TRAUMA THROUGH DYSTOPIAN DISTORTIONS OF MEMORY: OGAWA YOKO'S *THE MEMORY POLICE*

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Abstract: This article studies Ogawa's The Memory Police *as the depiction of memory loss and equates it to the traumatic experience that leads to the loss of identity. The trauma of losing oneself in a place with no memories and, hence, no history is represented captivatingly by Ogawa and is at the center of this research. It demonstrates how the process of memory loss affects people in the most traumatic ways and traces the dystopian means that help represent the "unrepresentable." The focus is on dystopia as a genre, its manifestations in Japanese literature, and Ogawa's place in this context.*

Introduction

Japanese literature has always found ways to depict reality and address social issues through the means of fantastic. The second half of the twentieth century is marked by the blooming of the science fiction genre with a high leaning on dystopian imagery. Traumatic, disturbing, and often hopeless representations of life and where Japan as a society may be headed are traceable in the works of Abe Kobo, Oe Kenzaburo, Tsutsui Yasutaka, Shimada Masahiko, and, of course, Murakami Haruki. Different authors incorporate dystopian elements into their work, but this genre's general direction is unmistakably gloomy, bleak, and undeniably anti-utopian.

Yoko Ogawa (1962) is a Japanese author known for her works of fiction awarded with major Japanese literary prizes (the Akutagawa Prize, the Yomiuri Prize, and the American Book Award). While she has explored various themes in her writing, the dystopian worldview received its own distinctive representation. Her novel *The Memory Police* was originally published in 1994, so it fits well in the late twentieth-century dystopian literary context dealing with its traumatic visions of postmodern existence. The novel is set on an isolated island controlled by the authoritarian Memory Police, who make both material objects and abstract concepts gradually disappear. They control people's memories, personal and collective, and remembering becomes a crime that is severely persecuted and punished. The story follows a young female writer who tries to protect her memories and evade the control of the Memory Police. As shown below, the novel explores the themes of loss, trauma, memory, and the power of imagination in the face of oppressive control. The author will attempt to argue that Ogawa depicts the psychological and emotional impact of dystopian surroundings and loss of identity on individuals, emphasizing the human experience within the authoritarian world she creates.

The author's choice of research subject, looking into the issue of trauma through a fantastic lens, is not accidental. Let us consider the structural levels of a literary work. We can, along with Todorov (1975) and Fry (2020), focus on the main aspects of it: the style of the work and the perspectives (points of view), syntactic or compositional aspect (inner logic of the work along with its chronotope connections), and the semantic (or thematic) aspect. In this article, the author will study the thematic level of *The Memory Police* as the

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representation of memory and its traumatic loss. She will look into this issue through the concept of genre literature – the fantastic and, more specifically, dystopian literature.

Few literary reviews (Margolis, 2020; Rich, 2019a; Rich, 2019b) and academic articles (Soon Seng and Chandran, 2020; Borkina, 2022) that introduce Ogawa's *The Memory Police* unanimously and justly claim the influence on the novel of Orwell's *1984* and underline Kafka's style and sensibility, while some of them mention Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*(Seng and Chandran, 2020) and Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* (Rich, 2019a). In this paper, the author aims to demonstrate that Ogawa is after a particular sensibility and emotional landscape of a dystopia rather than a full-blown social and political critique.

The trauma of losing oneself in a place with no memories and, hence, no history is represented captivatingly by Ogawa in her novel. It is at the center of this research. In this article, the author sets out to show how the process of memory loss affects characters and how dystopian settings help represent the trauma. In the subsections of this paper, she will look into dystopia as a genre and trace its main features and the peculiarities of its manifestations in Japanese literature to provide more context for Ogawa's work. The author of this paper will also look into the general concepts of representing trauma in literature and then try to prove how Ogawa fittingly does it through the means of the fantastic. Additionally, this article will deal with the concept of memory and its loss and how it is connected to trauma and the sense of self.

I. Dystopian Literature as a Genre, Its Peculiarities in Japan and *The Memory Police*

Since the twentieth century and up until now, dystopian fiction has remained popular and in demand in Japan. Napier goes as far as to say, "It is virtually a truism that the twentieth century has been the age of the anti-Utopia or dystopia" (Napier, 1996, 182). Kumar explains that, arguing that "the problem with all Utopian strivings of the time was that they struggled against the overwhelming anti-utopian character of world events" (Kumar, 1987, 386).

