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Toddler-Hunting in Wartime: Kōno Taeko's "On the Inside"

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As late as the spring of 1944, Welfare Minister Koizumi Chikahiko spoke against the drafting of women: "Although in Germany and among enemy countries women are conscripted," he said, "out of consideration for the family system, we will not draft them."¹

When I was at my most beautiful
The dead piled up all around
In factories, at sea, on nameless islands
Any excuse to get all dressed up was long gone.

Ibaragi Noriko, "When I Was at My Most Beautiful" (1957)²

Introduction: Representing War

In a *taidan* (public discussion) with Yamada Eimi 山田詠美 (b. 1959), Kōno Taeko 河野多恵子 (1926–2015) describes her experience of living in Manhattan on the day that the World Trade Center's twin towers fell. This dialogue began serialization in the literary journal *Bungakkai* (文學界 2001–2007) the same year as the terrorist attacks and was later published in book form as *Bungaku mondō*. Here two women writers of very different generations and backgrounds share stories about America, life, war, and literature, and soon turn to the subject of 9.11 ("Let's Tell the Truth About War: From New York and Military Bases").³ Yamada relays how family on her husband's side died in 9.11. She evokes the trauma of loved ones' bodies never recovered, and friends unable to protect their children from the sight of people falling from crumbling skyscrapers.⁴ In turn, Kōno describes how that day began for her with a series of strange disruptions: someone she was supposed to meet never showed up, and she was unable to reach anyone by phone. Hours later she learned of the attack on the news. Living on the forty-first floor of a high-rise apartment building on the Upper West Side, she and her artist husband, Ichikawa



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(“Henry”) Yasushi 市川泰 (1925–2012), witnessed from the building’s rooftop the huge plumes of dark smoke emanating from the disaster in lower Manhattan. Memories of wartime Japan resurfaced.⁵

What does it mean to represent war as an artist, and to represent war in one’s own life story as both its witness and active participant? How do gender and sexuality shape such representations? What roles should aesthetics and fictionalization play in documenting war? Kōno’s wartime experiences shaped her as a writer, just as 9.11 inspired her husband Ichikawa’s abstract oil painting entitled “September 11, 2001” (Figure 1).

One year later, that painting would grace the cover of Kōno’s essay collection, *Omoigakenai koto* (思いがけないこと The unexpected, 2002).⁶ Questions about representing war inform this essay’s approach to “Hei no naka” (塙の中 “On the Inside,” 1962), a vital story in Kōno Taeko’s quasi-autobiographical writing of her wartime experiences.⁷ I contend that her postwar writing is centrally concerned with representing the ways that war both reveals and warps the social fabric and individual psyches long after war is over. Ichikawa exemplifies this claim, one might say, in creating hundreds of untitled war paintings after the triggering event of 9.11. Ichikawa had studied art as a student and after the war took up painting (洋画 *yōga*) as a vocation, teaching art and participating in artists’ cooperatives. During WWII, he served as a soldier and was later promoted to second lieutenant (少尉 *shōi*) in the Imperial Navy. Based in Sasebo in 1945, he witnessed first-hand the immediate aftermath of the atomic bombing in Nagasaki where he was sent to help the wounded and handle the dead.⁸ From 2001 he began to paint what he had witnessed there, telling his niece that the smell of 9.11 reminded him of the smell of Nagasaki, awakening in him the need to express what he knew about war.⁹

Kōno’s wartime experiences had a profound impact on her as a writer, so it is hardly incidental that she chose a life partnership with a man who had also experienced war first-hand and expressed it in his art. Most of Ichikawa’s oil paintings fall into two dramatically different styles, with “September 11, 2001” being something of an outlier. His earlier travel and landscape paintings show the influence of Western art and are generally representational, deft in their simple architectural lines, emphasis on light, and use of pastel watercolors or bright oils. His portrait of Kōno Taeko (Figure 2) provides a recognizable shape and then a defining gesture or set of details to represent his subject without being strictly realistic.¹⁰ His later paintings of atomic bomb (原爆 *genbaku*) victims swerve into altogether different territory, however, adopting violently expressionistic qualities.

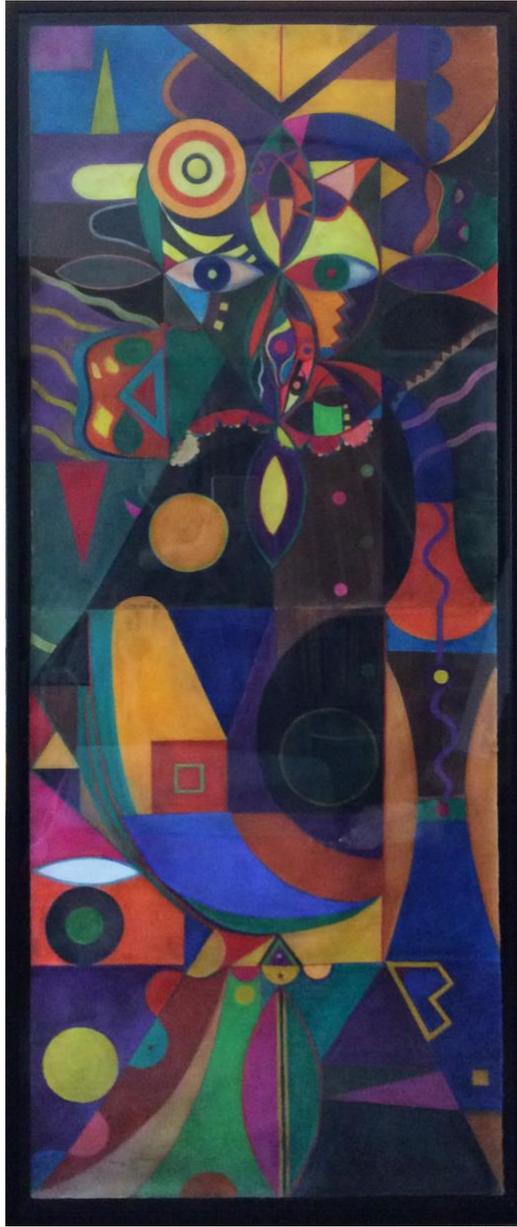


Figure 1. "September 11, 2001" (2011), Henry Ichikawa. Courtesy of the Kōno Taeko estate.



Figure 2. Untitled, undated portrait of Kōno Taeko, Henry Ichikawa. Courtesy of the Kōno Taeko estate.

These compositions frequently contrast distant bright yellow suns or flashes of light with murky deep red and brown human figures in the foreground, as if covered in blood or burned flesh. In one haunting painting, a human form has been disfigured and burned beyond recognition, but the startling white of human eyes gaze out of a painful corporeal shell (Figure 3). Another painting is unusual among all of Ichikawa's *genbaku* works, exhibiting characteristics of both his *genbaku* expressionistic style and the abstract two-dimensional shapes and vibrant colors in "September 11, 2001"; indeed, this painting's composition literally divides the canvas into two planes, the upper half abstract and geometric while the lower half dramatizes the representational figure of a woman crouched over and embracing her dead child in a posture suggestive of death and childbirth simultaneously (Figure 4). Here a motif

recurs in Ichikawa's *genbaku* style and his abstract 9.11 painting: a persistent return to "eyes." Eyes remind the viewer of the living human still trapped in a destroyed body, and at other times demands that both the artist and the viewer bear witness to war, as in the tower-like geometric figure reconstructed of exploded fragments in "September 11, 2001." Strikingly, the eye figures prominently on the cover that Ichikawa illustrated for Kōno's most autobiographical of fictional works built around her wartime youth, a quartet of stories collected into the single volume, *Tōi natsu* (遠い夏 A distant summer, 1977) (Figure 5).¹¹

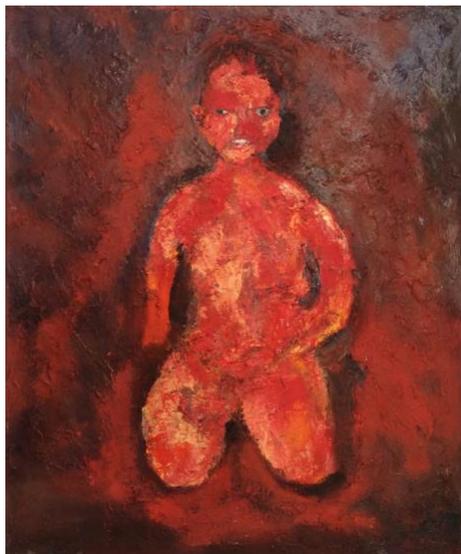


Figure 3. Untitled, undated *genbaku* painting, Henry Ichikawa. Courtesy of the Kōno Taeko estate.

Roughly chronological with Kōno's wartime childhood and youth growing up in Osaka, each of the stories in *Tōi natsu* weaves fictions around historical and autobiographical kernels. Beginning with "Michishio" (みち潮 Full tide, 1964) set the year before the invasion of China in 1937 when Kōno was eleven years old, the collection continues with "Toki kitaru" (時来たる The time will come, 1977), set between 1936 and the date of June 1945 that appears in the first line of "Hei no naka," the third story and focus of this essay. The final title story, "Tōi natsu" (遠い夏 A distant summer, 1964) picks up where "Hei no naka" leaves off to cover the last months as the war comes to a close.¹²



Figure 4. Untitled, undated *genbaku* painting, Henry Ichikawa. Courtesy of the Kōno Taeko estate.

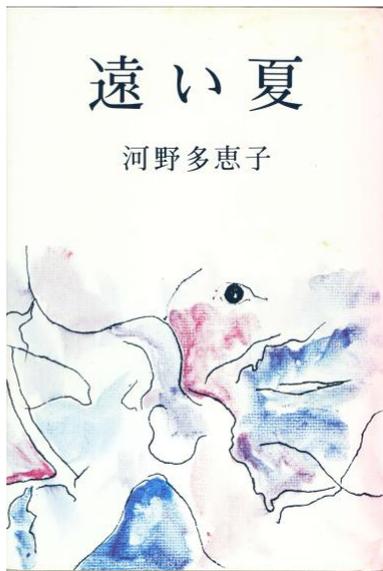


Figure 5. Untitled, undated dust jacket artwork for *Tōi natsu* (1977), Henry Ichikawa. Courtesy of the Kōno Taeko estate.

In closely reading Kōno's "Hei no naka," I bring to bear the ways in which the author's life informs and at times intersects with her fiction and literary aesthetic. My aim, simply put, is to explore what it means for Kōno to represent war. In doing so, I pursue questions of the distorting forces of war on society and gendered power relations. Wartime enables a particularly visible manifestation of what Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (b. 1942) calls the "state of exception," when the state justifies the legal abuse or suspension of the law for extralegal or authoritarian ends.¹³ Such a state of exception not only excuses atrocities on the battlefield but also creates the conditions for a proliferation of corruptions, lies, and perversions on the home front and in everyday life that may not end with the end of war.¹⁴ Historian Chalmers Johnson argues for an ongoing state of exception that continued into the postwar with the Cold War's expansion of military bases around the world, all brought into bright focus on 9.11.¹⁵

That women and children serve as staple subjects of wartime fiction and art reminds us of not only a powerful anti-war message in such representations (amply visible in Ichikawa's *genbaku* paintings) but also, paradoxically and simultaneously, of a profoundly militaristic and formulaic one too that demands that sacrifices in the name of everyday home and family be presented in propagandistic ways to provoke sentimental patriotism. This paradox creates a kind of representational trap for women writers like Kōno struggling to represent the realities of war beyond simplistic lines of victimhood and oppression, as a matrix of individual lived experience and traumatic memory constituted within larger overlapping forces and contradictory laws and ideologies.

Cited in an epigraph to this essay is an oft-cited example of such a lived contradiction for Japanese citizens during the war: bordering on hypocrisy, Welfare Minister Koizumi in 1942 boasted of the Japanese government's policy line of protecting women in direct contradiction of the reality. To openly recognize the need for women's labor would mean going against military propaganda about a paternalistic war carried out to protect the family.¹⁶ The dissonant reality was that the 1939 National Conscription Ordinance (国民徴用令 *kokumin chōyō rei*) required everyone to register for the draft, and targeted males 16–40 years old, females 16–25 years old, along with girls who were unmarried or unemployed.¹⁷ By early 1944, conscription expanded to include males 12–60 years old, and females 12–40 years old, unmarried, or widowed.

