

Un/Making of a Hero in “Yojō”

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Abstract

This paper discusses Yamamoto Shūgorō (1903-1967)'s “Yojō (1952),” often referred to by critics as one of the most important works of Yamamoto's later life. While Yamamoto is a popular writer in Japan, he is virtually unknown in the U.S., partly because of the lack of translations and partly because of the misperception of Yamamoto's work as “uniquely Japanese,” since most of his works are set in the historical Edo period. However, contrary to their setting, Yamamoto's works depict more universal, contemporary human issues that are relevant today and worthy of a wider audience.

“Yojō” is the satirical story of a commoner protagonist, Iwata, who accidentally ended up in a vengeance plot against the famed swordsman Miyamoto Musashi for killing his father. While Iwata has no intention to take revenge, the people around him, including Musashi, continue to misunderstand him, and treat him as a hero. Preceded by Yoshikawa Eiji's popular wartime novel series, *Musashi* (1935-1939) that depicts Musashi as an ideal samurai, Yamamoto's work subverts and dismantles this conventional image in a satirical manner.

This paper first provides some background information, introducing the conventional image of Musashi that Yamamoto subverts in “Yojō,” Yamamoto's idea of novels, and his reception in the U.S. It then examines how “Yojō” deconstructs and satirizes the image of Musashi as a model samurai, while making a hero out of an unheroic no-name protagonist. In conjunction with Yamamoto's essays about his work and the war, this paper considers the role the historical novel played in reflecting Yamamoto's satirical views.

Introduction: Musashi's Popularity and Yamamoto Shūgorō's Subversion

If someone asked the average Japanese to name the most famous swordmaster, Miyamoto Musashi (c. 1584-1645) would come at the top of the list. Certain images of Musashi – Musashi as a wielder of two swords, his rivalry with Sasaki Kojirō and their battle at Ganryūjima Island, his romantic relationship with Otsū, etc. – are still well-known in Japan. While historical records of Musashi are scarce, that leaves plenty of space for imagination. Most legends about Musashi were formed through fictional works such as *kōdan*, *jōruri*, and *kabuki*, and, in more recent years, novels, television dramas, films, and *manga*. From the time of its serialization in *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun* in 1935-1939, Yoshikawa Eiji's novel, *Miyamoto Musashi*, has been the most influential work in the formation of modern images of Musashi. In this novel, Yoshikawa remade the image of Musashi from the hero of a vengeance story, as established in *kōdan* and *jōruri*, into a swordmaster, a model samurai who was enlightened in the way of the spiritual sword. Many of the well-known images of Musashi, for example, his romantic relationship with Otsū and choosing the way of the sword over her, are popularized in Yoshikawa's *Musashi*.⁽¹⁾

Written in the buildup to and early days of World War II, Yoshikawa's *Musashi* was read under the war context as an ideal for Japanese soldiers, especially Musashi's characterization as wishing to die honorably, and fighting for

(1) It also became the source of the Musashi boom in the 2000s. Inoue Takehiko's *manga*, *Vagabond*, based on Yoshikawa's novel, began serialization in 1998, and numerous TV dramas and films based on Yoshikawa's novel followed its success. Although not in full, English translation by Charles S. Terry is available. Yoshikawa Eiji, *Musashi*, translated by Charles S. Terry (New York: Harper Collins, 1981).

his country and for the ones he loves. Sakurai Ryōju's discussion of how *Miyamoto Musashi* was interpreted under the war context concludes that the novel "was accommodating to the social circumstances in which the wartime regime was being formed. Yoshikawa himself was aware of his novel's role as such, and was satisfied with it at the time."⁽²⁾ However, after the war, Yoshikawa was shocked to learn that his name was briefly included in the list of people who were responsible for the war and thus ineligible to serve as public officials, and he revised some parts of *Miyamoto Musashi* before it was republished in 1949.⁽³⁾ The revised and reprinted 1949 version was also a big hit, with the renewed image of Musashi as a stoic swordsman and philosopher who perfected the way (道) of the spiritual sword (精神の剣).⁽⁴⁾

It was in this context that Yamamoto Shūgorō's "Yojō (よじょう)" was published in an extra issue of the *Weekly Asahi* magazine in 1952. Yamamoto satirizes Yoshikawa's popularized image of Miyamoto Musashi as a master and "god" of the way of the sword, through the eyes of a commoner protagonist, Iwata, whose father was killed by Musashi. Remarkably, Yamamoto never once made Iwata utter "michi (道)," or "the way," a key term that Yoshikawa often used in his work on Musashi.⁽⁵⁾ Instead, Iwata constantly describes Musashi as "単なる見栄っばり," or "a mere poseur." Yamamoto also satirizes the society that, while ignorant of Iwata's true feelings, comically heaps praise and charity upon Iwata by interpreting (and thus misunderstanding) his becoming a beggar according to the samurai convention of waiting for a chance to take revenge for one's father. This paper examines how Yamamoto's postwar work deconstructs and satirizes this image of Musashi as a model samurai, while making a hero out of an unheroic no-name protagonist. In conjunction with Yamamoto's essays about his work, the role of popular novels (大衆小説),⁽⁶⁾ and the war, this paper considers the role the historical novel played in reflecting Yamamoto's satirical views.

Yamamoto Shūgorō, His View of Novels, and U.S. Reception

Yamamoto Shūgorō (1903-1967), born Shimizu Satomu, was a prolific writer who wrote over 230 short novellas and over twenty long novels in his life. He consistently published his works in popular magazines, with most of his works set in historical settings, often during the Edo period, and with protagonists varying from townspeople to samurai, nobodies to historical figures. In 1943, his work, *Tales of Japanese Ladies* (日本婦道記) was chosen for the Naoki Award, but Yamamoto declined it, since he thought that being read by many readers was the only real award.⁽⁷⁾ This attitude never changed, and he never accepted any kind of award in his life.⁽⁸⁾ His works are still made into dramas, stage plays, and movies,⁽⁹⁾ and are loved by many people in Japan.