As Isomaa, Korpua, and Teittinen (2020) claim, "the interest in dystopias seems to signal both a widespread political uncertainty and the genre's ability to observe and criticize power relations." Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell's *1984* (1949), and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) are some of the most significant examples of the genre, the dystopian literature continuous in Margaret Attwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and indeed in Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police* (1994). It is worth mentioning that researchers often interpret dystopian literature as an umbrella term; "it gathers together thematically close genres that often intertwine in individual works of fiction" (Isomaa, Korpua, and Teittinen, 2020).

As Bethune (2012) points out while trying to identify the genre, "citizens in a dystopian world have to deal with 'harshly repressive societies' that constrict any free thought or individuality (p.86). Additionally, dystopia has often been defined as a future world that exaggerates and distorts the problems of the modern world and creates a dehumanized state ruled by control and restrictions inflicted by authorities (Penley 1989, Spisak 2012, 55). Dystopian literature is also part of speculative fiction, a genre that takes it upon itself "to motivate a generation on the cusp of adulthood" (Basu, Broad, and Hintz 2013, 1).

Most dystopian literary texts feature surveillance, numb and bleak reality, and the issues of freedom of speech and thought, and we can see that Ogawa takes it even further, centering her novel on the problem of freedom to remember. It has been argued (Shaffer, 2011) that this type of fiction bloomed through the twentieth century as a reaction to significant political, economic, and cultural changes. The status of individual freedom and its anxieties cause authors to consider how restrictions and limitations may impact the future creatively. Dystopian fiction is "message fiction," and the message is alarming. Unlike other types of fantastic literature, which is based on the departure from consensus reality (Todorov, 1975), this type of critical fantasy "drills into the real, transmogrifying it into a grotesque version of itself" (Napier, 1996, 181).

It has been observed (Hume, 1984; Penley, 1989; Napier, 1996) that Western dystopias often feature the motif of an attempted escape from a threat or entrapment. Ogawa, though he incorporates the motif in the background of the main plot, the protagonist gives up on realizing the futility of such an endeavor, opting out to help other people around her. The protagonist is a writer, and in the novel she writes (Ogawa creates two planes of narrative, a novel within a novel), the female character is also portrayed as being trapped.

Japanese literature incorporates the dystopia genre, and we find its prominent features in the works of Abe Kobo, Oe Kenzaburo, Yasutaka Tsutsui, and Murakami Haruki, to name a few. Ogawa Yoko's *The Memory Police* is by no means alone and is part of a broader Japanese dystopian landscape. Analyzing the dystopian genre of Japanese literature, Napier argues that "the modern Japanese dystopian tradition is less concerned with the crushing of the individual will, a narrative element which is a major feature of Western dystopias" (Napier, 1996, 181). Whether it is a fair statement or not, in the case of Ogawa, we can certainly notice that she leans towards the Western tradition since what is controlling and erasing memory and persecution of those who remember if not the "crushing of the individual will"? On the other hand, the "technological nightmare" as one of the most popular tropes of Western dystopian literature (Hume, 1984; Penley 1989), which has been utilized widely in the Japanese dystopian tradition, seems to be absent in Ogawa's novel. The only "advanced" or "technological" feature is the ability of the Memory Police to "disappear" things, which is rather abstract and not strictly technological. Otherwise, the setting in Ogawa's novel is relatively rural and straightforward.

Another essential motive of dystopian literature appears to be violence. As Hume (1984) claims, much fiction of this genre "derive much of their power from some central image of violence" (p. 112). Moreover, in this case, Ogawa follows in the predecessors' footsteps. The violence in *The Memory Police* is possible to divide into two main categories – a subtle, or, borrowing Zhizek's definition, "symbolic" one (Zhizek, 2008), which happens when the objects and memories disappear, and a more conventual one, when people who can remember are taken away and killed.

Thus, to summarise, *The Memory Police* incorporates the themes of control, violence, authoritative state, bleak and numbing reality, violence, and motifs of traumatic loss of memory and self, entrapment, and futility of the escape and introduces a subtler way of resistance.

