

The Image of Latin America in Ōe Kenzaburō's Post-Mexico Fiction

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Abstract

The current paper historicizes and analyzes the influences that Latin America exerted on Japanese writer Ōe Kenzaburō, specifically as seen in the literary works he produced after his trip to Mexico City between 1976 and 1977. The paper will define the texts that Ōe composed from the end of the 1970s to the end of the 1980s as 'Ōe Kenzaburō's post-Mexico Fictions' and will try to show that Latin America not only played a decisive role in them, but also left an imprint in his future literary career. Three of the author's works in particular will be examined in order to show the changes and transformations in such corpus and in his reception of Latin American culture. Those works are: the novel *Dōjidai gēmu* (Contemporary Games, 1979), the short story "Ame no ki no kubitsuri otoko" (Man hanged from the Rain Tree, 1982), and the novel *Jinsei no shinseki* (Life's Parents, that was translated into English as an *An Echo of Heaven*, 1989). The objectives of the paper are: to explain Ōe's depiction of Latin America in those and other related works, to clarify how the region (and more specifically Mexico) worked as a source of inspiration for him, and to understand the literary, theoretical, and political implications of his uses of Latin America in his works.

Introduction

Several Japanese writers showed interest in Latin America and made reference to the region and its culture in their own works. Some of those writers recognized the region's situation within global geopolitics and tried to empathize with it in order to question the world order and Japan's role in it. From Ishikawa Tatsuzō's *Sōbo* (1935), which describes early Japanese migration to Brazil while criticizing official migration policies, to Hoshino Tomoyuki's *Mezameyo to ningyoha utau* (2004), that follows the life of a Peruvian Nikkei while questioning the supposed homogeneity of Japan, the presence of Latin America in Japanese literature seems to be linked to ideological positioning. Of those writers, none is more exemplar than Nobel Prize winner Ōe Kenzaburō (b.1932). Ōe first traveled to Mexico from 1976 to 1977 as visiting professor at the Mexican university El Colegio de México, a time when he was able to meet other literary celebrities such as Gabriel García Márquez and Octavio Paz. Upon returning to Japan, he wrote multiple essays, stories, and novels depicting Latin America, describing his experience in the region, and using it as an instrument to reflect upon domestic and global history and politics.

A great variety of literary critics have studied the influence that Latin America had on Ōe's literature. Such studies range from highlights of the impact that the trip had in his persona in general examinations of the author's works (Enomoto, Nakamura, Reinsma), to interpretative studies of some of Ōe's works that depict Latin America and/or mention Latin American culture (Yoshioka, Shi, Jin-Hee), to much broader studies that analyze Ōe's case as an example of the fluctuations of world literature and translation (Nakaoka, Smith, Reinsma). Perhaps the most comprehensive study about the relationship of Ōe and Latin America is Manuel Cisneros Castro's, in which the author gives an exhaustive annotated bibliography of all of Ōe's texts which mention Latin America to further exhibit Ōe's lifetime intention to construct an image of himself connected to the region (Cisneros Castro 25). All these studies, and specifically the latter, were of great importance to the current research and paper, as they served both as reference and as starting point to the issues to be discussed. However, it must be mentioned that none of them

focused on the way in which Ōe's utilized Latin America as an instrument to question and criticize both domestic and local established discourses and orders.

In order to compliment these previous studies, the current paper focuses on how Latin America is depicted in Ōe's literature of the immediate years that followed his trip to El Colegio de Mexico. It will cover the novel *Dōjidaigēmu* (1979, Contemporary Games), the story "‘Ame no ki’ no kubitsuri otoko" (1982, Man Hanged from the Rain Tree,), and the novel *Jinsei no shinseki* (1989, Life's Parents, translated into English as *An Echo of Heaven*), referring to this late-1970s to 1980s corpus as 'Ōe's post-Mexico fiction'. As the paper will show, each of these works serve as examples of three different interpretations that the Nobel laureate made of Latin America: first, as a peripheral region from where to perform revisionism of Japan's historiography; second, as an old friend from which he learned camaraderie and companionship; and third, as a life's relative, an affiliation that made him reposition Japan within global geopolitics. An analysis of each of these works will enlighten the way in which the author envisioned the interaction between different cultures of the world. The first section is dedicated to historical context and to Ōe's life prior to the trip, specifically in regards to his early academic studies and his subsequent political activism, two experiences that intertwined with his experience in Latin America in all of his future literature.

Ōe's First Approaches to Latin America

Historical sociologist Eiji Oguma explained that Japan's support to the U.S. in the 1960s Vietnam War spread the view that the Japanese were also aggressors in the conflict. "By 1970", states Oguma, "this aggressor consciousness was increasingly being extended backward in time to encompass Japan's role as aggressor in World War II. The result was the rise of a new historical consciousness emphasizing Japan's war responsibility to challenge orthodox historical narratives" (Oguma 2015, 18). Several Japanese writers and scholars rapidly became the flagbearers of this current of thought, standing against the U.S. by organizing groups such as Beheiren (Peace in Vietnam Citizens' Committee) and movements such as those against the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the U.S. Critical of both wartime Japanese historiography that had promoted the Emperor System and State Shintoism, but also critical to the diplomatic and military actions of the U.S. in Japan and in the rest of Asia, these writers sought for greater connection with stricken regions of the world in a quest to fight back imperialism and capitalism. One of those intellectuals was Ōe Kenzaburō.

Born in 1935 in Ōse, a village in current Uchiko, Ehime Prefecture, Ōe Kenzaburō spent his childhood surrounded by nature and detached from a big metropolis. Only in 1954 did he travelled to Tokyo to study French literature at Tokyo University, where he graduated with a thesis on Jean-Paul Sartre. His first literary successes, *Shiiku* (1958, Prize Stock) and *Memushiri Kōchi* (1958, Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids), are set in a remote village of his native Shikoku region, though his next ones took a more political stance. In 1961, he published in the literary journal *Bungakukai* the novellas "Sebuntin" (Seventeen) and "Seiji shōnen shisu" (Death of a Political Youth), both inspired by Yamaguchi Otoya, who committed suicide while being imprisoned for the murder of the chairman of Japan's Socialist Party, Asanuma Inejirō. In 1963, Ōe's eldest son, Hikari, was born with severe brain damage, an experience that became a recurrent motif of his literature of the following decade. In 1976 Ōe travelled to Mexico as a visiting professor, an experience which, as the current paper will try to show, was crucial for his literature of the 1980s onwards.

