



The Liminal Lyrical I in the Poetry of Tawada Yōko and

Arthur Binard

JASMIN BÖHM

Universität Trier

Abstract

This paper compares the position of the speaking subject in the work of two transcultural poets, Tawada Yōko and Arthur Binard. German-Japanese bilingual poet Tawada Yōko establishes a poetics of exophony, which focuses not on a person's entering a new language community, but on the departure from the mother tongue. Through this, the writer becomes free to explore the possibilities of new language(s) and thoughts. To this end, Tawada's poems often construct a lyrical subject removed from the action, belonging to neither of the cultural spheres presented. Using the concept of liminality as developed by Victor Turner, I consider the implications of the liminal subject positions in the poems 観光客 (*kankōkyaku*, *Tourists*, 1987) and チガレット (煙草か) (*chigarette* (*tabako ka*), *Cigarette?*, 2017). In contrast to Tawada, American-born Japanese poet Arthur Binard can more readily be classified as a migrant author, choosing to write exclusively in his acquired language. He engages with topics typical for migrant writing, such as his experiences with Japanese language and culture and his feelings of exclusion. 線 (*sen*, *Lines*, 2000) and タグ (*taggu*, *The Tag*, 2000) also inquire into the confining attribution of (national) identity. This is where I will point out similarities in both writers' transcultural poetry, referencing the model of layered lyrical subjectivity developed by Henrieke Stahl.

Keywords: exophony, Japanese, poetry, transculturality, subjectivity, liminality

© Jasmin Böhm

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

<http://interface.org.tw/> and <http://interface.ntu.edu.tw/>

The Liminal Lyrical I in the Poetry of Tawada Yōko and Arthur Binard

As the number of multilingual writers increases through global migration, global travel and global communication, scholarly interest in border phenomena and their artistic representation also rises (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2007).¹ In this analysis, I plan to show one such phenomenon: the liminal lyrical subject, as it appears in the Japanese–language poems of two contemporary poets. While Tawada Yōko² relocated from Japan to Germany in the 1980s, the American Arthur Binard immigrated to Japan in the 1990s. Reflecting on these fractures in their biographies, both writers construct a liminal subject in their poems. However, Tawada’s text subjects, the ‘voices’ of the poems, elect the in–between space and are empowered by it, whereas Binard’s speakers are more ambiguous regarding the liminal state, and seek to assert themselves by exerting power over their readers.

Using the concepts of lyrical subjectivity as described by Henrieke Stahl and the notion of liminality as developed by Victor Turner, I consider the implications of the liminal subject positions in Tawada’s poems 観光客 (*kankōkyaku*, *Tourists*, 1987) and チガレット (煙草か) (*chigarette* (*tabako ka*), *Cigarette?*, 2017). In these texts, Tawada constructs a lyrical subject removed from the action, as commentator or spectator. It takes part in the poem’s content only tangentially and belongs to neither of the cultural spheres presented, thereby deconstructing the binary. Meanwhile, in the poetry of Arthur Binard, the lyrical subject often acquires liminality through its status as a foreigner. His poems illustrate the struggles of a non–Japanese within Japanese culture, in a more typical ‘migrant literature’ style. But at the same time, Binard’s humour questions a straightforward assignation of this label, and a de-

1 This article was first presented as a paper at the Poetry and Transculturality in Asia and Europe Symposium, Taipei, 22–23rd February 2019.

2 In this essay, Japanese names appear in their original order (family name first).

gree of ambiguity appears desirable for his lyrical subjects. His poems 線 (*sen, Lines*, 2000) and タッグ (*taggu, The Tag*, 2000) also inquire into the confining attribution of borders and of (national) identity. Before the analysis of the four texts, however, I will briefly explain four relevant theoretic concepts: migrant literature, exophony, liminality and the lyrical subject.

‘Migrant literature’ is a term that immediately comes to mind regarding writers in a foreign language context. Professor of German and Comparative Literature Azade Seyhan describes three ‘stages’ of migrant literature, although she acknowledges that they can be mixed in a specific work. The first stage would be for a migrant to report their experiences in their new country, usually in their mother tongue. In the second stage, migrant writers would address their observations of the host country to its natives in the language of the majority (Seyhan, 2001). This is what Binard does in his poems; Tawada uses this stance in her German-language prose work. Japanese studies scholar Florian Gelzer (2000) argues that after 20 years of living in Germany, her stance becomes a pose. Since I work with the basic assumption that the lyrical subject is *always* a construction (see below), the liminal observer would be a pose (a constructed poet persona) of Binard, as well.

Despite his work’s fulfilling Seyhan’s criteria, Binard’s move as a white Westerner towards a non-western culture is an inversion of the usual image of the migrant and thus troubles the categorization of his work as migrant literature. This could also have an impact on his poetics and the poet persona constructed through his poetry, as I discuss below. In particular, the usual power dynamics of the speaking position are disrupted: the subject of a first stage text speaks to an audience of peers, while the second stage features a speaking subject culturally and linguistically removed from its intended audience, which therefore speaks from a position of inferiority. Binard, by contrast, assumes a more empowered position, as I will discuss below.