II. Dystopian Sensibility and Intertextuality in Ogawa's *The Memory Police*

Having proven the undeniable affinity of the novel to the dystopian genre on the whole, it is possible to argue that *The Memory Police* is also a masterly created literary intertext and rather a postmodern pastiche on dystopian literature than a full-blown dystopia itself in its sense of "speculative fiction" and "message literature." The author of this paper has listed the characteristic features of dystopia as urban alienation, nuclear disaster, and authoritative state; however, in The Memory Police, we see the countryside (somewhat similar to Murakami's End of the World in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*). There is no mention of any apocalypses; the only element of an authoritative state is the Memory Police. What comes forth is a particular sensibility of dystopia, more of a feeling, not a social critique – it is a literature work of the emotional states. Rich notes that Ogawa was influenced by Anne Frank's Diaries, its general atmosphere, and its emotional landscape (Rich, 2019a; Rich, 2019b).

Here, the author of this paper would like to look more closely into all the dystopian features and other literary references that Ogawa's novel contains. Ogawa's novel is after a certain dystopian, bleak, oppressive feeling. Though dystopia is the closest genre that is possible to define the novel with, there may be other, more realistic literary examples that address real totalitarian nightmares (like Nazi Germany or pre-war Europe) that influenced Ogawa in creating the world of *The Memory Police*.

It has been noted that apart from Anna Frank's Diaries, *The Memory Police* was influenced by Kafka's work (Rich, 2019a; Margolis, 2020; Soon Seng, 2020). While there are no explicit connections to Anne Frank's diaries in the plot or characters of *The Memory Police*, both works explore the significance of memory and its preservation in the face of oppressive regimes and the motives of entrapment and living in a closed space. Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* is a profoundly moving first-hand account of a Jewish girl's experiences during the Holocaust, hiding from the Nazis in Amsterdam. The diary captures the struggles of a young person living in extreme circumstances. Ogawa's novel recreates similar circumstances, totalitarian regimes, and life in hiding. The room her protagonist creates to hide R. ("We had no place to be, other than this small rectangular space" (Ogawa 2019, loc.3031)) along with the room the typist from the protagonist's novel finds herself locked in with all the broken typing machines, has a lot in common with the Secret Annex from Anna Frank's Diaries. Ogawa's work also presents the motives of survival, memory, and resilience of the human spirit depicted in Anne Frank's diary. Additionally, both works delve into the idea of preservation through writing – Anne Frank documented her experiences to remember, and the protagonist in *The Memory Police* is a writer who struggles to preserve the memories of the disappearing objects.

Themes of alienation and isolation, bureaucracy and oppressive systems, surreal and imaginative worlds, and existential themes are just a few that Ogawa shares with Kafka's writing. For instance, in Kafka's novels such as *The Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*, the protagonists often find themselves alienated from the society they live in, like the main character of *The Metamorphoses*: "Oh God, he thought, what an exhausting job I've picked on! Traveling about day in, day out. It's much more irritating work than doing the actual business in the office, and on top of that, there's the trouble of constant traveling, of worrying about train connections, the bed and irregular meals, casual acquaintances that are always new and never become intimate friends" (Kafka, 2019,

9). In *The Memory Police,* the focus is on alienation through memory loss, and the plot revolves around a dystopian society where people are cut off from their memories, leading to isolation and detachment.

It is not too difficult to notice that Ogawa's book is full of literary references to dystopian works, and it may even appear that the author does not look to create a unique fictional world that would serve as a criticism of the real one but rather to recreate the literary images of dystopian fiction. Thus, the novel's central concept is memory and its obliteration by the Memory Police. The choice of what to remember (pretty much what to think) is taken from people and controlled by the authorities, which instantaneously brings to mind Orwell's *1984*. In Orwell's novel, we find the following words "The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became the truth" (Orwell, 2017, 36). In *The Memory Police*, objects disappear along with the reality they existed in, and their memory disappears. Ogawa writes, "People – and I'm no exception – seem capable of forgetting almost anything, much as if our island were unable to float in anything but an expanse of totally empty sea" (Ogawa, 2019, loc.157). The intertextual reference to Orwell's novel becomes clear.

The Memory Police also references Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. For example, people brought books to burn in fires that started in parks, fields, and vacant lots. From the author's study window, she could see smoke and flames rising all over the island, absorbed into heavy, grey clouds covering everything (Ogawa, loc.2522).

