

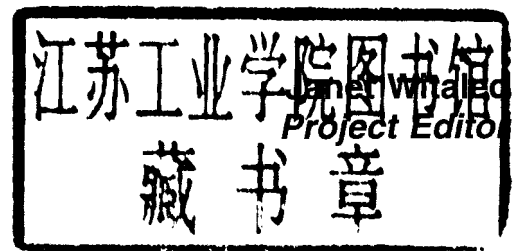
Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 131

Volume 131

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



THOMSON
—★—
GALE



Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol. 131

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Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author’s works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by the Gale Group, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *TCLC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *TCLC* volume in which their entry appears.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in the series as well as in *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, and the *Contemporary Literary Criticism* Yearbook, which was discontinued in 1998.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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George Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi," *Partisan Review* 6 (Winter 1949): 85-92; reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, vol. 59, ed. Jennifer Garipey (Detroit: The Gale Group, 1995), 40-3.

William H. Slavick, "Going to School to DuBose Heyward," *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*, ed. Victor A. Kramer (AMS, 1987), 65- 91; reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, vol. 59, ed. Jennifer Garipey (Detroit: The Gale Group, 1995), 94-105.

Suggestions are Welcome

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Kōbō Abé

1924-1993

(Born Kimifusa Abé; also transliterated as Kobo Abe and Abe Kobo) Japanese novelist, short story writer, playwright, theater director, essayist, screenwriter, and photographer.

The following entry provides criticism on Abé's works from 1989 through 1997. For criticism prior to 1989, see *CLC*, Volumes 8, 22, and 53; for an obituary entry on Abé, see *CLC*, Volume 81.

INTRODUCTION

Abé was the foremost Modernist writer in Japan and an international literary figure who was frequently considered a candidate for the Nobel Prize. Sometimes referred to as the "Japanese Kafka," Abé wrote many tales depicting ordinary people in absurd, nightmarish situations. His work helped to attract attention to post-war Japanese life and literature.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Abé was born on March 7, 1924, in Tokyo. His father was a physician who moved his family to Manchuria when Abé was an infant. In 1942 Abé returned to Tokyo at the age of eighteen to enter Tokyo University and study medicine. During these years, he became influenced by the nihilistic movement that gained popularity among Japanese students and intellectuals near the end of World War II. After the end of the war, he began to experiment with poetry and fiction. In 1948 he graduated from Tokyo University with his M.D. degree, but he soon abandoned his medical career to pursue his interest in writing fiction, drama, and poetry. Abé joined several important literary groups and by 1950 had become an enthusiastic participant in the avant-garde movement. He gained recognition as a fiction writer, director, screenwriter, and playwright. In 1973 Abé founded his own theater group, the Abé Kōbō Studio, which produced many of his best-known plays. During the 1970s and 1980s he also wrote several television and radio dramas in Japan. He died of heart failure on January 22, 1993.

MAJOR WORKS

Abé is best known in the West for *Suna no onna* (1962; *The Woman in the Dunes*), an allegorical, metaphysical novel about an entomologist who becomes trapped in a



sandpit by a sensuous widow. Initially, the man tries to escape, but eventually he becomes attracted to the widow and accepts his situation. The novel is often categorized as a Kafkaesque morality tale. The award-winning film based on this novel, *The Woman in the Dunes*, directed by Hiroshi Teshigahara and scripted by Abé, brought him international acclaim. His novel *Tanin no kao* (1964; *The Face of Another*) was also adapted into a popular film in 1967. Using motifs from detective novels, Abé chronicles the story of a disfigured man who wears a mask to hide his true identity. With his new face, the protagonist changes and behaves in uncharacteristic ways, including a successful attempt to seduce his own wife. Abé's novel *Hakobune sakura maru* (1984; *The Ark Sakura*) is a farcical version of the biblical story of Noah and the Flood. Mole, the protagonist, is an eccentric recluse who converts a huge cave into an "ark" equipped with water, food, and elaborate weapons to protect himself from an impending nuclear holocaust. Abé's works in other genres include the plays *Tomodachi, enemoto takeaki* (1967; *Friends*),

