The Neoliberal Production of Cultural Citizenship in *My Year of Meats*

Ruth L. Ozeki’s novel *My Year of Meats* ends in a confounding manner. Japanese housewife Akiko Ueno successfully achieves the “happy life” she desires by immigrating to the United States with help from Asian-American Jane Takagi-Little (214). Akiko escapes her abusive husband, John, who rapes her earlier in the story. After learning she is pregnant from the assault, she flees to the US, settles peacefully, and starts what she believes can now be that happy life. It is a happy ending in that she asserts her own will to freedom, yet at the same time, the novel appears to fall in line with the tired trope of the immigrant story, the problematic kind of narrative that supports an American self-told tale of exceptionalism and freedom. This complicated resolution owes to the way Akiko forms her expectations of the US—from watching a television documentary filmed by Jane that showcases American life. Jane tries to use the documentary to broadcast a more diverse vision of what it means to be an American, but that nuanced image of the US is different than what Akiko sees. She assumes the US is simply a place where happy lives are lived.

At first glance, then, *My Year of Meats* seems to be a story about transnational forms of disconnect between perception and reality, but there is an added dimension to that disconnect worth investigating.[[1]](#endnote-1) Ozeki shows, primarily through Akiko’s story, that the myriad subject and object positions involved in global interactions cannot be separated from one another. That is to say, moments of individual agency and instances of the individual being acted *upon* occur simultaneously to the point that they are nearly impossible to distinguish. In this way, *My Year of Meats* contributes to our understanding of complicated positionalities within political theories of immigration and theories of neoliberalism, both of which have sought to understand the interplay of subjecthood and objectification. Ozeki’s complex narrative spotlights different artistic, economic, and political conflicts that cannot be separated into simple binaries—authenticity/constructedness, subjectivity/objectivity, freedom/subsumption.[[2]](#endnote-2) Instead, her novel foregrounds the simultaneity of these experiences to suggest that opportunities for freedom and agency are both possible and impossible all at once. I argue that, through the character of Akiko, *My Year of Meats* is a novel that envisions forms of individual and communal resistance to neoliberal binaristic forms of thinking while also situating how socially-produced cultural citizenship still places immigrants within the purview of the neoliberal nation-state.

Though *My Year of Meats* is nearly 20 years old and set during the Gulf War, it is timely reading when neoliberal values, isolationist rhetoric, and anxiety over immigration form the basis of the American political landscape under the Trump administration. Ozeki’s novel reminds us that the kind of immaterial, socio-cultural production associated with neoliberalism can often continue to flourish despite one’s best efforts to resist or work against it. As I will argue later, Jane’s television documentary is easily co-opted by the ever-present American self-narrative of exceptionalism, despite her careful attempts to complicate that national narrative. This is important to consider, especially in light of different critics’ suggestion that the most efficient means for protest against neoliberal capitalism are already housed within its very structures.[[3]](#endnote-3) Ozeki uses her novel to suggest just the opposite: that any critique of or resistance against the state, no matter how seemingly effective it may be, can easily be used to the state’s advantage, which ends up being mostly true with Jane’s documentary. This co-optation is, after all, one of the hallmarks of neoliberal thought—its adept knack for producing and preserving a rhetoric of common sense around itself that makes it seemingly impervious to transformative criticism.[[4]](#endnote-4)

*My Year of Meats*, then, occupies two specific loci of conflict that this paper focuses on: first, the legitimacy and occasional success of attempts to resist neoliberal practices and, second, the simultaneous imperviousness of neoliberal structures in the face of such resistance. Specifically, Ozeki highlights the concurrent subjecthood and objectification of immigrants, a dual state of being that has been described as cultural citizenship. This novel, then, is a work of fiction that calls attention to certain limits of neoliberal thought. As Mitchum Huehls argues, neoliberalism as an ideology situates the individual as both a subject and an object—an agent of freedom as well as a standardized unit—but it never represents the individual as fulfilling both roles at once (19). It is, perhaps, one of the chief contradictions within neoliberalism, this desire for an either/or construction of the human, and *My Year of Meats* interrogates that contradiction through the character of Akiko and her experience as a new cultural citizen in the US.

Before moving forward, some terms merit clarification. First, I find Aihwa Ong’s definition of *cultural citizenship* particularly useful, as a set of “cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory.” Being a cultural citizen means becoming enmeshed in “a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society” (“Cultural” 738), and I argue that this simultaneity of “self-making”/“being-made” is precisely Akiko’s positionality in *My Year of Meats*.[[5]](#endnote-5) Second, I approach *neoliberalism* as a set of economic principles that fundamentally alters how we view and think of human life. Within neoliberalism, individuals are defined chiefly by their economic potential, which appears to privilege freedom and agency, but actually encourages greater biopolitical standardization and data accumulation for the sake of mapping and influencing human behavior.[[6]](#endnote-6) As a result, one’s potential to enter the market is more important than one’s politics. This is an aspect of neoliberalism that will be important later on, as I discuss Akiko’s position within the US as a potential model minority.