Various women's, patriotic, and volunteer organizations such as the Women's Volunteer Corps (女子挺身隊 *Joshi teishintai*), moreover, had long harassed and pressured girls into "volunteering," a practice that escalated with the government's backing from 1944.¹⁸ These policies meant that Kōno herself could be mobilized for labor and sacrificed for the war effort along with boys and men conscripted as soldiers. Kōno was able to commute from home for factory work but, as described in "Hei no naka," many others were forced to live in dormitories at factories cut off from their families. It lies beyond the scope of this essay to lay out the full history of general conscription, student mobilization (学生勤労働員 *gakusei kinrō dōin*), and the evacuation (学童疎開 *gakudō sokai*) of children during the war, much less to do justice to the rich scholarship of Jerome Cohen and Yoshiko Miyake 三宅義子 in this area.¹⁹ Suffice to say that although the official policy was that women were never conscripted, their actual mobilization functioned to expose one characteristic of the state of exception during Japan's war years: more women were conscripted in Japan by war's end than in Germany, if fewer than in Britain.²⁰ What began as registration in 1939 became "volunteering" and small-scale mobilization of students from 1943, and turned into 3.4 million students mobilized for labor by 1945.²¹

"Hei no naka," first published in 1962 in mentor Niwa Fumio's 丹羽文雄 (1904-2005) literary journal *Bungakusha* (文學者 Literati), is set on the outskirts of an unnamed city and tells the story of school girls mobilized to a factory in the last months of the war.²² It dramatizes the kinds of complicities and deceits that operate in tandem with contradictory realities and blatant sloganeering in wartime Japan. Kōno reproduces, and questions, the rhetoric of just causes and righteous victors from the viewpoint of girls caught up in war to show how, in a very real sense, no one wins in war, no matter how it ends; at the same time, no one escapes complicity even as all are deformed by its half-truths and bald lies.

This essay builds on previous scholarship that considers in depth the psychoanalytical concepts and literary qualities of Kōno's masochistic aesthetic. It seeks to open new lines of inquiry about how Kōno's experience of war inflected her representations of sadistic violence against women and children, masochistic and eroticized power dynamics in heterosexual and familial relations, and the gendered dimensions of national identity in the "everyday" life of not only wartime Japan but in its postwar, including the Occupation era. Ichikawa Henry obsessively painted with one kind of "eye" on war, and in fictions like "Hei no naka,"

Kōno adopts her own more decadent and “fallen” (墮落 *daraku*) viewpoint on the corruptions of wartime. Her writerly eye has much in common, one might say, with Sakaguchi Ango’s 坂口安吾 (1906–1955) idea that the writer’s “demon eye must crawl at ground level.”²³ In his “Discourse on Decadence,” Ango presents his theory of a necessary turn away from wartime idealism and propaganda about nation, home, and family towards what looks like decadence. For Ango, recognizing the inhumanity of humanity is necessary before redemption is possible.²⁴ Thus, *daraku* literature insists on beginning with the realities of base human desire, weakness, and failure at “ground” level as the only possible starting point for starting over after war. Strikingly, Kōno insists in her interview with Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner that her masochistic aesthetic may at first appear negative—decadent and base—but it actually aims for the opposite effect: much like the *jūjitsu* of Ango’s *daraku*, masochism turns a negative force against itself until it becomes, or reveals, something necessary and affirming about human desires amidst the limits of the human condition.²⁵

The Child as Enigma: Childless Women Go Toddler-Hunting

By the early 1960s Kōno had been heralded in the *bundan* literary establishment at the late age of thirty-seven, winning the Akutagawa Prize in 1963 for the story “Kani” (蟹 “Crabs”) after prior acclaim in 1961 for “Yōjigari” (幼児狩り “Toddler-Hunting,” 1961).²⁶ Besides taking all of Japan’s highest literary accolades, Kōno garnered widespread praise as a literary critic for her 1972 study of Tanizaki Jun’ichirō 谷崎潤一郎 (1886–1965) and the concept of literary masochism.²⁷ She was the first woman elected to join the Akutagawa Prize committee and presided there for twenty years. Only in 2007, at the age of eighty-one, and after returning to Japan after fourteen years’ residence in New York with Ichikawa did she resign from this powerful position.

Kōno’s reputation rests on complex psychological realism sharpened by a quality of sadomasochistic suspense and a disturbing predilection for pederastic and violent erotic fantasies on the part of her women characters. Translated into English and many other languages, Kōno is particularly well known at home and abroad for translator Lucy North’s story collection that includes the representative title story, “Toddler-Hunting.” Scholarly attention to feminist issues of gender, sexuality, and erotic violence in Kōno’s prolific output—ranging from short and long fictions, essays, interviews, and critical writing—makes her work inextricable from the historical “boom” in postwar writing by women, as so-called 女流作家 (*joryū sakka*).²⁸

Although Kōno is rarely treated as an autobiographical writer per se, critics usually note the traits of her female protagonists that overlap with their author's life. For instance, her characters are not infrequently childless or barren as a result of illness, and Kōno too suffered with bad health and was finally diagnosed with tuberculosis after the war. Just as her characters are typically self-sufficient if rather alienated modern women who deem marriage and children unnecessary to their working lives or private sexual freedom, Kōno herself never had children and did not marry Ichikawa until late in her life, and then only after first becoming a professional writer.²⁹ For feminist literary critic Mizuta Noriko, Kōno's work played a major role in carving out a singular "back alley" for later women writers through which female protagonists might narrate pleasure in sexuality without reproduction.³⁰

The ongoing struggle for Japanese women's civil rights and sexual liberation in the postwar surely inform the shocking sexuality and taboo fantasy life that Kōno and other women writers created for their women characters.³¹ Julia Bullock argues in her study centered on Kōno, Takahashi Takako 高橋たか子 (1932–2013), and Kurahashi Yumiko 倉橋由美子 (1935–2005) that these writers (but especially Kōno as the eldest) wrote rebellious representations of "women" and "femininity" in their fictions that acted as a bridge between the oppressive silencing of women in the early Shōwa era and the outpouring of expression that came with radical women's liberation activists by the 1970s.³² Setouchi Jakuchō 瀬戸内寂聴 (1922–2021) too wrote and lived a radical life of free sexual expression before becoming a Buddhist nun and activist helping to found the Little Women Project to aid abused and homeless girls.³³ Upon Kōno's death in 2015, Jakuchō wrote a tribute to her close friend, noting that in their late night phone calls Kōno had no compunction about describing her sexuality in terms as diverse and rich in fantasy as any of her fictional characters.³⁴

"Yōjigari" may well be Kōno's best-known story but the enigmatic allure of the child for the childless woman out toddler-hunting also appears in "Hei no naka," a wartime story that Kōno had conceived earlier and published at roughly the same time.³⁵ The figure of the child that recurs in various ways in Kōno's fictions—usually a boy toddler—is perhaps not solely the representational object of liberated female sexual desire or base deviance, or merely a trope of women's rebellion against family and child-bearing expectations, but also a complex figure deeply anchored in the author's wartime youth that carries diverse representational and

metaphorical meanings in her work.

As fellow Osaka-born poet Ibaragi Noriko 茨木のりこ (1926–2006) expresses in the epigraph to this essay, Kōno too felt that her generation had had their youth stolen, and their subsequent lives distorted, by war. In the context of toddler hunting and war, Ibaragi’s poem “Onna no ko no mǎchi” (女の子のマーチ Girls’ march, 1958) proves even more resonant in the context of Kōno’s toddler-hunting women:

I like bullying boys
 I really like making them whine.
 Just today, I knocked Jirou about the head in school.
 He said *Ouch* and ran away, tail between his legs.
 A hard-headed boy, Jirou
 Put a dent in my lunchbox

Pa says, I mean Father the Doctor says
 Girls shouldn’t race about, act wild.
 Inside each of our bodies is a special room,
 So we must go quietly, softly.
 Where’s my room, do you think?
 Tonight I’ll look for it....

Grandma’s pissed Mrs. Dried Plum
 Tells me girls who don’t eat all their fish get kicked out,
 They don’t last three days as brides before they’re returned.
Eat everything but the head and the tail, she says.
 Well, I’m not marrying
 So you can keep your darn fish bones!

The old baker started yelling,
Women and socks have gotten tough! Women and socks!
 The women behind the counter were laughing at him.
 Of course women have become strong—there’s a reason for it.
 I, too, am going to be a strong woman.
 Tomorrow, who should I make cry?³⁶

Against the traditional codes of society and family that dictate how a proper girl should behave to live out her destiny as wife and mother, Ibaragi’s speaker interjects between stanzas her resistance to such norms, offering sassy retorts to euphemisms for maternity (“special room”) by evoking a liberated sexuality (“Where’s my room, do you think? Tonight I’ll look for it”). She opens and closes her poem with the pre-emptive

bullying of boys who in the future might threaten her progress (her “march” forward). Women writers like Kōno Taeko and Ibaragi Noriko of the wartime generation dared to survive the war, and even thrive in the postwar (“Women and socks!”) when women gained new freedoms and rights. And yet, they could not escape the march of the war’s ongoing history, including the double bind of postwar domestic resentment and backlash to their growing strength while bearing the same trauma and responsibility for war as men.

Historian John Dower offers a resounding critique of the self-serving rhetoric of masochism and victim consciousness in the postwar that best hits its target when trained on the male-dominated structures of Japanese society and culture resurrected after the war. Dower shows how then and now such rhetoric seeks to evade war responsibility by emphasizing Japanese suffering and downplaying or omitting aggression. He balances a rich critique of masochistic victim consciousness with insights about the *kasutori bunka* (dregs culture) that arose amidst postwar hopelessness and impoverishment and provided fertile ground for Ango’s *daraku* literature. And yet, Dower does not reckon seriously with masochism as a discourse in itself most often centered on women and derived from sexology and psychoanalysis. In such theories, masochism is considered *abnormal* only when applied to men; for women, it has long been prescribed as *appropriate* feminine sexuality and sacrificial behavior.³⁷ The gendered and sexual language of Kōno and Ibaragi replay these gendered dynamics to acknowledge the familial and societal expectations for women’s proper masochism. They then warp these structures from within with willful, unexpected fantasies of not only violence received but also violence imagined or even usurped. When such women writers get to voice their own stories and wield the pen rewriting masochistic scripts for liberatory ends, they express the double bind of victimized infantilization and newfound postwar power in occasionally violent, often unconventional, ways.

Literature offered Kōno a way of writing herself positively into the future from out of a negated past and destroyed youth by unsettling sacrificial maternal images of women and dogmatic certainties around that potent, if enigmatic, symbol of the future: the child. Toddler hunting certainly acts as a trope within Kōno’s complex literary aesthetics of gendered power dynamics and decadent desires, one finding expression in various forms of carnal, psychological, and spiritual masochism. But toddler hunting also signals Kōno’s hunt for her own lost childhood and a

quest to imagine the kinds of future possible for “childless” modern Japanese women emerging fully grown in the postwar. “Hei no naka” harbors vital clues to Kōno’s aesthetic as well as the intersections of life and literature that shape how she represents war.

Secrets and Lies “On the Inside”

The first line of “Hei no naka” announces its historical and personal moment simultaneously: “On June 8th, 1945, Masako forgot that it was her nineteenth birthday.”³⁸ The story proceeds from there in limited third-person narration focalized through nineteen-year-old Sone Masako. Together with other girls and teachers mobilized from their urban school twenty kilometers away for the war effort, Masako is worn out from long hours of tedious labor and the accumulated toll of facing death with each new shriek of the air raid sirens. All the girls can think about is their desire to go home. Although in March there had been a devastating firebombing of the city nearby, Lieutenant Sakamoto did not allow the girls to return home to check on their loved ones; instead, he lectures them on getting revenge on the enemy nation who burned down their homes by ratcheting up their levels of production.³⁹

But the girls go from restless to rebellious in their imprisoning factory life. To quiet the growing unrest, the school principal meets with Lieutenant Sakamoto and decides that one girl each Monday will be allowed to act as courier for reports to their former school in the city. The authorities make clear they will look the other way should a girl stop by her home on the way back to the factory. Masako’s report day is scheduled for the second week of July, and she wants only to survive each day’s labor and each air raid until she gets to go home. At this point, the story returns to its opening air raid and why Masako forgot her birthday: she had spent a terrifying, sleepless night in an air raid shelter, worked a full day helping civilians whose homes had been destroyed, and then, to top it off, she had found a lost boy.

Nearing midnight, the night before her birthday, Masako and the others are rushed into a bomb shelter as the sirens sound. She grasps the air raid bag that contains a tiny scrap of paper on which she has written a final testament in case of her death. Originally begun as an honest letter to express her true feelings, it ends up as a single line for any person who might discover her dead body: “I was happy” (私は幸福でした *Watashi wa kōfuku deshita*).⁴⁰ In this way, Masako will appear to any stranger as a devoted daughter and patriotic woman of the nation in its time of war. Her

very name, “Masako” (正子), predicts her destiny as literally this kind of *tadashii ko* (正しい子), a “proper daughter.”