which examines the cruel and predatory nature of members of a family who intrude upon the life of a bachelor, and *Bo ni natta otoko* (1969; *The Man Who Turned into a Stick*). Abé utilizes irony and ambiguity in order to explore issues of identity and alienation, which are recurring thematic concerns in his work.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critics note that much of Abé's fiction explores the loneliness of modern existence and the tenuous nature of identity, posing questions and describing events designed to undermine the reader's complacency and stimulate reflective thought. Reviewers have asserted that unlike his contemporary Yukio Mishima, whose uniquely modern fiction incorporated numerous elements from traditional Japanese culture, Abé avoided culturally specific details in an effort to address a worldwide audience and underline the universality of his themes. Several commentators have speculated that this widespread appeal led to international interest in his work but to negative critical reaction in his homeland. His work is often compared to that of Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, and Paul Auster.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Owarishi michi no shirube ni* (novel) 1948
S. Karuma-shi no hanzai (novel) 1951
Daiyon kamyoku [*Inter Ice Age Four*] (novel) 1959
Yurei wa koko ni iru [*The Ghost Is Here*] (play) 1959
Suna no onna [*The Woman in the Dunes*] (novel) 1962
Tanin no kao [*The Face of Another*] (novel) 1964
Moetsukita chizu [*The Ruined Map*] (novel) 1967
Tomodachi, enemoto takeaki [*Friends*] (play) 1967
Bo ni natta otoko [*The Man Who Turned into a Stick*] (play) 1969
Abé Kōbō gikyoku zenshu (collected plays) 1970
Mihitsu no koi [*Involuntary Homicide*] (play) 1971
Uchinaro henkyo (essays) 1971
Abé Kōbō zensakuhin 15 vols. (plays, essays, novels, poetry, and short stories) 1972-1973
Hako otoko [*The Box Man*] (novel) 1973
Han gekiteki ningen (lectures) 1973
Midori-iro no sutokkingu [*The Green Stockings*] (play) 1974
Mikkai [*Secret Rendezvous*] (novel) 1977
Hakobune sakura maru [*The Ark Sakura*] (novel) 1984
Beyond the Curve (short stories) 1991
Kangaru nōto [*Kangaroo Notebook*] (novel) 1991
**Three Plays of Kōbō Abé* (plays) 1993

*This collection contains *The Ghost Is Here*, *Involuntary Homicide*, and *The Green Stockings*.

CRITICISM

Robert Garis (review date winter 1989)

SOURCE: Garis, Robert. Review of *The Ark Sakura*, by Kōbō Abé. *Hudson Review* 41, no. 4 (winter 1989): 757-59.

[In the following unfavorable review, Garis derides *The Ark Sakura* as lacking in coherence and meaning.]

International high style at its most stupefyingly relentless is the achievement of Kobo Abe's *The Ark Sakura*, which lays out the ingredients for some sort of fable about the nuclear age or human survival or paranoia, and then shuts down without putting anything together. The first-person narrator named Mole (also Pig, a nickname he dislikes) is looking for people to join him in his survival "ship," a many-chambered abandoned underground quarry in which his father had once imprisoned him as a punishment, but which he has now fitted out with all sorts of provisions, booby traps against intruders and the like, as an "ark" for survival. The quarry's main feature is a huge toilet, with no seat and with immense water pressure in the flushing mechanism which makes it very inconvenient to use—it was this toilet to which his father had tied him. The candidates for survival Mole gathers (with no particular criteria) are an insect seller at a bazaar and a man and a woman who work as shills for him and whose animated conversation about one of the insects attracts Mole's interest. This insect, an eupuccia, feeds entirely on its own feces, moving in a perfect circle just slowly enough to keep its nutritional system functioning smoothly, except during its mating season, when it rises precariously from its circle on flimsy wings, and then "time stands still." Once Mole and his three recruits enter the Ark, there is a steady, boring action of exploration of the place itself, temporary disappearances of the male shill and the insect seller, much searching for them, suspicions that other people are hiding in the quarry, much searching for them too. Both the shill and the woman tell Mole that the other has cancer but doesn't know it. Two thirds of the way through, emissaries arrive from a group of old people called the Broom Brigade, who hope to survive in the "Kingdom of Quintessential Castoffs." In the meantime, they serve as garbage-collectors. But they have contracted out their most dangerous product, poisonous industrial wastes, to Mole and his huge toilet, and now they want him to destroy a human body for them. In the last hundred pages the action speeds up; Mole gets his leg stuck in the toilet, from which he finally releases himself by setting off an explosion which changes the pressure in the water system. He tells the other characters that the explosion is a nuclear explosion, that nuclear warfare has begun;

