

Limits of Memory: An Interpretation of The Changeling and Other Late Novels by Ōe Kenzaburō

The Nobel laureate, Japanese writer Ōe Kenzaburō, is known in Poland mostly as the author of two novels: *The Silent Cry* and *A Personal Matter*, and a few short stories: *The Catch* as well as *Lavish Are The Dead*. That oversight remains even though more than thirty novels and a few volumes of short stories of his were published, out of which at least fifteen works are available in English translations. In Poland however, there seems to be a lack of ambitious publishers who would honor the Nobelist of 1994 by publishing more of his works. After being awarded an international prize in 2004 only one work, *Nip the buds, Shoot the Kids*, 1958, was published, which could mean that the Nobel Prize in Literature did not influence the rise of public interest in his literary output – supposedly too difficult for the demands of modern Polish readers.

Ōe deserves stronger interest on the part of translators and publishers, since he is still writing about important issues, not only for contemporary Japanese, but Polish people as well. Even though he is seen as an outsider in Japan, his attitude as a writer and moralist does count in Japanese society and is widely commented on in the world. His refusal to receive The Order of Culture granted to him by the Japanese Emperor after Ōe's Nobel Prize caused the discontent of many Japanese, and angered the nationalists. On the other hand his deploring of atomic weapons in his youth and his current disapproval for the usage of nuclear energy – especially after the Fukushima Plant disaster – do gain an ear in wide circles of Japanese society. It would not be right to say though, that his literary output is political in character, or that it advocates for leftist ideology. There is no doubt that at the base of the ideology of his novels – especially his late prose – lies a specific traditionalism. It is traditionalism in a sense of being rooted in the philosophy of life in a rural community and its primary mythology that he created himself drawing inspiration from the history of his family village on the island of Shikoku. It is there – in a kind of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha – that his characters often times look for wisdom and solace after painful experiences and dangers posed by the real world of a big city. The mythology of a village is for

him the archetype for a nation, or even greater, the universe, in which the faults of contemporary Japan are reflected as in a mirror. Also in the third volume of the last trilogy the writer Kogito, the main character of the story, returns to his family village in his later years but he does not find peace there, neither does he find the solutions to his problems. And, what really awaits him there will be an object of a different study.

Let me remind you that the author combined novels published in the beginning of the 21st century into a trilogy entitled *Okashi na futarigumi – sūdo kap-puru*, which can be translated as “funny couple – pseudo-relationship”. There is an uncertainty as to what the *okashi na* means here exactly – does it mean “playful”, “funny”, “comic”, “strange”, “suspicious”, “eccentric” or maybe just “fake”. Maybe “fake” will be the best translation here, since it does relate to the second half of the subtitle, the “pseudo-relationship” or the “pseudo-couple”.

At first let us forget about the subtitle since it is not seen in the first edition of the novel, but later counted as part of the mentioned trilogy. The three parts being:

1. *Torikaeko chenjiringu* (The Changeling, 2000), where the Japanese word *torikaeko* means “switched children”, and the added word “changeling” usually means a child switched by fairies.
2. *Ureigao no dōji* (The Boy With a Melancholy Face, 2002), here *dōji* does not mean “a boy”, but rather a mythological figure, a universal symbol representing harmony and conciliation (see Claremont 2009:142).
3. *Sayōnara, watashi no hon yo* (Farewell to My Books!, 2005), the title relating to Nabokov (The Gift) (*ibid.* 151). Here the author does bid farewell to his books, so therefore his past life, and definitely contemplates death.

1. The Duality of the Protagonist

In the above mentioned novels the narrator and protagonist is the writer, Chōkō Kogito, a character modeled after, most surely, Ōe Kenzaburō himself. On the other hand, in each novel there is a different specific “partner”, co-creator of the protagonist. In the first volume it is Itami Jūzō, in the second – Rose, an American researcher of Kogito’s work. In the last volume it is Tsubaki Shigeru, a friend from the writer’s youth.