The motive of burning books and suppressing thoughts is the focus of the author's attention in *Fahrenheit 451*. In Ogawa's work, burning the books is part of a bigger picture of the disappearing process. When an object is announced as "disappeared," everyone must burn all their objects—Roses, calendars, and eventually books. Thus, the world of Ogawa becomes even more suffocating than Bradbury's since the number of "forbidden" objects that have to be "disappeared" is much more significant. The protagonist's feelings about this particular disappearance are ambivalent. She does not try to save all her boos though she agrees to hide some. When she throws books into the fire, she thinks: "As each volume left my hand, I felt a slight twinge, as though the hollow place in my memory were being enlarged book by the book" (Ogawa, 2019, loc. 2586). It shows that the protagonist is concerned about her state of memory, which is diminished by the disappearance of each book. At the same time, "Never before had I seen anything burn as brightly or as beautifully, and the intense light and heat chased away all traces of the fear and sadness I had been feeling" (Ogawa, 2019, loc.2610). These quotes would suggest that although the protagonist feels sad and experiences a sense of loss (not only the loss of books and what they represent but also the memory loss and the identity crisis it brings), she lets go quickly and finds comfort in the beauty of the world even if it is in flame

Being a writer, the protagonist recognizes a specific problem in this particular disappearance. It means she cannot keep writing and must get rid of her own work. "Losing novels is hard for me," says the protagonist, but then she turns this statement into a deeply personal one; rather than a social critique of a world without books, her words become a sign of regret of a lost personal connection: "It's as though an important bond between the two of us is being cut" (Ogawa, 2019, loc.2508), as she says to her friend, editor and eventually lover R. She decides not to burn her manuscript and hides it in a secret room where she hides R.

Despite this personal notion, the protagonist has no idea where all the disappearances are headed. She quotes famous words of the German poet Heine (though Ogawa does not name the poet, she trusts her readers to recognize the reference): "Men who start by burning books end up by burning men" (Ogawa 2019, loc.2610), which shows she understands perfectly well the destiny that awaits the citizens of the island. Moreover, she is not wrong – Ogawa finishes her book with people disappearing one body part at a time until they are all gone: "If it goes on like this and we can't compensate for the things that get lost, the island will soon be nothing but absences and holes, and when it's completely hollowed out, we'll all disappear without a trace" (Ogawa, 2019, loc.740).

Another obvious literary connection of *The Memory Police* would be the example from Japanese literature – Murakami Haruki's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, originally published in 1985. It is worth mentioning that Murakami's work generally has a lot to do with nostalgia and memories, and as Napier puts it, it "does seem to be populated by ghosts" (Napier, 1996, 207). This particular novel is exciting in the context of this paper since it also studies memory and, while recreating a world that bears a lot of dystopian features in its "Hard-Boiled Wonderland" part, is similar to the island of The Memory Police in its "The End of the World" part.

In both novels, the memory problem, remembering and forgetting, is at the center of attention. Murakami creates a world where people cut off their shadows and lose their memories and past. Ogawa's world shows a gradual process of people forgetting their world and themselves. Ogawa's protagonist often thinks of the decay of her heart: "I have to make do with a hollow heart full of holes" (Ogawa, 2019, loc.1151). Murakami's characters lose their shadows and memories, losing their souls. Ogawa's protagonist loses her heart. Interestingly, in Japanese, the word *kokoro* is used to indicate both.

The most striking resemblance between the novel would be that though the worlds of the island in Ogawa's novel and the Town in Murakami's are increasingly bizarre and uncomfortable and present a concrete danger of decay and disappearance, the protagonists willingly denounce the idea of an escape. This attitude peaks in Murakami's final scene, where the protagonist's shadow tries to convince him to leave the Town, saying, "Your rightful world is there outside" (Murakami, 2010, 399). The idea of an escape is scattered around Ogawa's novel, too – there are always rumors of people who succeeded in leaving the island. Although the protagonist is hinted at that, she finds no meaning in this idea. Thus, both characters stay and protest their reality by succumbing to it. Thus, along with the motifs of traumatic memory loss, entrapment, and futility of the escape, they offer a subtler way of resistance.

While the researches who study dystopian genre (Hume, 1984; Matthew, 1989; Napier 1996) generally agree that all of the greatest dystopian fiction of the twentieth century (Zamyatin, Orwell, Huxley, Bradbury, Attwood) is the apparent reaction to the harsh reality of totalitarian societies of the twentieth century along with the blind belief into the technological progress, the author argues that Ogawa is more after the general sensibility of a dystopian novel rather than a concrete societal critique. Therefore, though it is possible to trace ideological and literary influences of the dystopian masterpieces, it is also possible to claim that she creates a specific type of fiction where the notions of memory, trauma, identity, and the importance of having your own voice (as the ability to speak, to write and to remember) come forth in her novel.

