

ABSTRACT

Monologue Amid the Shatters

Japanese urban culture following WWII, as reflected in the writings of Ōe Kenzaburō

Rotem P. Ayalon, The Hebrew University

One of the paramount visual symbols of post-war Japan was the all-embracing destruction of cities. From a periodic perspective, the affects of the war were primarily measured by the direct physical damage and its consequential effects.

Ōe Kenzaburō is considered as one of the leaders of Japan's 'post-war generation' authors, and undoubtably one of the most prominent and exceptional, specifically in his social-political discourse. Ōe's writings serve as a mirror through which he presents a reflection of reality alongside a profound social critique. In his acceptance speech of the Literary Nobel Prize he noted how the modernization process turned Japan to a militaristic state, and only the loss and surrender allowed it to rebirth itself, out of that same suffering. This rebirth, he describes in his writing by examining the physical and social destruction that existed in Japan at the end of the war, the period of occupation and the years that followed. Amid these descriptions are the shatters of a culture and a society; the attempt of rehabilitation within the urban spaces of Tokyo on the one hand, and Hiroshima on the other. In this discourse, Tokyo represents the perception of the Japanese majority, while Hiroshima represents what Oe would have like to have been the majority.

Ōe, who was born in a small village by the name of Ose on the island Shikoku and moved to Tokyo in his maturing, presents one additional reflection, and that is the comparison between urban space and culture to the peripheral and village one.

In a comprehensive observation, one can see Ōe's endless search after a Japanese identity that disappeared amid the physical and metaphorical ruins that remained after the war. Ōe tries to chart a path, to mend the fragments, and to

lead to this lost identity.