In order to understand Ōe's literature after this stay in Mexico, however, it is necessary to bring up two important influences prior to his trip. The first of these influences was Professor Kazuo Watanabe, a specialist in French Renaissance literature who introduced him to François Rabelais. The satirical, exaggerated, and grotesque style of the latter, that Mikhail Bakhtin would later define as a "grotesque realism" (Bakhtin), was of great influence to Ōe's oeuvre. According to Bakhtin, Rabelais's literature was rooted in popular festivities, rituals and carnivals, a mundane origin which imbued his style with four distinctive characteristics: it was free regarding the topics it touched; it promoted an eccentric behavior of the characters; it profaned social rules and orders; and it scoured for unexpected connections between binary opposites such as beauty and ugliness, Heaven and Hell, etcetera. Ōe explicated that this style became predominant in his own literature and life, serving him to subvert established social structures and to question widely-accepted dichotomic pairs (Ōe 1988, 176).

The second influence that was most important for Ōe before travelling to Mexico came from his colleague, cultural anthropologist Yamaguchi Masao. In his 1975 essay, *Bunka to ryōgisei* (Culture and Ambivalence), Yamaguchi delved into the dynamics of the center / periphery dichotomy, claiming that the center of a given society is but a symbolic ideal, a sort of faith that exists to make society intelligible and clear. As a symbol, the existence of the center implies also the existence of its counterpart, that is, of peripheries or liminal spaces that can be blamed for adversity. Polarization and repulsion of peripheries, then, is essential to sustaining the social system and keep harmony. Additionally, Yamaguchi connected his theory to the figure of the Japanese Emperor, which he considered to be a central symbol of Japan that had eradicated dissent and had created a cult, while always retaining its symbolic power as unifier of the nation, even after being disposed of its political power in several moments during history (Yamaguchi 1975, 92; 1987, 11).

Many of Ōe's works of the period reveal the influence of Rabelais' grotesque realism in terms of style and of Yamaguchi's concept of *periphery* in terms of political positioning. In regards to the latter, Ōe considered Yamaguchi's interpretation of national history to be the cornerstone ideology of the writers of his generation: "The aims of the postwar writers were to 'relativize' the value of the emperor, who had had absolute power, and to liberate the Japanese from the curse of the emperor system which haunted their minds, even at subconscious level" (Ōe 1989, 198). Furthermore, he explicated that the place of the writer was always supposed to be peripheral in order to be able to criticize the center, and that its role was to bring back humanity into such centers (Kreisler: 2010, 277-278). He even applied the concept of *periphery* to his literary spaces, not only setting his fiction in a remote village that mimicked his native Shikoku, but also using it as an ideal and desired space for some of his characters. Such is the case, for instance, of *Kojinteki na taiken* (1964, A Personal Matter), in which the protagonist is haunted by his desire to travel to Africa to escape his oppressive life in Japan. During the mid 1970s, Latin America too served Ōe's fiction in a similar way.

The 1960s was a decade when Latin American Studies were spreading throughout the world, mainly for a growing interest in the economic potential of the region. In Japan in particular, the field started developing with the 1958 initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to establish the Latin American Society of Japan, only to further expand with the launching of the first area study program on Latin America in Sophia University in 1964 and with the creation of the Research Institute for Brazilian Culture in Kyoto University of Foreign Studies in 1967 (Mesa-Lago 1982, 173). With much different intentions, Left-Wing groups, those supporting the recently established USSR and Chinese communist governments, and those less factionalized and yet with a strong Anti-U.S. nationalist view, turned their attention to Latin America in 1959 after the Cuban Revolution. Likewise, writers and scholars linked to the 1960s Asian-African Conference, which sought to bring connection between Third World countries in the context of the Cold War, rapidly made notice of the political and cultural changes occurring in Latin America. Latin American Studies influenced many fields in Japan like archaeology, ethnography, and linguistics, but also literature, after the success of the so-called 1960s Latin American literary boom⁽¹⁾.

Simultaneously, Japanese Studies were proliferating in the world. In Latin America in particular, Japanese Studies had mainly focused on Migrant Studies until the opening of the Section of Oriental Studies (in Spanish, *Sección de Estudios Orientales*) in 1964 at El Colegio de México⁽²⁾. Founded in 1939 by a fellowship of Spanish scholars who had exiled from Spain after the triumph of military dictator Francisco Franco, and by a group of Mexican scholars, heirs of the 1910 Revolution and statemen of progressive president Lázaro Cárdenas, El Colegio quickly

(1) Latin American Boom (in Spanish: *Boom Latinoamericano*) is the name given worldwide to a group of Latin American writers of the 1960s and 1970s who became widely popular in the U.S. and Europe and which are characterized by experimental work, especially by blurring to the limits of the real and the fantastic, hence naming the style of most of the group 'magical realism'. Among its most representative writers are Julio Cortázar of Argentina, Carlos Fuentes of Mexico, and Gabriel García Márquez of Colombia, among many others.

(2) The Section was first part of the Center of International Studies, but in 1968 it was transformed into an independent center and renamed Center of Oriental Studies (in Spanish, *Centro de Estudios Orientales*). After the impact of Edward Said's theories, however, the center was renamed in 1974 to Center of North African and Asian Studies (*Centro de Estudios de Asia y África del Norte*) and again in 1980 to Center of African and Asian Studies (*Centro de Estudios de Asia y África*). (El Colegio de México 1987, 85).

became a beacon of political heterodoxy for scholars all over the world. Starting in 1968 and financed by the local government, the UNESCO, and the recently established Japan Foundation, El Colegio invited several Japanese scholars as visiting professors, including philosopher Tsurumi Shunsuke (who lectured from 1972 to 1973), sociologist Mita Munesuke (1974 to 1975), and the aforementioned Yamaguchi Masao (1977 to 1978). All of them were critical Left-Wing intellectuals who had put together and/or taken part in Beheiren (Peace in Vietnam Committee) as well as in movements against the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the U.S. The professor visiting for the period of 1976 and 1977 was Ōe himself.