Seyhan’s third stage of migrant literature uses techniques such as collage and language experiments (Seyhan, 2001). Much of Tawada’s work

I N T E R F A C E

can fit into this third category. However, Tawada actively rejects the attribute of ‘migrant’ writer. Instead, she prefers the term ‘exophony’, which developed to its current meaning in the aftermath of a conference on African literatures she had attended.

As a contrasting term to migrant literature, ‘exophonic’ literature constitutes a move *out of* the native language (instead of *into* a foreign language/culture) in order to discover the artistic potential of language(s). This makes the borderland between languages the origin of creativity (Tawada, 2012, pp. 3, 6–7, 31–32, 35, 2016). I would argue that the inside/out/between dynamic Tawada develops here also applies to the speaking subject in Seyhan’s three stages of migrant literature. While Seyhan’s stage one places the speaking subject into a state of peripheral belonging to their culture of origin (still endophonic), stage two presents them in liminal state between the cultures (exophonic), and the third stage then represents a type of literary empowerment *through* this liminal state and the exophony associated with it. In this way, I connect migrant literature and exophony through the notion of liminality.

Originally coined in anthropology by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, the term ‘liminality’ describes the transitional phase in a ritual, after separation from the social group and before re–entry in a new role. It is an ‘in–between stage which bears features of neither the past nor the future state and enables new, partly disturbing experiences’ and is able to (temporarily) dissolve borders (Warstat, 2005, p. 186, my translation). This concept has gained traction in the humanities, particularly Theatre Studies, through the argument that in aesthetic processes, the irritation or disorientation of a liminal subject is transferred to the audience. This alienation is the artistic experience of liminality, which encourages the questioning of borders, i.e. preconceptions, and may even lead to a change of perspective (Warstat, 2005). In this way, literary liminality could have the same status–changing effect as ritual liminality. Consequently, the liminal state is a position of in–between–ness both empowering and threatening to one’s very identity, and in the following, I use it in this sense.

Authors can choose to construct a liminal speaker (subject) in the text, and I argue that both Tawada and Binard do so in the texts I present below. As the ‘liminal lyrical subject’ is my focus in this analysis, it is relevant to clarify the model of lyrical subjectivity to which I refer. Professor of Russian Studies Henrieke Stahl describes the subject as a given feature of lyrical texts. It emerges from their performativity, so that for centuries, critics have presumed the existence of a ‘lyrical I’ or speaking subject even if it did not appear directly in the poem (Stahl, 2017). The layered narratological model of subjectivity in fiction (character(s), focalizer(s), implied author etc.) is more complex than the notion of a ‘lyrical I’, but its applicability to poetry remains contested, which is why Stahl develops an outwardly similar model based on transcendental philosophy instead (Stahl, 2017).

Stahl differentiates two types of subjectivity, text–external and text–internal. The first type includes constructs such as the abstract or transcendental author as well as the actual person writing (the empirical author), while the second type consists of the character(s)/ experiencing subject(s), the speaking subject (‘text subject’) and the poet persona (‘subject of expression’) (Stahl, 2017, p. 132, 2018). An editorial instance can also exist between the second and the first type of speaker, as either text–external reality or text–internal fiction. Critics may differentiate the instances of subjectivity, if they comment on or contradict each other. However, text–internal subjects can also merge (i.e. the experiencing subject is also the speaker (text subject), which is also the poet persona) (Stahl, 2018).

Comparing the poems of Tawada and Binard illuminates the versatility of the liminal speaking position. The two writers share some similarities, most notably a background of voluntary migration and exophony, i.e. artistic expression in a non-native language. In this context, they both choose a similar – liminal – speaking positions for their poems, and the speakers of their poems reflect on shared themes: experiences of marginalization and the desire to belong. However, the speakers have different goals, as is already apparent from the language choice of both

I N T E R F A C E

authors. Tawada's decision to continue writing in Japanese³ when she is also publishing in German points to her desire for interstitiality, while Binard's focus on writing in Japanese reveals a drive toward recognition in the host culture; the analysis will show how the poems reflect this difference.

The liminality I want to explore in the following poems affects every level of subjectivity. The experiencing subject may live through exclusion (see Binard), the text subject may speak from a liminal perspective (see Tawada), the subject of expression may emerge from the liminal space between languages and cultures (see both authors). This latter aspect of cause has a connection to the real-life border-transgressing situation of the actual poets. However, while connections may exist between the poet persona created by the poem (or series of poems) and the empirical author, they cannot be the same, since the former is created by the text, whereas the latter is always external to it. In other words, the text may evoke a poet persona that resembles the author him/herself closely in situation or biography, but this persona is still a textual construct and not the author him/herself. Despite this, considering the author's biography is necessary to notice such connections, which is why I introduce both authors before I discuss their poems.

