Hisaye Yamamoto in the 1950s: Her Passive Resistance and the Response to Herman Melville in "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara"

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Abstract: This paper examines the narrative of resistance in "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" (1950) as Yamamoto's response to Melville's short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" (1853). First, I will explore how Yamamoto's narrative is distinct from the protest style of American ethnic writers. Second, I argue that the resistance Mari Sasagawara articulates in "The Legend" synchronizes with an eccentric copyist on Wall Street, Bartleby's passive resistance to American capitalism. The paper focuses on Mari's botanical image and performative insanity, both of which invoke Bartleby's distinct stance of non-assimilation to Americanization. By focusing on Mari's esoteric poem, which she wrote in the camp, the paper concludes that Mari Sasagawara embodies Yamamoto's passive resistance in the 1950s, aligning with neither the US nor Japan. I would argue for the role of the narrator, Kiku, who takes a more autonomous position than the narrator-attorney in Bartleby by highlighting her gendered perspective toward Mari. This comparative reading with "Bartleby" sheds new light on the current field of American ethnic literature by questioning its Japanese American discourse of victimization while foregrounding the supranational aspect of Japanese ethnic solidarity during WWII.

Keywords: Hisaye Yamamoto, passive resistance, Herman Melville, The Internment, the 1950s

INTRODUCTION

If American ethnic writers' act of criticizing US racial politics has been considered "resistance" against the nation-state, their protest contains a pitfall, which paradoxically indicates their autonomous inclusion of racial and capitalistic hierarchies in the US.[1] Such protests in ethnic literature stem from the voices of those repressed, ignored, or persecuted by the US nation-state;

thus, writers' perspectives and artistic expressions have been shaped by their self-defined subaltern position. Aware of this pitfall, Japanese American writer Hisaye Yamamoto strategically creates a unique narrative of resistance to both assimilationist discourse and ethnocentrism. Having gone through the internment during WWII, she did not literally write about the persecution of this collective memory: only two of her works directly refer to the internment, while her major works written after World War II, such as "Seventeen Syllables" and "Yoneko's Earthquake," focus on life in Japanese American farming areas in the 1930s. Her works are received as if her primary theme were intra-ethnic conflict between first-generation Japanese mothers and second-generation American daughters.

As a Japanese American writer who experienced internment during WWII, Yamamoto developed a complex narrative strategy that critics have occasionally understood as "passive" in American ethnic literature. Several critics, while praising her talent, have pointed to Yamamoto's "passive" way of articulating her ethnic identity.[2] However, as a Japanese American writer in the 1950s, Yamamoto could not openly criticize US policy; thus, she had to articulate her resistance without explicit protest. Even in the 1980s, after the Japanese American Redress movement, she maintained the same "passive" narrative strategy. As Cheryl Higashida calls this rhetorical strategy "the poetics of inarticulation" (35), Yamamoto's message is buried in its complex rhetorical style.

When historical figures could not articulate their dissent from nation-state politics at a specific moment, literature can play a significant role in transmitting a hidden message that only a few chosen ones can reach in the writer's mind. Matthew Elliott, in "Sins of Omission: Hisaye Yamamoto's Vision of History," which focuses on an American canonical writer who influenced young Yamamoto in the 1950s, mentioned nineteenth-century American writer Herman Melville and his unreliable narrative in the novella *Benito Cereno* (1855). The novella recounts a series of incidents aboard the Spanish slave ship San Dominick, commanded by Benito Cereno. By uncovering the argument about *Benito Cereno* in the correspondence between Yamamoto and her mentor, Stanford Professor Yvor Winters, Elliott shows that Yamamoto found humanity in Babo, an African servant of Spanish Captain Benito Cereno, who later becomes a slave-revolt leader attacking San Dominick. "What Winters failed to comprehend is," Elliott asserts, "that Yamamoto's reading was guided by a discerning view of history, but her understanding of how history is shaped and which stories are passed along was different from his [Winters'] "(49). Based on the evaluation in the 1950s, when ethnic consciousness was not a central issue in American literature, this African character, as Winters did, was simply interpreted as a symbol of evil. In the 1980s, Melville scholars began to reconsider the novel through a postcolonial lens. Yamamoto in the 1950s, well before the Civil Rights Movement, already demonstrated a radical interpretation aimed at seeing through the mask of this African character.

If Yamamoto was such an enthusiastic reader of Melville, as Elliott suggests, we can see signs in her creative work that she may have used Melville's strategies to articulate her resistance as a Japanese American former internee and writer

in the 1950s. To explore Yamamoto's act of literary resistance, I would like to examine her work, "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara," which directly addresses internment and was written in 1950. The story is narrated by Kiku, a teenage internee at Poston Internment Camp in Arizona during WWII, who portrays Mari Sasagawara, an eccentric artist and the daughter of a Japanese Buddhist minister. Mari and her father came from Tule Lake internment camp in California, where the "problematic" group on the side of Japan was interned. When Mari's "eccentric" behavior resumes, and her nocturnal wandering frightens other internees, they send her to a California institution. However, the image of Mari as "a mad woman" in Poston changed drastically after the war. Released from the camp, Kiku discovers the book of poetry Mari wrote in Poston and recognizes her striking intelligence and artistic genius. Kiku eventually learns that Mari is a resistant figure who survives the internment, neither directly protesting US policy nor fully sympathizing with Japan.