Ōe became widely influenced by the literary figures he met in Mexico, such as Octavio Paz, Gabriel García Márquez, and Juan Rulfo, but also by the scholars of Asian cultures that taught at El Colegio, such as Óscar Montes and Flora Botton Beja, whom he later referenced in his writings about the country. However, his fellow activist colleagues who had travelled before him were equally important in developing his view of Latin America. Tsurumi Shunsuke in particular laid down several aspects of Mexican culture which Ōe would later analyze. Among other topics, he was interested in aboriginal groups, history of the Spanish Conquest and U.S.'s imperialism, the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution and the artistic movements that followed it, the spread of Christianity, and the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, an apparition of Virgin Mary venerated locally which took the form of an indigenous Mexican origin or mestiza woman. Cousin of Sano Seki, a Japanese exile who had fled from the USSR to Mexico in 1939, Tsurumi would also try to redeem his uncle and all exiles, turning the figure of the political exile into an archetype later used by the writers and scholars who traveled to El Colegio. Furthermore, Tsurumi tried to connect Latin American political uprisings with Japanese political activism of which he was part himself (Beheiren, Anti-Treaty movements, etcetera). Upon returning to Japan from Mexico in 1976, for instance, he wrote *Guadarūpe no Seibo* (The Virgin of Guadalupe), a book narrating his experience in Mexico. In it, he compares the banners he and his activist colleagues had used while taking part in demonstrations in Japan to the banner of Virgin of Guadalupe hoisted by Miguel Hidalgo, a New Spanish Catholic priest, while charging into battle for Mexican independence (Tsurumi 1976, 170).

Another symbolic universe in which Tsurumi was very interested and passed it along to Ōe was Christianity. Tsurumi understood Christianity, and specifically the hybrid image of Virgin Guadalupe, as a juxtaposition of different traditions. Going even further, and in connection to Yamaguchi's notion of *periphery*, he saw Christianity as a religion at the margins of Japanese history. Banned during the Tokugawa period, and considered a threat to the emperor system and to State Shinto by the Meiji government, Christianity was accepted in the Taishō and Shōwa periods as a complimentary religion to Japan's native religions. Mark Mullis describes this introduction of Christianity as an "process of indigenization" that adapted its international principles while simultaneously changing local religious circumstances (Mullis, 1998, 33). After a halt during the Pacific War in which Christianity was limited, it regained strength once the Allied Occupation Forces proclaimed freedom of religion in Japan in 1945. Tsurumi, but also Ōe, though not Christians themselves, envisioned in Christianity's peripheral position in Japanese history a possibility to alter (or at least to question) their cultural atmospheres that had inherited wartime utilization of religion. That is, Christianity coincided excellently with the attempts geared towards historical revisionism that Oguma highlighted 1970s intellectuals (*Supra*).

As previously shown, the travels of Ōe's activist colleagues to El Colegio de Mexico were as influential and decisive to his writing as Rabelais' grotesque style and Yamaguchi's concept of *periphery*. It was only upon returning to Japan, however, that he started using Mexico as a recurrent theme of his writings. The first time he did so was actually in his 1976 novel that he finished while in Mexico, *Pinchi ran'nā chōsho* (Records of a Pinch Runner), in which he briefly mentions the Yaqui indigenous Mexican community, though this had been mentioned by Tsurumi and Mita before him. Then, from 1977 to 1978, he wrote several essays about Mexico in which he compares the country to Japan by using Yamaguchi's notion of *periphery* (Cisneros Castro 11-14). From then onwards, Ōe would recurrently use Mexico as a setting for his novels, as well as presenting characters who traveled to Mexico as visiting professors just like him. The following sections of the will focus on the novel *Dōjidai gēmu* (1979, Contemporary Games), the short story "'Ame no ki' no kubitsuri otoko" (1982, Man Hanged from the Rain Tree), and the novel *Jinsei no shinseki* (1989, Life's Parents, translated in English as *An Echo of Heaven*), as they each

show the different interpretations that Ōe had of Latin America, but also the distinct applications that he made of the latter to his understanding of local and global politics.

From Mexico to the Beginning of Time

The current section will focus on Ōe's politically engaged academic critique of Japanese historiography as materialized in his novel *Dōjidai gēmu* (1979, Contemporary Games), the first he wrote upon returning from Mexico. In it, Ōe put into practice his scholarly revisionist intents by reworking the myths of creation of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon-shoki*, according to which brother and sister gods Izanagi and Izanami begat the islands of Japan and other Shinto deities. Ōe re-envisioned the twin gods in the twin characters of his novel, Tsuyuki and Tsuyumi, while changing the focus that the myth had put on the Amatsukami (the heavenly gods who had descended to the earth) into the Kunit-sukami (the earthly gods who had been vanquished by the formers). That is, at the very core of the novel there is a reformulation of Japan's ancient myths and a priority in peripheral communities, both of which subvert the logic and narrative that Japanese historiography had sustained for centuries. Furthermore, the novel is scattered with rumors, hearsays, and unconfirmed events that put monolithic narratives into question while vindicating plurality of discourse.

A clear alter-ego of Ōe, Tsuyuki is working as visiting professor in Mexico and is writing back to his sister to tell her what he claims to be the true history of their home village in Japan, *Mura=Kokka=Shōuchū* (from now onwards, the literal translation in English, Village=Nation=Microcosmos). That is, from the onset of the novel, Mexico represents for the character a standpoint from where he can reinterpret and revisit his own past and from where historical revisionism is possible. In his very first letter, 'From Mexico to the Beginning of Time', he narrates the myths of origin of their village under the leadership of Kowasu Hito (literally, 'Person-who-destroys'), who would become the leader of their community. In his second letter, 'As big as a dog', he explains how their family story had been transmitted through a patrilinear education he calls a 'Spartan Teaching', something he wants to change by using myth and literature. In his third letter, 'Ushi-oni and the God of Darkness', he tells the many ways in which he and a new friend are planning to transmit the traditions of the village during the years following a war that closely resembles World War II. In his fourth letter, 'The War of Fifty Years turns into a glorious deed', he recounts how the Imperial Army once tried to invade their village, only to be repelled by locals. In his fifth letter, 'A family of people who write myth and history', Tsuyuki turns insane and tries to take over the Imperial Palace (a parodic reference to Yukio Mishima and his failed coup attempt). In the sixth and final letter, 'The Forest of Village=Nation=Microcosmos', the protagonist transcends into an eternal state and disappears into the forest.