1 Tawada Yōko (多和田葉子)

Born in 1960 in Tokyo, Tawada Yōko now lives in Berlin, Germany. She studied Russian Literature at Waseda University, Tokyo, and moved to Germany in 1982 to work at a publisher's in Hamburg. In the following years, she took up the study of German literature at Hamburg University and later completed a doctorate from Zürich University (Krstovic, 2017; Literature Resource Centre, 2010). Her first collection of poetry and prose appeared in 1987, translated from the Japanese by Peter Pörtner. Since 1991, she publishes prolifically in both German and Japanese: poetry, novellas, novels, dramas, radio plays, essays and more.

³ Both poems discussed here were written in Japanese, even though the first one was published in a bilingual edition in Germany.

Her works have won numerous awards such as the Akutagawa– and Tanizaki–Awards in Japan, or the Goethe–Medal, the Kleistpreis and the Erlangen Award for Poetry in Translation in Germany. She has been writer–in–residence at different universities in Europe and the US, and has twice given poetry lectures as guest professor at German universities. Her audience was able to witness her reading both published texts and specific performance pieces at over 1100 events around the globe (*Yoko Tawada*). However, little of her poetry is available in English. The poet herself has translated some for events and performances, and a few translations are online on the platform *Lyrikline*.⁴ Regarding print media, the Chinese edition *A Poem for a Book* 一詩一書 includes some English renditions along with Chinese translations.⁵ However, so far there has been no full translation of any of her poetry collections. All translations to English in this paper are therefore my own.

The first poem I want to consider is 観光客 (*kankōkyaku*, *Tourists*) from Tawada’s 1987 debut collection あなたのいるところだけなにもない/*Nur da wo du bist da ist nichts (anata no iru tokoro dake nani mo nai, Nothing only where you are)* (Tawada, 1987).⁶ The four sections of the poem are distributed across the book on specific salmon–coloured pages, which are not included in the pagination and thus attain special significance. In both languages, the first section of the poem is printed on the first page, doubling as an epigraph, and the last section on the second to last page. Thus, the poem forms a frame for the entire collection.

本当は言っははいけないことだけれど
 ヨーロッパなんて
 ない
 駱駝の行列が
 自分の足跡を踏みながら
 ゆっくり地球をまわっている
 [..]

(1. 5)

4 E.g. the Danish poetry festival ‘Poetry International’, see <https://www.poetryinternational.org/pi/poem/22156/auto/0/0/Yoko-Tawada/THE-FLIGHT-OF-THE-MOON/en/tile>. Retrieved on January 15, 2019. <https://www.lyrikline.org/de/gedichte/diagonal-13800>. Retrieved on January 15, 2019.

5 Cf. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/43183>. Retrieved on January 15, 2019.

6 The text of the poem appears on the front endpaper, a leaf between pp. 32/97 and 33/96, a leaf between pp. 96/33 and 97/32, and the back endpaper. Thus, no page numbers can be given.

I N T E R F A C E

ヨーロッパでは、と男が言いかけると (1. 12)

陽炎の鏡は下痢にかかる

わたしたちはおしゃべりな観光客になろう

ガイドさんは邪教徒の旗をかかげて (1. 15)

土地の名前を呼び続ける

わたしたちは存在の香りを写真に撮り

売り切れたおみやげを腕いっぱいにかかえて

とどかぬ土に涙と情報をふりそそごう

わたしたちの言葉の向こう岸に また (1. 20)

ヨーロッパの木がすくり伸び立つように

大きな声では言えないけれど

わたしたちは もう

それなしには生きられない

You really shouldn't say so, but

there's no such thing

as Europe

A parade of camels

follows their own footsteps (1. 5)

as they slowly round the globe

[...]

in Europe, a man begins to say, (1. 12)

and the reflecting haze gets diarrhoea

Let us become garrulous tourists

the tour guide hoists the heathen flag (1. 15)

and continues to call out place names

we take photographs of the scent of existence

our arms crammed with sold-out souvenirs

let us pour tears and information onto the unreachable earth

on our language's opposite bank, again (1. 20)

the tree of Europe rises high

You shouldn't say it out loud, but

We can no longer

Live without it.⁷

⁷ Tawada, 1987, npn. Translation by the article author.

The first section imparts the notion that ‘there’s no such thing/ as Europe’ (ヨーロッパなんて/ ない, *yōroppa nante/ nai*, ll. 2–3) in a gesture of telling a secret (言っ**て**はいけないことだけれど, *itte wa ikenai koto da keredo*, ‘You really shouldn’t say so, but’, l. 1).⁸ This invites the reader into comradery with the voice of the poem, creating a personal connection between the reader and a speaking subject addressing them. By contrast, in the second section, the speaker remains an observer, and transcends the limited human perspective. The phrase ‘parade of camels’ (駱駝の行列, *rakuda no gyōretsu*, l. 4) employs a cliché image to allude to the global migration movements in the late 20th century, and the limited and formulaic response to it. The comparison of national borders with the sky reveals the constructed nature of borders — because they are based on a human point of view, borders become insignificant once the human perspective is left behind. In the same vein, the poem establishes borders and lines like the horizon as zones, instead of one-dimensional lines. The space within and beyond bordering processes, the in-between, is a central concept in Tawada’s poetics, and lines 5–11 (omitted in the quotation) similarly deconstruct the border images of language and reality. Childlike imagination transcends the limits set by human conceptualizations of the world, (such as the horizon as a line, instead of an area optically compressed). This concept is visualized in the children rope-skipping with the horizon.

