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## Chōmei as a Reader: Discovering “Self” in the Writings of Yasutane

### Abstract

Yoshishige no Yasutane (931–997) and Kamo no Chōmei (1155–1216) both engaged in Buddhist self-writing on the path to rebirth in Pure Land. Chōmei followed the example set by Yasutane and allegedly even chose the sinograph ‘*tane*’ 胤 for his dharma-name Ren’in with the Chinese reading ‘*in*’. In the present article I will take a look at how Chōmei / Ren’in constructs his textual identity based on the image of Yasutane discovered in reading. His main goal was to mimetically follow the example set by the earlier generations of practitioners. I will argue that through forming karmic links (*kechien*) with outstanding writers one could connect with the literary space provided by a group of interlinked authors. Following Mikhail Epstein’s ideas I have called this kind of mimetic relationship between authors hyper-authorship. Hyper-authorship cannot be reduced to any ‘real’ person and exists in the shared space of virtual authorial identities that are discovered in reading. The values and expressions common to these authors did not belong to any single individual and were freely shared by a community of people who followed the same path.

*Life itself is a quotation.*

Jorge Luis Borges

### Chōmei’s Library

Over the centuries Kamo no Chōmei (1155–1216) as a writer has received a lot of attention. He has been praised as one of the outstanding masters of prose during the medieval era who efficiently used the intricate possibilities of Japanese-Chinese mixed style to express his ideas

about the impermanence of the world and the joys of secluded life in his most important work “An Account of My Hut” (*Hōjōki*, 1212). During the time he was working on this famous piece of self-writing, he also collected hagiographic tales of Buddhist practitioners who aspired towards awakening and rebirth in paradise. These tales finally found their way into the *setsuwa*-collection “Tales of Religious Awakening” (*Hosshinshū*), which is strongly influenced by the tradition of compiling canonical tales of ideal rebirths (*ōjō*) initiated by Yoshishige no Yasutane (931–997).

It is a well known fact that Chōmei deeply admired Yasutane, who renounced writing poetry as the transgression of “crazy words and ornate language” (*kyōgen-kigo*) and embraced Buddhist practice in preparation for ideal moment of death. In 986 Yasutane assumed the dharma-name Jakushin and dedicated himself to Buddhist practice. In 1204, more than two hundred years later, Chōmei similarly renounced his life as a court poet and became a Buddhist writer under the name of Ren’in 蓮胤. It has often been pointed out that the character ‘in’ 胤 in his name might be taken from Yasutane 保胤, although there is no conclusive evidence that this is the case. Although both ‘ren’ and ‘in’ are common characters used in names, it still tempting to think that there is a deeper connection between the names Ren’in and Yasutane than just coincidence.

Usually whenever we discuss two authors being interlinked in some intimate way, we tend to see the connection on the level of real historical persons or what Wayne C. Booth has called “flesh-and-blood persons (FBP)” (Booth 2005: 75). We end up discussing how the experiences of Yasutane as a concrete historical person moulded the life of another historical person – Kamo no Chōmei. Rarely does one consider the fact that what Chōmei encountered in reading Yasutane’s works such as “The Record of Those in Japan Born in Pure Land” (*Nihon ōjō gokurakuki*) or “The Record of the Pond Pavilion” (*Chiteiki*), was the implied author (IA), which is the effect of a certain ideal person created by the historical person’s writings. Wayne C. Booth has said:

In every corner of our lives, whenever we speak or write, we *imply a version of our character* [emphasis added by me] that we know is quite different from many other selves that are exhibited in our flesh-and-blood world. Sometimes the created versions of our selves are superior to the selves we live with day by day; sometimes they turn out to be lamentably inferior to the selves we present, or hope to present, on other occasions (Booth 2005: 77).

There is always a multiplicity of selves at work in any process of writing, and literature offers a space for experimenting with different possible perspectives. Paul Ricoeur has even called literature “a vast laboratory in which we experiment with estimations, evaluations and judgements of approval and condemnation” (Ricoeur 1992: 115). When authors like Yasutane and Chōmei engaged in first-person narration, they not only documented their historical reality as “flesh-and-blood persons”, but they wanted to impart to the reader a certain image of themselves as authors. The reader, in turn, would reconstruct the ideal version of their authorial identities based on their experience of reading the text. Therefore in reading we rarely encounter the historical person, but rather the image left behind by the writer. One may of course attempt to reconstruct the “flesh-and-blood person” based on the information found in the writings, but it will always be just an educated guess<sup>1</sup> and might be even very misleading when it comes to describing the motives of action of the real person.

