

When the Dead Speaks: Remembering Guilt in Miyoko Matsutani's *Secrets of the Attic*

Japanese children grow up reading the picture books about the tragedy of the Second World War, particularly of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which reinforce the popular narrative of the Japanese as victims of the war. Japanese elementary school *kokugo* (reading and writing class) textbooks, too, contain previously published stories about the Japanese children's experience of war by some of the most prominent authors of children's literature in Japan. While these stories are useful resources for peace education, such one-sided emphasis on the Japanese people's suffering ignores the atrocities that the Japanese army committed against other Asian countries during the war, and runs the risk of perpetuating ignorance and indifference, if not narrow-minded self-righteous nationalism.

Miyoko Matsutani's (1926-2015) *Yaneurabeya no Himitsu* (*The Secrets of the Attic*, 1988) is one of the few children's literature that addresses Japan's wrongdoings as a perpetrator of the war. It is a juvenile novel about a 13-year-old girl who learns that her late grandfather was a member of "Unit 731," a secret Japanese army unit that conducted lethal human experiments on thousands of men, women, and children in northeast China and developed chemical and biological weapons during 1935 to 1945. The book is the fourth in Naoki and Yuko series. The first book in the series, *Futari no Iida* (*Two Little Girls Called Iida*, 1969) is, in fact, about the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. Matsutani, too, was not yet wring about Japan as a war perpetrator in this book.

This paper examines how Matsutani's perspectives on the past have allowed her to begin the series with the story of a Japanese victim of the war and proceed with the story of Japanese perpetrators of the war. While Matsutani's Naoki and Yuko series deals with social and political issues, she is also known for her retellings of the folktales and use of folklore in her books. I will explore Matsutani's use of the voice of the dead in Naoki and Yuko series to connect Matsutani's two hats--war and folktales-- with death as their common theme. (342 words)