when he afterwards tells them the truth, they prefer to believe the nuclear explanation, and when Mole leaves them behind in the Ark, he finds that the world, including his own body, has become transparent.

These are the ingredients, but no fable emerges. "Sakura" is the Japanese word for "shill": is Mole's survival ship a fake that manipulates people who are obsessed with nuclear disaster? You don't feel this as you read, and all the characters in the novel bring a kind of bland steadiness of attention to everything they do, without feeling obsessed or victimized, and you don't feel any irony about that. Apart from Mole's pleasure in little flesh contacts he makes with the flesh of the woman shill, particularly with her thighs or buttocks, and his pain when his leg is stuck in the toilet, the entire action is rendered without affect. None of the meanings promised in the action are made by the kind of connective process we are used to encountering when meaning happens. The strange insect, much discussed at the beginning of the novel, completely disappears, and we aren't given the wherewithal to connect any person or act with the insect's over-meaningful habits. Loud elements such as Mole's father's having chained him to the toilet for punishment, and the steady emphasis on the toilet and on excrement, seem continually on the verge of working up some meaning but remain inert; when we learn about Mole's job of disposing of industrial pollution, and eventually of disposing of a human body, our sense of being right on top of meaning without seeing it or feeling it generates an almost eerie emptiness which the book doesn't in any way register. The transparent outside world makes a very striking appearance formally, in a single-page final chapter, but the prose doesn't reveal either by tone or imagery what transparency means. And so on.

It is hard to guess what the novel would seem like to somebody without a reviewer's obligation to continue reading. Readers who have admired Kobo Abe in the past might find a positive value in what I experienced as negative: since the novel's consistent *moderato* narrative drive doesn't produce any meaning to distract us, it does bring that element of fiction—movement in time—to sharp focus. And I suppose it's possible to admire the odd skill with which Abe does in fact avoid meaningfulness—his foot never slips. When I had seen the film made from Abe's first novel, *Woman of the Dunes*, a highly regarded, portentously meaningful fable about some mysteries of sexuality, I read the novel itself to check whether the film had coarsened Abe's meaning and found that it hadn't. Abe's progress, which has led him to ever sterner renunciations of the conventional, has established him in a high place in the international literary scene. Other reviewers of this latest novel hint at the marvelous but ineffable experience they have had. For this reader there was nothing.

Wimal Dissanayake (essay date 1990)

SOURCE: Dissanayake, Wimal. "Self, Place, and Body in *The Woman in the Dunes*: A Comparative Study of the Novel and the Film." In *Literary Relations, East and West: Selected Essays*, edited by Jean Toyama and Nobuko Ochner, pp. 41-54. Manoa, Hawaii: University of Hawaii, 1990.

[In the following essay, Dissanayake lists the reasons for the success of the cinematic adaptation of Abé's novel *The Woman in the Dunes*.]

