

John Dower. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. New York: W.W.Norton&Co. 1999.

{Dower describes *Kike -- wadatsumi no koe* (*Listen -- Voices from the Deep*), a 1949 compilation of letters written at the end of the war by students (soldiers) who then died. The preface to the 1949 publication was written by Odagiri Hideo. Dower identifies three major historical contexts for the works: the war itself; the Tokyo War Crimes Trials; and the emerging Cold War. Dower claims that these and other works reframed the historical memory of the war by portraying the Japanese people as victims of Japan's leadership and asserting that the top priority of the Japanese people should be to avoid future wars.}

...“The blood that was shed,” [Odagiri's] appeal continued, “can never be atoned for except by ensuring that such blood is never shed again.” By this date, there could be little doubt that it was primarily the Americans who the compilers had in mind when they spoke of “those who one again plot war.” Essentially, the pure and noble dead were being recruited anew to stand against America.

Other writings that appeared around the time the Tokyo trial ended reinforced such reconstructions of the war's meaning. One of the most famous of these was Takeyama Michio's *Harp of Burma* (*Biruma no Tategoto*), an enormously popular novel (soon made, like *Listen -- Voices from the Deep*, into a movie). Takeyama attempted to do through fiction what Tanabe Hajime had ventured through philosophy: to convey the meaning of the war -- the themes of suffering, guilt, and atonement in particular -- by way of Buddhism. The book's protagonist, a former soldier named Mizushima Yasuhiko, became the great fictive consoler of the souls of the country's war dead. His response to the horrors he witnessed in the final, hopeless stages of the war in Burma was to refuse repatriation and become a priest, wandering the jungles to search out and bury the remains of soldiers who had starved to death or been annihilated in combat...

Tormented by the question, so central to Buddhism, of why there is so much suffering and misery in the world, Mizushima concludes that humans will never understand perfectly. Still, Japan had brought its recent suffering upon itself.

Our country waged war, was defeated, and now suffers. That is because our desires got out of hand. It is because we were conceited and forgot what is most important in being human. Because the civilization we held up was extremely shallow in some respects.

These are human problems, not just Japan's alone, Mizushima observes. For himself, he intends to devote his life to studying and thinking carefully about such matters, to serving others and trying to act as one who can bring salvation. (from Dower, p502-503. Quote is from Takeyama, p??)

Hayden White. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1978. {To understand this, we can think of a *trope* as a figure of speech or, more generally, figurative language, used to describe something. *Tropics*, then, is the study of how figurative speech is deployed to formulate our understanding of things, whether they relate to science, history, or human behavior. White essentially claims that we can only understand new things by making reference to the standard and shopworn language of *preexisting* discourse, and that our attempts to describe the not-yet-familiar always occur as a *dialectical* struggle between the controllable (but misleading) uses of familiar language and the overly chaotic realities of what we are trying to describe.}

When we seek to make sense of such problematical topics as human nature, culture, society, and history, we never say precisely what we wish to say or mean precisely what we say. Our discourse always tends to slip away from our data towards the structures of consciousness with which we are trying to grasp them; or, what amounts to the same thing, the data always resist the coherency of the image which we are trying to fashion of them. Moreover, in topics such as these, there are always legitimate grounds for differences of opinion as to *what* they are, *how* they should be spoken about, and the *kinds* of knowledge we can have of them.

All genuine discourse takes account of these differences of opinion in the suggestion of doubt as to its own authority which it systematically displays on its very surface. This is especially the case when it is a matter of trying to *mark out* what appears to be a new area of human experience for preliminary analysis, *define* its contours, *identify* the elements in its field, and *discern* the kinds of relationships that obtain among them. It is here that discourse itself must establish the adequacy of the language used in analyzing the field to the objects that appear to occupy it. And discourse effects this adequation by a *prefigurative* move that is more tropical than logical.

The essays in this collection deal one way or another with the tropical element in all discourse, whether of the realistic or the more imaginative kind. This element is, I believe, inextinguishable from discourse in the human sciences, however realistic they may aspire to be. Tropic is the shadow from which all realistic discourse tries to flee. This flight, however, is futile; for tropics is the process by which all discourse *constitutes* the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyze objectively.