

Wordplay in Yoko Tawada's *Überseetzungen*

Gordon Gamlin

Kobe University, Japan (Faculty of Letters)

Yoko Tawada who lives and works in Berlin, Germany, is a unique figure in the German literary landscape who writes both in Japanese and in German as a poet, novelist, playwright, and essayist. These days, German readers are well familiar with the wordplay in Yoko Tawada's works and her astutely highlighted dilemmas of postindustrial globalization and its *Zeitgeist*. Her works combine early Japanese folklore, German philology, and travel observations in complex and often self-reflexive ways to tell of intercultural being. In many of her writings, Germany's geography and the plots set in it are both curiously removed as well as part of the German language. In other words, a playful linguistic creativity or even a kind of poetic structural ingenuity lets images appear oddly detached from the language in which they are originally written. Polyglot, often Japanese, references, metaphors, and narratives that fracture and refract German semantics like a prism further strengthen this effect. The result is a liberating perspective with truly original images of life in Germany and elsewhere that are also surprisingly close to observable verisimilitude. Throughout, her structural devices help to raise intercultural sensibilities as one frame of reference illuminates or comments on the other and vice versa. Tawada's texts show us that intercultural competence within the literary realm can be represented through wordplay and its meaningfully translated and transformed images. Associative texts and playful game logic is at work in Tawada's *Überseetzungen* (2002), for example, in which there is talk about sole (*über Seezungen*) as well as translations (*Übersetzungen*). Wordplay in all its variations undoes definitions and lends the writing coherence in often unexpected and entertaining ways.