

Beyond Character Consumerism

A Manga Adaptation of *Can't be Howlin' at the Moon* and the Problem of War Poetry¹

Introduction

In Japan, where the manga² industry has been most prolific, numerous works of literature have been adapted into comics, anime films, and video games. These manga or anime adaptations exhibit prevailing cultural power due to their visual impact and accessible depictions of classical literature. For example, the 1974 TV series of *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* and the 1985 film adaptation of the juvenile literary work *Night on the Galactic Railroad* have gained greater popularity than their original source materials.³

In recent years, a new genre has developed within manga adaptations of literature: *bungō* manga (文豪漫画), which feature the great literary masters of early twentieth-century Japan. This chapter attempts to show how a genre of popular culture such as manga adaptation is conducive to the analysis of

1 Many thanks to Dr. Kanae Kawamoto of Kyoto University for her supportive advice in improving the structure of this article, and to Philomena Mazza-Hilway of the University of Chicago for editing and proofreading.

2 The Japanese word *manga* (漫画／マンガ／まんが) is written in kanji, katakana, and hiragana according to the context. The orthography is not determinable, but in this chapter, a general style is used except in citations and in bibliography.

3 *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (*Arupusu no shōjo haiji* ; アルプスの少女ハイジ) was based on *Heidis Lehr- und Wanderjahre* and, written by Johanna Spyri in 1880 and 1881, respectively. The original novels are not read in Japan at all, but the characters of the animation are so popular that they can be seen in contemporary television commercials. The animated adaptation of *Night on the Galactic Railroad* (*Gingatetsudō no yoru* ; 銀河鉄道の夜) received the Ono Fujio Award of the Mainichi Film Competition, one of the most prominent awards for animation, in 1986. It is regularly broadcast as part of midnight TV programming. The original story was written by Kenji Miyazawa (宮沢賢治 1896–1933) and it remains unfinished after Miyazawa's death.

previously undiscussed issues in Japanese literary studies. I attempt to conduct a subtle but stimulating discussion at the intersection between literary studies and representations of wartime in manga. This study focuses on Yukiko Seike's *bungō* manga *Can't be Howlin' at the Moon* (*Tsuki ni Hoerannē*; 月に吠えらんねえ, 2013–2019) in the context of modern Japanese literary studies. The manga comically depicts how the protagonist Saku-kun, a model of Sakutarō Hagiwara, and many other poets struggle to create poetry within a fictional world.

The manga also confidently depicts those poets' involvement in war works. Increasingly drawing readers' attention, *Can't be Howlin' at the Moon* unexpectedly succeeds in shedding light on the taboo topic of wartime poetry, as the comical depiction features the ability to disclose this taboo within a subcultural context. Since literature was employed as one of the most practical methods of propaganda throughout the Japanese Empire, especially during the time of the Asia-Pacific War, many poets willingly wrote works that functioned to raise the nation's morale and the people's admiration for the Empire of Japan. However, once the war ended and was succeeded by a significant wave of democratization, the propagandist works of these poets became an unspeakable topic in post-war Japan for a long time, and they still remain undiscussed in the Japanese literary world today.

Bungō manga not only increases younger generations' access to those writers' literary works, but also functions as an example of the pop cultural phenomenon of characterization (*kyarakutāka*; キャラクター化). The phenomenon of *kyarakutāka* is distinct to Japanese subculture. *Kyarakutāka* is remarkable in post-war Japan as a function of the cultural industry, involving the consumption of characters who are either fictional or based on historical figures. The Japanese word *kyara* is not a mere abbreviation of the original English "character." In his foundational book on Japanese manga culture *Tezuka Is Dead*, Gō Itō describes the definition of *kyara* as not necessarily related to the original story of a figure or the attendant background that it is designed to promote; instead, a *kyara* can be independent from its context (Itō 2005, ch. 3). In terms of *kyara shōhi* (character consumerism; キャラ消費), Japanese psychiatrist Tamaki Saitō argues that the Japanese consumption of *kyara* is circulates throughout Japan; so, it is not only a part of *otaku* culture (Saitō 2014).⁴

4 As BBC Future reported, the business of *kyarakutā* has greatly influenced Japan's economy. For example, *Kumamon* was originally a mascot of Kumamoto prefecture, but its popularity spread nationwide and it is used to stimulate economic activities throughout Japan (BBC Future, 2016).

In his well-known book *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (Azuma [2001] 2009), Hiroki Azuma challenges the “theory of database consumption” that post-modern Japanese consume cultural contents just as they extract fragments of those contents from databases: unsystematically, without contextualizing them within their original background (Azuma 2001, ch. 2). Since the 2000s, his theory has been applied to critique a wide range of cultural phenomena, all of which are deeply influenced by the spread of the internet.