Elliott's excellent archival evidence that Yamamoto engaged in *Benito Cereno* asks us whether she could succeed in creating a discourse of resistance as a Japanese American writer. If Yamamoto recognized humanity and dignity in Babo's violent revolt, she would also articulate her own form of resistance through her creative writing. In her case, however, resistance should not be as dynamic and violent as Babo demonstrates in *Benito Cereno*, but rather more subtle and static. Alongside Babo's radical resistance in *Benito Cereno*, Melville also presents another style of resistance in the 1850s through the character of a Wall Street copyist in "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853).[3] Though the settings and time periods differ, he explored resistance to ideological hegemony in US capitalism through unreliable American narrators: an innocent narrator, Captain Amasa Delano in *Benito Cereno*, and an anonymous attorney in "Bartleby". I assume Yamamoto, as a Japanese American writer who could not articulate her protest but also resisted assimilation, might see the same resistance in Bartleby, who refuses to work as a cog in the US capitalist machine on Wall Street and ends up dying in prison. "Bartleby" therefore serves as a structural and thematic analog for internment-era passive non-assimilation, as Mari Sasagawara articulates in "The Legend."

This paper examines the narrative of resistance in "The Legend" as Yamamoto's response to Melville's novella "Bartleby." First, I will explore how Yamamoto's narrative is distinct from the protest style of American ethnic writers. Second, to push Elliott's analysis further, I argue that the resistance Mari Sasagawara, the protagonist in "The Legend," articulates parallels Bartleby's passive resistance to the US nation-state. The paper focuses on Mari's botanical image and performative insanity, both of which invoke Bartleby's distinct stance of non-assimilation to American capitalism. By focusing on Mari's esoteric poem, which she wrote in the camp, the paper concludes that Mari Sasagawara embodies Yamamoto's passive resistance, not only against the United States but also against Japanese supranationalism. My argument specifically explores the role of the narrator, Kiku, who takes a more autonomous position than the narrator-attorney in "Bartleby," by highlighting her gendered perspective toward Mari, an artist of resistance in the Poston internment camp.

1. Not Identifying but Sympathizing:

Yamamoto's Perspective toward American Ethnicity

Although she acknowledged her marginal position as a Japanese American writer, Hisaye Yamamoto maintained a certain distance from other ethnic groups in the United States. Most stories in her collection depict encounters between Japanese American protagonists and racial "others," yet they invariably end with the parties failing to understand one another, their paths crossing in strange, disconnected ways. Yamamoto is best known for works such as "Seventeen Syllables" and "Yoneko's Earthquake" (1951)—stories centered on first-generation Japanese immigrant families on plantation farms in the 1930s. The Japanese American teenage girl, Rosie Hayashi, protagonist of "Seventeen Syllables," seeks salvation from her dysfunctional family life through her romantic relationship with a Mexican boy, Jesus Carrascos. "Yoneko's Earthquake" portrays the teenage protagonist's strong interest in Marpo, a Filipino contract worker. "Epithalamium" (1960) is a semi-autobiographical story of a Japanese American woman, Yuki Tsumagari, who falls in love with Marco, an Italian alcoholic patient in a Catholic sanatorium. "Las Vegas Charley" (1961) follows a Japanese American man working under a Chinese American owner. "The Eskimo Connection" (1983) is about a middle-aged Japanese American writer who communicates with a Native American prisoner, Alden, through pen pals. The interethnic relationships that Yamamoto portrays in these stories reveal her cosmopolitan interest in various ethnic minorities in the US, while the endings of Japanese American protagonists' inability to fully understand these cultural others suggest her peculiar resistance to American ethnicity. [4] This shows how Yamamoto differentiates the collective memory of Japanese American internment from that of other American ethnic groups.

Articulating a Japanese American subject in the 1950s requires a complex rhetorical strategy to address internment without directly criticizing US policy. Except for "The Legend," the only piece Yamamoto wrote about the internment is "Death Rides the Rails to Poston" (1942)—written, it is believed, while she was in the camp. The story is a detective mystery, while concerning a group of Japanese Americans being transported to a camp, but it does not actually depict life inside the facility; furthermore, Yamamoto cleverly avoids a direct narrative by framing the story as a "murder mystery" written by the narrator—an "I"—at the age of ten. Consequently, "The Legend," which portrays a female artist's "madness" within the Poston internment camp, is the only work that directly addresses the internment experience. The narrator, Kiku, receives Mari's hidden message through her esoteric poem at the end of the story. Thus, a characteristic of Yamamoto's work is the way the collective memory of the internment is layered and veiled through various narrative strategies. It is understandable that she would learn Melville's unreliable narrative style as she developed her internment discourse. In this paper, I will examine the rhetorical devices of resistance as literary motifs Yamamoto may have learned from Herman Melville, in an era of social amnesia when directly discussing Japanese American internment was taboo.[5]

Yamamoto in the 1950s reveals her state of mind as a resistant who rejected assimilation into her American society. In 1953, after being released from the camp in Arizona, she declined an offer to attend Stanford University; instead, she joined the Catholic Worker, a social charity organization in Staten Island, New York. Her choice of the Catholic Worker over Stanford could stem from her crankiness, which she herself excuses in the autobiographical story, "Epithalamium": "Maybe I'm a *katawa*… Nothing but a freak" (67). Her intentional use of the Japanese derogatory term for a handicapped person reveals her complex subject position, ostracized by her American society in the 1950s. In this short story, the protagonist, Yuki Tsumagari, who remains single in her thirties, embodies Yamamoto's autonomous choice to remain "defective" rather than becoming the "wholesome" American citizen in the 1950s. The term "defective" recalls the label "The Spoilage" (damaged products), a term applied to internees in Tule Lake who did not align with U.S. policies.[6] By deliberately adopting the term "defective," she sought to express her dissent against U.S. policy.