Despite his popularity in Japan as "perhaps the best-loved of all contemporary novelists,"⁽¹⁰⁾ Yamamoto is little-known in the U.S. Only a few of Yamamoto's works have been translated thus far, with only a couple of translations from major companies. *Hanamushiro* (花筵, 1948), translated as *The Flower Mat* in 1977 and published by Tuttle, was the only widely available translation until 2009.⁽¹¹⁾ In discussing the American market for English translations of Japanese literature, Edward Fowler lists Yamamoto as a writer of "[t]he kind of Japanese fiction that is almost

(2) Sakurai Ryōju, *Miyamoto Musashi no yomarekata* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2003), 67-68. All the translations in this article are by me.

(3) Sakurai, 73-74. The revision was also necessary to pass the GHQ censorship at the time.

(4) For more on the revision and the postwar reception, see Sakurai, 73-108.

(5) Okuno Takeo, *Yamamoto Shūgorō* (Tokyo: Sōjusha, 1977), 130.

(6) In a lecture at Chūō University, Yamamoto said he "personally do[es] not recognize the distinction between pure literature and popular literature." From Yamamoto Shūgorō, *Teihon Yamamoto Shūgorō zen essei shū* (Tokyo: Chūō daigaku shuppanbu, 1970), 30.

(7) Though there is no written record of the reason for his declining the Naoki Award, his reason for declining the Bungei Shunjū Readers' Award is recorded. Yamamoto said that he had already received many awards by being read and accepted by readers and critics. For more detail, see "Bungei shunjū dokushashō o jisu no ben" in Yamamoto, 1970, 102.

(8) It is ironic that Yamamoto, who did not accept any awards in his life, had an award named after him almost twenty years after his death. Winners include Yoshimoto Banana's *Tsugumi*, Miyabe Miyuki's *Kasha*, and Shigematsu Kiyoshi's *Eiji*.

(9) For example, "Ameagaru" and "Doraheita" were made into movies in 2000 under the same names, "Sabu" was made into a movie in 2002, and five to ten of his works have been performed in the theater every year at least since 1967, possibly earlier.

(10) Donald Richie, *Japanese Literature Reviewed* (New York ; Tokyo : ICG Muse, Inc, 2003), 327.

unknown in the United States.”⁽¹²⁾ His is among “[t]he names of popular writers rarely heard of in academic circles,” but well-known among “American publishers and journalists working in Japan.”⁽¹³⁾ The few academic English writings that mention Yamamoto merely note him as the author of the original stories on which Kurosawa Akira’s films such as *Red Beard* (1965) and *Dodes’ka-den* (1970) are based, or dismiss him as a “popular writer” whose work is “untranslatable”⁽¹⁴⁾ and only good “to those looking for examples of popularized images of Bushido and womanhood in the Edo period.”⁽¹⁵⁾

There are several reasons for such dismissive reactions. First, the lack of availability of translations of Yamamoto’s works in English, as both of these critiques were based on *The Flower Mat* that was translated forty years ago. With Yamamoto’s copyright expiring in 2017, this situation may change. Second, the academic tendency to dismiss popular literature as not worthy of serious study. This should not be a big hurdle today, with growing interest in popular literature as part of academic study. The third and most fundamental reason comes from a rather hasty assumption that Yamamoto’s works, most of which were set during the Edo period, purport to show a “uniquely Japanese spirit” that cannot be understood outside of Japan by depicting traditional Japan and its values. However, what Yamamoto did was the opposite. Rather than expressing established “traditional values” of old Japan, most of his works are subversive of the preexisting, dominant views.⁽¹⁶⁾

This is exemplified in one of his representative long novels, *There Remained the Fir Tree* (縦ノ木は残った), 1958, in which he presented a different view on Harada Kai, who is traditionally regarded as the villain in the Date Incident. Yamamoto perceived the intentions of the people in power in later days to make out Harada as a villain in the historical records, and tried to show a more “faithful” or “accurate” view on Harada in this novel, by reading behind the intentions of the historical records. “Yojō” is in the same spirit as *There Remained the Fir Tree* to deconstruct the established image of a historical figure and tell an alternative story from a non-conventional standpoint.

Through historical settings, Yamamoto aimed to depict more contemporary and universal human matters, beyond “traditional Japanese” or “historical” confinement:

Some of you may be interested in historical novels – or period novels, perhaps ... For example, if I were to write a novel on Taira no Masakado, I would write it only when I find the theme that I want to share with the largest majority of people who live today... I never pick up my pen if I don’t have a theme I feel compelled to write upon, a theme that I cannot leave untouched. I think that’s what novels are about.⁽¹⁷⁾

Yamamoto wrote historical novels to convey messages for people currently living, as widely as possible. Though the material is old, the messages that are in the novels are contemporary. He considered his task as a historical novel writer to form a real human out of the many anecdotes that can be found in historical records, without being deluded by the conventional reading of the historical records,⁽¹⁸⁾ and conveying his message to the readers through presenting

(11) *Hanamushiro* (花筵), 1948, was translated in English in 1977 as *The Flower Mat* by Inoue Michiko and Eileen B. Hennessy, published by Tuttle, Tokyo. A few other stories were published by Senjō Publishing in 1980s to 90s, but are out of print and not readily available. Most recently, a short story, “Through the Wooden Gate (その木戸を通過して, 1959)” was translated by Mark Gibeau in an anthology, *Kaiki: Uncanny Tales from Japan, Volume 1: Tales of Old Edo* in 2009, from a relatively new publishing company, Kurodahan Press.

(12) Edward Fowler, “Rendering Words, Traversing Cultures: On the Art and Politics of Translating Modern Japanese Fiction,” *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Winter, 1992), 31.

(13) Ibid.

(14) Richie, 328.