Likewise, each writer or poet appearing in *bungō* manga is consumed as a *kyara*. There is more than one historical reality, and fictional works are expected to differ from any reality. These depictions function to make the reader feel closer to these authors, as humane characters, and, by extension, to their works, as accessible, rather than the typical way that readers learn to relate to these authors as remote literary figures through school textbooks.

With its accessible status as a pop cultural production, *bungō* manga exerts a powerful potential for broaching delicate but important subjects in both society and history eloquently and humorously.

1 The increasing popularity of *bungō* manga

1.1 What is *bungō* manga?

Bungō, literally “literary giant” in Japanese, is a term that refers to great novelists or poets who were primarily active from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Prominent examples include Nobel Prize winner Yasunari Kawabata (川端康成 1899–1972), Nobel Prize nominee Yukio Mishima (三島由紀夫 1925–1970), and Sōseki Natsume (夏目漱石 1867–1916), known for the novel *I Am a Cat* (*Wagahai wa neko dearu*; 我輩は猫である). In the process of developing modern Japanese literature, the works of *bungō* writers came to be acclaimed as serious literature. Although their works can be challenging for the average Japanese reader because of the language in which they are written, even now these texts are highly recommended as reading for educational or cultural purposes. In terms of academic importance, both the works and the life stories of *bungō* writers are a major focus within Japanese literary studies.

Bungō manga is opened to readers of any generation, as long as they are familiar with the “manga-fied” way of pictorial expression, for example, exaggerated facial expressions.⁵ As mentioned above, it is read not only for

⁵ For example, Michael Abbott and Charles Forceville argue about visual expressions in manga and their specific meanings (Abbott and Forceville 2011). When we understand

entertainment purposes, but also for educational and cultural aims. For this reason, teachers and parents encourage children to read *bungō* manga, as well as *rekishi* manga (manga regarding historical stories ; 歴史まんが) or *kagaku manga* (manga containing scientific information ; 科学まんが) and they are considered recommended books.⁶

1.2 Four subtypes of *bungō* manga

There are four subtypes of *bungō* manga in Japan. The first and most important subtype is historical manga, which heavily references episodes in *bungō* writers' lives. However, these episodes are not necessarily related to the known historical chronology of their lifetimes, but often parodied in a subcultural context. Instead of sombre black-and-white portraits in school textbooks, these manga-fied writers are mostly depicted as comical and humane characters, which endears them to the reader, fostering a feeling of closeness. Since *bungō* writers existed in the real world, and not as fictional characters, it is not unknown for readers to create a fictional figure to fall in love with. For example, a reader may develop an infatuation with a particular handsome character in the manga and then try to research the *bungō* writer's history in a library to get more information. This type of manga potentially motivates the reader to read the *bungō* writer's difficult original works and to find them interesting. As a result, the reader comes to associate the *bungō* writer's work with that of the beloved character they encountered in the manga, and eventually will come to regard it as precious.⁷

what is meant in manga, we decode specific representations in manga. Reading manga therefore demands an ability to understand its grammar. Many Japanese begin to read manga in their youth, so it is common for them to have the literacy for manga reading.

⁶ These kinds of manga are generally called *gakushū manga* (学習まんが). This genre of manga is expected to play an educational role for children. However, *gakushū* manga is sometime enjoyed by adults, too. A project, *Koremo gakushū manga da!* (*This is also manga for education!*; これも学習まんがだ!) promotes the expansion of this genre by claiming that manga is well worth reading by all generations who want to be informed about important issues.

⁷ An example is the “rediscovery” of Shūsei Tokuda (徳田秋声 1872–1943), one of the most popular characters in *Bungō and Alchemist* (*Bungō to arukemisuto*; 文豪とアルケミスト), originally an online game published in 2016 and also adopted into manga and anime (*Animemiru*, 2020). While Tokuda was a novelist of naturalism, his works have not been well-read. However, his popularity in manga works increased interest in his novels. A bookstore's blog regards the increased prices of some second-hand books by *bungō* as having an influence on the popularity of manga and *bungō* subcultural content

This subtype of *bungō* manga is fostered by the availability of richer and more detailed sources for creativity or re-interpreting than other works of fictional manga. In Japan, the reader can access most *bungō* writers' collected works and their biographies, including personal letters, diaries, private notes, and even school reports from their youth. Since these publications are available at libraries and online, such ease of access encourages both professional and amateur cartoonists to create and recreate historical *bungō* manga.