It could be said then, that the protagonist does consist of two people simultaneously, with one of them being in a privileged position. In most of the trilogy fables the privileged one is Chōkō Kogito. And still, Chōkō Kogito is a fairly standard character – he constantly reads and writes, travels a lot, mostly to academic institutions all over the world where he does his presentations and gives lectures. It is only because of the “partners” that the other side of his character shows itself, his more complicated personality, along with its negative features.

In *Torikaeko*, it happens thanks to the director Hanawa Gorō, who constantly criticizes Kogito, even though from their youth they are seen as best friends. By the end of the novel Kogito's wife Chikashi, Gorō's sister, plays a similar judging role.

In *Ureigao no dōji* the writer Kogito, accompanied by Rose – a researcher of his literary output, travels back to his homeland on Shikoku island, where his mother is still alive. The mother talks about her son in a very critical way, saying among other things that all his writing is a pack of lies. Both women – the young one and the old one – fill in the blanks in Kogito's roughly sketched image.

In *Sayōnara, watashi no hon yo* Kogito's partner is Tsubaki Shigeru, he is seen to be “a friend” from Kogito's youth, but actually he is a manipulator, a relationship with whom is both difficult and dangerous for Kogito.

2. The storyline of *Torikaeko*

Torikaeko is an independent, complete novel that does not require continuation in the next volumes. Therefore combining it with the next one might even be seen as an artificial maneuver since the relationship between the two protagonists runs out – in the beginning of the novel one of them is already dead. The story consists of Prologue, six chapters and an Epilogue.

In the Prologue entitled *Tagame no rūru* (The Rules of Tagame), the main character of the story, lying on an army cot in his study, listens to the voice in the headphones called “tagame” (a giant water beetle). The voice says: “So anyway, that's it for today – I am going to head over to the Other Side now” (Oe 2010:3). The words were followed by a thumping sound. After a moment of silence the voice continued: “But don't worry, I'm not going to stop communicating with you. That's why I made a special point of setting up this system with Tagame and the tapes. Well, I know it's probably getting late on *your* side. Good night!” (*ibid.*). Kogito fell asleep but after a while he heard his wife come in with the news of Gorō's suicide.

And so in the first paragraph the reader gets to know the three main characters of the story: the writer Kogito, his wife Chikashi and his friend Gorō, the filmmaker. The wife also mentions their son, Akari, whom she did not want to leave alone in the house while going to see Gorō's wife, Umeko, in order to go together with her to the police to identify the body. Kogito decides to go with his wife to see the widow and then he plans to return and take care of the phone calls from journalists, all the more expected since the family of the suicide had such close ties with the family of the famous writer.

In the Epilogue: *Mōrisu Sendakku no ehon* (Picture Books of Maurice Sendak), Chikashi, Kogito's wife, takes on the role of narrator and describes the situation, sharing her thoughts on her husband and her brother, Gorō. She remembers Sendak, the writer and illustrator, and his works she read in the past. Especially *Outside*

Over There that her husband recently brought from Berlin with a brochure entitled *Changeling* decorated with portrayals of monsters by Sendak. Thanks to this book Chikashi regains many facts from her childhood reconstructing her own story with a prominent thread regarding changelings.

Between the Prologue and Epilogue the story of Kogito's stay in Berlin develops. The time spent in Berlin is supposed to be a kind of "quarantine", an isolation from the relation with the recordings listened to through the "tagame" headset. The lonely stay in Berlin, however, does not separate Kogito from "talks" with the deceased filmmaker and his own past.

In the first chapter, One Hundred Days of Quarantine (I), the writer is signing a German translation of his book, *The Silent Cry*, at the School of Comparative Culture of the Free University. During the signing he is approached by a slightly aggressive Japanese girl, who wants to talk about Gorō and the new generation of German filmmakers. Most likely she is the mother of a girl who used to be Gorō's interpreter during his stay in Berlin. Because of those encounters Kogito keeps remembering talks with Gorō. On occasions like that, known names come to surface. Among those mentioned are the poet Miyazawa Kenji, the writer Fukuzawa Yukichi, or Lord Jim – mentioned within the subtitle of a film that Gorō played a part in as an actor.