Yet her patriotic fate is subtly called into question when Masako survives instead of being sacrificed. The light of day after the massive firebombing reveals a neighborhood once visible from the girls’ dormitory windows now completely gone. Although the girls are tasked with meeting wounded, hungry, or dispersed civilians who enter the compound for urgent help, their help is greeted by citizens who leave frustrated and angry after receiving nothing but tedious paperwork to fill out at bureaucratic offices that no longer exist. At the end of the day walking back to the dorm, Masako is demoralized, exhausted, and thirsty when she suddenly remembers a possible water source. There, she finds a five-year-old boy, Sugao Shin’ichi (スガオ・シンイチ nicknamed シン坊 “Shinbō”).⁴¹ Masako takes him back to the dormitory, where together with her roommates Takeko, Sakiko, and Fumiko she enlists the help and secrecy of other factory girls to keep Shinbō without reporting him.

At first, the girls rationalize their inaction as a chance to enjoy Shinbō for a short time until his mother inevitably comes, but when no one shows up, they go to great pains to hide him, feed him, and keep him as their own precious secret. Thanks to him, the boredom and misery of the girls’ days are eased, and they look forward each day to collaborating to hide him from the authorities while taking care of him. They take turns guarding the door, stashing food supplies, or making him clothes. Shinbō calls all the girls “Oneechan” (big sister) but only Masako “Obachan” (Auntie). As Sakiko points out, Masako is special to him for having come to his rescue.⁴² As if to heighten the impact of the boy’s death to come, much of the story centers on the girls doting on Shinbō, and treating him, by turns, as a little brother, their own child, a boy to embrace in their beds, or a kind of pet. Lieutenant Sakamoto only learns about his existence with his death.

A sudden inspection of the compound by visiting authorities sends the girls into a panic to hide Shinbō, fearful of greater punishment now that they have covered up his presence for so long. At the last minute, they put him in the bottom of an immense sake barrel used to store water for dousing fires. Their plan might have worked but for an overzealous factory supervisor who, suspecting that the giant barrel was not topped off, orders it filled. Over the rushing sound of water splashing into the barrel, any sounds made by the drowning boy apparently go unheard. The girls are interrogated and beaten in order to find out where the boy came from, and how he died. Furious at the deception by the girls and the possible

ramifications along the chain of command, Lieutenant Sakamoto threatens to use all means necessary to find out who caused Shinbō's death, a crime of involuntary manslaughter (過失致死罪 *kashitsuchishizai*).⁴³

At the end of the story, the real mother suddenly appears. Lieutenant Sakamoto warns the girls beforehand to stick to the story of no boy having appeared, relaying to them what the mother had told authorities: she had temporarily abandoned the boy in the compound because there was food there and their family home had been burnt down in the bombing. She had come back soon afterwards and asked around for her son but no one had seen him. In the story's final paragraphs, a humble grieving mother stands beside Lieutenant Sakamoto asking about a boy wearing a light blue shirt. Lined up to face her, the girls are silent, having been ordered to say nothing. When asked to raise their hands if they might have seen him, the turmoil inside Masako reaches a fever pitch.

“Raise your hand if you saw anything,” the Lieutenant said, but not a hand lifted.

Masako could not bear it any longer. Ever since the child's death, her heart had felt as though it were being torn asunder. The teachers had warned them that their crime was to be sealed up tightly inside and never see daylight beyond these walls, which only intensified the pressure that now expanded to full capacity—if only she could release a little of that pressure.

Her heart breaking in two, Masako could no longer hold it in. If she let this chance go by, it would be all over. If only she could lift her hand. She tried to open a window into her heart, her crime.

She hesitated. The Lieutenant would be put on the spot.—That child was not in this compound on that day, nor on the day of the inspection. Whether the boy had been here at all was not even a question. *But in fact that child had come from somewhere and had been inside these walls.*

Something inside Masako was starting to rend. But the Lieutenant's face was right in front of her.—Where in the world had that child come from? Did he just percolate up from the earth? *No, that's not it. Well then, how about we say the boy fell from the skies?*

If we say that, Masako thought, then of course the boy would be an angel. He was an angel fallen from the skies who came just for us. And I killed him.—In one fell swoop, her heart cracked in two. It opened wide.

Suddenly, Masako's right hand was caught. Takeko pressed it down, having stopped it before it reached shoulder level.⁴⁴

Mounting pressure behind the mental anguish and impending heartbreak in this final scene accompanies the dueling voices of the

narrator and Masako. These voices fight for control over the story that must be told, for the story's weight in fiction versus reality. Masako's divided heart signals doubled maternal grief as Shinbō's fictional mother Masako faces Shinbō's real mother. That breaking heart is the locus too of the doubled "sin" and "crime" (罪 *tsumi*) in covering up and lying about him, which led to the child's death. Literally opening her heart to us in the story's final lines, Masako shows us that Shinbō's death was not a tragic accident caused by the schoolgirls together with the unwitting factory teachers and military administration but rather a death and cover-up for which she feels responsible.

Masako's crime turns out to be a necessary act of rebellious survival and even creative destruction, and her heart split open figures that painful confession. Having to choose between Lieutenant Sakamoto's story filled with administrative lies and forced silences or make up her own to justify the unjustifiable to Shinbō's real mother, Masako conjures forth the child as an angel, a boy without past or origin falling from the skies. Making Shinbō into an "angel," she can imagine him saving *her* while also being a willing sacrifice. In finally killing him, Masako takes his place as the *right* child (*tadashii ko*) to survive the war.

Kōno's unique form of "I-novel" fictional autobiography fragments into multiple confessions in this story. Some lead us back to the author's own life, certainly, but even more often they mark the place of lies, secrets, and ellipses in the storytelling of history through fiction's mirror hall. One such confession occurs in Kōno's 2014 essay "The Unthinkable" (考えられないこと "Kangaerarenai koto," 2015) first published in *Shinchō* (新潮 New tide) as Kōno was entering the last months of her life, going in and out of the hospital. Here she relays most directly the historical and autobiographical details of her wartime years with her family.⁴⁵

The essay's title refers to a veritable ghost story that leads to her sister-in-law's barely averted miscarriage and finally a family secret. Kōno begins by recounting the last months of the war: their family home was burned down in the infamous 14 March 1945 incendiary air raid on Osaka that luck alone enabled them to survive; her father finds a rental house for her, her mother, older sister, and younger brother to move to in the southern part of Osaka that had not yet been bombed; and she sees dead bodies and destruction as she walks in the destroyed city, feeling a curious numbness. After student mobilizations became compulsory in 1944, her classes were increasingly cut and Kōno was mobilized along with classmates to work in fields tilling crops and later in a clothing factory that she commuted to

each day.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, her older brother had escaped the draft but was sent with his company to work in China, while her unmarried older sister had narrowly evaded the dreaded Women's Volunteer Corps by finding gainful employment. Her younger brother was mobilized for labor like Kōno herself. Kōno describes the sudden end to the war and the family's waiting, then relief, when her oldest brother finally returns safely from China.

The “unthinkable” happens about a year after the war. Her brother has just married a long-time friend, and after their modest wedding the couple leaves for a nearby honeymoon on an overcrowded train. Suddenly, a voice calls out over the crowd to the brother. The brother recognizes it as belonging to an old university friend of his. The friend calls out again, asking if he has married. Strangely embarrassed, the brother is unable to admit his good fortune in dire times. The friend disappears in the crowd. Later, the wife and brother relay this story to the rest of the family as a humorous anecdote. But actually, the brother was upset by this event. Despite a long separation as soldiers at war and the good luck of finally meeting his friend again, he had not only lost his friend all over again but also lied to him. Some months later, the brother makes his sister Taeko promise to keep secret what he is about to tell her. To the best of his knowledge, he confesses, his friend had already died. He could not have been on that train. He was one of many young men of his generation who died in the war, never able to marry or go on with their lives. The brother had confessed this story to his now pregnant wife too, but it so upset her that she was hospitalized and at risk of miscarriage. Kōno concludes “Kangaerarenai koto” by writing that even though mother and child turned out fine, and now in 2014 her brother and his wife have long passed on, right up until this day she still has told no one in or outside of her family this story. She asks plaintively why this is a secret she must take to her grave—she did not know personally this friend of her brother's, or anything about him—and concludes by saying she will not keep this secret anymore. It is an intensely personal and yet curious piece written and published at the end of Kōno's life. It evinces her well-known belief in the supernatural, and the power of chance events and superstition. It conveys too the weight of a war-related family secret that she had carried all her life.

And yet, buried in the essay is an anecdote that deserves mention for being perhaps just as “unthinkable” for Kōno as the ghost story. Kōno relates that her brother didn't like to talk about the war. Only once did she

hear him mention that while part of an entourage walking on the road to reach a boat for demobilization from China, he noticed how there were no older people there, just women with kids, and dead children abandoned on the road. Young unmarried men like her brother were tasked with clearing away and disposing of those bodies. From Kōno's account, it is unclear if these women and children are from the local Chinese population or Japanese.

Ostensibly confessing her brother's secret about the ghost of his dead friend as her own secret and confessing her broken vow to him in order to do so, Kōno actually describes a story of women and children left behind on the home front and the kind of "unthinkable" brutal work that soldiers did. Having gone to China with a Japanese company and not as a soldier, by the war's end, her brother is demobilized, impoverished and ragtag, and must perform a military task like any soldier. Mobilized girls like Masako and Kōno herself were not soldiers either but had to carry out military roles and contribute to the war effort. Civilian or soldier, ally or foe, the stain from the blood of war reaches everyone. In this essay, Kōno represents war itself as ongoing and "unthinkable" as part of myriad untold and half-told stories, memories, and silences that continue to haunt long after war is over. Wartime ghosts—and angels—exert their pressure as secrets, confessions and a sense of responsibility to tell the fuller story. At the end of "Hei no naka," Masako's split heart cannot bear this pressure and it is unclear whether the story's concluding confession signals Masako's liberation or her irredeemable fall.⁴⁷

The language of falling from the skies in the story's final confession scene is striking. It repeats similar language used throughout "Hei no naka" about the threatening propaganda flyers dropped by American planes on her home as well as the constant threat of bombs falling from above. The reader knows too that less than a month after this July moment in the story, the war will end with another "Little Boy" dropping from the skies over Hiroshima. In this way, the victorious masochistic defeat in Masako's final confession scene raises complex questions about the war's end as simultaneously liberation and defeat, soon to be followed by Occupation and exhaustion (虚脱 *kyodatsu*) for those who survive and struggle to go on after the war.⁴⁸

Itohan Taeko and the Senjika Generation

Okuno Takeo 奥野健男 (1926–1997) locates Kōno Taeko among what he and others call the "wartime generation" of writers (戦時下の世代 *senjika*

no sedai). Okuno includes “Hei no naka” in his co-edited volume *Senjika no hai tōn* (戦時下のハイティーン Teenagers in wartime, 1965) along with poetry by Inoue Mitsuharu 井上光晴 (1926–1992), and fiction by Ōe Kenzaburō 大江健三郎 (b.1935), Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925–1970), Yoshiyuki Junnosuke 吉行淳之介 (1924–1994), and others.⁴⁹ For Okuno, the category *senjika no sedai* is comprised of an “older” and “younger” generation of writers. The older generation gained their values in prewar Japan, and many were already actively publishing and known by the postwar. Unlike the amorphous Third Generation of New Writers (第三の新人 *daisan no shinjin*) that arose with the Occupation to make the postwar their theme, or writers still young children during World War II, Okuno’s younger generation of wartime writers (including Kōno) falls into a kind of no man’s land because they were in their upper teenage years during Japan’s fifteen-year war. For Okuno, this generation lost their chances for education, family, and marriage due to the deaths of family members and classmates drafted as soldiers or mobilized for labor instead of school. As impressionable youth still innocent about loss and grief, this generation experienced the traumas of mass death and destruction in war as well as Occupation after defeat. If they became writers at all, it took years of personal trial and error to find their way amidst diminished material circumstances and despite psychological barriers.⁵⁰ Kōno was an example of this, Okuno contends, struggling for fifteen years after the war to regain her health and find her voice as a writer.⁵¹

Kōno Taeko’s fictionalized autobiography *Tōi natsu* traces the span of Kōno’s girlhood from quite literally the start of the Shōwa era and her country’s growing militarism until its final defeat and occupation. As her autobiographical essay “Kangaerarenai koto” makes clear, she and her family were witness and participant to full-scale mobilization for war on the home front in ways that overlap with her protagonist Masako in “Hei no naka.” Critics Kanda Yumiko 神田由美子 and Kawamura Jirō 河村二郎 implicitly treat Kōno as a member of the *senjika no sedai* based on such life experiences and the role that the war plays in her fictional corpus.⁵² Ōta Saburō 太田三郎 goes so far as to say that all of the major themes in Kōno Taeko’s fiction germinate from “Hei no naka.”⁵³ When “Hei no naka” appeared in a collected volume with the title work *Yōjigari* in 1962, leftist critic Hirano Ken 平野謙 (1907–1978) singled out the former as the “key” (カギ) for understanding the latter. He notes the precarious and extraordinary balancing of both war responsibility and victim consciousness in “Hei no naka” through the figures of Masako and Shinbō,

adding: “One cannot help but think that it would be only natural for this nineteen-year-old schoolgirl to grow up to be the thirty-year-old woman in ‘Toddler-Hunting.’ In the hands of this writer, that would not be just another chapter in the life of her I-novel but rather demonstrate the growth and strength of her artistic expression.”⁵⁴

Hirano’s appraisal of Kōno’s sophisticated “artistic expression” of gender and war is evident in a later story concerning war, “Tetsu no uo” (鉄の魚 “Iron Fish,” 1976).⁵⁵ Here, two women visit a museum dedicated to soldiers and wartime Japan. One of the women had lost her husband in a manned suicide torpedo known as an “iron fish.” At one point, finding herself alone, she gets inside an iron fish at the exhibit in mimicry of a child she had seen do the same thing earlier. This moment condenses into a single striking image of both empathy—walking in the soldier’s shoes, so to speak, and trying to see his suicidal sacrifice through his eyes—yet also a chilling rejection of this sterile model of Japan’s past and future in women’s militarized and sacrificial wombs. “Tetsu no uo” dramatizes women’s wartime roles as simultaneously idealized vessels of life, and mobilized weapon of destruction carrying an aborted life inside.