What I want to attempt to unravel in the following is the process of reader’s reading reader’s of readers – Allik attempts to read Chōmei who is a reader of Yasutane who in turn reads different Chinese authors like Jiakai and Baijuyi. Each of these stages involves certain amount of distortion, since every author sees the other through their own “lenses”. This becomes especially evident in the places, where one author tries to incorporate the other into his own work through citation or adaptation of an earlier work. The present article in itself is an example of such a distortion, where a writer from a different era and completely different cultural background attempts to read a text belonging to the very specific cultural milieu of medieval Buddhist writings. But these distortions in turn reveal the inner structure of writings such as *Hōjōki* – how some qualities of a literature engage a reader in a certain way, giving birth to various readings. This in turn helps us to notice how literature itself works, how the image of author can be created based on reading a literary work and assigning meaning to the different parts of a text.

Chōmei as a reader, compiled his own textual self from a variety of sources and was therefore also very conscious of the fact that whatever he himself is writing is going to influence a subsequent generation of writ-

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<sup>1</sup> By concentrating on the implied author in this article, I do not want to downplay the importance of historical research. Any reliable biographical information about the author helps us to understand how the “flesh-and-blood person” and the implied author relate to each other. I only want to emphasise that one cannot be reduced to the other.

ers. He seemed to be conscious, that the text is inhabited by a reflection of himself – the implied author – whose existence is governed by the laws of literature. The future generations would never see his “true self”, but the image of it left behind in literature. It was this image that would also be used by the subsequent generation of hagiographers. These writers might engage in writing his life story largely based on the reading experience of his texts and use this as a main source of information. Therefore, one had to be very careful to “imply a version of one’s character”, as Booth said, through one’s self-writing which would engage the future readers and writers in a certain way. This would in turn lead to a satisfactory version of one’s life story, which would perpetuate a certain desirable image of an author.

What do I mean by saying this can be exemplified by looking at the passage where Chōmei describes his library. This is one of the main sources of information about his reading practices and the way written texts relate to his life in a secluded hut:

Toward the north end of the west wall, beyond a freestanding screen, there is a picture of Amida Buddha, with an image of Fugen alongside and a copy of Lotus Sutra in front. At the east end of the room, some dried bracken serves as a bed. South of the screen on the west side, a bamboo shelf suspended from the ceiling holds three leather-covered bamboo baskets, in which I keep excerpts from poetry collections and critical treatises, works on music, and religious tracts like *Collection of Essentials on Rebirth in the Pure Land* (McCullough 1990: 388).

This passage does not give us any hints about the way he reads different writings, but rather describes the position of some important texts in relation to other objects in the room. His copy of “Lotus Sutra” is placed in front of the image of Fugen, while Genshin’s *Ōjōyōshū* is placed in one of the bamboo baskets. The strict organisation of the outer space (the placement of furniture, writings and musical instruments) seems to reflect the economy of the inner space of the author. The strict rules he applies to the arrangement of objects in the room is in accordance with the ascetic practices he uses “to teach his mind” (see Miki 1995:43). Thus the objects in the room all support a certain type of “self” that would inhabit such a room. For any reader of *Hōjōki* they are not *real* objects (although the hut can be and has been physically reconstructed based on this description), but rather conceptual objects found in reading the text which allow a certain type of implied author to emerge. The well organised room that includes the essential library is clearly opposed to the troubles of the im-

permanent world, providing an ideal stable environment for self-development. In this kind of space one should be able to prepare for one's last moment of contemplation and be reborn in Amida's Pure Land.

As a modern reader of this text I see myself looking over the shoulder of Chōmei as he reads Genshin, Yasutane and other writers in preparation for death. I cannot help but think that the author who inhabits this small hut I have discovered in his writings would have most happily agreed with Jorge Luis Borges, who saw Paradise as a kind of library. This library appears as an ideal organisation of space, where different selves are interlinked through their writings. But this somewhat idealised image of the library also reminds us that we should not read such passages uncritically, as if they represented an unadulterated historical truth. This is an imaginary library that is situated in the space of literature which reflects other such libraries discovered in reading one's predecessors. The particular library Chōmei had in mind when writing about his own arrangement of scrolls was probably Yoshishige no Yasutane's library described in "Record of the Pond Pavillion":

I enter the western hall, contemplate Buddha Amida, and recite Lotus Sutra. After eating I enter the eastern hall, open my scrolls and meet the wise men of past. Emperor Wen of the Han dynasty is a ruler from another age, who kept expenses low and let his people be at ease. Bai Juyi is a teacher from another age, who excelled in poetry and relied on Buddha-dharma. The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove are friends from another age, **who kept their bodies in the sun [court] but their minds in the shade.** [emphasis added] I meet a wise ruler, a wise teacher and wise friends (Yanase 2008: 125).