In the second chapter, This Fragile Thing Called Man, the narrator still conducts lectures in Berlin. He remembers Gorō being attacked by *yakuza* mobsters after producing a movie about them. He also reminds us about Gorō's recorded speech about Kogito's book, *The Fragile Thing Called Man*, based on which Gorō was planning to make a movie, *The Unbreakable Man*. The memory of a conversation with a journalist brings back the issue of a young right-wing activist who murdered the secretary of the Socialist Party and then committed suicide in prison. The narrator remembers how these right-wing activists used to attack him – and not only in press – after his novel *The Death of the Rightist Youngster*¹ was published.

In the flow of memories (... *his thoughts kept returning to times long past*, Oe 2010:176) Kogito contemplates the reasons for Gorō's suicide. He arrives at the conclusion that the reason for his friend's death might have been something other than the terrorists' attacks.

Gorō killed himself because he was worn out after having been played for a fool by an 'evil woman' (ibid., 162).

In the third chapter, Terrorism and Gout, Kogito again looks back on his memories; among others he remembers the pain in his foot affected by gout that the assailants hit with a miniature cannonball (*ibid.*, 464).

¹ Oe did publish a short novel entitled *Seventeen* (1961) about a similar topic.

The most important of the memory threads takes Kogito from Berlin back to his homeland, and to Matsuyama, where seven years after the war he was spending his evenings in the library of the American-run Center for Cultural Information and Education, reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, getting ready for his studies and listening to records of concert music. That was when a student appeared, a student of his deceased father, a nationalist, whose library was burned down by the students in fear of American inspection. It was also the place where the mysterious incident happened, latter referred to as “ARE” (“That”), in which all took part: Kogito, his friend Gorō and an American officer, Peter, allegedly a homosexual, who was supposed to deliver weapons – although faulty – to eventual attackers. The incident was dramatic and mysterious enough for everybody to avoid referring to it directly – through the whole novel it turns out the protagonist is unable to discover what exactly happened during the preparation for the attack, but the certain fact was, that officer Peter disappeared around that time. The reader suspects assassination, or homosexual relations between Peter and Gorō, or both. The main investigation here is an attempt to clear up the reasons of Gorō’s suicide, a famous filmmaker, and Kogito’s brother-in-law.

In the fourth chapter, One Hundred Days of Quarantine (II), during his second stay in Berlin, Kogito takes part in a film festival. He was invited because the young German filmmakers wanted to know the writer’s opinion on a fragment of a movie they made based on his novel *Der stumme Schrei* (German title of *The Silent Cry*). During his stay in Berlin Kogito conducts talks with Gorō’s acquaintances, some girl among others, looking for answers concerning Gorō’s suicide. He understood that the quarantine had two goals: going back to his state of mind from before listening to “tagame” tapes and gaining enough self-discipline to be sure he would be able to keep himself from listening to them after going back home. Still, in Berlin the past kept coming back to him.

He might, for example, be enticed by the style of a Japanese translation of Proust, and that might put him into a mood of leisurely remembrance of all things past (ibid., 238).

A terrifying memory from his boyhood (ibid., 250).

In the fifth chapter, Kokoromi no suppon, Trial by Turtle, the reader encounters the most cruel episode of the novel – murdering a turtle that Kogito got from someone after his return from Berlin. Before this incident Kogito was contemplating the words of a friend, to whose voice he was going to listen after getting back home.

Right now, who do you think is reading your novels? (ibid., 271).

The one experience he had never been able to escape from and which he now suspected had been one of the themes that had shaped his life's work (ibid., 276).

Having pursued his memories of himself and Gorō to that point, Kogito pushed the call button over his head, even though he knew that beverage service had already ended (ibid., 281).

Already in Tokyo he wondered:

For me, now, he mused, isn't Gorō already like another Brother Gii, as we exchange these messages about the much-missed past? (ibid., 275).