The second subtype of *bungō* manga is based on *bungō* writers' novels or essays. In this case, only their literary works are treated in manga adaptations, without reference to their biographies. In general, manga adaptations aid young readers in understanding both the plot and themes of literary works, as younger generations tend to be familiar with manga reading conventions. For example, teachers recommend that high school students read *Asaki yume mishi* (あさきゆめみし), a manga adaptation of the eleventh-century novel *Tales of Genji* (*Genjimonogatari* ; 源氏物語) in order to better understand the story. In addition, the cartoonist's vivid graphics, including impactful onomatopoeic words, can provide the reader with new interpretations of the *bungō* writers' difficult works.⁸

The third subtype of *bungō* manga serves as a guidebook that encourages the reader's interest in the original texts. In most cases, cute and funny characters, who are booklovers, explain why *bungō* works are worth reading.

In the fourth subtype of *bungō* manga, the story is a complete fiction, unrelated to any of the *bungō* writer's original work or life at all. For example, in *Bungō Stray Dogs*, characters named after existing *bungō* writers use magical powers and fight each other in a fictional world.⁹

(Shijōhanbunko [四畳半文庫], 2018). Such price increases are an example of a reaction to the “real” by *bungō* manga fans.

⁸ Many fans also like to visit the collaborative memorial archives of authors. Both in Tokyo and more rural areas in Japan, there are many small memorial museums dedicated to each *bungō*. Original houses where *bungō* writers actually lived a century before are maintained and open to the public today. *Bungō* writers in manga are indeed depicted unrealistically, but their depictions nevertheless preserve a kind of circuit to the world in which we live. Readers can thus modulate their views of how *bungō* figures operate both in and beyond the manga world.

⁹ *Bungō Stray Dogs* (*Bungō sutorei doggu* ; 文豪ストレイドッグ), created by Kafuka Asagiri (朝霧カフカ) and Sango Harukawa, (春河 3 5) has been published from 2012 to the present. Twenty volumes of the manga have been published by Kadokawa, and more than 80 million copies were sold by 2019, according to the official website. From 2014, the manga was novelized and adapted as anime in 2016. A theatrical adaptation also followed. *Bungō Stray Dogs* and its spin-off works represent one of the most famous *bungō* manga.

2 *Bungō* and war poetry

2.1 *The role of bungō in the Asia-Pacific war*

There is an unspeakable issue in the academic field of Japanese literature – *bungō* poets' involvement in the Asia-Pacific War. During wartime, they voluntarily assisted the Japanese Empire by writing numerous poems in admiration of the Empire and its "holy war." Under post-war democratization, this involvement on the part of both professional and amateur poets was largely ignored. During wartime, writing poems was regarded as an effective propaganda tool in the service of nationalism. According to Hideto Tsuboi, moreover, it was important that those poems were actively broadcast on the radio and sung or read aloud in order to increase a sense of national unity (Tsuboi 1997, chs. 8–9).¹⁰

Toshio Nakano argues that the cultural commitment of these propagandist poets did not begin suddenly. According to him, cultural mobilization for war formed steadily with the increase in popular and local songs after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923, after which the Japanese people demonstrated their willingness to join in the mobilization, which, in turn, created a foundation for the acceptance of war poetry (Nakano 2012). Tsuboi argues that a fanatical movement automatically grew out of the mobilization, which developed pre-war Japanese poetry; indeed, he defines the war poems as "an inevitable result" in the history of Japanese poetry (Tsuboi 1997, 11). He claims this war poetry movement advanced not only because of public fanatics and governmental expectations, but also because of the relative deadlock of modernist Japanese poetry. Modernist poetry had developed a heavily visual bias and emphasized technical styles such as the unnatural typography of kanji, hiragana, and katakana. These works were appreciated by the general public, who expected poems that were easy to read aloud and listen to, and so a large number of *minshūshi* (poems for the public ; 民衆詩) appeared in mainstream literature. These intelligible poems, addressed to the general public, including students and working-class people, gained popularity as a means for raising morale and acclimatizing the populace to the idea of sending soldiers to the battlefield. Writers were encouraged to produce propagandist war poems, even if they

¹⁰ Especially Tsuboi points to the importance of the power of recitations in the dissemination of war poetry. Recitations of war poetry were done on the radio regularly from December 1914. The broadcasts of war poetry had a strong influence on the public. In addition, recital meetings were frequently held, in which announcers and poets gave readings of war poems.

were not skilled in poetic composition, in the service of the Japanese Empire and the Imperial Army (Tsuboi 1997).

Within this historical context, the involvement of *bungō* poets was unavoidable. According to Tsuboi, their participation was not simply a question of unfortunate timing and circumstances, but rather that many of them voluntarily created war poems that played a decisive role in the national and cultural politic. While Tsuboi admits that many *bungō* poets devoted themselves to this “project” because the act of writing, even war poetry, fulfilled their essential passion for creation, he argues that they still bore a responsibility for their poetic themes, even during such difficult times (Ibid., 159–160).¹¹ The contemporary poet Tomio Sakuramoto (櫻本富雄 1933–) is critical of the war poets in this regard. He asserts that the poets were complicit in the popularization of war poetry and that they wrote the poems of their own free will.¹² According to Sakuramoto, the *bungō* poets’ support for propaganda inevitably led to them being blamed.