The speaker links the faculty of imagination to feminine creativity, especially the woman poet, who gives birth not to children but, through the act of writing, to herself (ll. 9–11). By contrast, the concept of Europe, which Tawada’s speaker colours as masculine, becomes a mirage, ‘the mirror of the heat haze’ (陽炎の鏡, *kagerō no kagami*, l. 13) because, as the poem has asserted in the beginning, Europe does not exist (l. 2–3). That the mirage ‘gets diarrhoea’ (下痢にかか**る**, *geri ni kakaru*, l.13) visualizes a rejection of language as a masculine principle as literal ‘shit-talking’.

However, the lyrical subject does not clearly assign itself to either side

8 Tawada also engages with the constructed image of Europe in an essay that takes its title from this poem: ‘Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen, aber Europa gibt es nicht’ (‘Actually, you are not supposed to tell anyone, but Europe does not exist’, Tawada, 1996, pp. 46–52).

I N T E R F A C E

of the gender binary. Instead, it remains liminal in this regard, as well, and dissolves into an all-encompassing ‘we’ (わたしたち, *watashitachi*, l. 14). This union with the addressee it had hooked in in the first section creates a plural lyrical subject. Liminality is maintained despite the union because this subject identifies as a tourist, which is a transitory and dislocated identity. The tourists are alienated from their surroundings, so much so that their tears cannot reach the soil (l. 19). The ‘sold-out souvenirs’ (売り切れたおみやげ, *urikireta omiyage*, l. 18) they carry symbolize consumerism, which has replaced social connections, such as religion. This becomes clear when the tour guide rises the ‘heathen flag’ to the tourists (l. 15). The selling out of the souvenirs, which indicates a failure of the subject to procure one as a token of belonging to the tourist group, and the rejection of religion, are two additional factors in the speaker’s liminality.

For the Japanese-speaking voice of the poem, Europe is an Other (positioned, as the poem points out, on the opposite side of the globe, l. 20). Yet this self/other dynamic is not merely geographically defined; it is constructed through language, as the man speaking the name of Europe (l. 12) and the verbosity of the tourists (わたしたちはおしゃべりな観光客になろう, *watashitachi wa oshaberi na kankōkyaku ni narō*, l. 14) suggest. Without the Other, there can be no Self, as the final lines claim: ‘we can no longer/ live without it’ (わたしたちは もう/それなしには生きられない, *watashitachi wa mō/ sore nashi ni wa ikirarenai*, ll. 22–3).

The poem comes full circle at the end, returning to the distanced stance of the first lines. This type of framing represents the greater and more encompassing viewpoint of the liminal speaker. The focus in this last part is directly on language: since the speaking subject exists beyond linguistic and cultural belonging, it can see the ‘other bank’ of language (言葉の向こう岸, *kotoba no mukō gishi*, l. 20). Their liminality is essential to the understanding of Europe as a construct. Nevertheless, they remain dependant on the image, unable to ‘live without it’. The idea of Europe arises from beyond any particular language as a trans-lingual, trans-cultural concept that has become necessary as self/other. Despite its constructed nature, it is essential to the construction

of subjects — even ones so transpersonal, de-localized, transitory (in short, liminal) as this poem’s speaker. While this speaker’s liminality is geographic as much as linguistic, the next poem I discuss focuses more on language and social spheres.

When she was writing ‘Kankōkyaku’, Tawada was a peripheral member of the German language community she lived in, a language-learning immigrant, which may have lead her to first consider a liminal speaking position. In the following decades, she has become an accomplished writer and speaker in her second language. Nevertheless, the liminal speaking position remains an important device in her poetics, as its application in following, the 30 years younger poem reveals. Like the exophonic stance, liminality becomes a conscious choice, a speaking position she can adopt in any of her languages.⁹

Tawada’s 2017 poem チガレット (煙草か) (*chigarette (tabako ka), Cigarette?*) is part five of the book-length poetry series シュタイネ (*shutaine*, a transliteration of the German ‘stones’). In the collection, every poem’s title is a transliteration of a German noun, followed by its bracketed translation into Japanese marked with a question particle (Tawada, 2017, pp. 29–32). Thus, by the titles alone, a poetic persona emerges which positions itself in the liminal border region of translation, between German and Japanese.

このおっさんの隣にしばし留まっていたい
 煙さ冷え切って
 にかい
 干からびた男たちの集まる焦げたにおい
 おむつの湿った塩っぼさから逃げて (1. 5)
 [...] 昨日の新聞みたいにインクが乾いて
 鼻の奥が痛い (1. 10)
 プラットホームがマイホーム
 巨大なアイロン電車が入ってきて
 両開きの鉄の扉が開き

9 For instance, in her Japanese novel 飛魂 (*Hikon, Flying soul*, 1998), Tawada uses metaphorical expressions that sound like literal translations from another language, as she notes in her essay 言語の狭間 (*genko no hasama*, lit. *The gap of language*, 1999, p. 74). This constitutes an exophonic style, even in her mother tongue.