Kogito, covered in blood after the fight with the turtle, listens to his wife saying he came back not the same person she had known all those years (*ibid.*, 299). He came back changed, became a “changeling”. But already the next day Kogito started to read, with undivided attention, a script written by Gorō thinking what a talented man Gorō used to be. In the script there was a Leader, most likely modeled after Daiō, a leader of the right-wing activists from Matsuyama. Reading Gorō's script reminded Kogito of many past events, since Gorō used them in his story.

In the sixth chapter, Nozokimi suru hito, The Peeping Toms, Kogito indulges in remembering his school times.

Kogito was able to supply those details from memory as he looked at the illustrations (ibid., 321).

According to Kogito's recollections of the trip to Daiō's training camp... (ibid., 322).

Reawakened by Gorō's screenplay, Kogito's memories of that springtime scene came flooding back... (ibid., 325).

As he looked at the illustration, the memories that crowded into Kogito's head were couched in the simplest sensory terms (ibid., 331).

Kogito had a fond memory of one New Year's Day during that period, when the family's close female friends had gathered to share a meal, as was the custom (ibid., 333).

These are the things Kogito remembered about that journey: the way the moon glittered fiercely on the surface of the river below (ibid., 338).

In the storyboard there was a visualization of Kogito's mother, who was reminding Kogito how Gorō once asked about the story of the family. Then he told him

the saga, starting with his great grandfather, who in the times of the peasant uprising of 1860, as a village official, had to condemn to death the leader of the uprising – the leader being his younger brother. One night Gorō was telling the story of Kobayashi Hideo's translation of Rimbaud's poem *Adieu*.

As a novelist, every time Kogito got bogged down in trying to re-create some past occurrence along a linear time sequence (i.e. this happened, then that happened), he would feel the necessity of changing the focal point of narrative by jumping around in time and space (ibid., 350-351).

I said that I had a feeling that Rimbaud was writing about our futures in "Adieu"... (ibid., 351).

Rimbaud says: Ha! I have to bury my imagination and my memory... (ibid., 354).

Once again Kogito goes back to the meeting with Gorō in the old house in the mountains, to the young fighters that already had some kind of a plan of action. That is how it would seem from the screenplay in which Gorō sketched out two endings, two versions of the truth about what happened. But Kogito did not witness the event, he left the training ground, so he did not know the truth about Peter's disappearance (was he murdered or not?).

The "investigation" run by Kogito ends in failure, because he can not bring up the details of the memories from his youth, those that would allow him to explain what happened back then, what changed Gorō's life. It is not clear whether he did have a homosexual relationship with Peter. Was he involved in Peter's presumptive murder? Do they both have some knowledge about that, but are mutually unable to admit to themselves the evil they committed? Definitely something dramatic did happen back then. Even Chikashi, Gorō's sister and later wife of the writer, is certain that, back then, after two days of being gone, the boys came back somehow different, changed.

3. No answers for the most important questions

That is the basic outline of the story flowing through the six chapters of the novel. The summary does lack some elements important for the structure of this complicated tale, written mostly from Kogito's point of view. Some major elements for explaining the storyline appear in the Epilogue, where Chikashi takes over the role of the narrator. She is usually the person responsible for maintaining the one set location in the story, Seijō Gakuen in Tokyo, from which the protagonist departs and to which he returns with new baggage – that of books, experiences

and regained memory. Most often Kogito was watching this place from afar during his numerous travels. And the second character, the director Gorō, is watching it from another world.

