

Course – Themes v190926

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We take the below themes as the focus of our discussions during the term. End-of-session cards should be written with these themes in mind. Recorders should relate their notes to these themes. The midterm and final papers take one or more of these themes as their topic. These themes might develop somewhat as the class progresses.

In the Session Transcript GoogleDoc and your Reflections always use the tag, and always in FULL CAPS and in BOLD and bracketed [].

Here's the list in simple, tag form. Then, it is repeated with descriptions:

- **[HUMAN WEAKNESS]**
- **[TRUTH / IMAGINATION]**
- **[G. REALISM]**
- HIKARI
- WOMEN
- INDIVIDUAL / GROUP
- TIME
- GAIN
- REPETITION
- ABANDONMENT

Human weakness

tag: **[HUMAN WEAKNESS]**

full name: Human weakness

- (ALL of these topics cross-over with **[HIKARU]**, below)
- passive (lack of action or over-thinking as causing or allowing negative outcomes) vs. active (the advantages, pitfalls, conundrums of active postures, ill-considered actions, activism)
- anxiety derived from perceived or actual weakness of body or spirit
- the state of being disabled and/or limited in ability
- care-giving challenges

- limited or insufficient understanding (almost always a cross-over with the **[TRUTH / IMAGINATION]** theme)
- leadership issues (crosses over to **[INDIVIDUAL / GROUP]** theme)
- fear of taking responsibility
- situations of momentous challenge (links with **[GAIN]**)

LAVISH — weak

MEMUSHIRI — strong

KOJIN — strong

AHWEE — strong

MANEN — strong

JINSEI — strong

想像力：理解・事実

tag: **[TRUTH / IMAGINATION]**

full name: 想像力：理解・事実 [capacity of imagination: understanding & realities]

- elusiveness of truth, and narrative strategies that explore this (put another way: limits of 想像力 — wrong use of 想像力 — wrong 想像力)
- limits of understanding another's thoughts, feelings, or needs
- persistence of misunderstanding, blindness to the state of misunderstanding something
- absence of compassion or empathy or sympathy, all considered important
- person-to-person distance (perhaps this is my way of saying Ōe's understanding / application of Sartre's existentialism)

Suggested readings: Ōe's own comments on his writing, Akio Kimura, Sartre

LAVISH — weak

MEMUSHIRI — strong

KOJIN — moderate

AHWEE — strong

MANEN — strong

JINSEI — strong

Grotesque realism / Carnivale / Defamiliarization

tag to use: **[G. REALISM]**

full name: Grotesque realism / Carnivale / Defamiliarization

- (G. REALISM is a technique, not a theme, but does inform his work in important ways, so the effects of these techniques on Ōe's writings and to what purpose is the point of this category, one must link it to other themes on this list or some other substantive issue)
- low humor
- animal imagery
- visceral emotion
- grotesque behavior and form
- the body
- coarse sexuality / penis as phallus / vagina

Suggested readings: Bakhtin on Rabelais, explanations of defamiliarization, explanations of the "carnavalesque" as inherited from medieval European, pagan practices

LAVISH — strong

MEMUSHIRI — strong

KOJIN — strong

AHWEE — strong

MANEN — strong

JINSEI — moderate

小説の中の「光」

tag: **[HIKARU]**

full name: 小説の中の「光」

- Influence of the experience of his son in shaping his themes and other aspects of his writing that would not better be discussed under **[HUMAN WEAKNESS]** or **[TRUTH / IMAGINATION]**
- Manifestations of his son in his writings

Suggested readings: Ōe's autobiography *A Healing Family*

LAVISH — zero
MEMUSHIRI — zero
KOJIN — strong
AHGWEE — strong
MANEN — moderate
JINSEI — strong

The role of women in Oe's narratives

tag: **[WOMEN]**

full name: The role of women in Oe's narratives

- women as more clear-sighted, intelligent, wise and/or practical (practical here means more direct access to 事実 than male protagonists / narrators)
- sexually abused women
- sexually liberated women
- women possessed by or passionate about an idea or emotion
- the difference between male-female bonds and male-male bonds
- wives vs. mistresses