We will return to the underlined part of this passage later, but suffice it to say now, that Yasutane imagines the various authors he encounters through the writings in his library as possibly even more real than some of the actual people he met during his everyday activities in the Heian court. In his understanding, reading allows one to transcend the limits of time and space and to connect with likeable and wise people from different ages. Yet these people, who he encountered while reading the characters written on scrolls, should not be confused with real historical persons. Clearly Yasutane describes here various implied authors who serve as "teachers" for the reading self. In other words Yasutane models his literary self after various "selves" discovered in reading. Yasutane (FPB) might have also read some other books, which were not so serious in nature or perhaps he even felt bored with reading altogether on some days. But Yas-

utane as an implied author confines himself to deliberate and respectable selection, which addresses the reader in a very specific way.

Let's add to this discussion yet another personal library, as described by Yasutane's "wise teacher", Bai Juyi. Both Yasutane and Chōmei were influenced by the description of his humble abode in the "Record of the Thatched Hut on Mount Lu". The short passage does not mention any particular names or titles of writings, but informs us about restricting the number of scrolls to a minimum, which was also an important theme taken up by Chōmei. Bai Juyi writes:

I have used slabs of stone for paving and stairs, sheets of paper to cover the windows; and the bamboo blinds and hemp curtains are of a similar nature. Inside the hall are four wooden couches, two plain screens, one lacquered *ch'in*, and some Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist books, two of each kind (Yanase 2008: 117, Watson 2002: 9).

The different libraries of Chōmei, Yasutane and Bai Juyi mirror each other and seem to exist in a very similar emotional space. Clearly, Chōmei's library found in *Hōjōki* is constructed based on his reading of Yasutane and Bai Juyi and designed to give a similar impression of the pleasures of secluded life. There is one big difference, however, which one cannot leave unnoticed. Both Yasutane and Baijuyi mention Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist books, while Chōmei (IA) restricts himself to Buddhism only. Although in other parts of *Hōjōki* the influence of Daoism and Confucianism can be seen, the writings belonging to these traditions are not mentioned as centrepieces of his library. Could these texts have also been in Chōmei's (FBP) actual library and omitted only in the description of it?

Indeed, what do we know about Chōmei's actual library? Could it have been different from the image presented by his self-writing? There are some differences of describing the books in different manuscripts (alternate versions of manuscript do not mention Lotus Sutra, see Yanase 2008: 100), but overall the impression we get from the variants of the text is the same: his collection is very minimalistic and all the scrolls fit into three baskets on a small shelf. One naturally becomes very curious reading the phrase "*Ōjō yōshu* and other writings like it" (*Ōjō yōshu no gotoki shōmotsu*) and wonders what might have been the other texts. Yamada Shōzen's extensive research on the citations found in *Hosshinshū* reveals that Chōmei relied on a wide array of sources in addition to the above-mentioned texts. These include *Hōbutsushū*, *Ōjō-shūin*, *Ōjō-kōshiki*, *Hōwa-hyakuwa* and many others (Yamada 2013: 37). Some of these might

have been cited by memory, but in many cases the source text must have been consulted, which has led Yamada to conclude that Kamo no Chōmei must have had access to a larger library than the one he described above. He suggests that Chōmei may have relied upon the collection of writings in Hōkaiji temple, since it was situated near his hermitage in the Hino mountains.

These facts clearly show that Chōmei as a “flesh-and-blood person” wanted to give readers a certain impression of his ideal library, which belonged to the implied author – one of the ideal selves of Chōmei. Instead of telling the reader about texts scattered on the floor and numerous trips to Hōkaiji to check some sources, he edits out this information to bolster the sense of a serene self that appears in his writings. This brings the image of the author closer to the model of the person striving for good rebirth (*ōjōnin*). It was this pattern that Chōmei moulded himself after in his old age after he had left behind his life as a court poet and devoted himself to Buddhist practices under the dharma-name Ren’in.

## Model of Self Presented by Jakushin

From the example of Chōmei library above we can see that the authors are intimately interconnected through imaginary spaces found in reading literature. Including a certain type of description in one’s own writings helped to generate a certain type of self (implied author), which would enhance the image of the author. These selves do not belong to any physical person – they are freely available to those willing to alter and develop their self in the “vast laboratory” of literature mentioned by Paul Ricoeur.