It is no sooner than in the Epilogue that the direction of the observation changes, when Chikashi, the writer's wife, becomes the narrator evaluating the world. The change is done in the moment she unpacks Kogito's suitcase after his return from Berlin. From amongst his unpacked things another world emerges in which she finds her own place, thanks to two books that were in the suitcase. We have to remember that the writer was sending his books by mail. This time though, for some unknown reason, he actually packed the illustrated book *Outside Over There* by Maurice Sendak and the brochure entitled *Changelings* (perhaps distinguishing them?) into the suitcase. Chikashi sees herself in Ida, the main character of this tale. Thanks to Sendak's book she regains multiple events from her past, rebuilds her own story, that she calls *monogatari* or in French *comte*. She contemplates the meaning of the "changelings" of Sendak, and those in her own life (Gorō after his mysterious disappearance in Matsuyama came back "changed" and her son, Akari, was born as a freak of nature). Chikashi wonders about the contents of Sendak's seminar essay and she writes down her thoughts in a list. She appraises Kogito whom she many times did not understand, but whom she did marry. She recalls Kogito's meeting with a Nigerian writer, Wole Soyinka, which took place in Hawaii. Then she focuses on Soyinka's play *Death and the King's Horseman*. The motto of the play constitutes the last sentence of Ōe's novel summing up the results of the protagonist's helpless wandering through retrieved memories that provide multiple details but no answers to his vital questions. It turns out that remembered and recalled facts contain no answers for the most important questions like considering the death of a close person, or the explanation of a fatal incident from youth. The narrator lives in a world build from narration and pieces of memory that do not coalesce into a logical explanation of the reasons of events that keep bothering the protagonist. He is reassured in his conviction about the restricted role of memory and he resorts to irony, advocating forgetting it all and thinking only about those who are not yet born.

Now forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn only to the unborn (ibid., 468).

4. Privileged names

In the fiction novel *Torikaeko*, there are names belonging to the real world that the reader might know from his cultural education. For example M. Sendak, whose name appears promptly in the Prologue and again later when the reader can learn more about him in the Epilogue. This figure supports the structure of the whole

novel, starting with the title *Changeling* (which is the subtitle in Japanese: *chen-jieringu*). The name of Wole Soyinka and his play *Death and the King's Horseman* bear a unique meaning for enclosing the ideological composition of the novel. Such privileged names (Sendak, Soyinka, Mozart, Kennedy, see Komori 2002:14-24) are written in katakana, stressing their non-Japanese origin. Of course the novel also contains names written in Chinese characters (Shiga Naoya, Nakano Shigeharu, Akatsuka Fujio, Sakamoto Ryūichi, Asada Akira).

A special position is given to the philosopher, Maruyama Masao, whose name appears in relation to the incident referred to by a pronoun "ARE" ("That") and in relation to the issue of right-wing activists (Kita Ikki, Inoue Nisshō).

On the other hand there is a set of fictitious names in the novel (Chōkō Kogito, Hanawa Gorō, Chikashi, Akari), and these lead the reader into a trap. These names prompt the reader into treating *Torikaeko* as an autobiographic novel (Jpn. *shishōsetsu*). The facts from the novel-lives of Kogito and Gorō seem to be taken from the biographies of two important figures from the real world. The main character Chōkō Kogito is a writer, laureate of an international prize. He has a disabled son (Akari), a composer. Therefore, for a reader that knows something about the life of the author of the novel, the main character could be identified as Ōe Kenzaburō. Similarly Hanawa Gorō, a famous filmmaker and actor, who commits suicide, brother-in-law and a friend of Kogito, can definitely be seen as the filmmaker Itami Jūzō (1933-1997). Chōkō Chikashi, Gorō's sister, remind us of Ōe's wife, who gave birth to their mentally disabled son, Hikari. The critics (Numano Mitsuyoshi, Matsuura Hisaki, Komori Yōichi) warn the reader not to fall into the *shishōsetsu* trap (*ibid.*, 8). But the reader does not listen to them. He will see the parallel: Kogito equals Ōe, Gorō equals Itami Jūzō. In his head he will create the characters compounded from two semiotic realms – the text of the novel and from his own imagination and knowledge coming from somewhere else, not from the novel. He will simultaneously read the text of *Torikaeko* and the paratext coming from his own imagination.