Unlike the words "rebellion," "repulsion," and "protest," which manifest straightforwardly against authority, "resistance" lacks this immediacy and aggression. The term "resistance" also refers to pausing, observing, and remaining silent. This seemingly "passive opposition," however, has its own axis, producing a sophisticated discourse that translates various types of silences and highlights the inability to compromise.[7] You can see this resistance in Yamamoto's protagonists, who act as tricksters, subverting US social values without directly opposing them. I would argue that Yamamoto learned this rhetorical strategy from reading Melville's works when she was young.

In her journalistic essay, "A Fire in Fontana" (1985), Yamamoto recalls her life in the 1950s, when she was still a young writer, arguing with her mentor, Stanford Professor and nineteenth-century Americanist Yvor Winters, over her interpretation of the slave character Babo in *Benito Cereno* (154). "A Fire in Fontana" is about Yamamoto's response to the 1965 Watts Riots in Los Angeles, but it also recalls her confrontation with Winters in the 1950s, which expands into the theme of finding humanity in this African slave character. *Benito Cereno* is told by an unreliable narrator, Amasa Delano, who cannot understand what is going on during the sudden attack by the African slaves on their Spanish ship San Dominick, but later finds out that the black slave Babo, who seems to be a "submissive" and "faithful" servant of Benito Cereno, was the leader of the revolt.

As Matthew Elliott has already pointed out, Yamamoto's furious reaction is attributed to her mentor, Winters, who "corrected" her interpretation based on the traditional analysis of canonical works at the time. The following quotation is Winters' letter in 1951, mentioning that Yamamoto's interpretation was "wrong":

… Your comments on the Melville are childish, however… In any event, Delano is carefully portrayed by Melville as the blandly mediocre man of good will and no perception (he misunderstands everything); Cereno as a man of too good a

heart to operate within the framework of a slave society- that is, he should either have improved his mind or hardened his heart; and Babo as a man of ability in whom evil becomes dominant as a result, if you like, of injustice, but of injustice which neither he nor anyone else in the story understands. The story is one of the most curious and profound studies of evil I have ever read. To "root" for Babo is silly; (9-10)

Winters's interpretation of Babo as a flat character rests on his assumption that the blackness of his skin signifies his evilness rather than his racial status. In contrast, the postcolonial frame, in which Babo, even in Senegal, was "a black man's slave…now, is the white's" (50), emphasizes Babo's victimized subaltern position under class and race. His revolt is justified because of his resentment as a doubly repressed subject. Later in the 1980s, several Melville scholars began to focus on Babo's intelligence and dignity, riding the wave of the Civil Rights movement.[8]

"A Fire in Fontana" is about the unsolved murder case of an African American family, the Shorts, living in a white residential area, and their house was set on fire supposedly by a group of racists in the 1940s. Furious, Yamamoto could not articulate her straightforward protest against racism when she recollects this brutal murder of this family in the 1960s. Her complex subject position is revealed as she reflects on Babo in *Benito Cereno*, saying, "I had come there on sufferance myself, on the coattails of a pale husband" (157). Reporting this riot as a Japanese American journalist for an African American publisher, *the Los Angeles Tribune*, in the late 1940s, Yamamoto could not help but feel she had to stay on the side of her white husband, concealing her anger toward this racial harassment.[9] Although sympathizing with Babo, Yamamoto did not simply identify with the racial subject position of African Americans.

The 1950s were a period when not only Americans in general but also Japanese Americans themselves did not want to talk about the internment during WWII. After being released from the camps, most Japanese Americans wanted to be accepted as members of "American society" by pretending nothing had happened. Against this traumatic silence, by calling herself "a prisoner" continuously watched by the FBI as a leftist journalist, Yamamoto needed to cultivate her own way of articulating resistance, one that belonged to neither assimilation nor direct revolt against white America. Creative writing, rather than a journalistic essay, may have been her best tool for developing a literary narrative of resistance.

Yamamoto articulated her resistance as a writer by using Melville's literary strategy. Babo in *Benito Cereno* is portrayed as a "good-natured," "quiet," and "faithful" servant of Captain Cereno. However, as Cereno's evidence after the revolt shows, Babo impersonates a clown to deceive American crews, including an innocent American captain, Amasa Delano. What Yamamoto sympathizes with in Babo is not his terrorism but his silent performativity as a black "faithful" servant who hides his revenge and pretends to be on the side of the Spanish colonizer. Yamamoto might be strongly attracted to his trickster characteristics as deceptive performativity.

2. Passively Resisting: The Intersection between Yamamoto and Melville

My question is what type of resistance Yamamoto in the 1950s could discover in the slave character Babo in *Benito Cereno*. For Yamamoto, resisting white supremacy is not a straightforward protest; then what type of resistance was possible for her as a Japanese American writer and former internee in the 1950s? How could she articulate her discord with US nation-state politics through her artistic expression?

Regarding this deceptive, trickster attire, I found several features belonging to both central characters in Melville's "Bartleby" and Yamamoto's "The Legend." Portrayed as eccentric, Bartleby and Mari resist in ways that are neither offensive nor violent; instead, they remain passive, static, and even performative. Both stories are also strikingly similar in structure, featuring unreliable narrators: an anonymous attorney in "Bartleby" and a teenage internee, Kiku, in "The Legend." Both plots unfold through these narrators' limited perspectives, reporting on the "eccentricity" of resistant characters while showing them peculiar compassion. Rather than seeing Yamamoto's story as a simple parodic revision of "Bartleby," I argue that Mari's resistance, which illuminates Melville's Bartleby, reveals a static, deceptive nature that challenges not only the discourse of Americanization in the camp but also her Japanese heritage, embodied by her Buddhist father.