I N T E R F A C E

夏休みが生産したみずみずしい
 少年たち [...] (1. 15)
 笑いかけてきても (1. 22)
 見向きもせずに
 煙草と睦(むつ)まじく見つめ合っている
 土色の顔をしたおっさん (1. 25)
 の隣にわたしは
 もう少しだけ
 すわっていたい

Next to this old guy I want to stay for a while
 Smoke going cold
 bitter
 the burnt smell of dried-up men gathering
 who fled from the salty moisture of diapers (1. 5)
 [...] dry like the ink of yesterday's newspaper
 the back of the nose hurts (1. 10)
 the platform is ,my 'home'
 giant iron, the train rolls in
 iron double doors open
 to summer's fresh batch
 of boys [...] (1. 15)
 even if they laugh at him (1. 22)
 he does not lift his eyes
 from the exchange of loving gazes with his cigarette
 The old guy with the earthen face (1. 25)
 next to whom I
 just for a little while longer
 want to sit.¹⁰

In addition, *Cigarette?* resembles *Tourists*, because its voice portrays two levels of liminality: a liminal observer describes a liminal object. While, in the earlier poem, the liminal object was tourists, here the voice evokes a man or group of men, lingering on a train platform,

¹⁰ Tawada, 2017, 29-32. Translation by the article author.

which is a place of transit and thus a liminal space.¹¹ These character(s) could be salarymen avoiding a return to a family home (with diapers and laughing children) where they feel out of place. Alternatively, they could be homeless people who have no *home* to go to but the platform (プラットフォームがマイホーム, *purattohōmu ga mai hōmu*, l. 11), a play on sound typical of Tawada’s work. The use of the full term *purattohōmu* is significant here, as it is usually abbreviated to *hōmu* in everyday speech, making the connection to the anglicism *maihōmu* (‘my home’) obvious.

An opposition emerges through the poem: Whether homeless or salarymen, the characters are associated with dryness and fire: they are described as ‘dried’ and having a ‘burned smell’ (干からびた男たちの集まる焦げたにおい, *hikarabita otoko-tachi no atsumaru kogeta noioi*, l. 4), and are associated with the drying newspaper ink (インクが乾いて, *inku ga kawaite*, l. 9). This imagery contrasts with the humidity attributed to homes and children as ‘wet saltiness of diapers’ and the ‘boys fresh as splashing water’ (おむつの湿った塩っぼさ, *omutsu no shimetta shioppo-sa*, l. 5; みずみずしい/少年たち, *mizumizushii shōnen-tachi*, ll. 14-15) .

The lyrical voice, however, is liminal: It identifies with neither realm, not even the also liminal space of the platform, and only establishes a temporary (もう少しだけ, *mō sukoshi dake*, l. 27), one-sided comradeship with the men in that liminal space. Unlike the text subject of ‘Tourists’, the liminal speaker of *Cigarette?* assigns themselves to neither side of the described binary male/adult/work/fire and female/child/home/moisture. Instead, it empathizes and observes, disconnected. Nevertheless, both poems position the speaking voice as a liminal subject and thus in a position to question binary oppositions (Europe/Asia, migrant/tourist, insider/outsider, gender). Again, the liminal position of the text subject empowers it to criticize and deconstruct, but it also isolates it. With Binard’s poetry, the situation is different, as I will demonstrate in the following section.

¹¹ For the specific (liminal?) status of places of transit as ‘non-places’, see Augé and Bischoff, 2012, pp. 83, 90.

2 Arthur Binard (アーサー・ビナード)

Arthur Binard was born in 1967 in Michigan, USA. He studied American English Literature at Colgate University, New York, and developed an interest in languages as he lived in both Italy and India. While writing his final assignment, he grew interested in Chinese characters, and moved to Japan after his graduation in 1990. Besides visiting a language school and supporting himself by teaching English, he practiced Japanese by translating children's literature in a local library (Binard & Tanaka, 2006, 104–6; Mami, 2011 (June 21)). His debut poetry collection 釣り上げては (*tsuriagete wa, Catch and Release*) appeared in 2000; with it, he became the first foreigner to win the Nakahara Chūya Poetry Award. In the following year, the work appeared in Binard's own translation into English.¹² Since then, he has published prose and poetry in Japanese as well as translations. He also works as a radio host (Binard & Tanaka, 2006). In public lectures, Binard takes a firm stance as a political activist against atomic weapons and nuclear power.

I discuss two examples from Binard's debut collection here, the first of which is 線 (*sen, Lines*; Binard, 2000, pp. 14–15). In this text, three poems are embedded in a prose (con)text, similar to classical Japanese literature. However, these poems are free verse, and their difference to the prose surroundings emerges mainly through the layout. One could make a case that the experiencing subject of the poems is immediately in the situation, whereas the subject narrating the prose parts is a later, reflective instance, a text subject.