Dōjidai gēmu also presents Mexico as a space of identification with Japan, as both have peripheries that mirror each other. Tsuyuki recurrently compares his home village to the neighborhood of Malinalco where he is residing in Mexico, naming the recognition of this identification a 'spiritual awakening' (*hosshin*). According to him, both his village and Malinalco are at the outskirts of city centers and show traces of invasion, destruction, and conquest. "The town of Malinalco, where I first felt such spiritual awakening, was a village at the foot of a mountain that opened towards the summit as if approaching a wasteland. But, as is usual with old Mexican towns, the history of the people living there is long and twisted" (Ōe 1979, 9)⁽³⁾. This way, the novel suggests that peripheries which had suffered similar histories of abuse by imperial powers, like Village=Nation=Microcosmos and Malinalco, are somehow empathically connected as spaces that share common traits that exceed their different cultures.

Even more, peripheries share the possibility of learning from one another. In the same letter to his sister, Tsuyuki mentions Enomoto Takeaki, a Meiji entrepreneur and former samurai who had led a failed conquest enterprise to the Mexican city of Escuintla.

Sister, while lecturing at the university in Mexico City as part of my job for the Research Center of Asia and North African Studies to which my office was affiliated, I sorted out some records by a Japanese colonizer that

(3) 僕はこの発心にいたったマリナルコという町は、荒野にむけて迫った山巔の裾をわずかに拓いた、あらかた斜面の集落だが、メキシコの古い町の御多分に濡れず、そこに住んできた人間の歴史は永く、かつ捻曲っている。(9). All translations are mine.

were donated there [...]. One of those documents dated the time of colonizer Enomoto Takeaki during the year 30 of the Meiji Era and was about some Japanese people who had failed to cultivate the land and instead had to flee to the capital with their hands up and simply shouting: “Oh, Mexico, Mexico!”. Isn’t there something greatly appealing about a parade of Japanese conquerors, with unkempt hair and shabby clothes, horseback riding and pointing to Mexico City, forever rooted in the hearts of the Indians that watched them along the road? And isn’t there something provocative in the *indios* of Malinalco, something stimulating in them excavating with their stone axes the wasteland to which the Japanese had come to establish a new Village=Nation=Microcosmos? (19-20)⁽⁴⁾.

This passage reveals some important points about the relevance of Mexico in the novel *Dōjidai gēmu*. First, Mexico is literally presented as a space where the character comes upon a document that literally triggers a revision of Japanese history. Second, by putting an emphasis on the failure of Enomoto’s enterprise rather than on the success of Japan’s colonization, Ōe seems to be putting into question the Meiji politics that eventually led to imperialism and militarization. Third, Tsuyuki’s rejoicing in the shame of Japanese conquerors connects Mexican natives with the Japanese who had also suffered, just like Tsuyuki, the hurts of the Empire of Japan. Fourth, the attempt to disclose the history of a failed Japanese entrepreneur can also be interpreted, in the context of the 1970s, as a critique to the U.S. and the whole of the capitalist system which Ōe was defying at the time. In this last sense, the opening chapter of the novel reveals not only Ōe’s revisionist intents of Japanese history, but also his political stance in a global context.

Another connection between *Dōjidai gēmu* and Latin America can be analyzed in terms of composition, as the novel uses the style known as *magical realism*, usually associated with Latin American writers like Gabriel García Márquez or Carlos Fuentes. Indeed, the novel includes several episodes that come close to the fantastic, a trait that took several critics to quote the novel as example of fantastic literature (Wilson 1986, Napier 2006). It must be recalled, however, that this is only so because the novel is being narrated by a first-person unreliable narrator who is sending letters back to his sister; the reader can never know if the contents of the letter are actually true or false. In this sense, in *Dōjidai gēmu* the fantastic is less an alteration of reality than an instrument of liberation in the character’s discourse, a linguistic trait of his expressions. Indeed, Tsuyuki recurrently presents his letters as a personal exercise of revisionism of different types of narratives (historical, anthropological, folklorists), even implying that ‘the fantastic’ is but a mere instrument in his narrative games.

In such a sense, *Dōjidai gēmu* is a novel that seeks to create myths, placing the reader in a constant spot of hermeneutical doubt, making him or her question history and create new interpretations. But more than that, it is an elegy to imagination and creativity, and as an exercise that opposes to mechanization and naturalization of history, whether in the form of religion, historiography, or any other genre. In this process, Mexico plays the role of a catalyst, a stimulant that boosts historical revisionism. Being at the periphery of the Japan-West discourse, yet closely connected to Japan once the peripheries of both countries are compared, Mexico is presented as an instrument to question local history that sought for homogeneity and global history advancing towards economic oppression.

In an article for *Asahi Shimbun* in the same year in which *Dōjidai gēmu* was published, Ōe commented on the sources that had inspired him to write that novel: first, a comment by Mexican writer Octavio Paz and, second, Diego Rivera’s mural, *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda Central* (1947-8). About the first one, Ōe said that Paz had told him that Latin America is a region where history was constantly bleeding, meaning that the wounds of the past were ever-present. About the second source, Ōe explained that he had wanted to reproduce in his novel

(4) 妹よ、僕はメキシコ・シティの大学の講義しながら、自分の研究室が所属するアジア・北アフリカ研究センターの仕事として、僕はそこに寄贈された日本人植民者の記録をも整理している【略】。それらの文書のひとつだが、明治三十年の榎本武揚植民の際、農耕地開拓に失敗した日本人たちは、メヒコ！メヒコ！、と連呼しながら、ただそれだけを手だてとして、首都への逃亡行進をおこなった。沿道で見送るインディオたちの、滅亡した古代に根ざす心に、メキシコ・シティを指して騎行した征服者たちとは対極の、弊衣蓬髪日本人の徒歩による行進は、善き訴えかけをしたのでないか？そして新しい村＝国家＝小宇宙の建設のためにやって来る日本人の、インディオの石斧による荒地の掘削も、やはりそれにつながる喚起作用を、マリナルコー帯のインディオにひきおこすのではないか？

what Rivera had done in his mural: show history simultaneously, all at once⁽⁵⁾. The bringing up of these inspirations led most of his critics to affirm the novel's intent to question Japan's historical narratives and revise national history (Wilson 1986, Napier 2006, Claremont 2008). It must be stated, however, that both the aforementioned Tsurumi Shunsuke and Mita Munetsuke, who had traveled to El Colegio de México before Ōe, mentioned exactly the same influences in their ideas of Latin America. It seems that by 1979 when he wrote *Dōjidai gēmu*, Ōe was still looking at Mexico through the lens of his activist and scholar colleagues, not yet having designed a personal gaze towards Latin America.