(15) Noriko Mizuta Lippit, “Review of *The Flower Mat* by Shūgorō Yamamoto, Mihoko Inoue and Eileen B. Hennessy,” *World Literature Today*, Vol. 52, No. 3, (Summer 1978), 523.

(16) Though this poses a related challenge for the reader: In order to appreciate satire, one must be familiar with what is being subverted.

(17) “Rekishi to bungaku” in Yamamoto, 1970, 50.

(18) Ibid., 51-56.

new interpretations of both historical and nameless people. This is not to claim that Yamamoto had worldwide readers in mind. However, I believe that his critical approach to established history, and his desire to depict human nature that is relevant to people living today through historical novels, would resonate with worldwide readers through translation.

Yojō

In “Yojō,” the theme that Yamamoto could not leave unwritten was Musashi as a “monomaniac, narrow-minded warrior,” the way he felt was a more genuine portrayal of this legendary swordsman.⁽¹⁹⁾ Considering his comments in a 1950 essay⁽²⁰⁾ and that he published this subversive depiction of Musashi in *Weekly Asahi*, the same publisher that serialized Yoshikawa’s *Musashi* in its newspaper (and, moreover, published it at the same time Yoshikawa was serializing another work, *Shin Heike monogatari*, in *Weekly Asahi*), Yamamoto’s intention to directly challenge Yoshikawa’s conventional image of Musashi is obvious. Yamamoto considered this story as “an unforgettable work” that “opened the way to [his] latter career.”⁽²¹⁾

“Yojō” starts and ends with very short chapters, six lines each in the Shinchōsha anthology version.⁽²²⁾ The first chapter briefly introduces an incident in Kumamoto Castle in which a cook⁽²³⁾ thinks to test Musashi with a sudden attack, and is killed by Musashi instantly. Around that time, the cook’s son, Iwata, futilely begs his girlfriend, Okita, for money to gamble, and is kicked out of her inn.⁽²⁴⁾ He feels desperate and thinks of becoming a beggar, out of his distaste for society. Soon after, Iwata learns of his father’s death from his friend and “big brother,” Kaku-san, and goes back to his house to see his brother, Kazuma, and the body of his father. Kazuma becomes furious with his ne’er-do-well brother, and disowns Iwata. Iwata decides to become a beggar. However, things change completely after he does so. On hearing the rumor of Iwata’s becoming a beggar, many people visit him and give him huge amounts of money, food, or other things to support him. He is perplexed, but soon learns from Okita that everybody has misinterpreted Iwata’s becoming a beggar as waiting for a chance to take revenge on Musashi. Musashi himself hears of the rumor and moves to his second house near Iwata’s hut on the riverbank. Musashi walks in front of Iwata’s hut twice every day, tells his servants to leave, and stops, to give Iwata a chance to strike. Iwata decides to take advantage of this opportunity to receive as much money as possible, and saves up, while mocking Musashi’s pretentiousness and the silliness of society. After half a year, Musashi dies of illness, but he sends his servant to give Iwata his kimono, telling Iwata to take revenge in accordance with the Chinese story Yojō.⁽²⁵⁾ Iwata, again, takes advantage of this: He marries Okita and opens an inn with her using the money he has been saving up, with

(19) Kimura Kuninori, *Ningen Yamamoto Shūgorō* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1968), 97-98.

(20) In his 1950 essay about popular literature, Yamamoto criticizes a list of what are commonly called “popular literature” works that use extravagant expressions to depict the protagonists just to create exciting scenes. Among them, Yamamoto lists: “a certain highly-regarded work of ‘popular literature’ in which, just because its main character is a master swordsman, he catches the flies that approach a bowl of *udon* noodles with chopsticks swiftly with ease. Even when there are tens of them, he can do it with ease... it’s absurd.” In “Taishū bungaku geijutsu ron” in Yamamoto, 1980, 7-8. Although Yamamoto does not give a name here, it would be clear to the 1950 readers that this refers to Yoshikawa’s *Miyamoto Musashi*, reprinted in 1949. Indeed, in the “Sky” volume of *Musashi*, there is a scene where Musashi catches numerous flies with his chopsticks, though the flies were around *soba*, not *udon*.

(21) “Shōsetsu ‘Yojō’ no onjin” in Yamamoto, 1970, 130.

(22) Since its first publication in *Shukan Asahi* in 1952, “Yojō” has been published over ten times in various anthologies. Most recently, it was anthologized in *Tales of Lazy People* (Namakemono no hanashi なまけ者の話), 2011, from Chikuma shobō. The texts are mostly the same, other than *furigana* (reading phonetic guides). The original magazine publication was accompanied by illustrations by Sata Yoshirō, and the title in the table of contents was in *kanji* accompanied by *hiragana*, written as 豫讓 (よじょう). This essay mostly refers to Yamamoto Shūgorō, “Yojō,” in Kawamori Kōzō, Okuno Takeo, and Toki Yūzō, eds., *Yamamoto Shūgorō Zenshū* Vol. 26 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1969).

(23) Though I translated 庖丁人 as “cook,” 庖丁人, in this case, is not just a cook, but also a samurai, since this 庖丁人 is serving as a special cook only to serve in the castle. Though nearly at the very bottom of the hierarchy, this cook is a kind of samurai.

(24) This girlfriend works in a big inn called Ibuki-ya. She notices that Iwata has four different girlfriends including her, and thus decides to break up with him in this scene.

(25) The Chinese story Yojō is recorded by Sima Qian. In this novella, a samurai explains this story to Iwata as follows: “The story is about Yojō’s slashing the clothes; since that famous Yojō in the Jin Dynasty could not take revenge for his former master, Chihaku, so he slashed the clothes of the enemy, Jōshi, and took revenge at last. It is about that renowned incident.” From “Yojō,” 45.

Musashi’s slashed kimono on display to attract customers. The last chapter says that the inn, Iwakita, became very popular thanks to the kimono.