Yamamoto realized that the Poston internment camp was not only a state prison that physically restricted the internees but also a symbolic prison of the mind, which brainwashed them under American assimilation policy. Surrounded by walls, she could see a similar existential condition in Melville's portrayal of Wall Street in "Bartleby." Like Bartleby, who must resist American capitalism, Mari resists Americanization inside the camp. Though Mari is considered "a mad woman," the narrator, Kiku, is strongly attracted to her and occasionally shows sympathy. While the locations and historical periods differ, Yamamoto and Melville share a common theme: how can we maintain humanity and dignity within the ideological prisons of the US through passive resistance?

When we confront the US capitalist ideology and choose not to engage in its hegemony, how can we act against it? Melville, in the 1850s, presented us with the strategy called "passive resistance" in Bartleby's behavior in the Wall Street office. His resistance is not confrontational but mildly disarming and even brings out sympathy from the opponent.

Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as passive resistance. If the individual so resisted be of a not inhumane temper, and the resisting one perfectly harmless in his passivity, then in the better moods of the former, he will endeavor charitably to construe to his imagination what proves impossible to be solved by his judgment (13)

Recognizing that Bartleby's act is from "a not inhuman temper," the attorney's first impression of this copyist is not anger but compassion. His passive resistance reveals a paradoxical truth about our minds: instead of condemning or refusing, we want to engage the resistant figure emotionally. As a pacifist,

Yamamoto might be interested in this concept, and she articulates it through her rhetorical device in “The Legend.”

3. Staying Neutral: Yamamoto’s Adoption of Melville’s Botanical Image

Yamamoto uses botanical imagery to portray Mari Sasagawara, which we can see as an interesting synchronicity with Melville's silent copyist, Bartleby. A plant or flower in nature is a planetary creature without any sense of belonging to national boundaries and social categories. This ecological imagery depicts passive resistance that represents political neutrality, independence, and non-assimilation.

Melville effectively uses botanical imagery to portray Bartleby’s passive resistance. “Pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn” (9), Bartleby is portrayed as a ghost-like figure; however, he is hardly unnoticeable; rather, impressive. What surprises the attorney is not only his refusal of work but also his constant presence in the office without doing any labor. Annoyed by his antithesis, the first thing the attorney does is put a green folding screen between him and the copyist, “which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice” (10). This color choice is suggestive, reflecting the attorney’s perspective toward this silent copyist. Green reflects the copyist's botanical nature: he does not impede the narrator but exists in his office as “the other.” This otherness, in fact, is not entirely unpleasant to the narrator. Because he cannot completely ostracize Bartleby from his office, the attorney needs this otherness in his hectic Wall Street life. The paradoxical truth is that, like the plants or flowers in our office, the attorney wants Bartleby to be close to him. His presence in the office resists American consumerism, but it also appeals to the attorney's human mind.

Such passive resistance, portrayed through a botanical image, is more obvious at the end of this novella. In the last scene, when Bartleby has died of hunger in a state prison, the attorney vaguely recognizes that his resistance takes a symbolic form, “a soft imprisoned turf” emerging from the soil.

> The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft imprisoned turf grew underfoot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung. (28)

The attorney’s lamentation, “Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!” (34), shows that, now watching Bartleby’s death, he realizes Bartleby symbolizes life in the desert prison. As for Melville’s usage of green, Leo Marx asserts, despite the desolated condition of Wall Street, “(g)reen, on the other hand, is life. The color green is the key to a cluster of images of fecundity which recurs in Melville’s work beginning with *Typee*. It is the color which dominates that tropical primitive isle. It is the color of growth and of all pastoral experience” (244). Bartleby's eccentricity as a cultural other is associated with this botanical color, appealing to the narrator-attorney’s humanity and contrasting with whiteness, which represents the death image of Wall Street offices and the lack of humanity under American capitalism.

Yamamoto's protagonist, Mari Sasagawara, also carries a botanical image in "The Legend." First, the protagonist's name carries ecological connotations. "Mari" indicates the truth, while "Sasa" is bamboo grass, and "kawara" is a river beach in Japanese, implying nature worship. If Bartleby is "a green screen," in a desolate office, Mari is an unusual flowering plant in the desert. The office "deficient in what landscape painters call 'life'" (5) in "Bartleby" is comparable to the Poston internment camp, the desert prison in Arizona. The narrator, Kiku, describes Mari as a fragile woman in botanical colors, wearing "forest-green and mustard-yellow clothes" (20). With "her measured walk said, 'Look, I'm walking'" (20), she is depicted as more plant-like than human. On the other hand, Kiku also notices her beauty and vitality: "her shining hair was so long it wound twice about her head to form a coronet; her face was delicate and pale, with a fine nose, pouting bright mouth, and glittering eyes" (20). From Kiku's perspective, Mari is like a desert flower whose vital force lies hidden in "an unlikely place of wind, sand, and heat" (20). Mari passively resists the camp's desolate circumstances.