Suggested readings: the atogaki of 『個人的な体験』

LAVISH — moderate
MEMUSHIRI — strong
KOJIN — strong
AHGWEE — strong
MANEN — strong
JINSEI — strong

The nexus of the individual and group

tag: **[INDIVIDUAL / GROUP]**

full name: The nexus of the individual and group

- the disenfranchised and marginalized
- groupthink / cults / groups lacking intelligence and morality

- the double-edge sword of collective political action
- troubled leadership
- families and pseudo-families
- brothers
- pseudo-couples
- husband-wife units

Suggested readings: Susan Napier (for the marginalized)

LAVISH — weak

MEMUSHIRI — strong

KOJIN — weak

AHWEE — weak

MANEN — strong

JINSEI — moderate

Future time, present time, past time, simultaneous times and/or pluralistic universes (時間、時、いま等)

tag: **[TIME]**

full name: future time, present time, past time, simultaneous times and/or pluralistic universes (時間、時、いま等)

- their relationship to grief, regret, and/or remorse
- their relationship to truth & imagination

Suggested reading: Faulkner might be helpful, Akio Kimura

LAVISH — weak

MEMUSHIRI — weak

KOJIN — strong

AHWEE — strong

MANEN — strong

JINSEI — strong

Gain (Grace?)

tag to use: **[GAIN / GRACE?]**

full name: gain (grace?)

- **[GAIN / GRACE?]** links powerfully with **[HUMAN WEAKNESS]**
- Beginning with KOJIN we see characters obtaining some sort of “gain” in some sort of spiritual way, but exactly what has been gained, for how long, and how much, can be, usually is, mysterious. Mysterious does not mean “don’t know, so mysterious” but rather “can sense that gain is happening but it is difficult to articulate its content, yet seems very important.” In JINSEI we take up this issue specifically as “grace” in the sense that Flannery O’Connor used it, but well before that Ōe ’s works have some sort of positive valence to them, despite their darkness, and this positive valence has to do with “gain” in most cases, I think.
- hindrances / the "wall"
- situations of extreme struggle
- wasted effort

Suggested readings: Material related to Flannery O'Connor and her stories themselves

LAVISH — weak

MEMUSHIRI — moderate

KOJIN — strong

AHWEE — moderate

MANEN — strong

JINSEI — strong

Repetition

tag to use: **[REPETITION / VARIATION]**

full name: repetitions or variations of many types and things

- (like **[G. REALISM]**, this is not a theme but rather a technique, and needs to be linked to themes, when used)
- repetition / variation of motifs: holes, eyes, depressions, valleys, dogs, birds, etc
- repetition / variation of character types
- repetition / variation of themes

LAVISH — weak

MEMUSHIRI — moderate

KOJIN — moderate

AHGWEE — strong

MANEN — strong

JINSEI — strong

Abandonment

tag to use: **ABANDONMENT**

fullname: abandonment

- (links in some ways with **[INDIVIDUAL / GROUP]**)
- may well link with his studies of Sartre & Existentialism:
 - I added this theme in August 2017 as a result of an email from a student who sent the following quote of Jean-Paul Sartre:
 - And when we speak of “abandonment” – a favorite word of Heidegger – we only mean to say that God does not exist, and that it is necessary to draw the consequences of his absence right to the end. The existentialist is strongly opposed to a certain type of secular moralism which seeks to suppress God at the least possible expense. . . . The existentialist, on the contrary, finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There can no longer be any good *a priori*, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. It is nowhere written that “the good” exists, that one must be honest or must not lie, since we are now upon the plane where there are only men. Dostoevsky once wrote: “If God did not exist, everything would be permitted”; and that, for existentialism, is the starting point. Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. He discovers forthwith, that he is without excuse. For if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one’s action by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words, there is no determinism – man is free, man is freedom. Nor, on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimise our behaviour. Thus we have neither behind us, nor before us in a luminous realm of values, any means of

justification or excuse. – We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does.

– “Existentialism is a Humanism” Lecture by Jean-Paul Sartre (1946), tr. Philip Mairet (<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm>)

LAVISH – weak

MEMUSHIRI – strong

KOJIN – strong

AHGWEE – strong

MANEN – strong

JINSEI – strong