When we look at how the canon of Buddhist stories of rebirth was formed, we see a tendency to mimetically follow the models established by one’s predecessors<sup>2</sup>. The self was not something that belonged to an

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<sup>2</sup> Following a particular model in one’s own life has a very long tradition in Europe, too. Foucault points out that for the ancient Greeks writing was seen as a practice through which one transformed accepted discourses into principles of action. In Greece personal notebooks, called *hupomnēmata*, had a function of building the self through the process of rewriting the models presented by others: “[...] the intent is not to pursue the unspeakable, nor to reveal the hidden, nor to say the unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for the purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self” (Foucault 1997: 211). A similar idea of moulding oneself after a certain model was also widespread in the medieval Christian culture of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

individual, rather it was something shared by people who engaged in Buddhist practice. This concept of self was facilitated by the idea that karmic links (*kechien*) existed between people throughout their various rebirths. Literature also helped to connect people, since it was widely believed that karmic links could be created by reading the story about a person who achieved good rebirth (*ōjōnin*). Thus one did not have to be physically present during the moment of good rebirth in order to create a karmic connection, but could do so through experiencing the tale describing the event. This gave life writing a very specific role as the mediator of the merits accumulated over the course of one's life. A lot of attention has been given to the protagonists of these stories of exemplary lives and deaths, but rarely do we think about the people who collected and compiled these stories into what is now seen as the canon of Buddhist rebirth stories. By compiling these powerful stories, the writers often became the actors in subsequent tales themselves. This certainly happened to Yoshishige no Yasutane, whose story is transmitted in many different collections including Kamo no Chōmei's *Hosshinshū* we are going to take a look at shortly.

Following the narrative model of recounting the stories of extraordinary monks and nuns presented in Jiakai's "Treatise on Pure Land" (*Jingtulun*) Yasutane introduced a new genre to Japanese Buddhist literature, which was not only descriptive, but was also considered to be prescriptive for the followers of the Tendai branch of Pure Land Buddhism. His compilation "The Record of those in Japan born in Pure Land" introduced the stories of "over 40 different people" in Japan who had achieved good rebirth. These stories provided life stories, which serve as models for those who aspire to be reborn in the Pure Land. It was believed that by conforming to this model one could reach the true self which was devoid of any delusion and achieve good rebirth. There is no doubt that the religious impact of this book was enormous, but we also have to take into account the influence on Japanese life writing. This book introduced the basic model of the hagiographic tale, as well as the self-reflective narrative found in the preface of the collection.

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As Carolyn Walker Bynum points out, the "twelfth-century religion did not emphasise the individual personality at the expense of corporate awareness" (Bynum 1982: 85). There was a great concern with how "roles are defined and evaluated, how behaviour is conformed to the models" (Bynum 1982: 85). Medieval writers therefore usually modelled and expressed themselves based on established types instead of relying on their "individual" views.



While compiling this book Yasutane (FPB) might have been conscious of the fact, that his own example as a practitioner of Pure Land Buddhism and as a compiler of *ōjōden* tales could influence subsequent generations of readers and writers. The preface, written in first person mode, presents the ideal image of the follower of these teachings:

Since an early age I have contemplated Amida Buddha and after becoming over 40-years old my motivation for it grew still stronger. I continued intoning the Name with my mouth and visualising the ominous signs of Buddha in my mind. Walking, standing, sitting or lying down – every single moment I did not forget practicing and kept on going disregarding any difficulties. I did not fail to venerate any statue of Amida Buddha or the picture of Pure Land found in temples, halls, pagodas or mausoleums. I did not fail to form a karmic bond (*kechien*) with any person aspiring for [good] rebirth whether monk or layperson, man or woman. I did not fail to research any sutras, treatises and commentaries, which expound the merits of practice and explain its consequences (Inoue and Ōsone 1974: 2).

As a compiler, Yasutane had to remain in the background in order to give the stage to the *ōjōnin*, who are the protagonists of these stories. Thus all the stories in the collection are presented through the gaze of the omniscient narrator, and the author never reveals his presence in the stories. But the preface, written in the first person, beginning with the masculine first person pronoun "I" establishes what Philippe Lejeune calls the autobiographical pact: anything said from this point forward is the reflection of the author himself. The first person pronoun "I" inside the text truly refers to the historical person Yoshishige no Yasutane. But this referentiality does not mean that the author's statements should be read as belonging to the "flesh-and-blood person". The Yasutane we encounter in reading this passage is still the implied author – a certain idealised conceptual person who presents a model for the future generations of compilers to follow. It is designed to impart a certain image of the self, which could be acquired by those who wanted to follow a similar path of self-development.

Ōe no Masafusa (1041–1111), the compiler of "Further Tales of Rebirth in Our Country" (*Zoku honchō ōjōden*), appears to be one of the diligent readers of Yasutane's collection, as well as an admirer of the image of the "self" transmitted by this text. He provides his reasons for the new collection of tales: "I have searched high and low fields for stories and included those left out from the earlier records in addition to those which have happened later" (Inoue and Ōsone 1974: 223). One of the most important additions to the new collection is the tale of Yasutane himself, which

appears under number 32. This hagiographical tale briefly summarises Yasutane's achievements in court and mentions how he surpassed his fellow university students. He appears as a person of outstanding knowledge who was awarded a position in the Office of Letters (*goshodokoro*) while still a student. This makes the impact of Yasutane turning to the practice of *nenbutsu* under the dharma-name Jakushin even stronger.