2.2 *Post-war attitudes towards war poems and the advent of bungō manga*

After World War II, most Japanese literary scholars refrained from engaging with propagandist poetry or considering its potential literary merit. Referring to war poetry became a taboo, the aim of which was to protect the *bungō* poets’ honour. When the *bungō* poets’ complete collections were published, their war poems were intentionally omitted. In Japan, the field of literary studies relies heavily on authoritative collected editions, but the manipulation of information in this case stifled any discussion of the war poetry by these poets. Regarding war poetry as shameful also affected education in Japan. For example, Kōtaro Takamura (高村光太郎 1883–1959, a *bungō* writer and a sculptor who was the head of the Association for Cultural Contribution to the Asia-Pacific War, is well-known for his poems *Dōtei* (*Road*; 道程) and *Chieko* (*Chieko-shō*; 智恵子抄). Many of his works are featured in school textbooks, but none of his war poems ever make an appearance.

¹¹ However, Tsuboi does not just blame the poets who joined the war poems movement. His main concern is what produced a sterile literature in wartime and how it related to a vulnerability in modern Japanese literature, a concern he shares with Hotsuki Ozaki (Tsuboi 1997, 166).

¹² Sakuramoto continues to raise issues of responsibility for war poetry from the position of a current poet. He has published many books, including for children, that deal with the problematic relationship between war and literature. *Shijin to sensō* (1977) and *Kūhaku to sekinin* (1983) are among his most important works.

Thus, literature is easily affected by the circumstances in which it is created. The suppressing of such works discussed above also informs us how difficult it has been for researchers in post-war generations to conduct an unbiased overview of particular authors' works. Certainly, it has been difficult, if not impossible, to explore and research the extensive corpus of wartime armature and works and by unknown poets.

However, *bungō* manga offers a breakthrough, along with an opportunity for change, though perhaps unintended by cartoonists and unexpected by readers. *Can't be Howlin' at the Moon* is a successful example of this breakthrough dynamic. Taking advantage of the impact of cultural representation in order to spark readers' interest, this *bungō* manga uncovers the taboo relating to war poetry while entertaining the reader with artistic manga depictions. I will describe the particularities of this manga in the next section.

3 *Can't be Howlin' at the Moon* and its rhetorical power

3.1 *Can't be Howlin' at the Moon* and Sakutarō Hagiwara's *Howling at the Moon*

Can't be Howlin' at the Moon, authored by Yukiko Seike (清家雪子), was serialized in the manga magazine *Monthly Afternoon* (*Gekkan afutanuun*; 月刊アフタヌーン) from November 2013 until September 2019.¹³ In 2017, the manga won the 20th New Face Award in the manga division of the Japan Media Art Festival in 2017. The manga is named after *Howling at the Moon* (*Tsuki ni noeru*; 月に吠える), the 1917 collection of verses by Sakutarō Hagiwara (萩原朔太郎 1886–1942), who is considered one of Japan's most preeminent modern poets. The book comprises 55 poems, essays by Sakutarō Hagiwara, Saisei Murou (室生犀星 1889–1962), and Hakushū Kitahara (北原白秋 1885–1942), and also features eleven illustrations by Kyokichi Tanaka (田中恭吉 1892–1915) and three woodblock prints by Koshirō Onchi (恩地孝四郎 1891–1955) with additional information about visual matters, as Hagiwara intended to make an illustrated book in the manner of *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley (Hagiwara [1916]1977, 13:137).¹⁴

¹³ *Monthly Afternoon* is a comic magazine marketed to young adults, and one of the most popular works serialized in the publication is *Parasyte* (*Kiseijū*; 寄生獣), created by Hitoshi Iwaaki (岩明均) in the 1990s.

¹⁴ Hagiwara to Onchi in mid-October, 1916.

Howling at the Moon is a text with monumental status in the history of Japanese modern poetry, as it is recognized as the first instance of free verse poetry written in colloquial Japanese. In the poems, Hagiwara evokes his own emotions, including the sadness and joy of life, through images of bamboo, the moon, cherry blossoms, and chrysanthemums. While these motifs are found in Japanese literature at large, the collection is remarkable in the sense that Hagiwara deliberately casts these usually auspicious motifs in a negative light – as old, rotten, and uncanny – in order to express his feelings of loneliness and melancholy. His poems are occasionally criticized for being mysterious and even strange, but they are also acknowledged as having the power to touch the emotions hidden deep within the human heart.¹⁵ Hagiwara wrote just one war poem, in admiration of the fall of Nanjing, and died before the height of the Asia-Pacific war.