The change in the sand corresponded to a change in himself. Perhaps, along with the water in the sand, he had found a new self.¹

—*The Woman in the Dunes*

The novel and the film are two of the most powerful media of symbolic communication in the modern world, and the relationship between them is as complex as it is fascinating. There appears to be an almost inverse relationship between the literary worth of a novel and the artistic worth of film based on it. Some of the outstanding novels of internationally acclaimed novelists such as Tolstoy, Joyce, and Lawrence have been made into films without much success while great works of cinema have been created based on undistinguished novels—Antonioni's *BLOW-UP* is a case in point. However, occasionally we come across a great work of cinema that is based upon an equally great novel. Hiroshi Teshigahara's film version of Kobo Abe's *Suna no onna* or *The Woman in the Dunes* is a good illustration of this. Kobo Abe, who is one of the leading playwrights and novelists of Japan, is the author of such well-known novels as *The Face of Another*, *The Ruined Map*, *The Box Man*, and, of course, *The Woman in the Dunes*. Many consider *The Woman in the Dunes*, which won the Yomiuri Prize for Literature in 1960, to be Kobo Abe's finest novel, a judgment with which I certainly agree. Hiroshi Teshigahara's 1963 film version of the novel, which was awarded the Jury Prize at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival in 1963, provides us with an excellent and rare example of a distinguished novel yielding up an equally distinguished work of cinematic art. The object of this [essay] is to examine, what I believe to be, the primary reason for this success.

One of Kobo Abe's abiding themes has been the alienation of man and his perennial quest for identity. He has chosen to explore this theme with the power, the clarity, and the elemental attraction of myth. This is clearly the case with *The Woman in the Dunes*. This novel tells the story of a man held captive with a young woman at the bottom of a dangerous sand pit in a remote seaside village, and his attempt to make sense of the bizarre world into which he has been transported much against his will.

The protagonist of the novel, Niki Jumpei—who throughout the novel is referred to not by name but by the pronoun “he”—is a school teacher and avid insect collector who disappears one August afternoon. The opening of the novel, with its casual and matter-of-fact tone, sets the stage for the strange experiences that are to follow:

One day in August a man disappeared. He had simply set out for the seashore on a holiday, scarcely half a day away by train, and nothing more was ever heard of him. Investigation by the police and inquiries in the newspapers had both proved fruitless.

(3)

In his search for insects, Niki Jumpei arrives at a desolate seaside village near the sand dunes. As “sand and insects were all that concerned him,” he is hardly aware of the grim and forbidden terrain into which he has wandered. When he eventually does survey his surrounding reality, he finds it anything but pleasant:

The slope suddenly steepened. It must have been at least sixty-five feet down to the tops of the houses. What in heaven’s name could it be like to live down there? he thought in amazement, peering down into one of the holes. As he circled around the edge he was suddenly struck by a biting wind that choked his breath in his throat. The view abruptly opened up, and the turbid, foaming sea licked at the shore below. He was standing on the crest of the dunes that had been his objective.

(9)

As fate would have it, Niki Jumpei misses the last bus. The villagers, however, invite him to spend the night in the village. He readily accepts their invitation, and, in what will trigger a series of bizarre incidents, asks to spend the night in a shack at the bottom of a sandpit. It is a strange place:

Indeed, if it had not been for the warm reception, the house itself would have been difficult to put up with at all. He would have thought they were making a fool of him and would doubtless have gone back at once. The walls were peeling, matting had been hung up in place of sliding doors, the upright supports were warped, boards had replaced all the windows, the straw mats were on the point of rotting, and when one walked on them they made a noise like a wet sponge. Moreover, an offensive smell of burned, moldering sand floated over the whole place.

(24)

Here, in this nightmarish world, he is held captive with a young woman. The only reality is the ever present sand:

The more he tried to sleep, the more wide awake he became. His eyes began to smart; his tears and his blinking seemed to be ineffective against the ceaselessly falling sand. He spread out his towel and

wrapped it over his head. It was difficult to breathe, but it was better this way. He tried thinking of something else. When he closed his eyes, a number of long lines, flowing like sighs, came floating toward him. There were ripples of sand moving over the dunes. The dunes were probably burned into his retina because he had been gazing steadily at them for some twelve hours. The same sand currents had swallowed up and destroyed flourishing cities and great empires.