In the following passage we can observe how the preface of *Gokurakuki* is quoted in order to give the reader important information. Masafusa includes additional commentary written in small characters (see the sentence in italics), which establishes a reliable connection with the quoted source text:

Since an early age he wished for the Land of Utmost Bliss in his heart (*this wish can be seen in the preface to the Stories of Japanese Rebirths*), and as soon as his son had come of age he decided during the 2nd year of Kanna (986) to enter the Path of Buddha (*dharma-name: Jakushin* 寂心).

He travelled all over the country and organised various Buddhist events. Whenever he found a statue of Buddha or a scroll of sutras, he would never pass them without stopping and paying respect to them. He venerated them formally, like he would in the case of rulers in the court. Although he mounted strong oxen and sturdy horses, he always shed tears and was sad because of it. His compassion was extended to all beasts and creatures.

He passed away during the 3rd year of Chōtoku (998) in Nyoirinji temple. A certain person told about his dream: "To benefit all beings he [Yasutane] shall return from the Pure Land and enter this *sahā* world once again". Through this it was known how deep his realisation truly was (Inoue and Ōsone 1974: 247).

Notably this story uses material from different sources to strengthen the image of the author of *Gokurakuki* as an extremely compassionate being. Since the characters in his dharma-name refer to his identity as a person with a "sad heart", the copious amounts of tears he sheds in the story serve to strengthen the idea that his true nature is somehow embedded in his very name. The tendency to lament and cry loudly becomes the most prominent feature of the stories about him in the *setsuwa* collections such as *Uji shūi monogatari* (2: 140) and *Konjaku monogatari* (19: 3). He is filled with deep sadness for any being who would be deprived of rebirth in the Pure Land, and he is ready to sacrifice everything he has in order to avoid this situation. It is interesting how without quoting the actual words of Jakushin the affective connection with Jakushin's true state of mind is created. Just mentioning his "heart" (*kokoro*) as it "can be seen in the preface to the Stories of Japanese Rebirths" is enough to evoke the image of

the author which enables the readers and listeners of the tale to intimately bond with the initiator of the *ōjōden* genre.

Kamo no Chōmei's account of Jakushin, found in *Hosshinshū*, starts out by informing us that Jakushin was already longing for the Buddha's way in his heart while serving at the court. This double identity as court scribe and one who aspires towards a good rebirth becomes a central core of this account. According to Chōmei, the protagonist had a quality "to be deeply moved by things" (*koto ni furete awaremi fukaku nan arikeru*, Miki 1995: 94). This remark once again relies on the image of the author invoked by the dharma-name Jakushin meaning "sad heart" – his deep sadness is yet again amplified in the Chōmei's version of the tale.

Chōmei further elaborates on Jakushin's compassion towards animals, which is mentioned in Masafusa's account and also in the versions included in *Uji shūi monogatari* and *Konjaku monogatari shū*. Chōmei tells us that a simple trip, which would normally take only few hours for any normal traveller, would inevitably transform into a whole day long adventure for Jakushin. He would get off the horse every time he saw a temple, hall or even a tombstone (*sotoba*) to formally venerate the holy places (again Yasutane's foreword for *Gokurakuki* is used). Whenever there was green grass, he would let the horse wander freely about transporting the rider here and there while the animal ate to its heart content. When the stable boy admonished the horse for doing this and beat him violently, Jakushin started to cry and shouted: "Doesn't the fact that this animal should not hesitate to come so close to us compared to all other beasts mean that there is deep karmic consequence from previous lives at work here? This might have been my mother or father in the past. What great evil has led to such a situation, how sad!" (Miki 1995: 96). While he lamented and raised a ruckus over the issue the stable boy had nothing to say for his defence and left in silence.

Until this juncture the storyline more or less follows the earlier versions of this story although Chōmei does add his own literary flavour to the tale imagining the dialogue between characters. Right after the above-cited scene he intervenes as a visible narrator who adds a personal comment from his own perspective. He quotes Yoshishige no Yasutane's "The Record of the Pond Pavilion". Because his nature was like this, he wrote in *Chiteiki*: "The body is in the sun [court], but the heart is in the shade" (Miki 1995: 96). Let us take a closer look at what is happening in this quote. Quoting another author is never a simple matter of embedding the original discourse into one's writing. As Meir Sternberg reminds us):

“What is cited in the subject’s name is one thing; what the subject originally said or thought is another” (Sternberg 1982: 108). That is to say, the inset (quote) is always influenced by the frame (the context of the quotation), and whenever quoting is involved there appear “manifold shifts, of not reversals, of the original meaning and significance” (Sternberg 1982: 108). In the above case these shifts are clearly visible, and we can observe how the new frame offered by Chōmei’s tale influences the meaning and significance of the cited text.