The novella has a well-calculated structure that symbolizes Yamamoto’s skeptical attitude towards the surface meaning. In explaining the structure of this novella, Yamamoto claims that Maurice Ravel’s “Daphne et Chloe,” which consists of a variation on only a few simple themes, yet still made a marvelous long symphony, inspired him to write a novel using the same method – repetition of simple phrases and themes to build up to a bigger story. The largest such structure is the first and the last chapters that are like mirror images. They are both short, seemingly objective depictions of simple facts – the fact that a cook was slaughtered by Musashi in Kumamoto Castle in the first chapter, and the fact that a new inn opened near Kumamoto Castle and became popular due to decoration with Musashi’s slashed kimono in the final chapter. Both chapters repeat the same expression, “there’s nothing more to it” (lit. “there are no details to relate”) (さしたる仔細はない),⁽²⁶⁾ to seemingly emphasize the trivial nature of these facts. However, on the contrary, the novella focuses on expanding on these “details (仔細)” with a more intimate narrative style,⁽²⁷⁾ showing how things are not always what they seem. As Saotome Mitsugu points out, the first “there’s nothing more to it” takes the viewpoint of Musashi and the social values he represents, trivializing Iwata’s father’s death, while the last “there’s nothing more to it” takes Iwata’s point of view, trivializing and laughing off the social values Musashi represents.⁽²⁸⁾ By repeating the same expression and the same style but shifting readers’ viewpoint, Yamamoto reveals an alternative story that renders a different “truth” that subverts the surface meaning.

Unmaking of a Hero

Throughout the story, Yamamoto depicts two viewpoints – those who conform to accepted social conventions and those who are “twisted” (Iwata and Kaku-san), while questioning and mocking the accepted social conventions. Iwata’s brother, Kazuma, represents the eyes of society at large in regarding Musashi. Kazuma recites the greatness of the way of the sword and Miyamoto Musashi by saying things such as “the way of the sword (剣の道) is unsparing”⁽²⁹⁾ and “Sir Miyamoto is called the ‘saint of the sword (剣聖).’”⁽³⁰⁾ Kazuma coldly says these things to Iwata, who does not seem to understand the greatness of Musashi or the sacredness of the sword. However, Kazuma believes this so firmly that he just says these words coldly and simply without any sense that it might be necessary to explain what “the saint of the sword” and “the way of the sword” are. For Kazuma, as well as other people in his society, Miyamoto Musashi being “the saint of the sword” is a matter of fact; they believe it without any question.

This blind belief is also exemplified by one samurai’s reverence for Musashi on hearing of Musashi’s gift of his kimono to Iwata after his death: “I have heard of the kimono he gave you. It is fitting for the great Sir Niten⁽³¹⁾ to think of the story of Yojō. How considerate a gift it is.”⁽³²⁾ He uses the word “fitting (さすが)” to show a certain existing expectation from society on Musashi, and how Musashi’s performance of the Chinese story “Yojō” meets this expectation. When presenting the conventional view on Musashi as an ideal samurai, Yamamoto does not give the characters voicing it convincing reasoning for Musashi’s greatness beyond “Musashi is expected to be so” or “Musashi’s performance matches our expectations.” There is no account of why that is a samurai ideal, and why it should be praised. People’s attitude to praise Musashi is presented as an example of uncritically following a social standard.

Yamamoto clarifies this point through Iwata who challenges this conventional view on Musashi, and, by extension, of the ideal samurai. Iwata disparages Musashi by saying he is nothing more than a poseur. When

⁽²⁶⁾ According to Kimura, this was inspired by Yamamoto’s friend who frequently said, “It’s not a big deal.” Referring to other critics, Kimura discusses Yamamoto’s use of this memorable phrase in detail in the afterword of the Shinchōsha version of “Yojō.”

⁽²⁷⁾ Takahashi Toshio points out how the tone of the narration changes from cold to intimate from the first section to the second section. Takahashi Toshio, *Shūgorō ryū: Gekijō ga hito o kaeru* (Tokyo: Nippon hōsō shuppan kyōkai), 149-150.

⁽²⁸⁾ Saotome Mitsugu, *Waga shi Yamamoto Shūgorō* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2009), 108-119.

⁽²⁹⁾ “Yojō,” 20.

⁽³⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁽³¹⁾ Niten is Musashi’s Buddhist name.

⁽³²⁾ Yojō, 45.

Kazuma sniggers at Iwata, saying Iwata could not understand Musashi's mind, Iwata says: "Cut out the nonsense. I don't care if he's called the master or the 'saint of the sword.' For me, he's just a poseur, an ostentatious poseur, and a *lunatic* made of showiness."³³ For Iwata, Musashi's social reputation, such as being a great swordsman and the "saint of the sword," means nothing.³⁴

Iwata evaluates Musashi from two episodes, in his own way, with convincing arguments. The first episode is about a local official who asked Musashi if he injured his head during the duel at Ganryūjima. Musashi "made an extremely fearsome face, bringing a candlestick at his side"³⁵ and forced the official to examine his head. Musashi did not stop bullying him even though the official was completely intimidated and apologized. Although this Musashi only appears in Kaku-san's account of this story, he is also illustrated in the original magazine as a stern-looking samurai. The second episode is the incident in which Iwata's father tried Musashi and was killed instantly. People in general, including Kazuma, immediately judged that the local official and the father were wrong and stupid, while Musashi did what he is supposed to do. There is no reason needed for Musashi being right; Musashi is unconditionally right since he is Musashi.

In contrast, Iwata argued that it was not reasonable of Musashi to bully the local official or kill his father. Iwata provides reasonable alternative choices that Musashi could have taken, were he not so ostentatious. Iwata says that Musashi could have simply said, "No, I did not get injured at Ganryūjima," instead of bullying the official. Respecting Musashi killing his father, Iwata says: "Just one lowly cook attempted to try his skill. He could've just sidestepped him, or thrown him. There's no reason he had to slay him like that."³⁶ Iwata's argument that killing such a weak person without uttering a word and without hesitation was neither the only nor the best option open to Musashi is well taken. Through it, Yamamoto suggests that, if it had not been Musashi, but rather somebody not as famous yet as strong as Musashi, who killed Iwata's father like this, that person might have been judged by everyone the way Iwata judged Musashi.