(41)

The woman, whose husband and daughter had died the previous year by being buried by sand, is destined to live with him in the shack at the bottom of the sand pit. He is a prisoner, and experiences a whole range of emotions toward her ranging from anger and annoyance to erotic love and compassion. He tries to escape from this nightmarish world five times but never succeeds; his efforts to outwit his captors repeatedly fail.

Toward the end of the novel, Niki Jumpei realizes, quite by accident, that he can obtain water through the capillary action of sand, a discovery that serves to bring about a fundamental change in his attitude and outlook. It is almost as if he had discovered a new self. The interaction between self and place has opened a new chapter in his existence, and escaping from the shack is no longer uppermost in his mind. The novel closes with the following memorable passage:

There was no particular need to hurry about escaping. On the two-way ticket he held in his hand now, the destination and time of departure were blanks for him to fill in as he wished. In addition, he realized that he was bursting with a desire to talk to someone about the water trap. And if he wanted to talk about it, there wouldn’t be better listeners than the villagers. He would end by telling someone—if not today, then tomorrow. He might as well put off his escape until sometime after that.

(239)

The Woman in the Dunes deals with the themes of alienation and identity, themes which are explored with the power of a fabulist imagination. Sand is the ruling trope of the novel; it is everywhere, pervading the thoughts, revelations, imaginings, ruminations and actions of the protagonist. As Currie aptly points out,² sand is the novel’s central metaphor, standing for the shifting reality in which the protagonist needs to come to terms with himself and his circumambient reality, in which he needs to sink roots to anchor his existence. Many literary critics and scholars have interpreted the significance of the symbolism of the sand in diverse ways. It is my conviction that Abe’s symbolism is deeply rooted in Buddhism, according to which sand signifies *samsara* or worldly existence, and water signifies wisdom and insight.

Hiroshi Teshigahara has made a visually stunning and critically acclaimed film from Kobo Abe’s novel. How does one account for this rare success—a great film

born out of a great novel. One can argue that Teshigahara is a hugely talented director in the way that Kobo Abe is an outstanding novelist. One can also argue that the novel is visually conceived so that it made the task of the screenplay writer and the director that much lighter. It is also true that the director of the film worked very closely with the novelist. All these factors, in their different ways, no doubt, contributed to the successful animated transcreation of the novel. There is, I believe, yet another, and in some ways, deeper reason for this success, namely, the dialectic between self and place that is so crucial to the thematic and stylistic intent of the novel and its bearing on the art of cinematography.

Teshigahara has sought to stick as closely as possible to the novel; even the dialogue is, by and large, taken directly from the novel. He has added a few incidents like the rape scene and the scene dealing with his old girlfriend that occurs at the beginning of the film, and shortened the escape scenes which are much longer in the novel. But beyond these changes, the film adheres very faithfully to the novel.

A distinguishing feature of *The Woman in the Dunes* is the vital dialectic between self and place. Niki Jumpei is realized, defined and assessed in relation to place. First we are shown how he attempts to escape from the urban environment that he inhabits; next we see him against the background of the desolate and remote seaside village; the third stage, which constitutes the bulk of the novel is his encounter with the pervasive sand in the shack at the bottom of the sand pit; finally his struggle with the environment and his triumph over it with the discovery of water, resulting in the emergence of a newer self. The interplay between self and place, then, is pivotal to the meaning of the novel.

Interestingly, something that cinema does far more effectively and cogently than the other media of symbolic expression is capture the mutual interaction between self and place. It is almost a power invested with the art of cinema. Therefore, the fact that Kobo Abe's novel deals precisely with this aspect certainly helped to make it a literary work full of cinematic possibilities, and the director, Hiroshi Teshigahara, was quick to exploit them to the maximum advantage.