We have to remember, that between the text and paratext, from which emerge the characters of Kogito and Gorō, as well as Ōe and Itami, there is a mediation – tapes with Gorō's talks (called "tagame"), that Gorō prepared before his death and sent to his friend. Thanks to those recordings, the writer Kogito has talks with their author, the already deceased filmmaker, and contemplates the times they spent together, mostly from their youth. He is reminded of Gorō's critical opinions.

Unfortunately neither the remembrance of the facts from the biographies of both artists, Ōe and Itami, so taken from paratext, nor the memory regained by the characters of the novel, provide answers to questions posed by the protagonist and the reader. It turns out that the memory is not absolute, it is limited, especially when it is not written. The mysterious episode from the past brought up in the novel is never depicted. One can only imagine what happened. Kogito can

only imagine what really happened when Gorō met with Peter during the night that was so memorable for Chikashi (see Riceour 2006:15), and when the rebels were carrying Peter running down from the mountain. And what do all those remembered events bring up? Nothing firm. Hazy remembrance does not clarify their meaning. It does not decide the truth about Gorō 's life. Gorō himself did not trust his memory. That was why he decided to recreate its pieces, recording them on tape. Freud claimed he resorted to pen and paper for similar reasons (see Draaisma 2009:15). But even through tapes Gorō could not explain to his friend what influenced his life so dramatically. His memory turned out to be elusive, restricted, and did not explain the unavoidable flow of events that culminated in the leap from a tall building.

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論文概要

「記憶の限界:『取り替え子』と大江健三郎後期作品の解釈」

本論文で筆者はまず、ポーランドにおいて大江の作品がそれほど多く出版されていないこと、また最も重要な作品は1994年のノーベル文学賞受賞以前のものであると指摘する。しかしこのノーベル賞受賞者は21世紀にも意欲的に著書を発表し、その中には本論文でも取り上げる『おかしな二人組み』三部作の第一作目である『取り替え子 チェンジリング』(2000年)も含まれている。

三部作、そして『取り替え子』の主人公は二人だが、前面に出ている人物は大江健三郎その人をモデルとする作家の長江古義人である。そのパートナー(メダルの裏面という意味において)は、一卷目では監督の埴吾良であり、現実世界における伊丹十三である。この監督のおかげで、比較的概略的に形作られた主人公、古義人の複雑な側面が浮かび上がる。

『取り替え子』は三部作に含まれるものの、その物語は独立していて終わりがある。という物語の終末とともに主人公達の間関係は終わるからである。『取り替え子』のプロローグとエピローグの間に古義人のベルリン滞在が語られるが、これは「隔離」つまり自身の過去と亡き吾良の残した録音を家で聞き彼の自殺の原因について「究明」しようとしたことからの隔絶である。

記憶を辿るとき、四国の家族との経験が最も重要なモチーフとして現れる。しかし妻の兄、埴吾良の死の原因の「究明」は失敗に終わる。何が起り、何が吾良の人生を変えたのかを明かしようとする少年時代の記憶の詳細を、主人公は辿ることができないのである。

エピローグになると視点が変わり、ベルリンから戻った古義人の荷ほどきをする妻である千檜が世界に目を向けるとき、彼女とともに別世界が現れ、そこに自らの居場所を発見するのである。そして、事実の回想では最も重要な問い、つまり彼女の兄の自殺の動機に関する問いに答えることができないことがわかるのである。

本論の筆者は、この物語の主人公が、数多の過ぎ去った出来事の動機を論理的に説明することのできない語りや記憶の断片からなる世界に住んでいると述べ、記憶の限られた役割を認める。最後は、全てを忘れただこれから生まれるもの達のことだけを考えよと皮肉で締めくくる。

キーワード: 大江健三郎、『取り替え子』、主人公の二重性、特権的な名前(伊丹十三、モーリス・センダック、ウォーレ・ショインカ、丸山真男、井上日召)、大江の神話、テクスト-パラテキスト

Keywords: Ōe Kenzaburō, *The Changeling*, duality of protagonist, privileged names (Itami Jūzō, Maurice Sendak, Wole Soyinka, Maruyama Masao, Inoue Nisshō and others), mythology of Ōe, text-paratext.