Mexico as an Old Friend

The current section will now focus on Ōe's 1982 short-story collection *'Rein tsurī' wo kiku onnatachi* (Women Listening to the 'Rain-Tree'), considering it a work that commences a gradual detachment from the use of Latin America as a standpoint for revisionism of Japanese historiography. His works of the 1980-1981 period depicting Latin America are all idealizations of the region as a place where it is possible to escape the oppression that the characters feel in Japanese society. His short-story "Migawari yagi no hangeki" (1980, Scapegoat's Counterattack), for instance, portrays a Japanese doctor who recently moved to México in order to run a rural school in a Nikkei community in the countryside, for which reason he contacts a Japanese professor visiting El Colegio de México. The novel *Atarashii hito yo mezame yo* (1984, Wake Up, Youngsters of the New Age, translated by John Nathan as *Rouse Up O Young Men of the New Age!*) introduced readers to a parent who, just like Ōe, is trying to raise a disabled child, through which process he encounters a teenage militia that is planning to travel to Mexico in search for spiritual redemption. Cisneros Castro mentions yet two other examples: "Yonman'nen mae no tachiaoi" (1985, Holyhock of Forty Thousand Years) and "Shi ni sakidatsu kutsū ni suite" (1985, On the in Before Death), two short-stories in which Mexico is again depicted as a space where it would be possible to commence a new life.

In the 1982 short-story collection *'Rein tsurī' wo kiku onnatachi* (Women Listening to the 'Rain-Tree'), however, Mexico is already a fragment of the narrator's personal history and less an idealized space for historical revisionism or future escape. Said first-person narrator and protagonist, another of Ōe's alter-egos, worked as visiting professor at El Colegio de Mexico and is constantly recalling his acquaintances there and many aspects of the country's culture. Readers accompany him in his memories of several melancholic Latin American characters who, like the narrator himself, were going at the time of the memories through middle-age crisis. What ties these stories together is the Rain Tree, a specimen that stands by a mental hospital and which can amass the raindrops that fall on it, hence giving the impression that it is still raining under it after a storm has already stopped⁽⁶⁾. This tree is compared to memory and to life itself, suggesting that the novel is less focused on revisionism of Japan's history than on a more general and universal view of all human memory.

The story in the middle of the collection, "'Ame no ki' no kubitsuri otoko" (Man Hanged from the Rain-Tree) starts when the narrator has already returned to Japan and learns that Carlos Nervo, a Peruvian researcher of Japanese literature that he befriended while working at El Colegio de México (an exile of his home country due to political reasons), was struck with cancer. Nervo is presented as a handsome and charismatic man, though also melancholic, possibly modeled after El Colegio's 1970s Argentinian professor Óscar Montes who Ōe described in similar terms in another occasion (Ōe: 1996). This man is also described as smart and thoughtful, often helping the narrator to compare Japan and Latin America, but also to deconstruct one and the other. A second protagonist of the

(5) Rivera made a simultaneous depiction of what he considers to be the main protagonists of Mexican history, from Hernán Cortés to Emiliano Zapata, also including writers, artists, folklore beings, one of famous Mexican *calaveras* representing death, even himself and his wife Frida Kahlo.

(6) It is called Rain Tree because every time it rains at night until the next day's noon, the tree will look as if it were still raining due to the drops that remain on its fronds. Other trees will dry immediately, but because this one has only tightly attached leaves, small, the size of a fingertip, attached to it, it can amass the drops of water that fall on its leaves. It's an intelligent tree, isn't it? (14-15)
『雨の木』というのは、夜なかに降雨があると、翌日は昼すぎまでその茂りの全体から滴をしたたらせて、雨を降らせるようだから。他の木はすぐ乾いてしまうのに、指の腹くらいの小さな葉をびっしりとつけているので、その葉に水滴をためこんでいられるのよ。頭がいい木でしょう。(14-15)

story, Nervo makes a second appearance in Ōe's literature in Mehiko no Ōnukeana (1984, "Great Underground Passage to Mexico"), in which another alter-ego of Ōe receives a lost draft of his novel *Dōjidai gēmu*, one very different from the published novel and for which Nervo suggests the title 'The great underground passage to Mexico'⁽⁷⁾.

In "Ame no ki' no kubitsuri otoko", Nervo also incarnates a simultaneous coexistence of opposites that the narrator highly praises. A blending of banality and helpfulness, also of knowledge and commonplace, he constantly helps the narrator both academically and emotionally. Nervo assists the narrator, for instance, to cope with the fact that his brain-damaged son is in faraway Japan, for which the latter writes him back a haiku as token of gratitude: "Without you, / I would have hanged myself / Under a bougainvillea shrub"⁽⁸⁾. Also, the Peruvian is a source of learning, a person whose comments make the narrator think upon his literature and of Japan as a whole. An example of this comes in the form of Nervo's fascination for the gossips of the writers that he researches, an interest which the narrator considers greater than the one in the writer's oeuvres. Though the narrator initially criticizes this preference, he then considers it to be a useful method to question established narratives. Such an emphasis placed on the positive consequences of Nervo's gossipy yet questioning attitude can be interpreted as a re-affirmation of Ōe's revisionist intents, though through new and transformed way that he learned in Mexico.

There is yet another episode in which a Latin American character is a source of learning for the narrator. While accompanied by Nervo and lecturing to his class about one of his most treasured principles, "tolerance is the intolerance to intolerance" (105)⁽⁹⁾, one of the narrator's students, a young Argentinian woman, stands up to him and takes a contrary stance. Making reference to the dictatorships that were governing the region at that time, the student tells the narrator that it would impossible for any South American like her or professor Nervo to show tolerance to the police members who had detained people in their home countries with the excuse of considering them terrorists. She concludes that his narrator's thesis on tolerance is not applicable to their context.

Inspired by this statement, each of the female students from Peru, Argentina, and Colombia, those who always remained in silence and just smiling, raised up their voices about opposing intolerance. All of these women suddenly stiffened as if they were about to testify in court and spoke in a slow and clear English so that I could understand for sure. The ones that spoke only Spanish, as if thinking that I could understand them too if they spoke to me slowly, looked straight to me and started talking as well. I realized that these women had the blood of all other Latin American female intellectuals running through their veins.