Osaka-born Okuno implies that the deprivations of wartime were traumatic for Kōno raised as a typical Osaka merchant’s *itohan* いとはん (in standard Japanese, *ojōsan*, or “well-heeled daughter”).⁵⁶ Born in Nishiku, Nishidōtonbori in 1926, Kōno grew up in Osaka’s lively commercial *shitamachi* district (traditional downtown merchant area). Her father ran an established wholesale business in *shiitake* mushrooms and other mountain vegetables, while her mother’s family had long operated a well-known pharmaceutical business. In her reading of the biographical elements in “Michishio,” Kanda Yumiko notes that Kōno’s merchant family rose a notch on the economic and social class scale when they moved to a more upscale suburban neighborhood and kept their family business downtown.⁵⁷

“Michishio” opens a year before the Marco Polo Incident of 7 July 1937 that led to full-scale war with China, a historical sea change that only appears in the story’s background. The foregrounded story centers on family relationships, and secrets, told through the point of view of a ten-year-old girl—Kōno’s age at that time. As in Kōno’s real life, the girl has moved, but in the fiction she maintains connections with her *shitamachi* roots through postcards and visits to an aging neighborhood granny that her mother in particular has long looked after, Oiesan (or おえはん *Oehan*, Kansai dialect for “wife”).⁵⁸ The start of the war is conveyed indirectly

through an unwitting child's perspective, in details and anecdotes of her frustration at having to wear rayon instead of proper wool school uniforms, collect metal foil for the military, and avoid playing with summer fireworks out of "proper restraint" (自肅 *jishuku*) during wartime.⁵⁹ At one point, the father makes an apparently innocuous request that his daughter keep a secret: his arrangement of a special dinner with Oiesan. Although the girl agrees to do it, she is troubled that the secret can also be a form of lying. It is only many years later that she learns of her father's broken promise of marriage to Oiesan's daughter, which led to her suicide and the collapse of the old woman's family and financial future. For the narrator, this delayed revelation compounds her complicity in having kept her father's secret as a child.

Casual details given inordinate weight act to characterize Kōno's literary style, together with structural and psychological techniques that reinforce themes of secrets and lies: gaps, omissions, displacements, and delayed revelations.⁶⁰ The casual reference in "Michishio" to cheap rayon (スフ *sufu*) reoccurs in "Hei no naka" when Masako bemoans the shift to rayon for the school girls' uniforms. Historian Thomas Havens writes that complaints about cheap *sufu* clothing wearing out quickly were virtual catchphrases during the war.⁶¹ As Masako's psyche begins to fray, this detail acts as an objective correlative to her dubious ability to withstand the new pressures, the new kinds of wear and tear of militarized daily life at the textile factory. In her *taidan* with Yamada, Kōno emphasizes that the experience of war is not just large-scale history but rather something that warps the fabric of daily life (日常 *nichijō*). She states: "What war robs us of is not 'peace' but rather our 'everyday'."⁶² That the looming war with China is sited in the background functions not to diminish the role of history or the fiction's correspondences with Kōno's own life but rather to give such details understated power; these details create depth as well as delayed, revelatory force in her character's internal psychic life just as larger historical forces loom in the background only for their full impact to be registered later. In "Hei no naka," Kōno uses Masako and the factory girls to knit together a story in which an oppressively masculinist wartime Japan demands women's complicity and invisible sacrifice to naturalized structures of gender hierarchy, filial piety, and both emperor and mother worship.

Details of history might at first appear to recede behind the more sensational plot in "Hei no naka" that culminates in a child's death. Yet these details are essential for building the fictional world's foundations in

realism. Beyond the story's treatment of student mobilization itself, one such important detail is the May 25, 1939 revision of the Meiji-era "Imperial Rescript on Education" (教育ニ関スル勅語 *kyōiku ni kansuru chokugo*, 1890) that targeted students, known as the "Imperial Rescript on Education for Students and Youth" (青少年学徒ニ賜ハリタル勅語 *seishōnen gakuto ni tamawaritaru chokugo*). Allusion to it in the story shows how students had to memorize—indeed, internalize—the language and thinking of nationalism and emperor worship that put masculine and paternalistic worship, endeavor, and sacrifice at the center of all activities.⁶³ Another similar but perhaps less well-known fact of Japan's everyday wartime occurs in the story as a kind of prayer that apparently had regional variations throughout Japan. At the meal scene everyone chants this prayer as thanks to a divine Emperor for the bounty of food before them.⁶⁴ Kōno also makes historical reference to psychological warfare in the massive quantities of propaganda dropped on civilian populations by American warplanes urging surrender or threatening further destruction.⁶⁵ Concrete details such as these in "Hei no naka" act as dense nodes of history that index the state of exception become the rule, how the mobilized students' daily lives are saturated with militaristic rhetoric and practices that hem them in on all sides. Autobiographical and historical details build Kōno's house of fiction in her wartime stories.

By the late 1960s, with the complex figuration of the "house" in *Fui no koe* (不意の声 A sudden voice, 1968), Kōno had developed a motif of not only childlessness but also homelessness for modern women left stranded and alienated by traditional family structures. The house as *ie* is no home for the modern daughter Ukiko in that story, and as in "Hei no naka," it is Ukiko's stint mobilized to a factory that marks the beginning of her profound alienation from family and society. Ukiko's father becomes a ghost lingering in postwar Japan, haunting his daughter in Tokyo from his deathbed in Osaka. The imprisoning compound of the factory where Masako works in "Hei no naka" functions similarly, as the wartime version of the *ie seido* (家制度 household system).

Kōno Taeko's life story merges with the fictional in "Michishio" and "Hei no naka" to signal the author's future themes. She writes her way through the rhetorical contradictions and traps of representing women and war, building on works by Hirabayashi Taiko 平林たい子 (1905–1972) and Sata Ineko 佐多稲子 (1904–1998) whose realism, she claims, paved the way for her and later women writers.⁶⁶ Kōno develops her own fictional and theoretical architecture of masochism for her characters' complex

sexual pursuits, psychologies, and power struggles in the world around them, and adds a dose of the supernatural and ghostly to other stories.⁶⁷ In the imprisoning factory compound of “Hei no naka,” the girls play house and raise a lost boy as their own despite not one of them feeling *at home* there, and despite the fact that several girls insist they never want children. Ironically, the girls’ sense of escape is inextricable from the masculine militarism that traps them in the first place, built on the foundations of Japan’s prewar idealization of the traditional household system, the *ie seido*.⁶⁸ Whether it is on the students’ side or Lieutenant Sakamoto’s side, the state of exception created in wartime doubles down on the patriotic scripts and role-playing even as such unstable, unpredictable times produce contradictions and gaps that challenge the coherence of the official story.

From Konno to Kōno: The Regressive Birth of an Author

To grasp the desire motivating Masako’s final confession and her paradoxical form of victorious masochistic defeat, it is necessary to backtrack to other parts of the story where the author’s own “I” life story has been reanimated by fiction’s creative power. The story’s unfolding plot distracts from just what the opening sentence preemptively warns us not to forget: it is Masako’s birthday. The distractions come from the air raid, specific historical dates, and then the discovery of Shinbō. In giving “June 8, 1945” such prominence, Kōno deliberately locates readers in a realistic world with historical facts in a manner strikingly similar to a writer whom she admired greatly, Hirabayashi Taiko 平林たい子 (1905–1972). Hirabayashi’s 1946 story, “Mōchūgokuhei,” (盲中国兵 “Blind Chinese soldiers,” 1946) famously opens with the record aerial bombardment of Tokyo on March 10, 1945.⁶⁹ “Hei no naka” notes elsewhere the well-known bombing of Osaka after Tokyo, and stresses instead the June bombing in its opening line.⁷⁰ Autobiographical and historical details are displaced, and function obliquely rather than overtly, as in the name of the city in Kōno’s story. Her details add up, though, to make it Osaka (other stories in *Tōi natsu* are clearly set in Osaka). The historical details of the students’ mobilization, labor at the factory, and day-to-day life buttress the story’s realism without diminishing the power of fiction. Indeed, Shinbō and the plot events centered on him function as a fictional device inextricable from its author as a woman writer finding her voice and representing the experience of war on the home front.⁷¹ The story’s opening pulls together threads of history and Kōno’s autobiography to

simultaneously raise, and question, the grounds on which war and one's true story can ever be told, just as the story begins with both death and survival on Masako's birthday.

Masako's trip home in early July finally arrives, only to illustrate Kōno's claim that war robs us of our everyday. Masako goes first to the school to deliver the reports, and hardly recognizes the hometown she sees along the way. The city has been reduced to rubble. Even her old school is merely an extension of the factory now. The strangeness she feels upon returning "home" grows until it is manifestly alienation. Despite initial relief at discovering her home and parents safe on the south side of town, Masako's earlier feelings about the city and the school appear to overtake her view of home too: "Is this what she had so looked forward to for months on end? Masako felt disappointed."⁷² In the very brief and rather cryptic "home" scene, it is as if Masako balks at the routine of domestic life. Her parents are happy to see her, and while they offer her a bath and food, they appear resigned to the fact that their home will be bombed. They refer to the factory as Masako's "home" to return to (帰る *kaeru*) now. She does not feel at home with them, and wonders why she came.

But Masako avoided her [mother] by going out to the verandah. There, she gazed at the expanse of summer sky stretching out overhead. It was a high and clear azure, with the cumulous clouds of midsummer sparring with each other. In their freedom, they made her want the days that should belong to her.

What she had wanted was to see a world of peace, freedom, prosperity. Not this. Her arms and legs were worked to exhaustion at the factory. Her head was used for nothing more than counting summer underwear. She knew she was tough but still, and again the sense of unfairness weighed heavily on her heart.—*No, not this. I want a living and breathing body and mind—and a larger life, one where I can really live, in a world where I can actually feel, and think, and experience things.*⁷³

Masako herself is surprised by these waves of disappointment instead of joy. War has changed everything. Her strong desire for something more from life—in short, her desire to live, to escape—makes her family home an extension of her school displaced and transformed into the wartime factory: her family now joins the school in forming the wider wall of a single prison under the same sky.

Before she heads "home" to the factory, Masako dredges up a curious memory:

Masako recalled a story often told about the day she was born. It was her mother's first time to give birth. And yet on the morning when it was due, the baby had leaped out without a moment's hesitation. You'd have thought it expected the world to be chock full of wonderful things and just couldn't wait to get started.... Recalling that child along with her own recently passed nineteenth birthday, Masako couldn't help but see just how precious that child was.

. . .

No matter what, I have to get that child back to its mother, Masako thought, as she turned into the front gate at the factory.

She had begun to think that all their clinging to small diversions and acts of rebellion was shallow, and rather ugly.⁷⁴

First thinking of her own birth, Masako's thoughts slide metonymically to Shinbō, until just who "that child" is—the one who needs to be returned home to its mother—becomes unstable. Is it Masako, whose home and childhood have been stolen from her by the war? Or is it Shinbō, who has become separated from his mother as a result of war's dislocations? Masako's thinking blurs the line between two different children as she returns from her real home to the factory and Shinbō. Emotionally vulnerable after the disappointment of "home," Masako can see "for the first time" that she and her classmates are wrong to keep the boy and that they have been keeping Shinbō for selfish reasons. Despite this newfound resolve to report him, Masako will fail to act on it.

Even before Shinbō's death and its accompanying trauma has set in by the last scene of the story when she stands before his real mother, Masako has already confessed to herself that keeping Shinbō was never really for his sake. After his body is found, and after being interrogated and beaten repeatedly by Lieutenant Sakamoto, Masako and her cohorts repeat the story they conspired to tell, a "confession" of their "charity" (慈善 *jizen*) and kindness. They say that the lost boy had nowhere else to go and needed their help—they *saved* him. But privy to Masako's first-person thoughts in limited third-person narration, the reader sees that by story's end she does not really believe this—and did not, it turns out, even before his death when she searches furiously for a place to hide him.⁷⁵

How about cajoling him into the closet and getting him to hide behind the futons? The inspectors would probably only take a glance in each room from the doorway, and probably wouldn't hear him even if he cried a little in the dark. But that presented its own dangers. A large futon could fall on

that little child from above and smother him. It was so hot and humid in the closet, and with no one to hear him, finally his sobs would end, completely muffled... *I would never do such a thing to him*. Masako knew this, but just as she resolved never to be so careless she also experienced a brief surge of some fresh new feeling linked to the glimpse of a possible accident.⁷⁶

Masako “would never do such a thing” as cause his death—murder him—intentionally; and yet, just as unintentionally feelings emerge of her own liberation should the boy die. The problem of the boy’s hidden existence is intimately tied to Masako’s need for him in the first place, so it is no accident, so to speak, that Masako’s feelings of liberation from him are described as *sugasugashii* (すがすがしい refreshing) in a simultaneous displacement and mimicry of Suga Shin’ichi’s name. In the end, both Shinbō’s unexpected appearance and his sudden death tell us something that Masako is as yet unable to articulate for herself or for us, but that “something” clearly has more to do with Kōno’s persona Masako than Shinbō.

Discovered on Masako’s birthday, Shinbō marks the “rebirth” of Masako. When she finds Shinbō, Masako takes him to the dormitory where the girls try to learn more about his family and where he comes from. He tells them his family has two baby girls. Fumiko presses him, teasingly asking if these babies are not really twins.

He told them that his father was a soldier who had been in hospital but then sent back to fight in the war, and that there were two babies in the family, both girls.

“Twins perhaps?” Fumiko’s thoughts had inadvertently become audible but the boy answered anyway. “Nope. Two regular babies born nearly together.”

Fumiko gave a wry smile, probing further. “So living at your house are you and your mama, two little babies born less than a year apart—anybody else?”

“There is Konno. She goes to the factory though.”

“This factory?”

“Nope.... Konno always brings me back dried bananas.”

At the boy’s mention of dried bananas, Sakiko recalled that she had some dried bread left over from lunch and gave it to him. He started to eat, making loud crunching sounds.⁷⁷

It is not only Masako’s and Shinbō’s “birthdays,” as Shinbō gains a new mother in Masako on her actual birthday. The new life that emerges

in this passage and that will come to full growth as a result of Shinbō's sacrifice is Shinbō's mysterious co-parent or sibling named "Konno" (コンノ). This name is written without kanji, sounded out instead as katakana, in the same manner as "Sugao Shinbō"—as if alienated, foreign words not at home in the language, unmoored from either family or context. Both names fluidly move to encompass wider meanings beyond either a literal boy or any real person named "Sugao Shinbō" or "Konno." As if a lurking spirit or a rumor, the author "Kōno" inserts herself as both distraction and uncanny echo in the gaps between the names' similar sounds and the orthographic uncertainty born of katakana and spoken speech. Konno/Kōno incipiently emerges in relation to Shinbō's life, simultaneously a character in the story and member of his family sent away to the factory. Konno/Kōno acts as a proper noun in unstable kinship to him or his family.

Masako is similarly split long before the heart-rending scene at story's end: she is both any and all girls who were conscripted for factory work during the war, like Konno/Kōno, and Masako, the specific girl who will return from her visit home wanting nothing more than to escape her double-walled feudal prison of the traditional *ie* system and the wartime "family state" (家族国家 *kazoku kokka*). The subtle overlapping of Masako with Konno/Kōno finally cracks in two with the Masako who wants to confess at the end of the story, revealing in that split heart the birth of Kōno's authorial voice. That voice comes at great cost.⁷⁸

Only now does that earlier metonymic slide into the confusion of which child, which mother, upon Masako's return "home" to the factory after leaving her real "home" become legible. When Shinbō enters Masako's life she has just faced death in surviving one of the worst fire bombings of the war on her birthday. Shinbō serves as a figure of both rebirth and escape from death. At first his "mother," Masako will gradually usurp the place of the boy himself to achieve her own rebirth. Perhaps his name had always hinted at his true function as *her* rebirth: the "new child" (Shinbō) is the "right child" (*tadashii ko*). Her own death by air raid the night before his discovery is deferred and displaced onto his sacrifice to come, in order for Masako/Konno/Kōno to defeat both actual death in war—the unrecognized wartime deaths of women and children on the home front and mobilized to factories—and social death, her daughterly sacrifice within a household system that would have preferred a boy whose sacrifice would bring honor.

Discovered by Masako when going to look for water, killed by

drowning in water, identified by his real mother as having worn a shirt on the day he went missing that was sky blue (*mizu iro*, or literally, the color of water), Shinbō is from the start less a real child than a *mizuko* (水子); that is, an aborted child. From the start, he stands for the aborted destiny awaiting Masako in the *ie seido*. *Ryōsai kenbo* (良妻賢母 “good wife, wise mother”) ideology binds the family system’s traditional strictures to the ends of the family state under militarism, where women’s value lies in being mothers who increase the population, bearing soldiers and heirs. Patriotic “*ume yo, fuyase yo*” (産めよ増やせよ “Give birth, increase [the nation]”) wartime slogans put women in their reproductive place of bearing children and increasing the population while ignoring the significance of their productive labor in factories building that nation.⁷⁹ Like their mothers before them, such “filial daughters” will work in factories “for the sake of the country” or as mothers sacrifice themselves for father, husband, and son. Masako’s freedom from the social death of the double-walled prison, one where her life matters less than a man’s, as if a woman’s life were less human, will demand that she abort that life. Just where and what other kind of freedom might be possible, though, remains unanswered.

Redemptive Violence and Violent Dis-Placements

Putting Shinbō in harm’s way despite their intent and plan to save him, the girls together with Shinbō’s “mother,” Masako, dramatize a story that is part William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* and part Ōe Kenzaburō’s *Shiiku* (飼育 *Prize Catch*).⁸⁰ With Shinbō’s forced confinement, where he is treated as a plaything by the girls before ending in his death, the “toddler hunting” seeds of a typical Kōno story whose protagonist desires boys, fantasizes masochistic abuse, or stalks children out of displaced feelings of oppression and thwarted passions are planted.

Displacements structure “Hei no naka” as they do so many of Kōno’s fictions. One such displacement occurs with the author’s presence in the fiction as “Konno” and numerous details that align with or come very close to Kōno’s own life and wartime experiences. Another striking displacement lies in the structural parallel between Masako’s actual family home and the pretend family and domestic life Masako creates with Shinbō and his “sisters” at the factory.

When the military authorities in “Hei no naka” break their own rules to forge the time of each report’s delivery by the girls, tacitly enabling the girls to stop by their homes on their way back to the compound from the

school each month, it is hard not to sympathize with such white lies that benefit the girls. But by the story's end, the girls are complicit in keeping another more burdensome secret, the truth about Shinbō's existence—soon to be followed by the lie that he never existed at all. For Masako, the gap between reality and the official “story,” resulting from escalating levels of mendacity behind and beyond the walls, will reach the breaking point in the final scene. In that moment, Masako faces the fiction/lie embodied in Lieutenant Sakamoto standing before her, and simultaneously the story/truth embodied in the mother who refutes Masako's delusional maternal claim to Shinbō. Shaken by her inability to reconcile these competing stories, the last line of “Hei no naka” shows Masako barely held together by her friends. Under threat of punishment, all the girls must keep a new secret, and tell official lies. The girls maintain a complicit silence with the very military authorities they had at first protested against, then joyfully cooperated with in order to go home on Mondays, while all along they hid the secret of Shinbō. By story's end, they are forced to collude in the dirty secrets and official story making of the authorities about his death, thereby compounding their captive bonds.

Recall that Masako had wanted to write a different final testament to carry in her air raid bag, one that would respond to her father's feelings about her as a girl instead of a boy. She struggles to find the words:

To My Revered Parents

I have been sent to the factory and so if it is bombed I will likely die. That is why I am writing this. I was the oldest among all of us girls, and Father used to say, “If only you had been a boy.” As the war dragged on and I grew up, though, he became glad I was a girl after all. And yet, it looks like even I—a girl—will end up dying for the war....⁸¹

At this point, Masako pauses, and then discards her confessional testament. She understands that, either way, she loses. Her father once regretted that she was not born a boy, only later to be glad she is a girl because it means she will not be sent to war as a soldier. Yet her father's old-fashioned feudalistic thinking about girls' inferiority to boys aligns in the wartime context with the government's hypocritical failure to recognize the sacrifice of mobilized girls and women. Masako and the factory girls know that they are as likely to die in the war as any young man sent to fight. Enemy planes targeted factories, and labor conditions affected the workers' health through exhaustion, overwork, and the spread of diseases. The real difference is that her sacrifice and her life will not

count as similarly valuable, fully as human.

Masako cannot even confess her true feelings in this final testament. She sees that to continue with her letter as she began it, exclaiming her dissatisfaction, could only come across as unfilial, or even unpatriotic (非国民的 *hikokuminteki*).⁸² Whatever stranger discovers her body and the note attached might even implicate her family in her unpatriotic transgression. Masako struggles with her final testament but ends up lying, betrayed by language itself. As we have seen, she oversimplifies her complex feelings to “I was happy,” suspending her real feelings in silent lacunae.

This literal scene of writing that cannot say what it means has much in common with the beating and interrogation of Masako by Lieutenant Sakamoto. Masako comes to realize that she cannot tell Lieutenant Sakamoto why she and the girls did what they did because she simply has no words that he would understand. Perhaps the voice of the writer Kōno can be heard at this point, suggesting that neither history’s facts nor fiction’s lies can fully convey what has happened in wartime “on the inside.”

Beyond her fictional worlds, essays, and interviews, Kōno’s voice can be heard years after her own death in yet another striking way. At a memorial for Kōno a few months after her death in 2015, her family displayed a crumbling old piece of paper found among her most private belongings that had been folded until it was tiny and could fit inside a small pouch. Its words are remarkably close to those in Masako’s final testament: 「私は本当に幸福でした。皆さんへ 多恵子」 (“To all of you: I was truly happy. Taeko”).⁸³

Kōno’s transmutation of autobiography into thoroughgoing fictional worlds echoes in surprising ways her literary forebear, the proletarian writer and activist Hirabayashi Taiko. Certainly, Hirabayashi’s stories of factory life and wartime resonate with the mobilized factory labor of wartime Japan depicted in Kōno’s story even if overt political or didactic messages inherent in proletarian fiction are simply lacking in Kōno’s fiction. As is well known, Hirabayashi wrote stories generated around an autobiographical kernel of her own, specifically, the death of her newborn while in Manchuria. “*Seryōshitsu nite*” (施療室にて “In the charity ward,” 1927) is the best known of these stories.⁸⁴ This only child, later given a name without kanji and denoted in katakana as “Akebono,” died while Hirabayashi was ill with beriberi. Her former employers at the factory where she had worked, and the doctors at the charity ward where her

destitution inevitably takes her, refuse to provide safe milk for the baby until she gets well. Hirabayashi's persona is forced to infect and kill her baby. Shocking as an autobiographical tale of infanticide, the story's social commentary bluntly asks why some human lives are worth more than others. Kōno's "Hei no naka" picks up a similar thread, we might say, one where a boy is unnecessarily killed and Kōno, via her alter ego Masako as the boy's surrogate mother, asks why the sacrifice of a girl's life does not have the same value as a boy's.⁸⁵

Linked in a series of maternal displacements from Shinbō's real mother by Masako first, who discovers him, and then Takeko, rumored to have covered up a false abortion of him, and then back to Masako, Shinbō stands in not only for the brother or boy Masako should have been for her father but also for the dawning of a writer, as with *Akebono* for Hirabayashi. As a boy, Shinbō's sacrifice would count as one that her own death could never measure up to as a mere female, while her privileged maternal role with Shinbō serves to supplement Masako's feminine lack, fulfilling her responsibilities as a properly filial daughter become mother under the *ie seido*. Displaced from any real family into the ideological one created and rationalized by the nation state, Masako meets the needs of fictional family with her own competing fiction, a kind of *mamagoto* (playing house) with Shinbō and the other girls at the factory dormitory. There they create a fantasy space that simultaneously revises the *ie* and exposes its grotesque distortions from the vantage point of a girl trapped within it.

Masako's masochism means taking upon herself harsh punishment for the crime of Shinbō's death even though, as the teacher reminds Takeko, if anyone killed him, it was those who filled the barrel or ordered it done. Sunk in grief and harassed by interrogations, Masako not only faces the beatings Lieutenant Sakamoto gives her, but wants more:

I want you to hit me harder. I want you to hit me more furiously. And then, when all my feelings of irritation, frustration, and bitterness that are tearing me up get condensed into one tight little ball I want you to smash it to smithereens. If you were to do that, what a new and refreshing feeling that would certainly be.—
Preoccupied with this vision, Masako let the Lieutenant do as he pleased.⁸⁶

Masako's sentiments might indicate her guilt-stricken acceptance of

punishment except for the masochistic pleasure the beating clearly holds for her. Leading into the final scene of Masako's guilt and self-dissolution facing Shinbō's real mother, this transformation of Masako from rebellious daughter to masochistic woman cautions us to read the story's conclusion not simply for Masako's straightforward narration, her "testament" that the world expects to hear, one might say, but rather for the contortions her willful self must assume. In apparent masochistic submission to her guilt, Masako actually refuses the walls and traps of the gender roles presented at each stage in the story until finally, when she faces Shinbō's real mother, she claims not the real child but rather herself as the fictional child she could never be for her father or her country. She confronts the "good girl" that must be killed off in order to find her own voice as a woman telling the truth of her story in historical moments when it cannot be heard or understood. For the author Kōno Taeko that would have to wait until long after the war. Deep inside the heart of her fictional persona Masako, Kōno expresses the desire to be "smashed to smithereens" in order to see if she might reach a clean slate, a "refreshing" (once again, *sugasugashii* すがすがしい) new starting place, to begin anew out of a painful wartime past.

Sugao Shinbō's *sugao* (素顔), his "true face," wavers between the ultimately unrecognizable swollen face of the drowned boy—"Masako could not summon forth from that face his real face"—and Masako's own face looking in the mirror, swollen and distorted from the beatings of Lieutenant Sakamoto as he demanded a confession.⁸⁷ In the final scene, her heart finally cracked open for the reader alone, these overlapping faces merge and become clearer when we hear Masako's silent confession—and it looks a lot like Kōno's.

Coda

In a tribute to Kōno just after her death, *genbaku* writer Hayashi Kyōko 林京子 (1930–2017) writes about Kōno's generous encouragement of her as a writer, and contends that while the meaning of defeat in August 1945 looked very different to each of them—for Hayashi in Nagasaki, it was the beginning of a new horror, while for Kōno it offered hope of survival and liberation just ahead—they shared the need to write about war and the difficulties of representing that experience. Moved to tears when reading Kōno's "Hei no naka" by the memories it brought back of her own mobilization to a heavy industrial factory in Nagasaki right up until the dropping of the atomic bomb, Hayashi asserts that both boys and girls shared difficult lives in their mobilization to factories during the war but

only girls had to worry about protecting themselves from their own countrymen while there.⁸⁸ For Hayashi, as for Kōno—and in a different way, for Ichikawa too—wartime experiences are too often untold, hidden and silenced behind the walls of past and present politics, history, and family stories.

NOTES

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I wish to express my profound gratitude to the Kōno family for permission to translate Kōno Taeko's story. I remain indebted to them for sharing their family stories and the artwork of Ichikawa Yasushi. The patience and generosity of colleagues with both general advice as well as detailed feedback on drafts of this essay and on the story's translation cannot be overstated. Deep appreciation goes out to Tonooka Naomi, Tatsumi Takayuki, Arimitsu Michio, Yoneyama Hiroki, Michiko Suzuki, Helen Weetman, Takahashi Shoichi, and Nakazawa Kazuo. Special thanks go to the hardworking editors and anonymous reviewers of *Japanese Language and Literature*.

¹ Translation by, and cited in, Yoshiko Miyake, "Doubling Expectations: Motherhood and Women's Factory Work Under State Management in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s," in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (University of California Press: Berkeley, Calif., 1991), 267–295, 288. Koizumi's speech to the Diet, Feb. 1942, originally cited in Mitsui Reiko 三井礼子, ed., *Gendai fujin undōshi nenpyō* 現代婦人運動史年表 (Tokyo: San'ichi shobō, 1963), 169.

² Ibaragi Noriko, "Watashi ga ichiban kirei datta toki" わたしが一番きれいだったとき, in *Onna no kotoba* おんなのことば (Tokyo: Dōwaya, 1994 [1957]), 48–51. The translation here of one stanza is my own.

³ Kōno Taeko and Yamada Eimi, *Bungaku mondō* 文学問答 (Tokyo: Bungei shunjū, 2007), esp. 45–84. All translations from this book are my own.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 45. See also the Asahi TV short program that aired on August 5, 2018, accessible on YouTube, that includes interviews with Ichikawa's and Kōno's family, *Tsuiseki: 'Maboroshii no genbakuga' no shinjitsu* 追跡: 「幻の原爆画の真実」, www.youtube.com/watch?v=DeuZQEgGGPE. Accessed May 7, 2022.

⁵ Kōno Taeko and Yamada Eimi, *Bungaku mondō*, 45–84. See also the website dedicated to Ichikawa ("Henry") Yasushi: 市川泰, *Henry Ichikawa no kiseki no genbakuga*. www.hhichikawa.net/. Accessed May 7, 2022.

- ⁶ Kōno Taeko, “Omoigakenai koto,” in *Omoigakenai koto* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2002), 166–170. This book’s middle section is comprised of New York essays and concludes with the title essay written around 9.11 and its aftermath.
- ⁷ Kōno Taeko, “Hei no naka,” 塀の中 in *Kōno Taeko zenshū* 河野多恵子全集 vol. 1 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1995), 51–88. All translations from “Hei no naka” cited in this essay are my own. The translation appears in full in this volume, entitled “On the Inside.” The story’s literal title is “behind a fence or wall” but the idiomatic expression in Japanese *hei no naka* immediately connotes prison conditions much like the English expressions “behind bars” and “on the inside.” Moreover, a concrete “wall” (replete with locked gate and guards) is a prominent architectural feature of the fictional factory compound. The final translation of the title seeks to preserve both the idiom in Japanese and English while having the further advantage of suggesting both the psychic interiority of the story’s protagonist and the secrets and lies that get covered up in the story. Italics are not used for emphasis in this essay’s cited passages. See the “Translator’s Note” at the end of the story for explanation of italics and dashes in the story’s translation.
- ⁸ Ichikawa was born “Hiroshi” (宏), but took the name “Yasushi” (泰) as a professional painter, and in the final decades of his life, many of which were spent living in the U. S. and traveling abroad, he often used the name “Henry” (ヘンリー) as well as “Yasushi.” He rarely gave his paintings titles or dated them, making it difficult to historicize his output; the “September 11, 2001” painting is a striking exception in this regard. See the chronology in both English and Japanese documenting his life and work: *Henry Ichikawa no kiseki no genbakuga*. www.hhichikawa.net/. Accessed May 7, 2022.
- ⁹ In the Asahi TV program, *Tsuiseki: ‘Maboroshii no genbakuga’ no shinjitsu*. Ichikawa’s niece Satō Yasuko testifies to her uncle’s explanations about his work. This remains some of the only evidence extant about when these paintings were done, and Ichikawa’s motivation for doing them.
- ¹⁰ Ibid. On the website *Henry Ichikawa no kiseki no genbakuga* see also the portrait of the couple’s close friend, the writer Setouchi Jakuchō.
- ¹¹ Kōno Taeko, *Tōi natsu* (Tokyo: Kōsōsha, 1977).
- ¹² Kōno Taeko, “Atogaki” [Afterword], *Tōi natsu*, 225–6. In her “Afterword” (*atogaki*) to *Tōi natsu*, Kōno stresses that each story was originally written out of chronological order. While the different fictional protagonists certainly stand in for her own experiences, she contends, they also stand in for many others who will surely recognize the details of life in wartime Japan. Of these four stories, “Full Tide” has been translated by Lucy North in *Toddler-Hunting & Other Stories* (New York: New Directions, 1996), 45–68, and “On the Inside” appears in translation in this volume for the first time.

- ¹³ Agamben's ideas about sovereignty and the law in and out of states of emergency and war developed out of the political theory and biopolitics of Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, and Michel Foucault. His concept of the "state of exception" was especially catalyzed by the U. S. (and increasingly global) so-called War on Terror since 9.11. Representative works include Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998) and *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Atell (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005).
- ¹⁴ Agamben's "state of exception" as the implementation of "extraordinary" or "emergency" extralegal measures without legal sanction or clear end comes to mind here. A recent popular dramatization of this can be seen in Anthony Horowitz's deeply researched ITV television series about the suspension and evasion of civil procedures and the rule of law on the home front in Britain during WWII, *Foyle's War* (2002–2015). Chief Superintendent Foyle's job on the home front is to make sure that the rule of law and civilization—the very thing the war is reputedly being fought to protect—does not break down at home where it is at risk of doing so at every level of society, no matter social or economic class.
- ¹⁵ See Chalmers Johnson's Blowback trilogy, particularly *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2007). Of course, the lengthy occupation of Japan by U. S.-led Allied forces contributed largely to the reality of Japan's ongoing "state of emergency" that included conditions of censorship, as well as to debates in Japan about just when the "postwar" began.
- ¹⁶ Miyake, "Doubling Expectations," 286–8. Miyake's thorough research details "emergency" and "wartime" measures put in place that actually eliminated hard-won gains for protection of women and child workers in the prewar, such as the revision of the 1923 Factory Act into the 1943 Wartime Factory Act (戦時下工場法特例 *Senjika kōjōhō tokurei*). Miyake describes contradictory policies of support for maternity together with encouragement of labor in hazardous jobs by women and those under sixteen in the 1942 Control of Important Plants Ordinance (重要事業場労務管理例 *Jūyō jigyōjō rōmu kanrirei*).
- ¹⁷ Economist Jerome B. Cohen's *Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1949) remains the single best source in English on wartime industries in Japan. Cohen often refers to the government policies on student mobilization and the conscription of women and children as "secret" policies. He also notes that Japanese scholars tend to say that women were not conscripted until late 1944 but this is not accurate since, in fact, women at war plants were frozen in their jobs so they were never "officially" conscripted by labor mobilization officers. Similarly, married

women working in plants were never required to register so their labor and mobilization were rendered effectively invisible. From November 1941, men and unmarried women were required to register as part of a potential labor pool (*Kokumin tōroku seido*), and all others, including schoolchildren, had to volunteer on projects with patriotic labor associations (*Kinrō hōkokutai*), all of which underlines the degree to which students and women found it difficult to “choose” or “escape” labor during the war. See Cohen, 272, 278, 309, 317–318, 325–6.

- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, esp. 319–322. Cohen has a section focused on women, and notes too the change in the name of the Women’s Volunteer Corps from 1944 to eliminate “volunteer.” See too Miyake’s section, “Military Conscription of Women,” in “Doubling Expectations,” 288–290. Women were long threatened with the draft if they did not “volunteer,” and Miyake shows how ordinances regarding the Women’s Volunteer Labor Corps resulted in women’s compulsory industrial labor for one year from March 1944.
- ¹⁹ Considering this story’s focus on the unintended death of a child in wartime, it is worth noting here that the Japanese government’s policies of evacuation of children to the countryside, ostensibly to protect them, functioned to separate them from their families and often resulted in their being orphaned and working in rural plants by war’s end. In the course of being evacuated by the Japanese military in large numbers, they also became targets of military attack.
- ²⁰ Cohen, 272.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 324.
- ²² There are several variants of this story having minor discrepancies, including the first version of the story that appeared in *Bungakusha*, the one in *Tōi natsu*, and the last version in the *zenshū*. My decision to use the *zenshū* version is simply because it was the final revised version overseen by Kōno herself for the collected volumes and the most complete.
- ²³ Sakaguchi Ango’s words 「作家には地ベタをはいずる鬼の目が必要だ」 are quoted by Ogino Anna 荻野アンナ in Komori Yōichi 小森陽一 and Inoue Hisashi 井上ひさし, *Zadankai: Shōwabungakushi* 座談:昭和会文学史 (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2003), 9–118, esp. 96. Ango’s language of the “demon eye” that writers need to cultivate appears in the stories *Omoichabako* おもちや箱 and *Gaitō to aozora* 外套と青空, both available at Aozora bunko online: www.aozora.gr.jp. Translations here are my own.
- ²⁴ For translation and exegesis of Ango’s essays on decadence, see James Dorsey and Douglas Slaymaker, eds. *Literary Mischief: Sakaguchi Ango, Culture, and the War* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010).
- ²⁵ Irmela Hijjiya-Kirschnerreit, *Joryū hōdan: Shōwa o ikita joseitachi* 女流放談: 昭和を生きた女性作家たち (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2018), 39–75. This *taidan*

with Kōno took place in the 1980s, along with all the interviews in this book, but was only published in 2018. Hijjiya-Kirschner places Kōno first in a section entitled *Senchūha no sengo* 「戦中派」の戦後, and their rich and illuminating conversation reveals how central Kōno's wartime experiences were to her life and development as a writer. At one moment, she even switches the interview tables, so to speak, to ask Hijjiya-Kirschner how she feels as a German scholar of Japan about war responsibility. Such questions were long on Kōno's mind, we might say, as this essay argues in its emphasis on confessions and tacit deceptions in "Hei no naka."

- ²⁶ Kōno Taeko, *Toddler-Hunting & Other Stories*, trans. Lucy North (New York: New Directions, 1996). Both stories appear in North's collection.
- ²⁷ Kōno Taeko, *Tanizaki bungaku to kōtei no yokubō* 谷崎文学と肯定の欲望 (Tokyo: Bungei shunjū, 1976). She would go on to write a second volume of Tanizaki criticism: Kōno Taeko, *Tanizaki bungaku no tanoshimi* 谷崎文学の楽しみ (Tokyo: Chuōkōronsha, 1998).
- ²⁸ For more on the history of this term see Joan E. Ericson, "The Origins of the Concept of 'Women's Literature,'" in *The Woman's Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women's Writing*, ed. Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A. Walker (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 74–117. Kōno never, to my knowledge, shied away from the word "feminist," although she apparently wanted to see both *feminisuto* (feminist) and *joryū sakka* used more precisely for different historical moments. See her discussion with Hijjiya-Kirschner about *joryū sakka*. The term "feminist," for instance, in the early postwar years referred to men, not women in Japan, as is evident in "Toddler hunting." It is worth noting too that in her *taidan* discussion with Ōba Minako, she agrees with Ōba that a token single woman on literary prize committees is not enough: more women must be at the table so that committees more fairly judge and evaluate women's works together with men's as no longer exceptions or unusual. See *Ōba Minako zenshū*, vol. 22, ed. Tani Yū 谷優 (Tokyo: Nihon keizai shinbun shuppansha, 2011), 416–437.
- ²⁹ She lived and traveled with Ichikawa until his death in 2012, having married him in 1965 after living with him for some years first. His artwork appears on some of Kōno's book covers, and he illustrated and co-authored a book of New York essays: Kōno Taeko and Ichikawa Yasushi, *Nyū yōku meguriai* ニューヨークめぐり会い (Tokyo: Chuōkōronsha, 1997).
- ³⁰ Mizuta Noriko, "Women's Self-Representation and Transformation of the Body." *Josai International Review*, 1.1 (1995): 85–102. Accessed 22 August 2021. Online: <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/AN10479396?lang=en>
- ³¹ For an excellent overview of women's movements and activists in Japan, see Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment, and Sexuality* (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003). On the 1970s

“women’s liberation” movement, in particular, see Setsu Shigematsu, *Scream from the Shadows: The Women’s Liberation Movement in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

- ³² Bullock sees Kōno’s wartime girlhood as a departure point, though, rather than as a formative stage in her development as a writer that continues to shape her work as I argue in this article. See Julia Bullock, *The Other Women’s Lib: Gender and Body in Japanese Women’s Fiction* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010). Critics Yonaha Keiko 与那覇恵子, Gretchen Jones, and Nagaïke Kazumi 長池一美 have explored the disturbing sexual violence throughout Kōno Taeko’s corpus and the feminist implications of her masochistic aesthetic. Jones’s application of film theorist Gaylyn Studlar’s concepts of masochism and suspense to Kōno’s work offers one of the most original takes on Kōno’s literary techniques. Yonaha deftly interpolates biography into analysis of the three types of masochism that Kōno develops as a critical tool for analyzing Tanizaki’s work, and then persuasively deploys them to analyze Kōno’s own fictional world. Drawing upon psychoanalytic theory and Freud’s essay “A Child is Being Beaten” for her provocative reading of sexuality in “Toddler hunting,” Nagaïke explores connections between violent father figures, male children, and the female masochist in order to theorize Kōno’s “perverse aesthetics.” See Gretchen Jones, “Subversive Strategies: Masochism, Gender, and Power in Kōno Taeko’s ‘Toddler-Hunting,’” *East Asia: An International Quarterly* (Winter 2000): 79–107; Nagaïke Kazumi, “Japanese Female Writers Watch a Boy Being Beaten by His Father: Female Fantasies of Male Homosexuality, Psychoanalysis, and Sexuality,” *PAJLS* (Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies) vol. 5 (Summer 2004); Yonaha Keiko, “Kōno Taeko ron,” *Gendai josei sakkaron* (Tokyo: Shinbisha, 1986), 7–29. My own scholarship has benefited from these critics’ readings of Kōno while trying to take into account how her wartime youth and the postwar Occupation period inflect the violence and masochism so persistent in her fictional worlds. See Mary A. Knighton, “The Masochist’s Masquerade: Kōno Taeko’s ‘Beautiful Girl’ (*Bishōjo*),” *Japan Forum* 29.4 (2017): 496–517.
- ³³ “Hei no naka” actually references *Little Women* (1868), American writer Louisa May Alcott’s novel of women left at home while their father goes off to civil war. This detail is a reminder that despite wartime government education policies that forbade the teaching of texts in English and other languages, there is often a gap between national policy or law and implementation at the local and everyday level.
- ³⁴ Setouchi Jakuchō wrote explicitly about sexuality and gender in her fiction. In her own life, too, she rather scandalously abandoned a husband and child to pursue a relationship with another man. Writing about Kōno, see Setouchi Jakuchō 瀬戸内寂聴, *Tsunoru wabishisa つのる侘しさ* in *Gunzō* 群像 4 (2015):

188–189.

- ³⁵ Kōno Taeko, “Atogaki,” *Tōi natsu*, 225–6. Kōno explains that “Hei no naka” and two other stories in this collection were written closer to the end of the war. Only “The time will come” 時来たる (*Toki kitaru*) was written expressly for this volume at the editors’ urging in order to fill in chronological gaps in her life and the background history.
- ³⁶ Ibaragi Noriko, “Onna no ko no māchi” [Girls’ march] in *Onna no kotoba* (Tokyo: Dōwaya, 1994), 24–26. This translation is Mulvey’s in his article looking at women’s poetry aesthetics, including Yosano Akiko’s famous anti-war poem (*Kimi shi ni tamau koto nakare* [Love, You Must Not Go to Your Death]). See Bern Mulvey, “Sweet Music from a Strange Country: Japanese Women Poets as ‘Other,’” *Japanese Studies Review* XIV (2010): 91–111, esp. 100–101.
- ³⁷ See Chapter 16, “What Do You Tell the Dead When You Lose?” in John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (W. W. Norton & Company and The New Press, 1999), 485–546. Here, and in the following final chapter, Dower discusses at length not only positive changes but also unfortunate continuities between prewar and postwar economic and political structures that form the legacy of the U. S.-led Occupation of Japan. Subjection and power are inextricable from the workings of masochism. Gilles Deleuze, in his groundbreaking study of Sacher von Masoch’s fictions (from whence the sexological term “masochism” now derives), stresses the necessary contractual and storytelling elements of masochism as the limits within which freedom and pleasure can be experienced. Masochistic pleasure in bondage acts as a fantasy of liberation; indeed, constraints set surprisingly realistic conditions in which abstract masochistic theories might offer a sobering critique of liberatory politics, feminist and otherwise. Deleuze goes to great lengths to separate masochism from sadism but Kōno makes clear that masochism contains sadism but sadism has no room for masochism. Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (including Leopold Von Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs*) (New York: Zone Books, 1989). It is worth recalling in this context the classic text of J. S. Mills’s *On Liberty* (1859), which stresses that freedom is not absolute but always exercised within constraints. For more on how gender inflects power dynamics in masochism relevant to Kōno’s work, see Knighton, “The Masochist’s Masquerade.”
- ³⁸ Kōno Taeko, “Hei no naka,” 51.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 56.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴³ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 88.

⁴⁵ Kōno Taeko, “Kangaerarenai koto,” *Kangaerarenai koto* 考えられないこと (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2015), 63–90.

⁴⁶ Uranishi Kazuhiko 浦西和彦 ed., *Kōno Taeko bungei jiten/shoshi* 河野多恵子文藝辞典・書誌 (Osaka: Izumi shoin, 2003), 476–7.

⁴⁷ The confessional quality at the end of this story calls to mind the language that Kōno uses to describe the stories in *Tōi natsu*. She stresses that she wrote them with a “feeling of secrecy” (密かに) and rather hopes that the reader too will be able to read them that way. Kōno Taeko, “Atogaki,” *Tōi natsu*, 225–6.

⁴⁸ On how U. S. Occupation authorities’ censorship, particularly of the atomic bombings, functioned to “impede reasonable and therapeutic expressions of grief” (Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 413) as well as get in the way of a healthy transition to true democracy, see chapter 14 in Dower, *Embracing Defeat*. Also see John Dower, “The Bombed: Hiroshimas and Nagasakis in Japanese Memory,” *Diplomatic History* 19.2 (Spring 1995): 275–295.

⁴⁹ Okuno Takeo, “Kaisetsu” [Literary commentary], in *Shōwa sensōbungaku zenshū iinkai* 昭和戦争文学全集委員会, eds. *Senjika no hai tūn*, vol. 11 (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1964–5), 468–475.

⁵⁰ See Okuno Takeo, “Kōno Taeko,” *Sakkaronshū* 作家論集 (Tairyūsha, 1978), 239–245, esp. 242–3. The historical and literary category of the *senchūha*, or *senjika no sedai* 戦時下の世代, is problematic, not least because it is based on loose criteria of generation and theme besides being variable in focus on which war or geographical region provides the author’s experiences. That said, the designation of “wartime generation” remains widely used in the critical literature to refer to those who experienced and wrote about war starting from the Japanese invasion of Manchuria from 1931 leading to the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese war in 1937, and the expansion of the Pacific War with the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the war’s culmination in Japan’s surrender in August 1945 following two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the U. S. Anthologies of wartime literature often include only literature written during the war, necessarily limited due to censorship and proscriptive conditions for publication, or else include colonial and multilingual *gaichi* literature in addition to *naichi* domestic literature and postwar writing about the war. One condition might be said to unite most definitions, however, and that is the expectation of an author having had direct experience of war. A recent volume in a historical series on women writers does not even include an essay on Kōno although she is mentioned twice in the Introduction, first to locate her in the postwar 1960s “decade” of emerging writers, and then to bemoan not having included an essay on her (and several others) in this volume. The

Introduction makes an important contribution to thinking about periodization, however, by focusing on early and late Shōwa itself as a rupture in history and society in Japan, between fascism with its attendant ideological apparatuses and democracy and women's rights imposed under Occupation with the contradictions of censorship and prosperity as a result of Cold War proxy wars in Korea and Vietnam. See New Feminism Critique Group 新・フェミニズム批評の会, eds. *Shōwakōki josei bungakuron* 昭和後期女性文学論 (Tokyo: Kanrin shobō, 2020), 7–13.

- ⁵¹ Okuno, “Kōno Taeko,” 243.
- ⁵² See Kanda Yumiko, “‘Sonzai’ kara ‘jidai’ e no ikō: Kōno Taeko ron” 存在から時代への移行：河野多恵子論 *Meiji kindai bungaku* 明治近代文学 9 (1994): 117–126, wherein Kanda explores how the war experience distilled in “On the Inside” unites the themes of humiliation 被凌辱 and death 死 seen in much of Kōno’s masochistic “existential” fiction. See also Kawamura Jirō, *Genkai no bungaku: fukusūkei no genjitsu* 限界の文学：複数形の現実 (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 1969), esp. 267–283, who argues that Kōno builds multiple “realities” through narration that does not allow the reader to distinguish clearly between fantasy and reality, character and author. On women and the home front of war, see also historian Kanō Mikiyo 加納美紀代: *Joseitachi no “jūgo”* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1987 [Expanded edition, Impact shuppankai, 1995]). Kōno’s “Tetsu no uo” appears in vol. 14, *Joseitachi no sensō*, in the twenty-volume collection *Sensō to bungaku* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2012).
- ⁵³ Ōta Saburō, “Sensō taiken ga tsuranuku bungaku: Kōno Taeko no sekai” 戦争体験が貫く文学：河野多恵子の世界 *Bungei* 文藝 (April 1972), 218–228.
- ⁵⁴ *Kōno Taeko zenshū*, vol. 1, 306. The translation here is my own.
- ⁵⁵ Kōno Taeko, “Iron Fish” in Van C. Gessel and Tomone Matsumoto, eds., *The Shōwa Anthology: Modern Japanese Short Stories*, trans. Yukiko Tanaka (Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International, 1985), 362–374.
- ⁵⁶ Okuno Takeo and Kanda Yumiko both describe Kōno as *itohan*, denoting thereby her class background and regional identity simultaneously. Okuno Takeo, “Kōno Taeko,” 240; Kanda Yumiko, “‘Sonzai’ kara ‘jidai’ e no ikō: Kōno Taeko ron,” 117–126, esp. 118.
- ⁵⁷ Kanda Yumiko, “‘Sonzai’ kara ‘jidai’ e no ikō: Kōno Taeko ron,” 118. See Lucy North’s translation in *Toddler-Hunting & Other Stories*.
- ⁵⁸ Kōno rarely uses dialect even when her works are set in Osaka, and Tomioka Taeko makes clear that this is Kōno’s deliberate choice as part of her philosophy of fiction (*shōsetsukan* 小説観). See Tomioka Taeko 富岡多恵子 (b. 1935) ed., *Osaka bungaku meisakushū* 大阪文学名作集 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2011), 328–9. Consequently, whenever Kōno does use dialect to mark the traditional culture of a place it deserves close attention.

⁵⁹ Kōno Taeko, “Full Tide,” translated in North, *Toddler-Hunting & Other Stories*, 27–44.

⁶⁰ Elsewhere I have stressed the techniques of displacement, open secrets, and red herrings that characterize Kōno’s fiction, all of which contribute to the powerful delayed revelatory force of her fictions’ psychological realism. See Knighton, “The Masochist’s Masquerade.”

⁶¹ See Thomas R. H. Havens, “Women and War in Japan, 1937–1945,” *The American Historical Review* 80.4 (Oct 1975): 913–934, 919, 924. The experiences of housemother Urabe Takeyo are cited from *Shufu no sensō taikenki*, ed. Izumi no Kai (Nagoya: Fūbaisha, 1965): 144, 146. Is Izumi no Kai the publisher?

For those who lived in company dormitories, fatigue and filth were especially demoralizing. Urabe Takeyo, a housemother in a factory lodge for twenty-five teen-age girl workers near the campus of Keio University in Tokyo, noted how exhausting the nightly air raids became when the great American bombardments began in late 1944. Living so close to a noisy plant made sleep fitful at best, and the bombings meant that rest was nearly impossible. What was more, smoke from the coarse fuel used by the factory coated the surroundings: “The entire neighborhood seemed black from oil.” Urabe, in charge of having the girls’ work uniforms laundered, found that the staple fiber (*sufu*) from which they were made soon tore. Near the end of the war, she reported, clothes and bedding could no longer stand washing, and food was so scarce that only the ubiquitous lice grew fat.

⁶² This emphasis can be seen in the heading for this section of their talk: “Sensō ga ubau no wa ‘heiwa’ de wa naku ‘nichijō’” (戦争が奪うのは「平和」ではなく「日常」). See Kōno and Yamada, 55–57. The translation here is my own.

⁶³ See Benjamin C. Duke, *The History of Modern Japanese Education: Constructing the National School System, 1872–1890* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 2014) on the Meiji-era Imperial Rescript on Education and the ideologies invested in it by the politicians and Ministry of Education policymakers who created it, including Confucian values of filial piety and loyalty, secular ideals about education, as well as emperor worship. However, Duke does not discuss the 1939 revision of the Imperial Rescript for Students and Youth. See Miura Tōsaku 三浦藤作, *Seishōnen gakuto ni tamawaritaru chokugo kinkai* 青少年学徒ニ賜ハリタル勅語謹解 (Tokyo and Osaka: Tōyō tosho, 1939). See the National Diet Library (NDL) online for the version used in 1939 by Tottori Prefecture Normal Girl’s School 鳥取県女子師範学校 at <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1098126>. Accessed 9 May 2022.

⁶⁴ The Collaborative Reference Database of the NDL responded to a patron’s question about this “prayer” and answered with several examples from local

sources (March 13, 2007 created; August 25, 2012, last updated) of its use at mealtimes in schools from the early 1940s in Shimane Prefecture and Machida near Tokyo. See online: <https://crd.ndl.go.jp/reference/detail?page=refview&id=1000072089>.

- ⁶⁵ See Ferenc Morton Szasz, “‘Pamphlets Away’: The Allied Propaganda Campaign over Japan During the Last Months of WWII,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 42.3 (2009): 530–540. See Herbert A. Friedman’s website with visual images and explanation of the technology used to disseminate PsyOps (“Psychological Operations”) leaflet propaganda, from the Pacific War to Vietnam and Afghanistan.
- ⁶⁶ Kōno mentions the significance of these writers in her early essays of the 1960s; see Kōno Taeko, *Bungaku no kiseki* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 1974). Kōno’s discussion with Hijiya-Kirschner in *Joryū hōdan* also mentions these influences.
- ⁶⁷ Erotic obsessions and violent fantasies in Kōno’s fiction construct characters’ psychological realism and, at times, rely on the supernatural itself (as in “Saigo no toki,” translated by North as “Final Moments” in *Toddler-Hunting & Other Stories*, 185–213).
- ⁶⁸ On the *ie seido*, see Kathleen Uno, “Women and Changes in the Household Division of Labor,” in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1991), 17–41.
- ⁶⁹ Hirabayashi Taiko, “Blind Chinese Soldiers,” in *Japanese Women Writers: Twentieth-Century Short Fiction*, trans. Noriko Mizuta Lippit (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1991), 41–5.
- ⁷⁰ Kōno Taeko, “Hei no naka,” 51. The Kōno family home was burnt down in the March air raid. See Kōno Taeko, “Kangaerarenai koto,” 65–66.
- ⁷¹ See Yonaha Keiko chronology for Kōno in *Kōno Taeko / Ōba Minako, Josei sakka series* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1998), 426–433, as well as the chronology in Uranishi, *Kōno Taeko bungei jiten/shoshi*. Born on April 30, 1926, Kōno had one older brother, Masatomi (正富, coincidentally born on the same day as Kōno herself), one older sister named Masako (政子), and a baby brother who was two years younger. Neither sibling, nor Kōno herself, is Masako precisely, despite the echoes heard with the first *kanji* character for Masako’s name (正 *masa*); rather, Masako is a persona through which the author’s life and experiences, and those of others, are refracted via the medium of fiction.
- ⁷² Kōno describes her sense of liberation with the war’s end in words that share much with this passage. See Kōno Taeko, “Gobu no tamashii,” *Kiseki no bungaku*, 13–21. Kōno Taeko, “Hei no naka,” 74.
- ⁷³ Just as with Masako in the story, Kōno’s family home was on the south side

during the war and Kōno makes a visit there after the June bombing. See Uranishi, *Kōno Taeko bungei jiten/shoshi*, 477. Kōno Taeko, “Hei no naka,” 74.

⁷⁴ In the extended chronology of Kōno’s life, her birth as recounted by her mother is described in a way remarkably similar to what Masako recalls here: “She was born so fast it was as if she did not want me to waste any more time with recovery in bed” (「産褥を述べる暇もありなしというほどの早さで生まれた」). The translation here is my own. See Uranishi, *Kōno Taeko bungei jiten/shoshi*, 475. Kōno Taeko, “Hei no naka,” 74.

⁷⁵ Kōno Taeko, “Hei no naka,” 83.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 57. Note that the children that Shinbō’s mother has might be called in English “Irish twins,” which refers to children born within twelve months of each other, but it has a derogatory meaning in English (used to castigate poor Irish and Catholic immigrants as likely to have too many children); the term used here, とし児 *toshigo*, however, does not have that precise negative meaning in Japanese. That said, even in Japan siblings who are very close in age might end up being in the same class at school and therefore be subject to negative perceptions or rumors since they are not actual twins. That Shinbō’s mother’s husband is at war and yet she has two infants of such a young age close together dramatizes government policies of rewarding women for having children while also hinting that one or both might have been born from an affair outside marriage, perhaps with the mysterious “Konno” as a man, not a woman.

⁷⁸ Kōno writes about her war experiences not just for herself but for all girls mobilized for labor during the war (see Kōno, “Atogaki,” *Tōi natsu*). Hayashi Kyōko agrees with Kawanishi Masaaki 川西政明 on Kōno’s use of autobiographical elements in her fiction. See Kawanishi Masaaki, *Shōwa bungakushi* 昭和文学史 vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2001), 609–619, esp. 612. Kawanishi argues that Kōno’s fiction has its roots in her life and war but that she erases the “I” behind her protagonists in order to attain the goal of a more universal fiction that can speak to the experiences of others besides herself while striving for her ideal of the literary itself in telling stories of the human condition. See Hayashi Kyōko, “*Ano sensō o dōingakuto toshite ikita jogakusei no shi*” あの戦争を動員学徒として生きた女学生の死 in *Gunzō* 群像 4 (2015): 222–223. The translation above of Kawanishi as cited in Hayashi’s essay is my own.

⁷⁹ These slogans and more are explored in relation to wartime policies enacted to put women and children in the labor force while also advocating for the sanctity of motherhood and the home. See Miyake, “Doubling Expectations.” For more on the *ie seido*, see Uno, “Women and Changes in the Household Division of Labor,” 17–41.

- ⁸⁰ Okuno draws this link to Ōe, while I add William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, a work that while published in 1954 would only come to global prominence by the late 1950s and early 1960s, just when Kōno Taeko was making her debut. Okuno, 241.
- ⁸¹ Kōno Taeko, "Hei no naka," 53.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, 53.
- ⁸³ Author in private correspondence with the Kōno family, March 2022. See the *Yomiuri shinbun* newspaper article *Kono Taekosan owakarekai* 河野多恵子さんお別れ会 (morning edition, March 10, 2015): 25.
- ⁸⁴ Hirabayashi Taiko, "Seryōshitsu nite," in *Hirabayashi Taiko zenshū* 平林たい子全集 vol. 1, ed. Enchi Fumiko, et al. (Tokyo: Ushio shuppansha, 1979), 93–105. See also Linda Flores, "Reading the Maternal Body in the Works of Hirabayashi Taiko," *PAJLS* 5 (2004): 18–32; Stephen Filler, "Hirabayashi Taiko's Proletarian Fiction of the Worksite," in "Rhetoric and Region: Local Determinants of Literary Expression," *PAJLS* 14 (Autumn 2013): 214–228.
- ⁸⁵ Hirabayashi's protagonist will be taken to prison at the end of her stay in the charity ward after her child's death. In an essay entitled "Hirabayashi Taiko and Laughter" (*Hirabayashi Taiko shi to warai*, 1972), Kōno writes that she once overheard Hirabayashi claiming that her generation of women writers had too much realism and insufficient imagination in their writing because they had had to use their imagination more for life, just for survival. This so-called "wife realism" (*nyōbō riarizumu*) is just one aspect of Hirabayashi's accomplishments as a writer, one that Kōno describes as "realism beyond realism" (*riarizumu ijō no riarizumu*) and a transitional stage of writing unique to Japanese women writers. As long as women's modern literary development runs up against their realities, as up against a wall, as long as their real experiences remain unexpressed and outside of plausible representation, they will come out instead in cryptic moments of silence—or, in the case of Hirabayashi, displaced or abbreviated in inappropriate and mocking laughter. In striking ways, Kōno's autobiographical wartime story suggests that Kōno's shocking infanticides and "toddler hunting" find their precursor not only in "On the Inside," but in a literary "mother": Hirabayashi Taiko. When Yamada Eimi asks Kōno who, of all writers living or dead, she would want to talk with about 9.11, Kōno replies "Hirabayashi Taiko." See Kōno and Yamada, 66.
- ⁸⁶ Kōno Taeko, "Hei no naka," 85.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 83, 84–5.
- ⁸⁸ Hayashi Kyōko, *Ano sensō o dōingakuto toshite ikita jogakusei no shi*, 223.