ひしめき合う店と家とアパートに挟まれながらも (1. 7)
このアスファルトの黒無地の一帯には
それなりの〈無限〉があった。

[...]

いつも歩いている (1. 18)

自分ばかりの幅を持った〈私道〉には
線を引かずにいきたい。 (1. 20)

¹² Unfortunately, I could not acquire a copy. The English translations from Binard's poems in the following are therefore my own.

BÖHM

そう思いながら、真っ白な一丁に、たっぷりと醤油をたらす。

Pinched as it was between the jostling shops and houses and
flats (l. 7)

This strip of black, unmarked asphalt
had had a certain ‘infinity’ to it.

[..]

The path I always walk (l. 18)

which only is as wide as myself:

on my ‘private way’, (l. 20)

I want to walk without drawing lines.

So I thought, as I generously poured soy sauce onto the pure
white tofu block.¹³

One hint towards this is that the speaking voice of the prose text refers to a softly masculine ‘I’ (*boku*, 僕, in the opening prose section not cited here), but there is no direct mention of an ‘I’ as grammatical subject in the poems themselves. This is not unusual for Japanese texts, but it may support my assumption of two distinct speakers. In any case, the description of the route to the shop and the choice of silk tofu for lunch associate a local, i.e. Japanese, speaker. Indeed, after the collection won the Nakahara Award, critics praised the everyday feeling and Japanese perspective of Binard’s poems (Arakawa, 2001; Kitakawa, 2001; Sasaki, 2001). By contrast, the speaker of the poems is more aloof and critical.

The poem’s theme of drawing lines associates bordering processes and exclusion. The lines on the road impose difference where ‘infinity’ (無限, *mugen*, l. 9) had been before. The lyrical subject rejects these lines and moves physically beyond them, finally balancing on top of one (l. 13). The rejection of borders—‘on my ‘private way’ /I want to walk without drawing lines’ (〈私道〉には/線を引かずにいきたい, (*shidō*) *ni wa/sen wo hikazu ni ikitai*, ll. 19–20)—symbolically repeats itself in the last image of the text, as the lyrical subject pours black soy sauce onto white silk tofu. Poet and essayist Sasaki Mikirō sees Binard’s talent revealed

13 Binard, 2012, pp. 14-15. Translated by the article author.

I N T E R F A C E

in this last line, where the doubling of a block of tofu and a city block in the term ‘chō’ (丁) connects the image with the senses (Sasaki, 2001, p. 50). In my interpretation, however, the experiencing subject’s act of pouring black soy sauce onto the white tofu becomes a counter-image for the white lines drawn on the black road. The speaker symbolically erases these lines and thus categorical borders in general, so that he is no longer ‘defined far too clearly’ (あまりにハッキリする, *amari ni hak-kiri suru*, l. 12, not quoted in the extract above). Therefore, the subject of expression emerges from the contrast between experiencing subject and text subject, and positions itself *beyond* the border between those who belong (Japanese, such as the experiencing subject) and those who feel they do not (foreigners, such as the empirical author), as a hybrid poetic persona. The topic of assimilation becomes more overt in the next poem I discuss, the free verse piece タッグ (*taggu*, *The Tag*, Binard, 2000, pp. 16–17).

The Tag is a ‘punchline-poem’ in that its last line constitutes a witty return to the first image of peanut butter, which ironically undercuts the expressed desire for assimilation. Japanese critics Arakawa and Kitakawa both mention Binard’s engaging use of humour. Sasaki specifically voices his surprise that Binard uses a Japanese, not American, style of humour, and acknowledges Binard’s Japanese-language perspective (Arakawa, 2001; Kitakawa, 2001; Sasaki, 2001). Binard himself identifies as a ‘日本語人’ (*nihongojin*, ‘Japanese-language-person’) because he would not be seen as Japanese (日本人, *nihonjin*) even if he changed his citizenship status (Binard & Itō, 2017). This may also be the background of the hybrid subject of expression in this poem: Linguistically Japanese, but visually American.

よく見ると 100% CottonのこのTシャツって (l. 7)
マカオ出身だったのか。
たびかさなる出入国と洗濯でくたびれて やっと
〈MADE IN〉というアイデンティティから解放された。 (l. 10)
自らの〈タッグ〉も
ぼくは長いこといじくっている。
取れたかと思うと
ひょんなところで また顔を出す。

If you look closely, well, this 100% cotton T-shirt (l. 7)
 originally came from Macao.
 Worn out from bordercrossing and washing repeatedly. Finally
 it was freed from its ‘Made In’ identity. (l. 10)
 With my own ‘tag’, too/
 I’ve been fiddling for quite some time.
 If I think it has come loose
 unexpectedly, it shows up again.¹⁴