Both characters' physicality and stoicism remind us of the image of American transcendentalists. When the attorney discovers Bartleby as an extremely small eater who survives "a few crumbs of ginger-nuts and a morsel of cheese" (17), we can easily associate this image with that of a monk in training. Elizabeth Hardwick asserts Bartleby "passes across one's mind like a feather, calling forth the vague Hinduism of Thoreau and the outer-world meditations of Emerson" (261). His corporeality demonstrates anti-capitalism, rooted in transcendental ecology. Demonstrating her stoicism as a professional ballet dancer, Mari shares a similar corporeal characteristic with Bartleby. Following the men's comments, "Wow! How much does she weigh?" (20), Kiku, when she sees Mari for the first time in the camp, is amazed at her thinness. At the same time, while working as a receptionist at the hospital, Kiku simultaneously notices Mari's unusual stamina, which proves her physical energy to walk home, which is "a good mile off, across the canal"(25), soon after the examination at the hospital. Mildly rejecting Kiku's offer to take her home in a truck, Mari insists on walking, "as if to thank me kindly for minding my own business" (25). Like the attorney recognizing Bartleby's distinct attire with a certain sense of awe, Kiku admires Mari's resilience and strength.

In contrast to the mental rift between Bartleby and the attorney, Yamamoto implies Kiku may be psychologically closer to Mari by highlighting their shared characteristics. Like Mari's name, the name Kiku has symbolic connotations. Kiku, meaning chrysanthemum in Japanese, is also known as a flower with a strong life force; it suggests she shares Mari's characteristics. Beyond these two central characters, the story has no names tied to botanical imagery. Although Kiku talks with her friend Elsie about their future boyfriends and their married lives, her consciousness always returns to Mari, who acts independently and is not intimidated by other internees. For Kiku, Mari represents truth, reflecting what Kiku really seeks and wants to be.

4. Against Assimilation: Mari's Performative Resistance

Melville and Yamamoto describe passive resistance as a performative act to deceive others. In response to the attorney's demand for an explanation for his refusal to work, Bartleby replies with his famous closing, "I prefer not to," sometimes "in a flute-like tone," as if making fun of the attorney's inquiry itself (12). His resistance is not driven by straightforward anger, protest, or criticism; it is ridiculing and even joking. Bartleby also acts, concealing his state of mind and even letting the attorney guess his reason for resistance, saying, "Do you not see the reason for yourself?" (21). Passive resistance here is detached, performative, and playfully avoids confrontation.

Similarly, Mari playfully resists the doctors at the camp hospital. When Dr. Kawamoto examines her body by palpation when she is sick, she refuses him and his nurses because "she didn't want any more of those doctors pawing her" (26), indicating her unpleasantness that his examination is nothing but an invasion of her body. Although her action is not violent or frantic, it is calm: she does not follow his medical guidance, with "her head slightly bent," "staring at a certain place on the floor" (26). The doctor, who starts "trembling" (26), is threatened by her scornful attitude. Kiku notices Mari's performativity: "I knew this by her[Mari's] smile… to seem wryly amused with the entire proceedings" (26). Kiku even enjoys watching her behavior as if she were watching a scene in the film.

> I peered at her wonderfully through the triangular peephole created by someone's hand on hip, while Dr. Kawamoto, Miss Morris, and Miss Bowman tried to persuade her to lie down and relax. She was as smilingly immune to tactful suggestions as she was to tactless gawking. (26-27)

Kiku recognizes that her performance is an act of passive resistance against Dr. Kawamoto, a retired American army surgeon, and two white nurses, all of whom represent US governmental authority and surveillance. Mari's refusal to follow their medical instructions is not forceful; instead, she mildly questions their ability to understand her condition. Her smile also suggests emotional stability and confidence in facing authority.

Sexuality is also a major issue for these characters, indicating their resistance under the condition of imprisonment. Both Melville and Yamamoto portray their protagonists as unmarried, and their status serves as a metaphor of resistance against the nation-state reproductive system. Bartleby's sexuality, from the attorney's viewpoint, is anti-heteronormative. Once the attorney finds Bartleby in the office on Sunday morning, he is "in his shirt sleeves, and otherwise in a strangely tattered disable, saying quietly that he was sorry, but he was deeply engaged … "(16). As for the event that Bartleby works in his office, where no women were working at that time in "any state approaching nudity" (17), the attorney starts to doubt whether he is engaged in a "secular occupation" (17), suggesting prostitution, in his office on Sunday. Bartleby's nonchalance even threatens the attorney, who "for the time, is a sort of unmanned" (16), considering his sexuality as something transgressive. His silence, without excuse, fuels the narrator's selfishly meddling imagination. Bartleby's celibacy and eccentric behaviors in the office on Sunday challenge the attorney's sense of

heteronormative value as an “ordinary” American and “an eminently safe man” (4).

In the same way, Mari passively resists the gendered and sexual norms as a Japanese American woman inside the camp under surveillance. The “very strange things” (30) that people find about Mari include her eccentric habit of gazing at boys her son’s age. For instance, Mrs. Sasaki sees Mari watching the boys with “one finger in her mouth… in the manner of a shy child confronted with a marvel” (31). Joe Yoshinaga reports that Mari is watching him at night like a ghost, with “long hair all undone” and “dressed in a white nightgown” (31). These stories are unreliable, portraying Mari’s acts as perverted but passive; she is either “gazing” or “watching” the boys, never engaging in action. In addition, she is described either as infantile or dead, reflecting the narrator’s intention to locate her sexuality outside the heteronormative and “healthy” standards of women in the camp. In response to these rumors, Mari reacts with nonchalance, neither denying nor accepting her behavior. She is thus considered a “pervert” in the camp, but this “abnormal” portraiture simultaneously suggests a radical representation of her sexuality, passive resistance to the heteronormative womanhood in the camp. Her “legend” shows that her femininity resists being categorized into the types of “ordinary” American women in the camp whose major concern is to find “nice, clean young men, preferably handsome, preferably rich, who would cherish” them “forever and a day” (21).