III. Trauma, Memory, and its Representability in Literature

Trauma in literature is a multidisciplinary field involving scholars from various areas, such as literature, psychology, sociology, and cultural studies. Numerous scholars and researchers have contributed to exploring this topic, and the most prominent are Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dominick LaCapra, Marianne Hirsch, Judith Lewis Herman, etc.

Thus, Caruth, in her work Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History (1996), explores the intersection of trauma, memory, and storytelling in literature and its impact on individual and collective identities. The main focus is on the psychological and literary aspects of trauma, focusing on how traumatic experiences can be represented and understood through narrative; Caruth argues that trauma presents a paradoxical challenge. It is an experience that resists complete comprehension and often remains unprocessed, yet it demands to be expressed and understood. Caruth suggests that trauma can be better understood through the dynamics of repetition and belatedness: "Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth, 1996, 181). Caruth argues that traumatic events disrupt the normal functioning of memory and narrative. One of Caruth's key insights is the concept of "delayed witnessing" (Caruth, 1996, 187). She suggests that trauma survivors often struggle to articulate their experiences directly and may communicate their traumatic memories indirectly or through fragmented narratives. Caruth examines how literature, mainly works of fiction, can offer a space for survivors to witness their trauma and enable a form of belated testimony.

Researcher LaCarpa emphasizes that trauma is often characterized by its ineffability, meaning that it is an experience that cannot be fully captured or adequately expressed in language (LaCarpa, 2004). It poses a challenge for writers attempting to represent and understand traumatic events in fiction. He continues his thought in The Limits of Representation, exploring the limits of representation regarding trauma.

Although not primarily a literary scholar, Herman contributed significantly to trauma studies. Her book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992) has been influential in understanding the psychological effects of trauma and its representation in literature. She explores how traumatic experiences can affect memory and the formation of coherent narratives about the traumatic events. Herman, like Caruth, emphasizes that traumatic memories can be fragmented, disorganized, and difficult to recall due to the overwhelming nature of the traumatic experience. She highlights the concept of dissociation, which refers to a mental process in which individuals detach from their thoughts, feelings, or memories as a way to cope with overwhelming trauma (Herman, 1997). According to Herman (1997), traumatic memories can be stored in a non-linear fashion, with fragments of memory surfacing through flashbacks, nightmares, or triggered responses. She argues that the fragmented nature of traumatic memories should not be interpreted as evidence of fabrication or unreliability but rather as a reflection of the profound impact of trauma on memory processes: "encoded in a literal, linear narrative," whereas traumatic memory "lacks verbal narrative and context, and is usually encoded in lifelike sensations and images" (Herman, 1997, 35).

The unspeakability and unrepresentability of trauma is a subject that is addressed in modern trauma studies. Caruth insisted upon it, but later, it was questioned by other

researchers like Greg Forter, Ann Cvetkovich, Naomi Mandel, Amy Hungerford, and Narsullah Mambrol. Generally, researchers argue that memory and remembering are a fluid process of constructing and reconstructing meaning, which allows the idea that "memory is shaped to a certain degree in the present moment of recollection" (Mambrol, 2018, para.18). This perspective is aligned with the focus of this paper where, based on the analyses of Ogawa's novel, I argue that while the traumatic experience disrupts memory, it does not entirely destroy it even in the dystopian setting where the memory itself is regulated and controlled, and thus, trauma does not cancel the experience itself as well as its representability.

IV. Memory Loss as Identity Loss: Trauma in Ogawa's *The Memory Police*

The memory issue is central to Ogawa's novel, and its painful disappearance is essential in representing trauma. It is revealing that though there are people in the world of *The Memory Police* who retain their memories, the author chooses her protagonist to be the one who does not. The young female writer in Ogawa's novel loses memories just like anyone else as the objects keep disappearing. Such a choice allows the author to explore the influence of memory loss and its connection to the loss of identity. Ogawa traces the emotional response to such a loss and the mechanisms of holding on to memories. In the previous subsections, the author of this paper has already commented on the dystopian quality of the described world and the subtle sensitivity created with the help of intertextual references to other, more explicit dystopian works of fiction. In this part of the paper, she aims to trace the peculiarities of the reconstruction of memory loss as a process that leads to the traumatic experience of the loss of identity itself.