The central trope in the film, as in the novel, is sand. It is at once beautiful and frightening, attractive and repulsive. Director Teshigahara has captured with remarkable skill and power the various shapes, forms and patterns of the sand. At one point, he magnifies a single grain of sand so as to fill the entire screen; at another point, he shows how the sand flows on and on in a cascade-like manner. Throughout the film we are shown how Niki Jumpei's and the woman's bodies are covered with sand, investing their very being with its presence. Indeed, I can hardly think of any other film in which sand plays such a dominant role.

Hiroshi Teshigahara has an acute sensitivity to the sense of place. Niki walking all by himself across the dunes as the sun sinks beyond the horizon; the pitiful condition of the shack in which he is condemned to live with the woman; the woman holding up an umbrella to keep the sand from falling on the food as Niki eats his dinner; the torrential fall of sand on the shack; the shack as seen by the villagers from above; the faces of the villagers transformed into diabolic masks; how these sequences are presented through Teshigahara's wonderful use of the camera and editing bears testimony to this fact. Niki Jumpei's new awareness of himself is a direct consequence of his confrontation with his environment, and the film brings this out graphically.

As I mentioned earlier, *The Woman in the Dunes* communicates powerfully the emergence of the protagonist's newer self. This is accompanied by a significant shift in his cognitive style. It demonstrates the proneness of human beings to adhere to specific cognitive styles and to structure and reify reality in accordance with that style. What the novel points out is the imperative need to get out of such a rigid cognitive style as a way of realizing one's self fully. Needless to say, these cognitive styles are products of, and embedded in, specific discourses.

Niki is a product of the modern, urban environment and the discourse which brought it into being. He may not be totally happy with all facets of this discourse, but he certainly operates within its parameters. He structures his reality in relation to the signification systems that he has inherited from his environment. In addition, he is a resolute insect collector; the entomological and scientific discourse has deeply penetrated his being. He has a rational and analytical frame of mind; he likes to reduce things to their basic constituent elements. He privileges reductionism over holism. As early on in the novel, we are told

His head bent down, he began to walk following the crescent-shaped line of dunes that surround the village like a rampart and towered above it. He paid almost no attention to the distant landscape. An entomologist must concentrate his whole attention within a radius of about three yards around his feet.

(15)

Niki is used to classification and atomization rather than to seeing things holistically, as a consequence of his experiences in the shack with the woman, and as he becomes increasingly acquainted with her ways of thinking and perceiving, his cognitive style begins to change. As he says toward the end of the novel:

He was still in the hole, but it seemed as if he were already outside. Turning around, he could see the whole scene. You can't really judge a mosaic if you don't look at it from a distance. If you really get close to it

you get lost in detail. You get away from one detail only to get caught in another. Perhaps what he had been seeing up until now was not the sand but grains of sand.

(235)

As a consequence of Niki's experiences in the shack—as a consequence of the interaction between self and place—he acquires a new cognitive style which is more contextualized, holistic and experiential. This shift in the cognitive style is closely associated with his newly emergent self.

The dialectic between self and place is at the heart of *The Woman in the Dunes*. Kobo Abe has explored this with a great measure of sensitivity and concreteness. His powerful visual imagination has caught this interplay with subtlety and cogency. As I stated earlier, the dialectic between self and place is one that the art of cinema handles with undiminishing enthusiasm. This fact, more than anything else, in my judgment, has contributed to the stunningly successful cinematic transcreation of Kobo Abe's novel.

What Kobo Abe has sought to do is to remove his protagonist from his cultural environment and to probe deeper and deeper into his own psyche as a way of attaining his authentic selfhood. However, culture plays such a formidable role in the combination of self that by merely removing Niki from his familiar cultural surroundings, Kobo Abe is not able to achieve this. As a matter of fact the dialectic between self and place that is clearly a pervasive presence in the novel and the film gain much by way of force and definition from Niki's cultural reflexes.