Until that day engraved in my memory, I had always had a childish attitude while giving my first regular classes, not having an adult responsibility at all. I just thought about teaching students coming from Central and South America to Mexico City a bit about Japanese postwar ideology. But what meaning does it have for them? Isn't it something like an intellectual waste of time for them? Perhaps it is so. And maybe precisely because of that is that someone like me, with no teaching experience in Japan, is allowed be a teacher here. So, I thought, at least let's add some fun to this lecture as performance. That's what I had been thinking⁽¹⁰⁾.

The episode resolves with all of them having dinner together in a Japanese restaurant. It suggests that different theoretical positions and interpretations of history can coexist despite being seemingly opposite. In "Ame no ki' no kubitsuri otoko" what matters most is less the understanding and reinterpretation of the Self than the coming together with the Other that is Latin America, that is, trying to comprehend both its culture and logic. Hence the strong emphasis put on Latin American characters and personal relationships. Compared to the novel *Dōjidai gēmu*,

(7) In 1986, Ōe would actually publish, after the negative response from editors and critics alike, a new version of *Dōjidai gēmu* titled *M/T and the Narrations About the Marvels of the Forest (M/T to mori no fushigi no monogatari)*. In it, however, Nervo and Mexico are left unmentioned.

(8) The *haiku* is in English in the original. The *bougainvillea* is an ornamental flower native to South America, from Brazil and Peru to Argentina. Though now spread widely across the globe after its cultivation in the hands of European travelers and botanists, it remains a welcome symbol in Latin America. Coincidentally, it is also popular for Bonsai enthusiasts in Asia and Japan due to their ease of training.

(9) 寛容は不寛容に対して不寛容である。

it is a story more interested in human connections than in intellectual pretensions.

Indeed, “‘Ame no ki’ no kubitsuri otoko” presents several differences with *Dōjidai gēmu*, especially in the way that Mexico is depicted. As previously stated, the country no longer (or not only) stands for a remote periphery from where to rethink Japanese history, but is also a nostalgic and cherished memory that literally changed the narrator’s life. There is also a more detailed description of specific spaces over the city itself. A clear example is the apartment where the narrator resides during his stay in Mexico: “Other than going out once a week to the university, I stayed the whole of the other six days confined in my room. I said nothing to no one, depending only on the food and drink I had bought at the supermarket at Insurgentes Avenue” (93, 109, 111)⁽¹¹⁾. The apartment stands as a space of solitude and isolation (*kakuri*), from which he can reflect about many things. Different from the 1979 novel, however, the narrator of “‘Ame no ki’ no kubitsuri otoko” pays more attention to elements of Mexican culture, from art and literature to history and politics.

One object in particular haunts the narrator while in the apartment: a *calavera* (skull), a representation of death of the Mexican celebration known as the *Día de Muertos* (Day of the Dead). Death is actually ever-present in the story, even when the narrator leaves the apartment and walks the city. He finds it in the violent photographs of sensationalist newspapers, in the images and art pieces of José Guadalupe Posada, in the comments of Nervo and his other colleagues at El Colegio de México. “I was isolated in Mexico City. If I had to use a metaphor, I would say it was a Country of Death” (109)⁽¹²⁾. Yet, Death is never described in negative terms by the narrator, but rather in an ambiguous way, as a symbol of juxtaposition of past and present, one that epitomizes the power of memory, resurrection, enjoyment, and transcendence. In this sense, Ōe’s interpretation of Death in Mexican culture very much resembles yet again that made by Tsurumi in *Guadalupe no Seibo*. Furthermore, such a duality in Death likewise is reminiscent of Bakhtin’s subversion of established social structures and questioning of dichotomic pairs quoted in the first section of the current paper.

Despite these conceptualizations of Death, however, as previously analyzed in regards to the character of Nervo, Ōe’s 1980s post-Mexico Fiction seems to be characterized by a distancing from the writer’s previous theoretical and revisionist intents in a quest to develop a more personal view of Latin America, one less idealized and more real. Turned into a memory in itself, the experience in Mexico and at El Colegio is transformed from a part in global history to a part of personal history. Both Nervo and the female student that stands up to the narrator in class embody Ōe’s new view of Latin Americans: as an old friend with which to share camaraderie, companionship, and mutual learning. Ōe’s post-Mexican fiction which commence in these second group of texts is, in such a sense, an invitation to readers to further deepen the relationship of both regions.

(10) この発言をきっかけにして、日頃は沈黙し微笑しつつカルロスの働きを姉のように見守ってきた、ペルー、アルゼンチンそしてコロンビアからの女性たちが、それぞれ断固として不寛容に対すべき権力について声を発したのであった。彼女たちはみな、法廷で証言するように背をまっすぐに伸ばし、僕が確実に理解しようようにゆっくりと明瞭に英語をしゃべった。スペイン語で話す者らも、ゆっくり明瞭に話さえすれば、あたかも僕が理解しようと考えているように、僕をまっすぐ見つめてしゃべったのである。当然のことながら、彼女らがほかならぬラテン・アメリカの女性知識人の血を全身にみなぎらせた人びとであることを、僕は納得していったのであった。

...この記憶にきざまれた日まで、僕は自分の生涯におけるはじめての定期的な授業に、じつは大人としてよく責任をとっていない、子供じみた態度を示していたように思う。中南米からメキシコ・シティーにやってきている学生たちに、戦後日本思想史を語る。それがこれらの学生たちにどれほどの実際的な意味を持つのか？それはかれらにとっていくぶん知的な暇つぶしのようなものではないか？おそらくはそうしたものだ。そしてそれゆえにこそ、自分のように日本で教壇に立つことのない者が、教師の役割を演じるとして許されるのだ。したがってパフォーマンスとしての面白さくらいは、なんとか講義に加えるとしよう—そのように考えていたのだから。(106-107)

(11) 僕は週に一度だけ大学へ出かける他は、まるっきり六日間、その部屋にこもりきり、ということもあったのである。近くのインスルヘンテス大通りのスーパー・マーケットで買って来た、食料と飲みものに頼りつつ、誰とも言葉をかわさずに。(94)

(12) The full quote goes as follows: “I was isolated in Mexico City. If I had to use a metaphor, I would say it was the Country of Death. During the period I lived there, every time I walked the backstreets of the city and touched any real thing, I felt as if a paper-thin, smelly and oily membrane separated my fingertips and the surface of the objects”.

メキシコ・シティーのなかで、僕は隔離されていたのだ。暗喩（メタファー）としていうならば、そこは死の国であった。僕はそこに暮す間、自分の指がふれるすべての現実の事物の、指の腹と事物の表面との間に、メキシコ・シティーの裏通りの街路を歩くたびに嗅いだヤツ油の薄膜が張っているように感じていた。そこで交渉をもった人間についてはさらにそうであった。

Mexico and Japan as Relatives in Life

This final section of the current paper will analyze *Jinsei no shinseki* (1989, *Relatives in Life*, translated into English as *An Echo of Heaven*, 1996), in which Ōe's presents a more developed image of Mexico, while reworking several aspects of his previous post-Mexico fiction. *Jinsei no shinseki* shows an even more defined tendency to replace the revisionist theorizations in favor of a more personal approach to Latin American culture. The novel sets off when a group of filmmakers contact one of Ōe's alter-egos asking him for help in making a movie about one of his old activist colleagues, Marie Kuraki. Like Ōe and his alter-ego, Marie has a brain-damaged son and handicapped son who committed suicide together in an episode which triggered a period of nihilism in her. She managed to give some sense back to her life thanks to a Japanese Christian cult and by following the leader of this group to the U.S. and Mexico. After joining a cooperative farm in this last country, however, Marie was confronted with tragedy yet again: first, she was raped by the Nikkei who runs the farm and, second, she was struck with cancer. The filmmakers want to film how Marie ended up being venerated as a saint by poor neighboring villagers.

Jinsei no shinseki presents Mexico as an opposite of wealthy 1980s Japan, though it is still a multi-layered space. Mexico (specifically, Mexico City) is yet again presented as a space of melancholy and isolation in which the narrator can socialize only with scholars at El Colegio de México who understand English and with an occasional bookstore clerk. But the novel also introduces a second dimension: that of the outskirts of the city, a place full of foreign factories, surrounded by dangerous neighborhoods. Contrasting the cityscape, though, there is yet a third Mexican spatial level in the novel: that of the farm near the village of Cocoyagua, an altogether different area. Symbolically protected by Christian churches and an Aztec Pyramid, it is constantly described by its manager, Sergio Matsuo, in bucolic and idyllic terms, a sort of rural utopia where people of diverse origins can live together in harmony (164). These three descriptive levels of Mexico make it a much more complex setting than in Ōe's previous Post-Mexico fiction.

Likewise, Marie Kuraki is an equally complex and multi-layered character. While living in Japan she is a strong and sexually-liberated woman, engaged in political activities as hunger strikes, demonstrations and volunteer organizations. The narrator says, "There was something undeniably refreshing about a beautiful woman in her thirties, divorced, working, and thoroughly enjoying her life" (25)⁽¹³⁾. In a way, she stands as an anti-model of what was expected of women in the Japanese society of the 1980s. She is even a source of learning on behalf of the narrator. When discussing his novels about Hikari, his mentally disabled son, Marie tells him that there is an overemphasis of innocence and sentimentality in such works. Quoting Christian American writer Flannery O'Connor, she explains to him that tragedy should not be embraced in terms of pity, as it ends up generating the opposite effect to overcoming pain.

After the death of her sons, however, unable to find spiritual peace either in meditation or in sexual pleasure, Marie renounces all worldly desires and joins the Christian Church of Little Father, a character who reinterpreted God's teaching to fit the Japanese context. Her devotion during this period lies less on Christ and the Bible, however, than on (once again) Flannery O'Connor and what the latter calls 'a sense of mystery'. According to O'Connor, the divine emerges in our predisposition to the unknown, in letting ourselves be deepened by our contact with reality; in short, in our experience of mystery⁽¹⁴⁾. In *Jinsei no shinseki*, Marie takes this concept to its limits when she accepts becoming the symbol of Matsuo's utopian Mexican farm in hopes of convoking neighboring villagers to work for him. From that moment onwards, her activity as caretaker of the women and children of the village and farm is described by everyone as that of a saint.

Marie, however, never really turns fully into Christianity. In fact, by following Flannery O'Connor's definition of 'mystery' she understands divinity and religion as fluid concepts, capable of traversing through different cultures

(13) The English version of the novel is being quoted.

(14) "If the writer believes that our life is and will remain essentially mysterious, if he looks upon us as beings existing in a created order to whose laws we freely respond, then what he sees on the surface will be of interest to him only as he can go through it into an experience of mystery itself" (O'Connor 1970, 41).

and manifestations. Marie recurrently talks not of God but of a “cosmic will” (70) and puts at the same level the Christian faith many other practices, one of them being the ancient ritual of drinking cacti tea to have a hallucinogenic effect that the narrator learned in Mexico. Furthermore, she compares both of these experiences to the narrator’s trip to Mexico itself, naming it his “initiation journey” (an echo of the “spiritual awakening” manifested by the narrator of “‘Ame no ki’ no kubitsuri otoko”). Christian faith, Huichol ancient ritual, and Ōe’s alter-ego’s voyage to the periphery, then, are all equated, making *Jinsei no Shinseki* a novel about different manifestations of one same concept in different cultures, but also about the juxtaposition and blending of those cultures.

Activist in Japan turned saint in Mexico, Marie closely resembles the comparison made by Tsurumi between Miguel Hidalgo (the New Spanish Catholic priest who charged into battle for independence hoisting a banner of Virgin Guadalupe) and the 1960s protesters. Indeed, Marie is explicitly compared with that virgin:

When I remembered Marie from time to time, I associated her face with the Mexican image of the Virgin Mary she mentioned in her letter [...]. The Virgin of Guadalupe, and Marie emerging into the twilight from the gloom inside the church as though rising to the earth’s surface, exposing eyes like two holes deep in shadow, and bright red Betty Boop lips, to the chill air of late autumn.

Several critics highlighted this juxtaposition (Wilson 1986, Claremont 2008). However, they had discussed only the connection between Marie and “Virgin Mary”, equating the later with “Guadalupe”, something which erases the full extent of the Mexican reference and, most importantly, the meaning implied in the Virgin of Guadalupe: that of cultural mixing and blending. Marie is, indeed, not directly connected to Christianity, but rather a manifestation of values that she finds in phenomena of different origins: Christian faith, Mexican history, Japanese traditions, American novels, anti-imperialism activism, even pop-culture characters such as Betty Boop. That is, she is a symbol of multiplicity and universality which is not particularly rooted to any specific culture.