Traumatic memory has been the subject of study for some time already (Caruth, 1996; Herman, 1997; Gibbs, 2014) and "appeared as a perfect compromise between identity politics and poststructuralism, since it allowed literary critics to uphold the historical standing of memories of oppression while fulfilling the protocols of deconstructive rigor that called for a critical attitude toward the category of experience." (Ball 2000, p.36).

Ogawa, however, is interested in the process of forgetting and memory loss as part of trauma, not the fact of traumatic memory, which provides an original perspective on the problem at hand.

Memory studies are closely connected to trauma studies and present an interest in modern research. Memory's "dangerous fluidity" has been mentioned (Gibbs, 2014, 73), and it covers both the area of theory and literature with its representations of traumatic memories. Additionally, different types of memory have been defined. Ball writes about Hirsh's "post-memory," Alison Landsberg's "prosthetic memory," Astrid Erll and Terri Tomsky's "traveling memory," Max Silverman's "palimpsest memory" [1] (Ball, 2000, 36). For this paper, the concepts of "post-memory" and "prosthetic memory" seem the most fitting since both deal with the memory of something that was never experienced:

> "Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before the experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they

[1] The condensation of different spatiotemporal traces, which describe interconnections between histories and memories of the Holocaust, colonialism, and any other example of extreme violence (Silverman, 2013)

> grew up. … Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation (Hirsch, 2012, 5).

It is the type of memory Ogawa describes in her novel. The protagonist's mother hides various objects in the house that belong to the category of "disappeared" and now forbidden items. The protagonist does not have any memories of these objects of her own. Moreover, though she discusses her memories with the old man from the ferry, she understands: "Our memories were diminishing day by day, for when something disappeared from the island, all memory of it vanished, too" (271). However, with the help of R, whose memory remains intact, she recreates some of them. R tells her, "Still, I'd like you to tell me what you can remember. No matter how dim the impression" (Ogawa, 2019, loc.878). As she tries to remember, she begins "to sense a faint stirring somewhere deep within" (Ogawa, 2019, loc.882).

The previous subsection discussed how this novel is linked to Murakami's *Hardboiled Wonderland* through the motif of memory. Just like Murakami's character, who refuses to leave the Town and agrees to be there even without memories, creating new ones as he does, Ogawa's protagonist prefers to stay humble rather than resist actively. As a form of protest, she creates new memories, reforming and re-establishing her identity.

In her article, Borkina (2022) notes that memory in Ogawa's novel becomes a subversive tool for the characters; risking everything, the protagonist saves a collection of prohibited items and decides to shelter R., who, like her mother, is able to remember and who "teaches" her how to remember "in an attempt to restore memories, to glue together a painful, traumatic gap [2]" (Borkina, 2022, 111). However, the researcher states that the gap is too big, and it proves impossible for the protagonist to make someone else's memories her own. Not only are the memories traumatic, but the very act of remembering also becomes traumatic.

The disappearances continue, and the repressions become harsher. The old man is taken for questioning; he returns weak and eventually dies. The most painful disappearance for the writer occurs – now the novels have to go. "A new hole has opened in my heart, and there is no way to fill it up again" (Ogawa, 2019, loc.1335). The loss of identity connected to this phenomenon of a hollowed heart is shown in the novel quite literally; eventually, people forget their limbs and body parts until they cease to exist. Still, everyone remains calm and does not show any sign of resistance: "Everyone on the island had a vague premonition about what awaited them in the end, but no one said a word about it. They were not afraid, and they made no attempt to escape their fate" (Ogawa, 2019, loc.3800).

The atmosphere of the island seems to be full of holes, just like their hearts, so it only makes sense that their bodies adapt to reality by disappearing. The process of losing oneself is quiet and painless. The only thing the protagonist is worried about is her novel: "I may have managed to finish the story, but I'm still losing myself," she says to R. "I wonder whether the story will remain after I disappear" (Ogawa 2019, loc.3808). Fittingly, the character of her novel, the typist who loses her voice and can only type until her typewriter is broken, disappears too, locked in a room for a long time: "I am absorbed silently into the room, leaving no trace" (Ogawa, 2019, loc.3808). Thus, through her novel,

[2] Translation is mine.

the protagonist relives the event of the memory and identity loss, intensifying the experience.