First of all this passage seems to present a case of misquoting. If we look at the original text in the Yasutane’s preface (see underlined sentence p.2) we see that the words “the bodies are in the sun [court]; the hearts are in the shade” (以身在朝、志在隱也) are used to describe the Seven Sages of Bamboo Grove – a group of “good friends” Yasutane admired. Of course Yasutane subscribed to their ideas, but he did not claim these words to describe his own situation. However, in Chōmei’s version, the quote is clearly connected with the first-person perspective of Yasutane himself. The leader is led to believe that he wrote these words in *Chiteiki*, because “that’s what his mind (*kokoro*) was like” (Sternberg 1982: 108). The words are no longer used to describe the detached nature of Chinese poets, but to reveal the innermost thoughts of Yasutane himself. Secondly, we can clearly detect an ideological shift from the classical Chinese thought to Buddhism. In *Chiteiki* Yasutane adheres to three teachings – Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. But since Chōmei is writing a collection of Buddhist tales he omits the references to these other teachings and adheres to the image of Jakushin as a Buddhist writer. Thus the meaning of the word “shade” in the citation also appears to refer to taking refuge in Buddha-dharma and staying away from the worldly influence’s through Buddhist practices such as “contemplating Amida” and “reciting Lotus Sutra”, both of which are mentioned in *Chiteiki*.

In *Chiteiki* Yasutane leaves us with the image of the Court Scribe who lives like the layman Vimalakīrti – he can remain calm and collected even while participating in the activities of the court. He does not feel the urgent need for complete seclusion in the mountains or some remote area:

Though as master of house I hold office at the foot of the pillar, in my heart it’s as though I dwell among the mountains [...]. I have no wish to bend my knee and crook my back in efforts to win favor with great lords and high officials, but neither do I wish to shun the words and faces of others and bury myself away in some remote mountain or dark valley (Watson 2002: 32).

In his story Chōmei purifies the image of Jakushin from all of the elements that might distract the reader from imagining him first and foremost as a Buddhist writer. To do that he retrospectively revises the image of Yasutane / Jakushin to better conform to this ideal. In *Hosshinshū* he wants to acknowledge him as a writer who belongs to the *ōjōden* tradition, which entails ignoring the aspects of *Chiteiki*, where Yasutane talks about staying in the court and following the Vimalakīrtean ideal of overcoming the duality of here and there – city and mountains.

This omission is ultimately necessary, because the implied author found in reading the preface of *Gokurakuki* does not ideally overlap with the implied author found in reading *Chiteiki*. Thus one ends up concentrating on one of these images and editing the text from the selected perspective. This process, in turn, displays how literature, even when it uses factual material and first-person autobiographical sources, always conforms to the most important rule – the story itself must give a clear and concise image of the protagonist and help the reader to identify with the events of the tale. Chōmei as a reader and writer is not so much interested in historical truth and the “flesh-and-blood person” as he is interested in the image of the author that is created by the text. Undergirding this tendency is the notion that author’s image is used as model for practitioners and literature should use all means necessary to transmit it efficiently.

### **Chōmei speaking as Yasutane: Hyper-authorship in *Hōjōki***

We saw earlier that after becoming a recluse, Chōmei modelled himself after two implied authors – *literati* Yasutane and compassionate practitioner Jakushin. The connection with Yasutane / Jakushin might have even been deep enough for him to have used one of the sinographs in Yasutane’s name to build his new identity. If this were the case, his dharma-name itself becomes a certain type of quote – an attempt to overtake the identity of the other – which testifies to the deep affinity he felt with his predecessor. This affinity can certainly be seen in *Hōjōki* which is modelled after the example of *Chiteiki*. The deep connection between these texts can be seen both in the structure of the work, as well as in the different ways the words of Yasutane are embedded into the work. The most notable case of adapting *Chiteiki*’s words in *Hōjōki* is presented in the following passage, which, in Yasutane’s version, goes:

Then there are humble folk who live in the shadow of some powerful family: their roof is broken but they don't dare thatch it, their wall collapses but they don't dare build it up again; happy they can't open their mouths and give a loud laugh; grieving, they can't lift up their voices and wail; coming and going always in fear, hearts and minds never at rest, they're like little sparrows in the presence of hawks and falcons (Watson 2002: 27).

Renin rewrites this passage in the following way (I'm using Watson's translation in both cases here in order to highlight the similarities of style):

If a person of insignificant social standing lives by the gate of some great and influential family, in times of profoundest happiness he does not venture to rejoice too openly, and when sorrows oppress him, he cannot lift up his voice and wail. Never at ease in his comings and goings, timid and fearful each waking moment, he is like a sparrow drawing near to the falcon's nest (Watson 2002: 62).