The final episodes of the novel suggest that, despite all cultures and religions, human beings are connected through their feeling and more specifically through suffering and sadness. The narrator had compared Marie’s life with *The Broken Column* (1944), an art piece by Frida Kahlo, a Mexican artist who was left disabled after being impaled through her pelvis in a car accident. He then recalls Marie lying in her deathbed at the hospital while the filmmakers show her a version of her movie and she suggesting a title for it: “*Parientes de la vida*” (the Spanish for “Relatives in Life”, the Japanese title of the novel). The phrase is a quote by Plutarch, according to whom ‘sadness is an unwelcomed relative in life’. *Jinsei no shinseki* ends, then, making reference to a universal human sentiment which transcend different contexts. “*An Echo of Heaven*”, the title chosen for the English translation of the novel is more impactful than the original in regards to the Christian background and to Marie’s link to Flannery O’Connor. It does move out of the spotlight, however, this idea that sadness (and overcoming it) can connect human beings despite their origins, cultures, and experiences.

It must be stated that *Jinsei no Shinseki* is not the first of Ōe’s works thematically tied to Christianity. In *Kōzui wa waga tamashii ni oyobi* (A Flood Reaches Out for My Soul, 1973), for instance, Ōe used a phrase from the Genesis as title. In *Natsukashī toshi e no tegami* (1987, Letters to my Nostalgic Years), a novel which he dedicates a full chapter to Mexico in the same terms analyzed in the second section of this paper, Ōe attempted to re-write Dante’s *La Divina Commedia*. *Jinsei no shinseki*, however, uses Christianity extensively as a theme and as a literary device to talk about universality. Even if there is no indication that Ōe embraced the Christian faith (in fact, he denied such connection, as literary critic Yasuko Claremont emphatically pointed out), Christianity is presented as a symbol of humanity that can traverse different cultures and fulfill Ōe’s universal, humanist aspirations. In this process, Mexico and Japan are placed at a same level, both peripheries part of a fraternal human family facing the same pains and sufferings. This idea seems to be an important concern for Ōe starting this last work of his post-Mexican Fiction.

Conclusions

The present paper has shown that Ōe Kenzaburō’s writings after his 1976 trip to Mexico comprises different layers of interpretation of the Latin American contexts which cannot be enclosed in a single and unique experience.

Instead, his post-Mexico Fiction reveals a deep understanding of the region's culture that exceeds stereotypes and simplification. Furthermore, Ōe gradually distanced himself from a theoretical and literary application of Latin America as a topic or setting, to start seeing it as an equal, as a fraternal space that shared many problematics with Japanese peripheries like his native village. In such direction, Ōe leveled the Latin American situation with the Japanese situation in the context of the geopolitics of the 1970s and 1980s. Such a change in perspective took him to consider Latin America, first, as a cherished memory and old friend, and later, as a life's relative, with whom he shared a sense of sadness.

The identification with Latin America was reinforced by Ōe in his 1986 conference titled "Japan's Dual Identity", which he delivered at the event *Challenges of the Third World Culture*. In it, he severely criticized Japan's attitude towards its neighbor countries both after the militarization that followed the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and after the massive incursion of Japanese companies overseas that followed the rapid economic growth of the 1960s. Hidden behind the abuse of its former colonies and current cheap workforce is, according to Ōe, the fact that Japan is a peripheral country as well. In this direction, he stated: "There is an element in the Japanese nation and among Japanese that makes us unwilling to accept the fact that we are member of the Third World and reluctant to play our role accordingly" (Ōe 1995). Furthermore, he then proceeded to summon young Japanese writers to abandon the paradigm of Modernization imposed by Western powers, to reconnect with real social issues that had been neglected for long (like the Okinawan issue), and to embrace Japan's condition as a peripheral and Third World country, at the same time establishing connections with regions in the same situation.

Domestically, 1986 was the year after the Plaza Accord agreement, which depreciated the dollar in relation to the Japanese yen (making the U.S. export more competitive), and the onset of what would become an asset price bubble for five more years. Globally, 1986 was the first year in power of Mikhail Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, whose liberal reform eventually led to the collapse of the latter. Former anti-U.S. political activist Ōe Kenzaburō, but also his colleagues mentioned along the current paper, surely felt the inclination of global power in favor of the U.S. and the capitalist system. His statement in the aforementioned conference, therefore, can be interpreted as an attempt to counterbalance the position of the U.S. as a central power in the context of the enclosing Cold War and subsequent Globalization. In such case, it is possible to state that Ōe was trying to establish new strategic relations with peripheral countries that could be helpful in confronting the hegemony of the U.S. in a global arena.

However, going as far as positioning Japan as one of those countries, as a Third World country, was definitely too much of a stretch. Japan was at that time the world's second biggest economy, with both an industrial infrastructure and a financial system stronger than any of those countries that Ōe was comparing himself to. Most of those Third World countries called upon, in Africa, Middle East, Asia Pacific, even Latin America, had been ransacked colonies and had been and were still economically exploited by huge foreign firms and holdings (some of them Japanese). Ōe's intentions might have been truthful and sincere, but his humanist and universal stance ended up being a homogenization of regions that rub off a clear unbalance of power. Perhaps his greatest attempt to defy and question the hegemony of global politics actually comes from his self-guilt as a Japanese, something he highlights in the conference as well. Ōe summons the Japanese to accept their responsibility for the atrocities that the Empire of Japan had perpetrated in Asia. It is possible to interpret his approach to Latin America and to peripheral regions, then, as an assertion of such a self-guilt as a global power and as a recognition of the country's economic and international privileges, most of which came hand in hand with its alliance with the U.S.

Ōe would return to Mexico in 1996, soon after being awarded the Nobel Prize, where he gave a lecture with Octavio Paz, once again at El Colegio de México. In a much different context, he made no political declarations and chose instead to revive his experiences in the country during the 1970s, those cherished and friendly memories. "When we finally jump the barrier of the five senses, we will be triumphant", said Ōe at that time quoting one of favorite Mexican poets, Alfonso Reyes, "I hope the day comes when the Mexican youth lead the new universal culture and that I join them as a new Japanese" (Ōe 1996). These declarations show that Ōe's heartfelt interest in Latin America remained intact, while at the same time revealing some of that self-guilt as a global power. The door is now open to further analyze how his image of the region changed during the 2000s and until today.

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