It becomes clear that by addressing the issue of memory, traumatic memory loss, and remembrance, exemplifying the phenomenon of Hirsh's "post-memory," Ogawa creates a traumatic narrative about the gradual loss of identity, its inevitability, and the futility of any resistance. The refusal to challenge the circumstances or to escape, as well as the acceptance of one's fate, becomes the most vigorous resistance.

V. Losing Herself – Trauma of Losing Memory and Physical Body

The loss of a body as the loss of identity is not a new topic in literature. Kafka's "Metamorphoses" is perhaps the most well-known example of depersonalization. In Ogawa's *The Memory Police*, however, the traumatic loss of identity is illustrated through the absolute loss (and not just a transformation, unlike Kafka's work) of the physical female body, which allows us to look at the novel through a feminist lens. Like other Japanese female writers, Ogawa explores femininity and feminist issues in her works. Borkina (2022) states that the scope of topics of *The Memory Police* is concentrated, among other things, around the problems of female existence, self-identification, and the place of a woman in a changing world. In this novel, it is hard to ignore the total loss of physicality, both following and exemplifying the traumatic loss of identity due to memory's gradual yet inevitable disappearance. The phenomenon of "disappearance" is thus presented in close interweaving with the feminist problem.

The Memory Police is organized as a novel within a novel (reminding us yet again of a twofold structure of Murakami's Hardboiled Wonderland); one is the world of the Memory Police, and another one is the world of a novel the protagonist is writing to preserve her memories. As the world of the Memory Police is centered around the disappearing objects and eventually people, the world of the inserted novel features a gradual disappearance of a woman that, in a certain way, predicts what is about to happen to the writer herself. The plot follows the young typist who falls in love with her typewriting teacher and who, in the course of her affair, loses her voice and can communicate through her typing machine only until it gets broken. Then her lover takes her to a clocktower and locks her in a room full of broken typing machines where she gradually dissipates, losing her physical body while never acquiring her voice back: "I am absorbed silently into the room, leaving no trace" (Ogawa, 2019, loc.3789)

The protagonist of *The Memory Police* repeats the fate of her literary counterpart, but the process of disappearance goes in a slightly different way. As Borkina puts it, "Her voice becomes the last fragment of corporality that she loses" (Borkina, 2022, 113). The traumatic disappearance in both narratives is connected to the disappearance of a voice. The protagonist is afraid to lose her voice (and an ability to express herself), so she explores her fears through her novel, where the voice is the first to go. She holds on to her voice to the last, as it is her only way to feel alive. Furthermore, she does not want to disappear without a trace: "I wonder whether the story will remain after I disappear" (Ogawa, 2019, loc. 3808).

Both narratives deal with the closed spaces – the small room at the top of the clock tower and the secret room where the writer hides R and the forbidden objects. While the typist is locked there by her cruel lover, the writer eventually retreats there, not being able to walk anymore after her body begins to disappear. Borkina elegantly and through

literary references comments on the dimensional choice of such a space: "It is no longer Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, which should have given a woman the freedom to express herself in writing, but the claustrophobic space of Anne Frank's Diary, where writing becomes the actual registration of absence and fragility and the ease of reconciliation with disappearance, with the interruption of the normal course of things, become frighteningly all-encompassing" (Borkina, 2022, 113).

Ogawa's troping of the female body and showing it as another object that disappears may be read along the lines of Ruth Behar's words, "The body in the woman and the story in the woman are inseparable" (Behar, 1990, 270). Ogawa, however, puts accents slightly differently. For her, the woman's existence is not her body – it disappears, and the protagonist gives up control without a fight. If anything, R wants her to hold on to her physicality, and she does her best to humor him. At the same time, ultimately, she knows the process of losing herself is inevitable: "R alone was determined to find every possible means to keep me here, and though I knew all his efforts were useless, I did little to dissuade him" (Ogawa, 2019, loc.3800). But it is possible to exist and express the trauma of disappearance through writing, which is why the story she is writing is about the loss of the voice, the most terrible of all losses since it makes self-expression impossible. However, the protagonist accepts her fate without resentment: "It's peaceful with just a voice. With just a voice, I think I will be able to accept my final moment calmly and quietly, without suffering or sadness" (Ogawa 2019, loc.3848). The whole story, while presenting her as an exemplary friend and citizen, leads to her realizing herself as a writer. Furthermore, when her physical body "disappears" in the end, not only can it be viewed as the proverbial "death of the author" (Barthes, 1977) but also as an ultimate escape from the unstable reality full of traumatic changes and holes. Although in the act of disappearance, she follows the rules enforced by the Memory Police, she simultaneously escapes them and attains freedom, leaving her voice behind.

Conclusion

Contemporary literature often faces the difficult task of representing the concerns of modern society and the attempts to define the place of a human being in a rapidly changing (and, may I add, constantly disappearing) world. Trauma becomes an integral part of the human experience, and Ogawa in *The Memory Police* tackles the issue in a relatable yet original way. The task of depicting the traumatic and painful process of gradual memory loss and the disappearance of the world and the self as we know them is accomplished brilliantly. Having performed an in-depth analysis of her work, the author of this paper demonstrated that her approach to representing trauma is valid and efficient. Not only does she show that trauma is indeed representable, however painful and phantasmagorical the experience may be, through reacting in a creative way to the ongoing discussion on the unspeakability of trauma (Caruth, 1996; Herman, 1997; LaCarpa, 2004; Hirsh, 2012), she finds her own means and techniques to do so.

While it is undoubtful that trauma is brutal to catch in a single, linear, and logically constructed narrative entirely based on reality, Ogawa proves it is still possible if the whole experience is put into fantastic settings. She is not the first to do so. Painful experiences impossible to deal with send people into a state of dissociation, which did find its representation in literary texts, and abundantly so in the era of literary modernism and postmodernism, where psychological issues and the life of the inner world come to the

surface. As the author showed in this paper, Ogawa follows in the footsteps of such modernist giants as Kafka, dealing with the inadequacy of reality, and contributes to the dystopian genre (both in terms of world literature and the Japanese tradition); she finds new ways of dealing with the problem. In her novel, the main focus is on memory, its loss, and what it does to the perception and the self. In order to accomplish this mission, Ogawa chooses the fantastic setting of the dystopian society with the highly controlling force of the Memory Police and shows how everything, including people's bodies, disappears.

The dystopian genre proves to be particularly effective, and Ogawa uses this tool well, both highlighting the critique of a controlling and forgetful society without a past and creating a particular dystopian sensibility based on pronounced allusions to various famous dystopian works of literature such as Orwell's *1984*, Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*. The world of Ogawa's *The Memory Police* is characteristic of recognizable dystopian features such as control, violence, authoritative state, bleak and numbing reality, violence, as well as motifs of traumatic loss of memory and self, entrapment, and futility of the escape and introduces a subtler way of resistance.

The harsh, traumatic reality, as argued by Hume (1984), Matthew (1989), and Napier (1996), produces such literary works that can be regarded as the apparent reaction to it. Apart from this task, Ogawa also tries to catch the particular sensibility of dystopian fiction since it is possible to trace multiple literary influences, dystopian and otherwise. Thus, she generates a distinct form of storytelling in which the concepts of memory, trauma, identity, and the significance of possessing one's voice (encompassing the capacity to communicate, pen down thoughts, and recollect) emerge prominently within her novel.

The novel touches upon the problem of authorship and creativity, making the loss of the voice the most devastating one – the protagonist accepts without resentment or regret the disappearance of all the objects and body parts. However, regarding her voice, she worries about "whether the story will remain after I disappear" (Ogawa, 2019, loc.3808). The notion of Barthian's "death of the author" is creatively addressed here, showing her literal death and disappearance.

Furthermore, this paper addresses the feminist side of Ogawa's novel. The protagonist is a female writer who describes a disappearing woman with no voice, trapped, and no hope of escape. This novel inside of novel helps the protagonist deal with her own issue of losing herself and defining the role of a female author as such, referencing – and not by accident – *Anna Frank's Diaries*, written from a place of confinement and secrecy, which, arguably become both the topic and the atmosphere of Ogawa's novel as well.

Overall, it becomes clear that the chosen fantastic dystopia genre proves helpful in representing the trauma of memory loss, providing the unique technique to deal with the problem in a literary setting and enabling us to speak of the unspeakable. Ogawa's conclusion is an optimistic one – the process of writing prevails despite the loss of oneself. It lives on and subsequently serves as the vessel of memory and self-identification.

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