In most parts of the story, Iwata's unique view on Musashi's seriousness is presented in a comical manner. The more serious Musashi is, the more harshly he is mocked by Iwata. This is shown best in the description of Musashi's daily passing-by in front of Iwata's hut:

That man didn't move at all. It was an enjoyable show for Iwata. The man was prepared for danger, standing before a threat to his life. His stance was charged with potential to change to counter any kind of attack. It was the excellent posture of a peerless master. For his part, Iwata did nothing, did not even think about doing anything, it was too absurd. However, that man was prepared for danger. With the mythical stance, he was confronting a threat...

That man started walking. The man thought that he could start walking by now. At a quiet pace, staring forward, the man started walking slowly. As for the man himself, he looked also somewhat satisfied.³⁷

Here, the narrator refers to Musashi as "the man (その人)," a general pronoun that does not describe the person's social status, age (though it usually does not refer to a child), or personality. It enables the narrator to keep a certain distance from Musashi and show him as a mere nameless swordsman, apart from his social status and reputation. This passage presents the greatness of Musashi in an extremely comical way. Yamamoto Kenkichi interprets this scene as Yamamoto's direct challenge to Yoshikawa's Musashi, or the idealized image of Musashi, not through the

³³ Ibid., 21.

³⁴ While the "sacredness" of "the way of the sword" is questioned and mocked in this story, Yamamoto later goes even further to completely dismiss this concept in "Ese Monogatari (Fake Story)." This is the next story he published in the same magazine, *Weekly Asahi*, two months after the publication of "Yojō." In this story, a retired swordmaster is treated as crazy for insisting that he is the swordmaster who is trying to "protect the sacredness of the way of the sword." Yamamoto Shūgorō, "Ese Monogatari," in Kawamori Kōzō, Okuno Takeo, and Toki Yūzō, eds., *Yamamoto Shūgorō Zenshū* Vol. 26 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1969), 99-101.

³⁵ "Yojō," 19.

³⁶ Ibid., 21.

³⁷ Ibid., 38-39.

³⁸ Yamamoto Kenkichi, Annotation to *Yamamoto Shūgorō zenshū vol. 3* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1964), 503-505.

sword, but through humor.⁽³⁸⁾ Though Musashi’s performance is perfect as a “peerless master,” it is comically ironic that he does so when there is no danger. Musashi automatically believes that Iwata is going to take revenge someday, since it was the conventional thing to do in accordance with the way of samurai to bide one’s time disguised as a beggar, waiting for a chance to take revenge. The presupposition is wrong; the convention is narrowing Musashi’s way of thinking, and he does not know what the supposed “enemy” truly wants to do, since the convention makes him blind.

The scene closes with a description that Musashi appears to be “somewhat satisfied” after doing this routine, to emphasize Musashi’s showiness. From Iwata’s point of view, Musashi’s giving Iwata a chance to attack him is a mere performance to fulfill Musashi’s vanity. Musashi is intoxicated by his performance, and it does not mean anything for Iwata. Moreover, by using a third-person narrative here, the story seems to support Iwata’s view as a more accurate interpretation of Musashi’s true intention.

After all, Musashi is just depicted as a part of, representative of, “the society,” or “世間.” Musashi’s social values are the same as society’s values, and, if he is different from the nameless people in that society, he is only different in that he can actually practice the things socially accepted as “great.” However, since he is entrapped in these social values, when seeing him from a different point of view, Musashi appears as a mere poseur, and a fool who does not have eyes to see the truth (in this case, that Iwata does not intend to attack Musashi at all). Through Iwata, Yamamoto presents “another view”⁽³⁹⁾ of several different anecdotes, and, in the end, “another view” of Musashi himself. Though Musashi is a typical hero, who is a paragon for everyone, Yamamoto mocks him and makes him an antihero by presenting another view through Iwata’s voice throughout the novella.

Making of a Hero

Several critiques have claimed that “Yojō” shows Yamamoto’s “siding with commoners (庶民の味方)” and true nature as a “commoner-writer (庶民作家).”⁽⁴⁰⁾ Tada Takeshi states that Iwata’s cleverness represents commoners’ strength, and the story depicts a commoner’s victory.⁽⁴¹⁾ However, at least with respect to this story, I agree with Shinoda Masahiro who claimed that Yamamoto did not express sympathy with commoners,⁽⁴²⁾ and Yoshino Hiroshi who also cautioned against invariably reading Yamamoto as having a fond view towards commoners (民衆).⁽⁴³⁾ In “Yojō,” Iwata is not representative of commoners, but rather, a social outcast who holds a very unique point of view. Musashi and Iwata are portrayed as polar opposites – old and young, samurai and *yakuza*, dark and pale, grim and light-hearted, skinny and plump, etc. However, this also means that Iwata is the closest to Musashi in his extraordinary nature. Just as Musashi is overly idealistic, Iwata is overly anti-idealistic and iconoclastic. By contrast, other commoners are depicted more in line with Iwata’s brother, Kazuma, as foolish and unthinkingly entrapped in prevailing social values. The author Tsuji Kunio suggests that Yamamoto “depicted Edo commoners, not in order to portray old-style human emotions, but because Edo society was a locus where he could portray humans that embody his imagination freely.”⁽⁴⁴⁾ In this sense, “Yojō” can be read as a fantasy story or fairy tale that invents an imaginative, unconventional hero who questions meaningless conventional values, and who upholds his own unique point of view.

At the beginning of the story, Iwata is similarly singled out from society as is Musashi, but in a negative way. Iwata is rejected by Okita in chapter two, scolded by a local patrol officer in chapter three, and disowned by his brother in chapter four. He confesses that he tried to be a *yakuza*, but his personality was no good for it. He did not

(39) Yamamoto, 1970, 50.

