* 283.
[38] Mitsuko Iriye, "Cultural Uprootedness: A Japanese Case. Nagai Kafū: Twilight in the Mediterranean," in *Modern Asia & Africa*, ed. William H. McNeill and Mitsuko Iriye (London and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1971), 169.
[39] Iriye, "Cultural Uprootedness," 169.
[40] Iriye, "Quest for Literary Resonance," 106-07.
[41] Nagai, *Kafū Zenshū*, 287.

and the European—and belonging to none, thus relieving him of his responsibilities as man, son, and artist, as the following passage implies:

> As long as I am alive, I shall never be able to feel myself—the self that was shaped by external forces—as I can see my shadow. Freedom is an illusion invented by someone else. My parents made me the way they wanted, without ever asking me what I wanted. They made me a Japanese without asking my permission, although I do not know a thing about Japan, the Japanese nation, its way of life [. . .]. My parents, my country: they are both cruel enemies to me. I do not wish to return to Japan. And I do not wish to go back to Europe either. I just want to stay here, like this, forever and ever, staring at my black shadow. At my beautiful, fresh, black shadow. My shadow. The shadow that is so dear to my eyes.[42]

Here, the I-narrator expresses his frustration at being bound to accept decisions taken by others, thus the fundamental idea that individuals are powerless over their destinies. It is this idea, the acknowledgment of his impotence *vis-à-vis* the social life that awaits him in Japan, that ultimately leads to his peculiar *ennui*. The passage quoted above is of great importance because it summarizes Kafū's preoccupations over the social role he will occupy back in Japan, testifying to his anxiety about being a returnee, an enlightened man expected to promote Western learning to contribute to the modernization of the country—a country to which he did not feel he belonged. Indeed, Kafū's returnee opus, imbued with trenchant criticism against the condition of modern Japan, would add a further dimension to the notion itself of "returnee" (*kichōsha*).

The last part of the transoceanic crossing is reported in *Bad Feeling*. The bad feeling, of course, is the narrator's foreboding that he will be ill at ease in Japan, now very close: "The cloudy sky over the Atlantic Ocean, the clear skies above the Mediterranean, the intense heat of the Red Sea, the storms of the Indian Ocean. The ship has just reached Singapore."[43] Along the way, the ship had touched famous places that, the I-narrator recalls, stirred his imagination with reference to the artists who depicted and sang about them in their works: Pierre Loti, Rudyard Kipling, Leconte de Lisle, and so forth. The systematic reference to Western artists not only testifies to the achievement of an "Orientalizing" attitude, but also implies that Kafū is trying hard to break away from a notion of culture and sensibility based on nationhood to position himself within an imagined community of sensitive men who travelled (albeit sometimes only in their

[42] Nagai, *Kafū Zenshū*, 294.
[43] Nagai, *Kafū Zenshū*, 297.

imaginations) around the world and saw inscribed in the landscapes universal, unterritorialized concerns. This is the solution he found to the problem he posed at the beginning of his sojourn abroad: where to position himself. The denial of the idea that belonging should be conceived in terms of nationhood is implied in the episode of the I-narrator's encounter with a Japanese family aboard ship. They are described as totally different from him, reinforcing his sense of estrangement.[44]

The itinerary from France to Japan is, therefore, a journey toward unity and self-definition, although it is conceived within the flimsy framework of artistic sensibility rather than in the confines of race or nationhood. The landmarks the narrator comes across during this journey, as well as the variations of color and texture of the sea, confer a structure, albeit abstracted and fragmentary, on the sense of self that the sojourn abroad has helped to define.

Conclusion

Nagai Kafū spent more time abroad than the majority of Japanese of his generation and, not encumbered by material needs or official appointments, he was relatively free to shape his sojourn in the way that was most congenial to him. This experience provided him with a frame of reference for his reflections on Japan and Japanese patterns of modernization, influencing his critical stance *vis-à-vis* the Meiji State.

The motif of the seascape is a powerful narrative function in the stories analyzed, whose narrators go from implicitly criticizing the *risshin shusse* to questioning Meiji civilization openly, revealing Kafū's maturation as a writer, a man, and an intellectual. The openness of the ocean serves the purpose of emphasizing the problems that modern individuals have to face when they try to find a place in the world. The transition from the endless, empty seascape of *Night Talk in a Cabin* to the seascape full of symbols, in the French stories, testifies to the broadening of his scope that becomes universalistic rather than individualistic. Systematic reference to the imagined seas and coastal towns described by Loti, Kipling, and so forth show that the "place" which is the object of his narrator's quest no longer is conceived as something fixed and determined, nor can it be defined by the current standards of nationhood and "national character"; conversely, one can find one's place in a rather fluid dimension, which entails acknowledging the fundamental transience of reality and the inadequacy of current categories of thought to this reality.

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[44] Nagai, *Kafū Zenshū*, 302-03.

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