3.2 Particularities of *Can't be Howlin' at the Moon*

On the first page of *Can't be Howlin' at the Moon*, the following narration outlines the relationship between Hagiwara's poetry and manga:

The characters of this story were inspired by my impressions of the poetical works of modern Japan. Many episodes of the authors' lives are referenced, but these are embroidered with my impressions; thus those characters are not exactly like the real authors. This manga includes a lot of exaggerated expressions, but I would like you to understand that it was because I dealt with their works seriously, and sincerely respect all the authors of modern Japan (Seike 2014, 1:1 [my translation]).

The characters in *Can't be Howlin' at the Moon* were inspired by Seike's personal interpretations of the poems. She says that she depicts neither *bungō*'s actual figures, nor faithful visualizations of the poems. Instead, the manga is intended to be her interpretation of poems in modern Japan, and, as such, it should be seen as a kind of offshoot of the poets' history.

The manga takes place in the fictional setting of the "Town of poetry," where the poets live while devoting themselves to their creative endeavours. All the protagonists, who are named after real *bungō* writers, are depicted as handsome young men, and are featured not only in funny episodes that

¹⁵ For example, "Bamboo" (*Take*; 竹), "Sad Moonlight Night" (*Kanashī tsukiyo*; 悲しい月夜), Chrysanthemum Gone Rancid" (*Suetaru kiku*; すえたる菊), and "Essence of Spring" (*Haru no jittai*; 春の実体) also share the characteristics of *Howling at the Moon*.

originate in historical fact, but ones that are also based upon media critiques or academic research. The leading character, Saku-kun (朔くん), is modelled on Sakutarō Hagiwara and is portrayed as a sensitive person in touch with his emotions. Sai (犀) is modelled on Saisei Murō, who was Hagiwara's closest friend in real life. Haku-san (白さん), who is named after the famous poet and Sakutarō's teacher Hakushū Kitahara, is depicted as being in a romantic relationship with Saku-kun. This fictionalization is based upon the fact that Hagiwara had a kind of teacher-like affection for Kitahara that went beyond a mentoring relationship, while the latter valued Hagiwara purely as a great poet in his youth. Miyoshi-kun (ミヨシくん), who ranks highly as a fan favourite, is modelled upon Tatsuji Miyoshi (三好達治 1900–1964). Historically, he was one of Hagiwara's few disciples, evincing a sincere respect for Hagiwara.

Seike's manga emphasizes how these poets struggle with their creative works and with painful self-awareness in their relationships. Many of their poems are quoted as part of scenes in the manga, and they leave deep impressions upon the reader. Seike attempts to pay respect to the poets' works and to academic fidelity, providing a detailed bibliography at the end of each manga volume in a fashion that is quite different from other works of *bungō* manga.

Can't be Howling at the Moon is composed of many fragmented episodes in an unrealistic world. Within the manga, elements such as dreams, amnesia, time warps, and magic result in the reader perceiving the story as unsystematic, amusing, and elaborate.

3.3 *The theme of war poetry in Can't be Howling at the Moon*

According to Jun Ishiko, a large portion of post-war manga has been explicitly critical of war. Many established cartoonists, such as Osamu Tezuka (手塚治虫 1928–1989), Shigeru Mizuki (水木しげる 1922–2015), and Keiji Nakazawa (中沢啓治 1939–2012), have published works based on their own experiences during wartime in order to depict the misery of war for their readers, especially younger generations.¹⁶ While a significant number of manga depict war in a

¹⁶ Osamu Tezuka created many manga that depict wartime tragedies not only in Japan, but also worldwide. In *Message to Adolf*, which first appeared in 1983 (*Adorufu ni tsugu*; アドルフに告ぐ), Tezuka dealt with the crimes of the Nazis in World War II. Shigeru Mizuki is well-known as a pioneer of *yokai* (fantastic monsters; 妖怪) manga; he lost his left arm in the battle of Rabaul when he was young. Keiji Nakazawa was the author of *Barefoot Gen* (*Hadashi no Gen*; はだしのゲン), which was published from 1973 to 1987 and is an autobiographical manga based on his experiences as a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

heroic manner, or that praise the Pacific War, such as the series *Sensōron* (新ゴーマニズム宣言 SPECIAL 戦争論) written by Yoshinori Kobayashi (小林よしのり 1953–present), Ishiko asserts that the majority of war manga are written from a stance of pacifism (Ishiko 2016, 8–16). *Can't be Howling at the Moon* is included in this majority. Seike's advocacy for peace is not expressed openly, however, it is not difficult for readers to identify and to sympathize with it. Through funny episodes involving the *bungō* poet characters, the manga makes evident her love and respect for the modern poets who were subjected to the horrors of war. Her creative attitude is bolstered by her awareness of the cultural power of manga.