What is interesting here (besides the fact that Chōmei does not mention his sources – a point we will discuss later) is how once again the framing discourse changes the nature of the narrative. In the first case Yasutane is worried about the poor planning of the city, which does not make best use of the space available. He is annoyed, that the eastern sector of the capital has too big a population and “towering mansions are lined up gate by gate [...] [while] little huts have only a wall between them eaves touching” (Watson 2002: 27). Reading this we get a sense that the author is a man who worries how to effectively organise the city building certain types of buildings in designated areas and leaving enough space for them to truly thrive. Whereas in Chōmei's case, the rewritten text is framed differently to express difficulties of life in this world. He connects this passage to the general theme of *Hōjōki*, which is the impermanence of built environment and hardships people encounter in this world. The empirical description given by Yasutane becomes something that exemplifies the roots of human suffering and outlines the reason why one should leave the capital behind. Yasutane writes in order to improve the capital, but Chōmei writes to escape the capital – that is, to prove that such a place is not suitable for living. Yasutane speaks about the real issues of the capital, whereas for Chōmei description of the capital is a metaphor for the inequality inherent in life. Thus again the two authors who emerge from reading the two accounts use the same words, but do not say the same thing.

The words in the passages are “extremely similar” (Miki 1995: 27), but they transmit a slightly different meaning. As Yamada Shōzen has said, this is what Chōmei does – he rearranges the words of others to make them

look like his own writing and does not mention where he takes his material from (Yamada 2013: 37). This kind of appropriation of other's writings can be seen both in *Hōjōki* and *Hosshinshū*. When we look at this practice from the modern perspective, it certainly seems to lessen the value of his writings as an original author, since we can claim this to be plagiarism. Even in medieval context quoting without mentioning the source is only done when one can be certain that the original text is well remembered by the readers. For example, in Japanese poetry it was perfectly acceptable to borrow a few lines from one *waka* and a few lines from another *waka*, adding only a few original words of lines into one's text, but in the case of prose the rules appear to have been slightly stricter. However, the point I am making here about authorships suggests that there is a way to approach this issue without resorting to the rhetoric of "original" and "copy".

Of course, looking closely at these practices of quoting and adaptation makes it increasingly difficult to praise the author for his beautiful sentences, as has been the tradition over the centuries in Japan. But even if since the words and sentences themselves are indeed taken from someone else, I think there is no malicious intent in appropriating other peoples work through the process of rewriting. In fact, relying upon other sources in this way could even be seen as a form of writing wherein the "self" is striving to become completely "other". It could be seen as a form of self-writing where one reuses sentences from other sources as one's own, in order to reimagine himself according to a chosen model. As such, when one truly embodies the model, one can speak with the words of the model.

This notion of writing has always been the case in the literary space of Mahayana sutras, where authors can acquire the position of the Buddha and expound dharma from the Buddha's perspective. Indeed, in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of "Lotus Sutra", called "Preachers of Dharma", it is said that the only way to attain the ability to preach dharma is to become one with Buddha by wearing his robe and sitting in his seat:

Medicine King, if there are good men and good women, who after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, wish to expound his Lotus Sutra for the four kinds of believers, how should they expound it? These good men and good women should enter the Thus Come One's room, put on the Thus Come One's robe, sit in the Thus Come One's seat, and then for the sake of the four kinds of believers broadly expound this Sutra (Watson 1993:166).

Putting on the Buddha's robe was seen as an act of embodying the Buddha, which enabled one to speak from the authorial position of the Buddha. Thus



authorship in such a space of literature becomes a network of different authors expressing the voice of one particular “self” belonging to Buddha. Mikhail Epstein has used the term “hyper-authorship” to describe a similar phenomenon in the modern age of writers writing similar texts. He says:

Hyper-authorship is a paradigmatic variety of authors working within the confines of one (allegedly one) human entity. A hyper-author relates to an author as a hypertext relates to a text. Hypertext is dispersed among numerous virtual spaces that can be entered in any order, escaping any linear (temporal or causal) coherence. Hyper-authorship is dispersed among several virtual personalities that cannot be reduced to a single “real” personality (Epstein 2000).

To restate this in Booth’s terminology, there exists an interlinked space of implied authors (virtual personalities) that cannot be reduced to any single “flesh-and-blood person”. These virtual personalities seem to be available to anyone who starts writing about a certain type of experience. And, importantly, the relationship between them is not historical (in other words the earlier text is not seen as the original with the latter representing the copy). From this point of view it is possible to rewrite *Chiteiki* or *Hōjōki* even today without quoting anything directly, but using all the same words and sentences in the same order, on condition that the author has perfectly embodied the virtual author and is able to “wear his robe” and “sit in his seat”, thus acquiring the new “self” for expressing one’s ideas.

Let us take a look at one more example from *Hōjōki*. Chōmei talks about how he has already lived in the hermitage for five years, and during that time many people he knew in the capital have died. Although no first person pronouns are used in this part of the text, the account is nonetheless very intimate, as it unfolds using the suffix for personal recollection *-ki*, which is employed when one is talking about actual experiences. Therefore the truths he arrives at seem to be very individual and to stem from his personal experience. He goes on to say that he prizes above all the opportunity to know oneself, which, we should note, sounds like a famous Greek maxim *gnothi seauton* (“Know thyself!”). McCullough’s translation stresses this similarity very nicely: “Knowing myself and knowing the world, I harbour no ambitions and pursue no material objectives. Quietude is what I desire; the absence of worries is what makes me happy” (McCullough 1990: 391, Yanase 2008: 214).

Now it would be tempting to think that this process of “knowing myself” refers to the Chōmei (FBP) who has finally arrived at some deeper understanding. In particular, the Greek connotations would suggest to the



Western reader like myself that author has arrived at his unique identity. But in the light of the previous discussion, I feel that this "self" belongs in fact to all those who have arrived at a similar authorial position. It is a shared "self" presented by the virtual personality of the one who would speak about such a matter. This virtual personality enables one to construct a certain type of implied author, who can transmit ideas about the value of reclusion for understanding one's true nature. This same authorial position was available for Bai Juyi, Yasutane and many others who "put on the robes" of detachment and distanced themselves from mundane matters. In this shared space it is only natural then, that one can seamlessly include others' words into one's own writing. From this position, it becomes completely understandable that even in passage where Chōmei talks about understanding oneself, he uses the words of his "good friend" found in reading *Chiteiki* when talks about choosing friends. Chōmei writes: "Friends esteem wealth and look favours; they do not necessarily value sincere friendship or probity. I prefer to make friends of music and nature" (McCullough 1990: 391). Yasutane writes: "If in being a friend one thinks only of power and profit and cares nothing about the frank exchange of opinions, it would be better if we had no friends. So I close my gate, shut my door, and hum poems and sing songs by myself" (Watson 2002: 33-34). Yet again Chōmei does not quote his source, because there is no need for it – these claims do not belong to any person. There is no "original". Bai Juyi has said, that a "place with a good view does not have an owner" (Kawaguchi and Shida 1965: 175). This is the place where Chōmei stands when he uses the words of his predecessors. The perspective of the acquired textual "self" has no owner – it is a way of looking at world that belongs to anyone who embodies the ideals of a simple life.

## Conclusion: Towards Multiple Selves of Chōmei

In talking about the "self" in autobiographical writings such as *Hōjōki* we should take into account the possibility that the speaking self has been heavily influenced by the specific models from whose perspective one speaks. The vast array of different sources found in Chōmei's writings constitute a collage of different ideas, which all facilitate the emergence of certain type of textual "self". Chōmei as a flesh-and-blood person was striving towards awakening and was involved in everyday Buddhist practices

to become a true *ōjōnin*. He followed the model of his predecessors, intoning *namu-amida-butsu* and reciting the Lotus Sutra. Through this practice he existed in the space of karmically interlinked historical persons. Chōmei as an author, on the other hand, also follows particular models in writing by adopting the positions of certain speaking “selves”, which helped him to easily express his ideas. Writing in such a way constitutes a practice of “teaching one’s heart”, by virtually adopting the position of the other one could overcome the bounds of one’s limited self. Through practice of writing the implied author Chōmei exists in the space of shared virtual identities that facilitate certain types of discourse.

One of the subsequent tasks for reading and interpreting the works of Kamo no Chōmei lies in making a clear distinction between these two modes of existence of the author. The stories and facts concerning the identity of the singular historical person should not overshadow the multiplicity of selves found in reading his works. Moreover, the shared identities discovered in the space of literature should not be reduced to the perspective of one unique historical person. This process of accepting the somewhat fictional nature of the autobiographical self is, of course, difficult and bound to encounter some criticism, particularly from the historians, who would like to use *Hōjōki* as one of the central sources concerning the “truth” about Kamo no Chōmei’s life. However, literature does not appear to be a reliable source for constructing these types of historical narratives. Clearly, Chōmei is what Boris Tomashevsky has called “the writer with biography” – somebody whose facts of life form a supplement, but only a supplement, for making sense of his works. Tomashevsky points out that these types of writers often start to live by the rules of literature – their lives are modelled after their work and not vice versa. In that sense, the only Chōmei we truly encounter and build a connection (maybe even a karmic link) with is the implied author Chōmei, who vastly overshadows the flesh-and-blood person of whom we continue to know so little.

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