In the interview, Yamamoto explains Mari’s condition: “I didn’t really consider her insane, I guess. I tried to say that if it weren’t for being put in the camp, she might have gone on” (81), expressing her feelings freely with an emphasis that her condition as a resistant is a natural reaction to the dehumanization of the camp. Kiku, as Yamamoto's voice, understands her resistance: unlike her friend Elsie, who enjoys gossiping about Mari, Kiku becomes compassionate and anxious; she begins “to wonder seriously about Miss Sasagawara for the first time” (32). She sides with Mari and starts worrying about the rumor as if it were her own problem.

5. Against Japanese Heritage: Late Delivered Message

The wall, as a symbol of an impenetrable psychological boundary with others, is also a common theme in Melville and Yamamoto. Bartleby’s eccentricity stands as a wall to the attorney, and only after his death in prison does the attorney understand his passive resistance as a way of representing humanity. Bartleby’s former job as “a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office” (34) is symbolic, suggesting the attorney could not properly receive Bartleby’s message while he was alive. The dead letter in this case is a tragic paradox, as the narrator calls it “pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities” (34). While Melville’s dead letter represents the dysfunctional irony between the narrator-attorney and Bartleby, Yamamoto revises this motif, containing some hope for this postponement.

What makes Mari a “problematic” subject in the camp is her status as a single woman in her late thirties coming from Tule Lake. People in Poston thus

considered her "disabled," as she had some trouble in the process of growing up as "an ordinary American woman." That image of disability invokes the way the US government labels the group from Tule Lake, "Spoilage," the people who were on the side of Japan, unable to assimilate into American society. The discourse of disability is symbolically intertwined with anti-American sentiment, forming Mari as "abnormal."

Known as the camp "where they send all the troublemakers" (82) or "(t)he last stop before Japan"(83), Tule Lake was mainly for the group of people who insisted on siding with Japan during World War II as well as for those in the U.S. who refused to follow the government.[10] Without explaining the philosophy inside Tule Lake, Yamamoto highlights the difference in atmosphere between these two camps in her depiction of Mari's father. Rev. Sasagawara is a well-known Buddhist minister in Tule Lake, but in Poston, he "always seemed to be wandering lostly" in "an air of bemusement" (22). After losing his devotees in Poston, his only hope is his daughter, Mari, who stands between him and the people of Poston. Mari's performative "madness," in this case, is a shield to distract others' attention and to protect this Japanese father from being the direct target of investigation by the Poston internees.

If we see this father-daughter relationship, we can easily imagine Mari as a Japan sympathizer, but the poem Kiku discovers at the library in Philadelphia after the war shows her criticism of and disagreement with this Buddhist father. In fact, this father and daughter have no emotional interaction in the camp. Throughout the story, no scene shows Mari and her father talking; instead, they stand in parallel, as if no bond exists between them. Mari's poem, dedicated to her father, is "*a tour de force*, erratically brilliant and, through the first readings, tantalizingly obscure" (32), with the confession that Mari is unable to sympathize with him.

> It appeared to be about a man whose lifelong aim had been to achieve Nirvana, that saintly state of moral purity and universal wisdom. This man had in his way certain handicaps, all stemming from his having acquired, when young and unaware, a family for which he must provide. But she would describe this man's devotion as a sort of madness, the monstrous sort which, pure itself, might possibly bring troublous, scented scenes to recur in other sleeps. (32-33)

Although she admires her father, Mari confesses she cannot understand his profound Buddhist philosophy. She even calls his condition "a sort of madness" and "the monstrous sort," criticizing the danger of his radical thought in Tule Lake.

Then what exactly does Mari see as "dangerous" in her father's Buddhism? Yamamoto never details the father's philosophy, but we can see the Tule Lake internees' perspective in the historical documents. Although Tule Lake internees were categorized as "spoilage," whether they thought of themselves as "spoilage," as the title of this report suggests, is questionable. For example, in a magazine written in English by the internees and circulated among them, there

are descriptions like the following.

This is our colony, and we can make this into a modern Shangri-La of life and happiness by developing a sound mental attitude…We are pioneering an immense project; the first of its kind in American history. The success depends greatly upon the use of our brains… It is important that our thinking be positive and constructive, not complaining and destructive.

First, we must consider the practical aspects of living… It is important that our thinking be positive and constructive, not complaining and destructive. We can now realize that the success of this colony is greatly dependent upon our mental attitude. This is not a concentration camp. [11]

This narrative, reminiscent of the Puritanic 'city upon a hill' from America's colonial era, seems to view the internment experience not as a shame but even as a kind of religious trial. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, Japanese American communities, as we see in the case of Poston, rapidly assimilated into American culture and converted to Christianity. But even so, Tule Lake was the only island-like community that kept looking toward Japan. Inside the camp, Japanese culture was preserved with shrines and temples, and incidents of terrorism and internal conflicts targeting the U.S. government were frequent. Their consciousness is rather supranational, far from that of the American ethnic group positioning themselves as subaltern and victims of US governmental policy.

While Melville portrays Bartleby's late-delivered message as the attorney's inability to reach this copyist's mind, Yamamoto uses this motif as an effective time lag for the female bond between Mari and Kiku. Not only resisting Americanization but also criticizing her Japanese heritage, Mari chooses her subject position of resistance, standing in between. After WWII, Kiku understands that Mari's father is her cultural "Other." Standing between the American discourse of assimilation and Japanese supra-nationalism, the only thing Mari can do is passively resist both ideologies. This stance also shows that Mari knows Japanese ethnic solidarity could have an imperialistic aura, fanatically justifying the Japanese side. Inside the Poston internment, Mari says nothing definite, simply remaining silent. Kiku thus calls Mari's resistance "a legend," admiring the intellectual and rational perspective hidden under her mask of insanity.

The gender politics between father and daughter in "The Legend" imply a psychological distance: Mari cannot inherit Japanese heritage from her Japanese father. [12] The paternal role of Rev. Sasagawara lacks presence, as Anne Thalheimer points out as a characteristic of Yamamoto's stories: "Fathers (and father figures) do not fare well in these [Yamamoto's] short stories, but that is not to say that Yamamoto passes judgment upon them, for she is skilled at making a character's vice his virtue and never portraying anything as one single thing" (178). Analyzing the resemblance in Mari's and her father's professions- a ballet dancer and minister, both of which need charisma and extreme spiritual and physical training- King-Kok Cheung insightfully criticizes the people's way of regarding their occupations strictly based on gender: "His attitude is respected, hers suspected" (57). Before being interned, she was a traveling ballet dancer

(not a Japanese classical dancer) who would “go all over the country a couple of times” (21). In addition, her appearance in a botanical image differs from traditional Japanese femininity in a patriarchal context. Her cultural background is thus ambiguous, and tracing her cultural roots in Japan is somewhat meaningless. From the information and description of this protagonist, we cannot see whether she is on Japan's side. Like Bartleby’s eccentricity and enigmatic background, Mari stands as a wall for the internees.

Then what is Yamamoto’s purpose in describing this dysfunction between father and daughter? Stan Yogi asserts Yamamoto’s stories have “buried plots” that often reveal “the experience of Issei women and the troubling legacies they pass on to their daughters” (170). Yogi bases his analysis on Yamamoto’s major works about the Japanese American farming area in the 1930s. For instance, “Seventeen Syllables” (1949) follows a teenage Japanese American girl, Rosie Hayashi, and her forbidden romance with Jesus Carrascos, but beneath the plot is her first-generation immigrant mother’s tragic story as a picture bride who must leave Japan because her unrequited love crosses social classes. In the case of “Seventeen Syllables,” the buried plot of her mother’s story is told at the end, but Yogi also asserts, “the term ‘buried’ is flexible; in some cases, a plot is buried in the sense that it does not appear, or is not fully developed, until well into the story” (179). I would argue “The Legend” has what Yogi calls an alluded “buried plot,” which does not even take the form of a story. As this buried plot, Yamamoto emphasizes the female bond between Mari and Kiku by inserting Kiku’s queer point of view. Kiku’s perspective toward Mari remains consistent throughout the story, never influenced by others, even her close friend Elsie. Rather, Kiku articulates her sensitivity in close relation to Mari: Kiku confesses her inability to appreciate Buddhist ritual at the funeral, stating, “The only thing that came back with clarity was my nausea,” crossing “again the actual scent or suspicion of burning incense” (23). Mari and Kiku are connected in their inability to understand their Japanese cultural heritage.

So how can we describe the Mari-Kiku relationship through Yamamoto’s womanist frame? [13] Traise Yamamoto, in her analysis of Yamamoto’s mother-daughter relationships, reports, “[t]he mother as the central figure of the daughter’s enculturation is also present in an earlier story by Yamamoto,” with her assertion that “[s]exuality and art are closely associated, connected through their relation to language and silence” (170). The story alludes to a buried pseudo-mother-and-daughter bond between Mari and Kiku. As a radical womanist in academia, Kiku symbolically encounters Mari again at the library. Yamamoto chooses an academic space for their reunion: a research library. In this re-encounter, we can see Kiku take over Mari's message as an inheritor of Japanese American passive resistance. Melville’s “soft imprisoned turf” thus represents Kiku, who can now write about Mari as her predecessor and “legend.”

CONCLUSION

Yamamoto, in the 1950s, found passive resistance against American capitalism in Bartleby's character, reading the narrator-attorney’s failure to

receive this copyist's message. Melville presents an ironic ending in which the narrator-attorney recognizes the significance of Bartleby's resistance and humanity only after his death. Yamamoto reads this tragic ending of a late-delivered message by changing it into the story of succession between Mari and Kiku. At the time when Kiku finds Mari's poem at the library, we do not know whether Mari is alive or dead. Yamamoto shifts our focus not on Mari's current whereabouts but on the moment in which Kiku surely receives Mari's spirit of resistance through her poem. This ending shows that Yamamoto revises Melville's "Bartleby" into a Japanese American narrative of resistance, which Kiku, the next generation, secretly inherits and sustains during the social amnesia of the 1950s, when American society silenced the history of internment as if nothing happened during WWII.

There are a variety of interpretations about what Bartleby represents in this novella. Among them, Patricia Barber presents an interesting hypothesis about the copyist's gender. Her discussion centers on the hypothesis that Bartleby was a woman, given that the novella is about an illicit heterosexual romance between the attorney and his female copyist. Focusing on the attorney's famous statement, "For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam" (17), Barber, however, shows the difficulty of creating the sex-change version: "This task of a fraternal bond, of a bond between two men, between men in general, is the jarring note in the sex-change story, for a fraternal bond would seem to preclude an attachment to a woman, an erotic attachment" (222). Objecting to this perspective, I would rather argue that Yamamoto, who might have read this novella, attempted to write this sex-change version by changing not only Bartleby but also the attorney, highlighting their queer female relationship. This is Yamamoto's expression of respect for Melville, as she maintains the homoerotic relationship between the narrator-attorney and Bartleby in her version and avoids placing the story in the category of a stereotyped heterosexual romance. The queer space between Mari and Kiku stands as a site of resistance against heteronormative American ideology in the 1950s. Also, Mari's inability to understand her father's Buddhist philosophy suggests her (and Yamamoto's) dissent from this radical Japanese supernationalism. Mari's poem, therefore, slipped Yamamoto past U.S. state surveillance by insisting on her subject position as an American citizen. Kiku's slightly comical narrative as an onlooker, who depicts Mari's eccentricity, also represses the historical trauma of the internment, which internees did not talk about their imprisonment based on the discourse of victimization. Through these indirect literary forms, few readers recognize the queer relationship between Mari and Kiku, which embodies Yamamoto's pacifist stance, neither on the side of the US nor Japan. Yamamoto therefore positions this queer sphere as a passive resistance against state surveillance and historical trauma through Mari's and Kiku's literary narrative to transgress the voice of victimhood. This is Yamamoto's gendered response to Melville, showing two minority women imprisoned by American assimilation eventually synchronizing their spirits of passive resistance in the 1950s. Humbly saying "I still don't think of myself as a writer" (74) in her 1980s interview, Yamamoto uses a rhetorical device to show readers her passive resistance. In other words, Mari Sasagawara

represents Yamamoto in the 1950s, when she did not protest directly but articulated her passive resistance to the U.S. government's internment policy.

＊This work was supported by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (Kaken-hi), 24K03735 （Kiban C）

NOTES

[1] On this point, Viet Thanh Nguyen criticizes the condition that “resistance and accommodation-bifurcated responses are the most commonplace categories of action of Asian Americans.” Nguyen asserts, “Asian Americans in general pick and choose their tactics of struggle, survival, and possible assimilation” (7). The resistance that Nguyen mentions is the one against white supremacy; my definition of resistance indicates an act not only of refusing white supremacy but also of refusing ethnocentrism.

[2] Several critics have pointed out Yamamoto’s “passive” way of articulating her ethnic identity. See Ward Moore, “A Letter from Southern California,” San Francisco Chronicle, January 15, 1950: 5; Grace Kyongwan Hong, “Something Forgotten Which Should Have Been Remembered: Private Property and Cross-Racial Solidarity in the Works of Hisaye Yamamoto.” American Literature 71 (1999): 294. James Kyung-Jin Lee. 2004. Urban Triage: Race and Fictions in Multiculturalism. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press) 47.

[3] In the 1850s, Melville tackled three works whose titles begin with B: “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” Benito Cereno, and Billy Budd, Sailor.

[4] My argument on Yamamoto’s narrative style in “Eskimo Connection” focuses on the analysis of how “Yamamoto uses Christian discourse as a parameter of national ideology to visualize or (in-visualize) American ethnicity” (5). See “Absent Presence as a Nonprotest Narrative: Internment, Interethnicity and Christianity in Hisaye Yamamoto’s ‘The Eskimo Connection.”

[5] I borrow the term “social amnesia” from Tetsuden Kashima’s definition. “Social Amnesia is here defined as a group of phenomena marked by attempts to suppress feelings and memories of moments or extended periods. It is not a psychological pathology but a conscious effort to screen memories and, as manifested here, to suppress unpleasant experiences” (219).

[6] It was a group of the internees named after the title of field observations by the University of California social scientists. See the preface of The Spoilage (1946) written by Swaine Thomas. (preface xii)

[7] I use this term “resistance” from my book, Resistance and Nikkei Literary Narratives (2022). On page 8, I demonstrated my argument on Japanese American literary narratives.

[8] Caroline Karcher calls Babo “a favorable portrait of a black rebel” who invokes “an African heritage of civilization” (140). Joyce Adler, exploring the

antinomy between black (Babo) and white (Cereno), justifies Babo's revolt because of long persecution of slavery (103-105).

[9] Yamamoto worked at The Los Angeles Tribune under African American chief editor Almena Lomax. As for her complex reaction, Hong, by focusing on the issue of private property, analyses, "Because she is benefiting materially from suburbanization, as thematized by her position as the viewer, she participates and is interpreted. However, because of her memory of the ways in which citizenship and property rights have been denied to Japanese Americans, and indeed, of the ways in which citizenship and property in the United States have been defined by this denial, she cannot participate completely."(302)

[10] Wakako Yamauchi, Yamamoto's close friend in Poston, wrote a short story, "12-1-A." These two expressions are used by the Poston internees who call Tule Lake internment camp.

[11] Shibata, "This is Our Colony." pp.4-5.

[12] Ming-L. Cheung analyses "[i]n Mari's realm, the realm of the lyrical and the romantic, of the extravagance of the ballet, it is not extravagance but ascetic necessity" (103), adopting Sau-Ling Wong's theory of necessity and extravagance. But my way of reading this father-daughter politics is more from gendered conflict between male and female artists.

[13] I would like to call Yamamoto a womanist rather than a feminist by following the definition of Alice Walker's definition of "A black feminist or feminist of color" (preface, iv)

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