Likewise, *Can't be Howling at the Moon* is not a mere manga adaptation of the *bungō* poets' lives as entertainment. Rather, it is an attempt to deal with the creation of propagandist literature during the Pacific War. Saku-kun explains one shocking reason for the poets' creation of war poetry as follows:

Poets who hang around in society, writing and writing without making money, who were also called good for nothing, were mocked in the hierarchy of the literary world, which places novelists on top. Poets have been looked down on as worthless dropouts from society. In wartime, it was the first time people saw us being useful. Our poems were known among a limited range of people, as they were unreadable. But once our poems were given the label of “patriotic” poems, they were broadcast and spread through the radio. The time of war poetry was the time when the largest number of poetry books were published; the first time when poetry answered a call from society. If the poetry that society judges to be the best is devalued in terms of artistic merit, I can say the peak of modern Japanese poetry is war poetry (Seike 2016, 5:140–142 [my translation]¹⁷).

Representing this Saku-kun's lament, Seike implies why many poets joined the creative effort to uplift the Japanese Empire and its “holy war.” Art, including poetry, includes not only sacred but also worldly elements; every form of art requires an audience to appreciate it. Moreover, during wartime, when any creative activities or productions were subject to governmental scrutiny, it was incredibly difficult to revolt against prevailing pro-war viewpoints.

17 「世間から離れたところでうだうだしていた詩人たちが/書いても書いても金にならず穀潰しと呼ばれ/金になるってだけで小説至上の文壇からも軽視され/落伍者と馬鹿にされ続けた詩人たちが/初めて社会に求められた/みんなの役に立った/一部にしか知られていなかった/民衆には意味の掴みにくいおれたちの詩も/愛国の詩との熨斗をつけられることにより/音波に乗って拡散していった/戦争詩の時代/それは詩集が最も多く発行された時代/はじめて詩が社会の要請に応えた時代/社会が最上と認めるものが芸術の価値ならば/日本近代詩の頂点は/戦争の詩なんだよ!」

Such dilemmas about creation remain universal. The contemporary poet Harumi Kawaguchi (川口晴美 1962–present) candidly confesses her struggles. She cannot refuse proposals to write poems on subjects that she would not otherwise engage with if only she had a wider readership for her works, insofar as any poet desires to have readers read their poems (Kawaguchi 2018, 47).

The manga includes parallel stories of Sai's travels, portraying his feelings of regret and helplessness on various battlefields, including Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. These parallel stories imply that many poets admired the war while keeping a safe distance from the dangerous reality of the frontlines. In one scene, an innocent girl, Haruko, flees with Sai into the jungle; she is eventually killed but he manages to survive. Sai's travels demonstrate the dilemma of the poet, suspended between the miserable reality of the battlefields and the imperative of providing cultural assistance to the state. In another scene, Sai holds a dead child in his arms while crying out that he has been writing admirations of the Japanese Empire, composed in his safe cottage surrounded by flowers, without having to face the harsh realities of the war. His painful scream gives voice to how the poets might have felt about their involvement in their prior glorification of the war once it had ended. Sai's travels invite the reader to imagine what happened in the field of literature in both pre- and post-war Japan.

4 *Bungō* manga and consumption culture

4.1 *Otaku* desire for *kyara* commodification

Bungō manga fans enjoy these works in the context of character commodification in the same manner as they consume other popular cultural products. Once *bungō* is created into *kyara*, *kyara* become a target of consumption. Then, the reader does not necessarily consider each *bungō* writer's historical existence. *Kyarakutāka* allows us not only to approach historical figures and events as they actually existed in the past, but also to consume them arbitrarily. As Hiroki Azuma writes in his database theory, character consumption is a sub-cultural activity in which the fans consume different fragments extracted from the works or personality without the original context, and find every fragment, like scattered dots, valuable. Just as in the consideration of a large database, the reader does not interpret the fragments beyond initial impressions, and, moreover, cannot grasp the entire narrative arc of the fictional world (Azuma 2001). Instead, the information in the database is fragmentary and mutable. The real *bungō* authors differ from their fictional characters, but this difference is necessary in order to transform them into desirable objects.

Moreover, the enjoyment of *bungō* manga is a manner of *otaku* subculture. Tamaki Saito describes how *otaku* understand that the real world is different from the fictional world of *kyara*, but they make them their desirable objects to love. *Otaku* never mix up realities with dreams (Saito 2006). In same way, the readers of *bungō* manga do not equate the real *bungō* authors with the fictional *kyara*.

This *otaku* method of consuming *bungō* manga is also related to that of *yaoi* or BL (boy's love), which denotes fiction featuring homosexual relationships between males, in particular for the consumption of female readers. These readers enjoy *bungō* manga by replacing historical friendships or mentoring relationships between *bungō* writers and their disciples with imagined romantic relationships. Since most *bungō* writers are men, *bungō* manga satisfies the female reader's desire for immersion in their fictional romances.¹⁸

Bungō writers in *bungō* manga can be understood not only as characters, but through the Japanese concept of *kyara* as defined by Gō Itō. Itō argues that, taken out of their original context, *kyara* gain independence, and are, in turn, consumed independently by readers. In the process, *kyara* can be manipulated and recreated freely in different contexts (Itō 2016, 117–119). Thus, the commodification of *bungō* is an example of consumption of *kyara*.

Once a reader comes to love a *bungō* writer as a *kyara*, the *bungō* becomes a mere symbol in accordance with the reader's arbitrary desires. Accompanied by creation and consumption, *bungō* manga demonstrates the inner workings of a widespread Japanese popular culture.

18 Many manga are based on the historically chauvinistic literary world of modern Japan, in accordance with the educational system that began in the Meiji era (1868–1912) and the publication conventions of that time. Yet, this male-dominated world provides a convenient backdrop for contemporary female readers who desire exciting and immersive fiction to meet their particular tastes. In some *bungō* manga, characters are depicted as handsome young men in the *shōjo manga* style. This shows that *bungō* writers can become a target for female readers who approach the male-dominated landscape as a resource for their own desires. A few female *bungō* writers, such as Akiko Yosano (与謝野晶子 1878–1942) and Ichiyō Higuchi (樋口一葉 1872–1896), also debuted in the literary world. In spite of the fact that many women and girls attempted to write poems, novels, or essays and contribute to magazines or newspapers, their works have remained relatively unexplored even in contemporary scholarship.

4.2 Grand narrative

While readers may not understand the entire story of *Can't be Howling at the Moon* due to its complex mixture of historical facts and sometimes unreal depictions by Seike – the story's structure is so complicated that it is often confusing – this complexity and unclear structure has two effects on the reader. One effect is that the reader simply fondly appreciates the appearance of their favourite *kyara* in each episode. The other is that instead of grasping the story, readers are motivated to float in the confusing state where they are left and also to imagine a bridge between episodes.

In other words, readers are attracted by the “grand narrative” that emerges within their confusion, as defined by Eiji Ōtsuka. This “grand narrative” (*ōkina monogatari*; 大きな物語) refers to an overview, in the background, that is obscured by individual issues. Ōtsuka suggests that Japanese consumption since the 1980s has been shaped by fragments or events that arose in the world of the text with the specific purpose of achieving a totality that is hidden from our eyesight. He argues that what people actually consume is not any individual drama or object within the text, but rather the total system itself, which is a barely detectable framework in the background. This system is also a comprehensive background composed of fragments (Ōtsuka 2001, ch. 1).¹⁹ Marc Steinberg translates Ōtsuka's idea of the consumption of grand narrative (*monogatari shōhi*; 物語消費) as “narrative consumption” (Steinberg 2010, 109).

In the case of *kyara* consumption, practiced in the field of manga, the reader initially attempts to consume each individual *kyara* or a certain episode, as seen in *bungō* manga as well, but the readers are simultaneously consuming a “grand narrative” implicit in the manga as well as the explicit contents. Furthermore, this “grand narrative” plays a role in motivating the reader to consume the manga.

In other words, the “grand narrative” is consumed but also motivates the reader's desire because its presence “behind” the story arouses the reader's curiosity. This process has something in common with readers who thirst for the hidden framework that controls the world of *Can't be Howling at the Moon*. Specifically, readers imagine what is at play behind each complex manga episode.²⁰

19 Ōtsuka's concept of “narrative consumption” features in *Monogatari shōhiron* (1989), which became a pioneer in the Japanese subculture discourse. Indeed, the concept influenced the development of Azuma's “database theory.”

20 In addition, Seike shows her talent for demonstrating the technical manipulation of information and creative suggestion within the manga so readers remain gripped until

Not all manga have such a hidden framework; indeed, in some instances, it might actually obstruct the reader's enjoyment and immersion into the world of the manga. If readers notice that they are being controlled somehow by an invisible force, this might spoil their pleasure. However, as discussed, Seike appears to employ this "grand narrative" function in *Can't be Howling at the Moon* and reveals the existence of hidden framework. It is possible, for example, to interpret *Kami* (the Creator ; 神), who is supposed to dominate the "Town of Poets" universe, as an invisible ruler; indeed, as a metaphor for the "grand narrative." *Kami* does not appear as a particular *kyara*, but defines the worldview in the fictional town. *Kami* is selected from the poets in the "Town of poets," and he dominates the modalities of the world of manga. Given that Seike announced her manga to be created based on her own interpretation and overview of modern Japanese literature, it is safe to say that she is conscious of the effect of a hidden "grand narrative" that catches readers' attention. In other words, from a cartoonist's meta view, Seike metaphorically reveals the dominant function of the "grand narrative" in *Can't be Howling at the Moon*.