When discussing the dialectic of self and place in *The Woman in the Dunes*, it is very important that we pay attention to the concept of body that is so central to the textual strategies of the novel and the film. Once Niki is imprisoned in the sand pit, the only reality is the ever present sand and his own body. Much of the communication, experience of diverse emotions, imaginings' ruminations are anchored in the body. Many of the most memorable passages in the novel are associated with the human body.

She was stark naked.

She seemed to float like a blurred shadow before his tear-filled eyes. She lay face up on the matting, her whole body, except her head, exposed to view; she had placed her left hand slightly over her lower abdomen, which was smooth and full. The parts that one usually covered were completely bare, while the face, which anybody would show, was concealed under a towel. No doubt the towel was to protect her nose, mouth, and eyes from the sand, but the contrast seemed to make the naked body stand out even more.

The whole surface of her body was covered with a coat of fine sand, which hid the details and brought out the feminine lines; she seemed a statue gilded with sand.

Suddenly a viscid saliva rose from under his tongue. But he could not possibly swallow it. Were he to swallow, the sand that had lodged between his lips and teeth would spread through his mouth. He turned toward the earthen floor and spat. No matter how much he ejected he could not get rid of the gritty taste. No matter how he emptied his mouth the sand was still there. More sand seemed to issue constantly from between his teeth.

(44)

Here Niki is experiencing the strange and bizarre situation into which he has found himself in terms of the body; indeed, the body becomes the instrument by which the strangeness and the abnormality that surrounds him is measured and assessed. Similarly, the attractions and antagonisms that Niki and the woman experience for each other are signified in terms of the body. The human body assumes the stature of a master signifier in the novel.

Without paying any attention, he poised his arms to strike, but the woman, screaming, rushed violently at him. He put out his elbow and twisted his body in an effort to ward her off. But he had miscalculated, and instead of the woman he himself was swung around. Instantly, he tried to counter, but she held on as if chained to the shovel. He did not understand. At least he could not be defeated by force. They rolled over two or three times, thrashing about on the earthen floor, and for a brief moment he thought he had pinned her down, but with the handle of the shovel as a shield she deftly flipped him over. Something was wrong with him; maybe it was the sake he had drunk. Anyway, he no longer cared that his opponent was a woman. He jabbed his bended knee into her stomach.

(131)

As he was being soaped he pretended to be aroused and pulled at her kimono. He would wash her in return. Caught between confusion and expectancy, she made a gesture of resistance, but it was not clear just what she was resisting. He quickly poured a bucket of warm water over her naked body and without a washcloth began to pass his soapy hands directly over her skin. He started with the earlobes and shifted down to the jaw, and as he passed over her shoulders he reached around and with one hand grasped her breast. She cried out and, sliding down his chest, crouched level with his stomach. Undoubtedly it was a posture of expectation. But the man was in no hurry. With measured cadence, his hands went on with their painstaking massaging from one part of her body to another.

(166)

Throughout the novel we find tropes, passages of description which suggest to us that the human body in the novel has become the measure of achievement of all things human. For instance, the author says that, "They say the level of civilization is proportionate to the cleanliness of the skin" (122). When discussing the dialectic of self and place in *The Woman in the Dunes*, then, it is very important that we not lose sight of this very significant dimension of signification.

The last decade or so has witnessed a remarkable increase in the scholarly interest in the human body with a clear focus on the understanding of different modes in which the human body is constructed. The nature and significance of the human body as a reality that is being continually produced and reproduced in society is increasingly attracting scholarly attention. The mapping out of the modalities of construction of the human body, understandably enough, leads into discussions of politics, ethics and questions of power and knowledge. The pioneering work of Foucault, Elias, and Kantorowicz and the writings of Nietzsche from which they took their cue, have significantly inflected this newly generated interest.