(40) See, for example, Okuno Takeo’s annotation for *Gendai Nihon no bungaku Yamamoto Shūgorō shū*, (Tokyo: Gakushū kenkyū sha, 1976) and Kiyota Yoichi’s “Yamamoto Shūgorō ron,” introduced in Kimura Kuninori’s annotation for *Ougi no* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1981).

(41) Tada Takeshi, *Yamamoto Shūgorō o yominaosu*, (Tokyo: Ronsōsha, 2014), 138-139.

(42) Shinoda Masahiro, “Watashi no naka no Yamamoto Shūgorō zō: Shūgorō wa shomin nante shinjite inakatta,” in *Yamamoto Shūgorō o yomu*, (Tokyo: Shin jinbutsu ōrai sha, 2012), 113-120.

(43) Yoshino Hiroshi, “Yamamoto Shūgorō shōron,” *Ibid.*, 156-162.

(44) Tsuji Kunio, “Yamamoto Shūgorō no fukken,” *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, June 9, 1991.

(45) “Yojō,” 13.

want to be *yakuza*, anyway.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Yamamoto consistently depicts Iwata as a scoundrel, or “世間の鼻つまみ”⁽⁴⁶⁾ in the local officer’s words. To everyone other than Kaku-san, who still refers to Iwata with the honorific “san,”⁽⁴⁷⁾ Iwata is a nameless, useless guy who is shunned by the world.

Just as Musashi is a respectable person by definition, Iwata is a scoundrel by definition. Kazuma’s preaching to Iwata in front of the dead body of their father emphasizes this belief that Iwata is a ne’er-do-well. When Iwata argues that Musashi is a “poseur” and he could have done something different if he hadn’t been so “showy,” Kazuma does not even listen to this argument and rejects Iwata’s opinion out of hand. Kazuma uses derogatory second-person pronouns, “おまえ” and “きさま,” throughout their conversation. Considering that Kazuma uses respectful forms for their father and Musashi, 父上 and 宮本殿 respectively, Kazuma deliberately distinguishes Iwata from those who “understand the spirit of the sword.”⁽⁴⁸⁾ Kazuma does not see Iwata as a person in an equal position to talk to, so he sneers and ignores Iwata coldly. No matter how convincing the content of Iwata’s argument is, it never reaches Kazuma and the society, because they never pay attention to him.

Instead of explaining how Musashi became a hero, “Yojō” gives full voice to Iwata in explaining how he ended up becoming a scoundrel and acquiring an anti-social, anti-samurai attitude through his confession to his friend and “big brother,” Kaku-san. His father wanted Iwata to become a real samurai, not a cook: “That old man was a cook, and I took after my old man... But the old man told me this: ‘It is a despicable job to fix food for somebody else, and it is bad enough for me to take this job, so you should become a samurai by all means.’”⁽⁴⁹⁾ Iwata’s dream is to become a cook, not a samurai as his father wished. So he tried hard to work as a cook at four different inns, but his father came to disturb Iwata at every opportunity. This is why Iwata first becomes a *yakuza*, and then, figuring out that *yakuza* are still entrapped in a social convention, decides to become a beggar. When Kaku-san invites Iwata to work with him, Iwata declares that he is “tired of society and people altogether.”⁽⁵⁰⁾

This serves as a pivotal point that gives readers insight into Iwata’s true character, without the clouded lens of society. Up to this scene, even the readers do not know if Iwata is a real scoundrel or not. Or rather, readers are compelled to see Iwata from society’s point of view, since Iwata has never talked about serious things before. Through Iwata’s confession, the readers are drawn more to see things Iwata’s way, breaking away from the idea that the way of the sword or the world of samurai are superior things. The idea to trivialize useless samurai values and put importance on practical living skills is also shown through the crafty way Iwata constructs the hut while making this confession. The way Iwata examines the soil, builds a bamboo structure, and ties a mat around the bamboo is very smooth, swift, and natural.⁽⁵¹⁾ It shows that Iwata is quite skilled in manual labor, not completely useless as society has labeled him as. By becoming a beggar, Iwata tries to exit the society that has decried, “Samurai are great, and cooks are vulgar,”⁽⁵²⁾ questioning the division of high and low between different kinds of jobs, or different kinds of people. This theme of dismissing samurai values and praising practical usefulness is also further developed in “Ese monogatari.”⁽⁵³⁾

However, once Iwata really starts turning his back on society, society misinterprets the meaning of his becoming a beggar and suddenly shows him a warm, welcoming attitude. For people who live with an absolute samurai ideal, when somebody whose father was killed becomes a beggar, it automatically means that he is waiting for a chance to take revenge: “There are many stories of someone who becomes a beggar to take revenge. Everyone says this is the most common way. ‘Revenge’ and ‘beggar’ are almost a pair.”⁽⁵⁴⁾ Once this rumor is spread, people change their attitudes quite abruptly. They bring money and food to support Iwata, and attempt to cheer Iwata up.

(46) Ibid., 15.

(47) Ibid., 17.

(48) Ibid., 21.

(49) Ibid., 24.

(50) Ibid., 25.

(51) Ibid., 28.

(52) Ibid., 28.

(53) See footnote 34.

(54) “Yojō,” 34.

Most notably, they change their way of speaking. For example, when the local officer found out that there is a beggar by the riverbank, he initially shouts and demands Iwata to come out, calling him a “lawless wretch (不埒もの).”⁽⁵⁵⁾ However, on learning that it is that cook’s son, the officer is moved, bows, and apologizes politely for being rude, referring to Iwata as “the honorable second son of Mr. Suzuki.”⁽⁵⁶⁾ Iwata is surprised, since he does not understand the reason for the change in everyone’s attitude towards him, but, at the same time, the readers are also surprised until this question is answered in the next chapter. By dragging this mystery out for a while, Yamamoto prods readers also to question social values. Though these social values are almost self-evident in one social context, they do not work the same way when out of context. The readers, as well as Iwata, are put out of the social context that shares these values, and are thus compelled to question them.

Not only are these social values depicted as something that should be questioned, but, in Iwata’s instance, also as more of a “trend” rather than the product of a principled and enduring value system. “The society sympathized with him [Iwata], and respected him. The society looked forward to ‘the time,’ and became his supporter for ‘the time.’ ... Iwata’s popularity increased markedly since that man [Musashi] moved to his second house; ‘The time’ has come near.”⁽⁵⁷⁾ Here, Iwata’s “revenge” is depicted as one of society’s entertainments. Society is waiting for this entertainment to happen, and, until then, they support Iwata, the weaker side. This passage expresses not only respect in accordance with the samurai ideal, but also support for the underdog to make the match more exciting, and their fickle nature. Society is irresponsible, and trends can die easily. The same goes for their blind belief in Musashi’s greatness, for, no matter high the society’s regard for Musashi is, there is still a possibility it might vanish in an instant, because it is based on a blind, unreasoned belief. Reputation and social standing are that fragile. The meaninglessness of reputation and social standing is thus exaggerated by the sudden change in their attitude toward Iwata.

Iwata always maintains some distance from such social values, so he is aware of the fragility of his brief and unstable popularity. Once Iwata learns that the conventional social values are working in his favor, he not only laughs at it, but also observes it carefully and takes advantage of it to satisfy his dreams. Kaku-san tips him off that it would only be half a year at the longest that things will work in Iwata’s favor, so Iwata takes this tip and saves up money. He is quite calculating in the latter half of the novella, where he observes the reactions of society quite coolly and plans his future life in advance. Iwata told Kaku-san that he plans to run away with the money he saved to open an inn where he can be a cook, once he saves up enough.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Iwata “was not a fool.”⁽⁵⁹⁾ His dispassionate observation of a social trend for advantage is depicted as perceptive and clever.

As society’s view of him changes, Iwata’s appearance and performance change to be more hero-like, after he decides to take advantage of the situation. He learns to talk “properly” in front of other people, and he also wears nice clothing and takes care of his appearance. His performance is quite deliberate, with the purpose to take advantage of, and enhance, society’s misunderstanding of him. The narrator describes: “Iwata started putting on considerable weight. His fair cheek was plump, and his appearance became much more sophisticated, since he shaves every day. He has transformed almost beyond recognition.”⁽⁶⁰⁾ He talks really politely to people who come to visit him, or just keeps silent with dignity. Iwata changes the meaningless social value into something meaningful for himself. Iwata used to be made into a scoundrel by society, and now, he is made into a hero by society. Of course, those results should not necessarily be attributed entirely to society, since it was Iwata’s own personality that remained defiant of society in the first half of the story, and his own cleverness that made it possible for him to take advantage of society in the second half. However, at least in this novella, no matter how hard Iwata tried to live his own “good life,” he could not do so until society misinterpreted his intention of becoming a beggar. Since Iwata is aware of the meaninglessness of his society’s values and has the wisdom to read the social conditions, he ostensibly

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Ibid., 29.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Ibid., 38-39.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Ibid., 40.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Ibid., 39.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Ibid., 40.

follows what society envisions for a hero, in both his appearance and his way of speaking.

Thanks to Musashi's death in half a year, however, not only did Iwata not have to leave the area, but he also opened a very successful inn with Okita, just as he planned. He never lost society's sympathy, thanks to Musashi's death, and his performance of giving Iwata his kimono since he was a samurai paragon, or merely "to fulfill his vanity" in Iwata's words. Not understanding the meaning of "Yojō" and Musashi's gift of his kimono, Iwata says to himself: "Wait, he said something strange, something like 'in accordance with the story of Yojō.' Told me to take revenge 'in accordance with the story of Yojō,' he surely said so... What's Yojō, anyway? Yojō... Said silly phony stuff like that."⁽⁶¹⁾ The Chinese story, Yojō, is a story of revenge. It is representative of what samurai are supposed to be. However, for Iwata, it is nothing more than "trickery" or "fraud." He laughs at Musashi's intentions the hardest when he learns of the meaning of this story and Musashi's intentions. Yamamoto Kenkichi points out how this laughing fulfills Iwata's earlier determination to laugh at the society after becoming a beggar.⁽⁶²⁾ In fact, it is quite ironic that Musashi's kimono that he gave Iwata intending it as an ultimate symbol of spiritual/samurai values was used in a completely practical sense to feed Iwata and his wife.

In discussing the meaning of the title and its relevance to the Chinese story, Endō Yū claims that the title does not refer to the Chinese story itself, or Musashi's will in relation to the story. If it did, that would mean that this story takes the revenge story seriously. Rather, according to Endō, the title directly refers to the nickname of the inn that Iwata and Okita open.⁽⁶³⁾ Indeed, it is quite clear that Iwata's slashing Musashi's kimono is just a performance to attract more people to his inn. Also, if Yamamoto meant to refer to the Chinese story in the title, it would have been more proper to write the title in *kanji*. Considering that the author chose to write the title in hiragana, it is clear that the title does not refer to the Chinese story itself.⁽⁶⁴⁾ However, I think that taking the title simply as the nickname of Iwata's inn still seems to miss something important; it misses the point of why Iwata's inn is called Yojō. It is called Yojō because of Musashi's kimono displayed in it. The kimono is displayed because Iwata decided to make use of Musashi's kimono, not as a real revenge, but as a performance of revenge, to attract customers, and it worked. In a sense, Iwata has taken revenge not on Musashi, but on the social values and expectations Musashi stood for. Yojō in *hiragana* represents Iwata's "other view" on the Chinese story, Yojō, or Iwata's "other view" on Musashi's will. In the very beginning, the title itself foreshadows that the traditional story is not used in a traditional way.⁽⁶⁵⁾

Thus, Iwata, who started as a defiant scoundrel in this novella, succeeds by remaining defiant in the end of the story. Yamamoto depicted Iwata as a person who has a unique sense of values apart from "the society." Without actually changing the social norm, Iwata learns to adjust and present himself so that his social reputation will be higher. Then he takes advantage of this social reputation to reach to his goal, to become a cook. Though Iwata is a typical scoundrel, an antihero, in the beginning of the novella, Yamamoto makes this character more and more attractive by giving him his own unique values and the cleverness to observe society which lead him into success in the end of the novella, and make him a hero who deserves a happy ending.

Conclusion

By repeatedly contrasting the irresponsibility and meaninglessness of the prevailing social values and Iwata's clever observant eyes, Yamamoto emphasizes the importance of having another point of view that is not entrapped by the conventional social view. The conventional view of looking at Musashi as the samurai ideal is consistently mocked by Iwata in a very convincing way, while his greatness is not explained reasonably by other people. Of

(61) Ibid., 44.

(62) Yamamoto Kenkichi, 504-505.

(63) Endō Yū, "Yojō," in *Kokubungaku Kaishaku to Kanshō* 53.4 (1988), 73.

(64) Except for the table of contents in the original magazine publication in 1952, "Yojō" is consistently written in *hiragana*. Even in the table of contents, the *kanji* title is accompanied by *hiragana* in parenthesis.

(65) The title "Yojō" is translated as "Another View of Bushidō" in the only published English translation of this work. The "another view" part seems to reflect Iwata's view that is subversive of an orthodox value system, which could be represented by "bushidō." See Yamamoto Shūgorō, "Another View of Bushidō," in *Another View of Bushido*, translated by Yoshitsugu Kosumi and Michael Neiburg (Tokyo: Senjo Publishing, 1985), 5-51.

course, Iwata’s view is not the one and only correct view on Musashi. However, it is a true Musashi from the point of view of Iwata, who does not care for reputation or revenge and just wants to become a cook. Readers are made to notice that the way of the cook can be as noble as the way of the sword, or even nobler, and thus made to question the values that privilege the sword above all else. By depicting Musashi from Iwata’s point of view, Yamamoto questions and satirizes prevailing social values and samurai ideals throughout this novella.

The misinterpretation of Iwata’s intentions in becoming a beggar further emphasizes the meaninglessness of the prevailing social values. Society always misunderstands Iwata’s intentions, since they always think within their norms, while Iwata is outside of these norms. It is comical that the society believes so strongly in their interpretation when it is completely wrong. Through depicting society in this mocking manner, Yamamoto also points out that people are narrowing their understanding of the world by blindly believing their conventions and denying other possibilities. Iwata becomes happy in the end, since he holds on to his own values, values born of his own experience and convictions.

Furthermore, I would like to suggest that this conclusion can be applied to the context of Japan in 1952, when “Yojō” was written. Yamamoto was well aware of the danger of blindly adhering to social norms during the war, and after the war. In his lecture in 1965, Yamamoto said:

After the war ended and military government fell, we are now living in the democratic world, at least in form. It has been clarified how full of deception, full of lies, the announcements from Imperial Headquarters were... In this way, Japan became a democratic society due to the defeat in the war, and the lies and fabrications of the military government were exposed. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that we now know the truth. I believe that we cannot say that there is no fabricated exaggeration today, in order to present the lies and evil plots of the military government and hastily criticize them.⁽⁶⁶⁾

Yamamoto is both aware of the meaninglessness of the information given during the war, as well as the potential fraud of the current information given from the government. Though he is referring to politics and history in this passage, it also shows Yamamoto’s awareness of the meaninglessness of social values, insofar as they reflect uncritical trust and obedience to the order of the day. In presenting the life of Iwata, who becomes happy by remaining defiant and persistent in following his own values, Yamamoto tries to challenge the social norms that were created by the war, and the social norms that were created by the new government. Though society’s changes, Yamamoto’s insistence on following his own compass and judging for himself is not changed; he is persistently defiant.

The importance of having a critical eye toward the established social values, comedy and satire mocking authority, and keeping one’s own point of view are not limited to a uniquely Japanese or Edo context. A search for “Japanese spirit” or “Japanese emotions” in this story would end in disappointment. As Tsuji Kunio said, “contrary to their surfaces, [Yamamoto’s] melodramatic stories that depict Edo commoners’ pathos are acutely modern stories”⁽⁶⁷⁾ that are actually influenced by Western literature and music. Okuno Takeo also points out that Yamamoto’s stories “tell Yamamoto’s human observations and life experiences through the form of historical novels.”⁽⁶⁸⁾ While Yamamoto’s imagined “Edo” as a locus for exploring his ideas and human observations may need a bit more explanation for foreign readers, no more so than historical or mythical stories about foreign places like Rome, or science fiction or fantasy stories set in invented worlds. Some Japanese critics have already discussed Yamamoto in comparison with foreign writers, such as Georges Simenon (1903-1989), André Gide (1869-1951),⁽⁶⁹⁾ and O. Henry (1862-1910).⁽⁷⁰⁾ Translation of Yamamoto’s works may open up even more interesting points of view that would shed light on his works and the meaning of historical novels in the modern context.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Yamamoto, 1970, 35-36.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Tsuji, 1991.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Okuno Takeo, “Yamamoto Shūgorō tsuitō,” in Okuno Takeo sakkaron shū 4 (Tokyo: Hōryūsha, 1978), 375.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Tsuji Kunio, “Yamamoto Shūgorō ron 1,” in *Yamamoto Shūgorō o yomu*, 66-104.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Miyabe Miyuki and Sugimoto Shōko, “Shūgorō no miryoku wa tanpen ni ari – Shūgorō no egaita jōsei tachi,” in *Yamamoto Shūgorō o yomu*, 8-27.