Thus, we can locate the definitive characteristics of *Can't be Howling at the Moon* at the intersection of two dimensions. One is the conventional way in which *kyara* is consumed based on the subcultural phenomenon of character commodification within Japanese pop culture, in which fragments of information become objects of consumerism for the *otaku's* desire. In particular, romance, including the homosexual relationship between Saku-kun and Haku-san, becomes an object of pleasure for female readers. The second characteristic is a framework that secures the readers' desire to grasp the worldview hidden behind each episode and individual *kyara*. One of the strengths of *Can't be Howling at the Moon* is its ability to harness the reader's attention despite its confusing story, continuing to entrance them until they extract the "grand narrative." Together, these two characteristics reveal a tension between character consumption and narrative consumption. In other words, *Can't be Howling at the Moon* features a meta-framework formed by two opposing pillars of consumption culture: the manga is a criticism of culture, by culture.

Conclusion

My analysis clarifies two interpretive facets of *Can't be Howling at the Moon*. First, the manga takes up an issue that authorities on Japanese literary studies

the end. She is good at entertaining readers in terms of both modelling attractive *kyara* and controlling narrative in her work.

deemed “shameful” and thus have carefully sought to avoid in the post-war period by exercising the flexible power of popular culture. *Can't be Howling at the Moon* is neither an academic study, nor a thesis, and thus Seike can exercise her imagination and creativity freely within the context of popular culture. As she explains at the outset, the manga does not attempt to portray the historical reality of authors as they were, but to depict her own impressions of them, inspired by modern Japanese poetry. She intends her readers to regard the manga as a complete fiction based on a cartoonist's interpretation. In other words, this manga should be read principally as pop cultural entertainment. Readers can certainly enjoy *Can't be Howling at the Moon* in this way, but a careful reading also reveals the text's engagement with issues that lie behind our common understanding of *bungō* writers and Japanese modern literature, particularly with regard to the world of Japanese poems during wartime and the reasons why such poems are not widely known.

Secondly, as a popular cultural product, *Can't be Howling at the Moon* transcends simple character commodification as, ultimately, it tackles the problem of creation itself within a meta-framework. The manga demonstrates an innovative interpretation perspective combined with two types of consumption culture: *kyara* consumption and narrative consumption.

Manga has largely been understood as a part of popular culture that features dynamic and free expression. Its hilarious and eloquent approaches have the potential to deal even with sensitive issues that wider society tends to avoid. Likewise, *Can't be Howling at the Moon* is much more than an object of the character consumerism that encompasses Japanese cultural products. *Bungō* manga therefore provides new perspectives and critiques not only with respect to its influence on modern Japanese literature but also within an *otaku* cultural context.

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Comment by Hugo Gelis

Masako Hashimoto's study approaching Japanese wartime poetry through the lens of a twenty-first-century manga highlights the popular roots of texts that we instinctively classify as classical literature and high art. These patriotic poems were not published with any reverence: they were products of the cultural industry; propaganda aimed at the masses and broadcast on radio, a mass media.

It thus makes sense to see these shameful verses resurface not in scholarly publishing, which rarely acknowledges their existence, but in a popular manga. There, they are completely decontextualized: the appalling text is removed and only the poet – an appealing character – remains.

The reader's activity is "consumption of an historical figure," which cannot be explained by literary critics or cultural industries but rather by contemporary fan theories. Indeed, reading *Can't be Howlin' at the Moon* as a biographical fiction would miss the point that, in fact, it is a derivative work itself, a *bungō* fanwork. Given that its follow-up manga, *Tsuki ni HoetaNnee* (月に吠えたンねえ, 2020) is published on Pixiv Comic, a digital platform pivotal to Japanese manga and fan culture, the tools of non-linear and subcultural consumption are even more relevant.

Comment by Zoltan Kacsuk

The chapter by Masako Hashimoto provides an interesting perspective on how popular culture offers ways to address parts of Japan's wartime cultural history that have been suppressed in the post-war period. The *bungō* manga phenomenon, in which the creators of the stories draw on the literary greats of modern Japanese literature and/or their respective works, is one such example, and allows for the problematic surrounding the war poetry of these former masters to be touched upon. Furthermore, in her discussion of one of these popular *bungō* manga, *Can't be Howlin' at the Moon*, Hashimoto highlights the *kyara* nature of the great writers as they appear in the series. Discussing

the fragmented nature of this manga's story building, she draws attention to the way it underpins the joys of both the database consumption of the *kyara*/characters and the narrative consumption of piecing together the larger picture of the world setting. Hashimoto's reading of *Can't be Howlin' at the Moon* thus not only provides a perspective on *bungō* manga's potential for engaging with controversial subjects, like authors' engagement with war poetry, but also offers an excellent case for the need to reconsider the either/or approach to theorizing the relationship between database and narrative consumption.