The human body, it should be noted, is at the center of a plurality of discourses that produce and reproduce culture. It has, consequently, become a useful analytical tool with which to decode some of the cultural meanings embedded in fictional and filmic texts. For example, modern film theorists of a feminist persuasion are engaged in the task of symbolically reclaiming the body as a means of displacing patriarchal narratives that dominate filmic enunciation. Focusing on a hermeneutic of dominance and submission, they seek to call attention to the diverse ways in which women are situated as objects of male gaze and desire and how the female body is specularized as a rhetorical strategy of male domination over it.

In *The Woman in the Dunes*, the human body is portrayed as a central fact of self; this somatic facticity that runs through the novel inflecting all human emotions, perceptions and ratiocinations has a metaphysical dimension rooted in Japanese thought. It is interesting at this point, to compare the attitudes to body and mind in the Western and Eastern traditions of thought. The Western tradition, by and large, subscribing to a Cartesian duality, posit a definite separation of mind and body whereas the Eastern traditions posit a unity. This unity is perceived as an accomplishment, and wisdom, the highest achievement of human existence, is seen as a physical and intellectual attainment. Truth is not perceived merely as a way of examining the world, but is seen as a modality of being in the world, and a significant aspect of this has to do with our somatic existence. Their line of thinking has a direct bearing on Niki Jumpei's experience. As Yuasa Yasuo remarks, true knowledge cannot be obtained simply through theoretical thinking; it can be obtained only through "bodily recognition as realization" (*tainin* or *taikoku*), that is, through the utilization of one's entire body and mind.

The body and the somatic experiences associated with it play a central role in the novel bearing much of its existential meaning. And one thing that cinema in the hands of gifted filmmakers can do extremely well, is to capture the nuanced experiences and complex responses

of the human body. Kobo Abe in writing his novel, has given much attention to questions of corporeality, embodiment, and somaticity. Hiroshi Teshigahara, in translating the literary experience into a cinematic experience has fully utilized the power and beauty of the human body. The centrality accorded to the human body in the novel is another reason that facilitated the transcreation of it in cinema by Teshigahara.

In discussing the relative success of the novel and the film, and the ways in which the novel had enabled its cinematic conversion, the question of male gaze, which is closely related to the representation of the human body, merits closer attention. *The Woman of the Dunes* is essentially a male-centered novel obeying all the laws of representation associated with patriarchy. The novel in essence charts the physical experiences and the ensuing cognitive metamorphosis of Niki, and the woman in the dunes is the catalyst that brings about the changes in Niki. Indeed, the focus of interest in Niki, and the woman is seen and evaluated through his eyes. This is, of course, a limitation of the novel. Once again this feature in the novel is one that ties in very nicely with the dictates and imperatives of the medium of cinema as we know it today.

In Western cinema—and Teshigahara is clearly following the conventions of Western cinema—the female is generally dichotomously and fetishistically constructed as a symbolic outcome of female desire. The female becomes an object of male gaze and her subjectivity is denied, entrapped as she is in the complex dictates of patriarchy. In cinematic representation, the woman being a product of the male gaze, continues to be an object devalued as the site of male voyeurism. She is relegated to a position of marginality and that marginality being vital to the ahistorical, essentialist, and negative image of women created by cinema. Feminist film critics like Laura Mulvey have argued persuasively that women as represented in cinema are entrapped within the economy of male libidinal pleasure obtained in the dark world of fantasy of theater. The woman in the film *The Woman in the Dunes* suffers a dual entrapment; she is physically entrapped in the sand pits, and communicatively entrapped in the male gaze. And her plight serves to underline the mechanisms of scopophilia (the pleasure of looking) outlined by psychoanalytically-oriented film scholars. So what we find in the representation of the woman in the dunes in the film is the faithful adherence to the androcentric conventions of Western filmmaking. And once again, the built-in patriarchal biases in the novel helped the filmmaker immensely.

The relationship between the self and culture is another dimension that merits close analysis. Clearly, the distinction between society and culture is not an easy one to establish. Anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss who