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Digital Modernisms

Critically analyzing Akiko Yosano through the lens of New Historicism offers new perspectives into the anecdotal poems and stories she created. New Historicism itself has been criticized for simply locating power differentials and allocating those differences to theories, concepts, and discourses rather than blaming concrete and tangible bodies where power is reserved such as “people, institutions, or even ideas” (Harold Aram Veenser 4) as Harold Aram Veenser, author of “Re-Membering a Deformed Past: (New) New Historicism” states. As Veenser suggests, New Historicism looks to deconstruct and piece back together what once was in order to determine what will be. This concept is notably mentioned in Stephen Greenblatt’s *Practicing New Historicism* when he mentions “outlandish and irregular ones [anecdotes] held out the best hope for preserving the radical strangeness of the past” (Gallagher, Greenblatt 51) in the same way that Akiko Yosano introduced “outlandish” poems that examined erotic femininity and criticized war.

Yosano’s “O My Brother, You Must Not Die” (otherwise known/referenced as “Thou Shalt Not Die”) called for accountability and clarification from an Emperor who asked citizens to give their lives while suggesting that he “Exposeth not to jeopardy of war” (Line 11). In the two stanza poem, Yosano compared parental figures to the figureheads of the state alongside acts of violence to evoke an emotional response from her readers. She was successful, as the emotional response resulted in the poem being turned into an anti-war song that was sung during the war itself. Therefore, Akiko Yosano was actively engaged with being revolutionary in her work. This poem in particular, shifted the perspective on war and catapulted Yosano’s career in being a hypercritical author against the state.

As Paul Fry examines in his lecture on New Historicism, the anecdotal messages we receive (through aural, oral, and verbal sources) transmit knowledge and therefore power in a society. This interpretation was loosely based on Michel Foucault's concepts of power and knowledge but differ through the methods that society uses to progress a certain author or text. Fry's analysis of Greenblatt and Foucault's influence on New Historicism leads to the explanation that the significant difference between old Historicism and New Historicism is the recognition of being cognitive of one's subjectivity (Fry, 2009, 00:23:00-00:24:37). Not only is Akiko Yosano cognitive of the subjectivity she displays in her poetry but she's proactive in society by voicing her concerns and hopes in the political realm. This caused her to achieve power in the feminist and anti-war movements in Japan through her mass produced poems that exemplified the female struggle, highlighted forms of the female body/psyche, and critiqued war in ways that hadn't been highlighted before.

#### Works Cited

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For further reading, see: Rabson, Steve. "Yosano Akiko on War: To Give One's Life or Not: A Question of Which War." *The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1991, pp. 45–74. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/488910](https://www.jstor.org/stable/488910). Accessed 5 May 2021.