The speaker identifies with a T-shirt, which has travelled the world from America to Italy to Ikebukuro (a district of Tokyo) with him, and which has now lost its ‘tag’, the marker of its origin. The use of the term ‘出身’ (*shusshin*, l. 8) for ‘origin’ emphasizes the personification of the T-Shirt, because this word is normally used for human beings. As the T-Shirt is 100% cotton, the speaker is (originally) 100% American, but due to his extended travels, this label (tag) has lost much of its relevance.¹⁵ The tearing of the tag, however, occasions the speaker to contemplate his (ぼく, *boku*, l. 1, omitted above) own difficulty in dissociating from his American origins: ‘取れたかと思うと/ひょんなところで また顔を出す’ (*toreta ka to omou to/hyon na tokoro de mata kao wo dasu*, ‘If I think it has come loose/ unexpectedly, it shows up again’, ll. 13–14). The lyrical subject of ‘Tag’ is ultimately ambivalent toward the process of assimilation. On the one hand, he states a desire to be free of his nationality, on the other he remains loyal to it, as evidenced by its desire for peanut butter, which forms the final punchline. The structure of the poem implies that true assimilation is not feasible, or at least not desired by the lyrical subject. This puts the subject in a liminal, in-between position: He has integrated into the host culture, but not completely dissociated himself from his origin.

Fitting with the cultural hybridity of its lyrical subject, the poem includes foreign terms in Katakana as well as Arabic numerals and Roman let-

¹⁴ Binard, 2012, pp.16-17. Translated by the article author.

¹⁵ I thank professor of Japanese Studies Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt for pointing out the relevance of the choice of ‘出身’ and ‘100%’ to me.

I N T E R F A C E

ters and thus calls to attention the hybridity of the Japanese script.¹⁶ In this way, the subject of expression reflects visually the speaker's growing distance from America, most noticeably in line 10. Here, the script moves from the Roman letters and English language of 'MADE IN' to アイデンティティ (*aidentiti*, 'identity'), an English word that functions as a Japanese loan word in Katakana, and finally to 'release' (解放, *kai-hō*), a Sino-Japanese term written in Kanji. The experiencing, speaking subject desires a release from his Western origin into the Japanese (language) along the same trajectory.

At the same time, the poetic persona empowers itself, firstly by mastering the language and secondly by determining, in the poem itself, how it expects readers to understand it. In other words, the lyrical subject lays out the intended interpretation in the poem itself, merging the text subject (voice) with the subject of expression (the poetic persona). Binard is an atypical 'migrant writer' because of his privileged background as a white Western male. Perhaps this results in a certain confidence or sense of entitlement on part of the poet persona, which leads it to attempt controlling the interpretation of the poems.

3 Comparison and Conclusion

So far, it has become apparent that Tawada uses liminality to empower the text subject—the voice of the poem—as a trans-categorical entity. The two poems I analyse were published 20 years apart, so their common tones suggest that this is a continuing feature in Tawada's poetry. By contrast, Binard's poems emphasize a subject of expression (a poet persona) who empowers himself by asserting his mastery of the Japanese language (and culture, as the local knowledge and food choice of the speaker of 'Lines' suggest), and by controlling the interpretation of his poems despite the ambiguity of the text subject. A potential reason for this different stance is the difference in Tawada and Binard's poetics. Binard sees language as a means, whereas Tawada puts it centre stage.

¹⁶ Journalist Taylor Mignon claims that 'Tag' is one of the few poems in the collection originally written in English (Mignon, 6 June, 2001); this older version would possibly be less effective due to less options in the choice of script.

For example, Binard speaks of language in mechanical terms, calling it a ‘vehicle’ or ‘toolbox’ (Binard & Nakausa, 2015, my translation; Mami, 2011 (June 21)). Such a view of language is typical for migrant writers (Seyhan, 2001). Tawada instead emphasizes a sense of discovery rather than mastery. ‘Perhaps, I don’t want to become an author who writes in languages A and B, but fall into the poetic ravine I might find between them’ (Tawada, 2012, pp. 31–32, my translation), she states in her poetological essay collection *Ekusophonī*.

In all four poems, the lyrical subject works with and from a liminal position, but the use it is employed for is different. Tawada’s multi-layered poems foreground the voice of the poem as a subject who chooses the liminal position to break up dichotomies. Because she moves out of language/culture, she qualifies as an exophonic writer. By contrast, Binard’s poetry creates similarities by metaphor, then explains them. As a result, his poems focus on a poet persona directing his Japanese readers’ understanding. In Tawada’s case, the empowerment is directed out of the (one) language, exo-phonic, into the realm of poetic creation (Tawada, 2016). Contrastingly, Binard’s lyrical subject directs it inward, into the language and culture of the host country and into its own sense of control. Nevertheless, in the poems discussed here, the lyrical subject self-consciously positions itself in a liminal position and uses the creative potential of merging cultures for poetic effect, creating cultural hybridity.¹⁷

17 I plan to elaborate on the relation of Tawada’s in-between and Bhabha’s Third space in my doctoral thesis.

References

- Arakawa, Y. (2001). Nihongo no sekai (日本語の世界). *Yuriika* (ユリイカ), 33(4), 48–49.
- Augé, M., & Bischoff, M. (2012). *Nicht-Orte* (3rd ed.). Beck'sche Reihe: Vol. 1960. Beck.
- Binard, A. (2000). *Tsuriagete wa* (釣り上げては) (Shohan). Shichosha (思潮社).
- Binard, A., & Itō, Y. (2017, November 29). *Āsā Binādo gogo no sanmai oroshi* (アーサー・ビナード午後の三枚おろし): Jūchigatsu sanjūnichi (11月30日) [radio broadcast]. 文化放送 (Bunka Hōsō)/Nippon Cultural Broadcasting. Retrieved on January 15, 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxNwh9O84rl>. [The video has since been deleted.]
- Binard, A., & Nakausa, Y. (2015). Shijin Āsā Binādo (詩人アーサー・ビナード): The Person. *GALAC/ギャラク*, 223, npn.
- Binard, A., & Tanaka, T. (2006). Kioku wo tsuriageru (記憶を釣り上げる): Āsā Binādo (アーサー・ビナード). *Haidan* (俳壇), 23(4), 104–113.
- Gelzer, F. (2000). “Sprachkritik bei Yoko Tawada”. *Waseda Blätter*, 7, 73–101.
- Kitakawa, T. (2001). Semegiau gengo no chikara (せめぎあう言語の力). *Yuriika* (ユリイカ), 33(4), 49–50.
- Krstovic, J. (2017). “Yoko Tawada (1960-): Introduction”. *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, 414, 167–169.
- Literature Resource Centre. Yoko Tawada. Gale: *Contemporary Authors Online*. Retrieved on May 24, 2020 from <https://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=waseda&v=2.1&id=-GALE%7CH1000194320&it=r&asid=997ff84eec81de6a264a1e-728a5409ed>.
- Mami, M. (2011 (June 21)). Poet draws on senses to give words life. *The Japan Times*. Retrieved May 24, 2020 from <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2011/06/21/our-lives/poet-draws-on-senses-to-give-words-life/#.XD37oWkxmUm>.
- Mignon, T. (6 June, 2001). American Poet wins Chuya Nakahara Prize. *The Japan Times*. Retrieved May 24, 2020 from <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2001/06/06/arts/american-po->

- [et-wins-chuya-nakahara-prize-2/#.XDMdOTBKiUI](#).
- Pogatschnigg, G.-A. (2004). "Rollenprosa: Yoko Tawada als deutsche Schriftstellerin". In M. Tsuchiya & G.-A. Pogatschnigg (Eds.), *Yoko Tawada* (多和田葉子): *Schreiben im interkulturellen Zwischenraum* (越境文化の中間地帯で書くこと) (pp. 33–50). Sankeisha (三恵社).
- Sasaki, M. (2001). 'Nihongojin' toshite no shi (「日本語人」としての詩). *Yuriika* (ユリイカ), 33(4), 50–51.
- Schimanski, J., & Wolfe, S. (2007). "Entry Points: An Introduction". In J. Schimanski & S. Wolfe (Eds.), *Troll - Tromsøer Studien zur Kulturwissenschaft: Vol. 9. Border poetics de-limited* (pp. 9–26). Wehrhahn.
- Seyhan, A. (2001). *Writing outside the Nation. Translation, transnation*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7s8h3>.
- Stahl, H. (2017). "Towards a Historical Typology of the Subject in Lyric Poetry". *Journal of Literary Theory*, 11(1), 125–135. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jlt-2017-0014>.
- . (2018). "Typologie des Subjekts in der Lyrik: Ein transzendentalphilosophisch begründetes Modell", 29 p. (Unpublished essay).
- Tawada, Y. (1987). *Nur da wo du bist da ist nichts / Anata no iru tokoro dake nanimo nai* (あなたのいるところだけなにもない) (5 (2015)). Konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke.
- . (1996). *Talisman* (8 (2015)). Konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke.
- . (1998). *Verwandlungen: Tübinger Poetik-Vorlesungen* (2 (2018)). Konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke.
- . (1999). "Gengo no hazama" (言語の狭間). *Waseda Bungaku* 3, 24(2), 66–74.
- . (2012). *Ekusofonī* (エクソフォニー): *Bogo no soto he deru tabi* (母語の外へ出る旅). Iwanami shoten (岩波書店).
- . (2016). Rede zum Kleistpreis 2016. Konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke. Retrieved May 24, 2020 from <http://www.konkursbuch.com/html/net%202016herbst/reden%20kleist/yoko%20tawada-KleistPreisrede.pdf>.
- . (2017). *Shutaine* (シュタイネ). Seidōsha (青土社).
- Warstat, M. (2005). "Liminalität". In E. Fischer-Lichte, D. Kolesch,

I N T E R F A C E

& M. Warstat (Eds.), *Metzler Lexikon Theatertheorie* (pp. 186–188). J.B. Metzler.

Yoko Tawada: The Official Homepage: Information about Yoko Tawada's Life Books Events Projects and News. Retrieved May 24, 2020 from <http://yokotawada.de/>.

[received March 19, 2020
accepted June 10, 2020]