Third, I view US *exceptionalism* similar to the way Ali Behdad and Donald E. Pease each describe it, where the US is exceptional precisely because its global acts of violence are presented as the exception to the socially-produced norm of America’s ostensible promise of freedom and liberty for all.[[7]](#endnote-7) Finally, and as I will explain more later, I approach *simultaneity* in the way Henri Bergson does in that the relativity of an event owes to competing interpretations—inner experience of the event versus the outer observation of it (34). We often project our inner consciousness onto the world and believe as a result that there is “a time common to all things” (47). This is, of course, not entirely untrue, but common time or real time does not negate variations of perception and experience across that simultaneity of time. Sharon Lynn Sieber credits Jorge Luis Borges with connecting this “simultaneity to the falseness or inherent contradictory nature of language as a system of representation” (200). In other words, there is no unified sense of representational experience that literature or other artistic mediums can achieve, especially since time and space are relative. But, then again, interpretive meaning often is as well, the production of which fluctuates depending on who is doing the interpreting.[[8]](#endnote-8) This is especially true in *My Year of Meats*. Jane has a very pointed perspective of the US that she aims to transmit via her documentary’s episodes. Akiko, however, takes a different, much more optimistic view of the US from those episodes than Jane means to come across. My following arguments rely on the excellent work of political theorists and neoliberal critics as a way to further understand how *My Year of Meats* identifies and embodies forms of productive (albeit limited) resistance against neoliberal hegemony through cultural citizenship.

Ozeki’s novel follows Akiko’s connection to the US through the television documentary Jane is filming, *My American Wife!* Funded by a globalized US beef industry, each episode showcases an “ideal” US housewife—white, attractive, heterosexual—who makes a beef recipe for her family. Akiko’s husband, John, produces the show, and as Jane becomes acquainted with the insidious practices of the US beef industry, she sabotages his homogenous vision of the US by filming a more diverse set of Americans instead—Mexican immigrants, parents of a disabled daughter, a biracial vegetarian lesbian couple. Completing a viewer survey, Akiko gives Jane’s episodes higher marks for authenticity than John’s presentations of “typical” American housewives. Akiko is also intrigued by Jane’s ability to thwart John and contacts her. Jane eventually facilitates Akiko’s escape to the US, and Akiko travels around to meet some of the families featured on *My American Wife!*, cementing her feeling of belonging in her new country.[[9]](#endnote-9)

What unsettles the ending of the novel is the disconnect between Akiko and Jane’s views of the US and how these remain unreconciled. What Jane understands—and what Akiko does not—is that the US is constantly (re)constructing its narrative and image for the world. Jane is the critical native citizen; Akiko is the starry-eyed newcomer. But even the vision of the US in the episodes Jane shoots, while more realistic than John’s, is still a careful construction she has edited for affective impact. And it works. Jane’s episodes deeply move Akiko to the point that she believes they showcase reality. She eventually becomes convinced that America promises a happy life to anyone, just like it has for the people on *My American Wife!* In theory, all she has to do is get to the US to experience the same. Akiko accepts this rosy abstraction throughout the novel, and while the US does offer her an escape from John, absent from Akiko’s story are considerations of how life in the US could entail further hardships.

Ozeki herself has made vague comments on how to approach the happy, irresolute ending of her novel. She says that she gave the story a happy ending because she believes it is important to imagine how to “change the future” for the better; however, she admits being “suspicious of the efficacy” of writing happy endings, even if she hopes they would encourage readers to contemplate the issues long after they have put the book down (“Conversation” 13). It is tempting here to read Ozeki as sharing a conviction more recently expressed by Jessica Berman, that fiction can encourage “ethical and imaginative freedom and, by virtue of its social situatedness, can also anticipate or rework relationships in the world” (22). These moments are a “redescription,” where an alternative narrative of our environment potentially “resists or revises social reality” (25). But I am not so sure this is Ozeki’s aim with her novel. She mentions that she has Jane “discuss the shortcomings of happy endings” in *My Year of Meats* to nudge the reader toward “a more complex relationship with that ending” (“Conversation” 13), and we would be wise to do precisely that. The possibility that Akiko has only a “happy life” ahead of her in the US is hard to accept given that the novel is set during the Gulf War, a period of US history not exactly known for its openness and tolerance to immigrants.[[10]](#endnote-10) Yet the novel, on the surface, does seem to suggest that Akiko *has* arrived to a place where only a happy life awaits. This, then, is the productive work that Ozeki’s novel does: It showcases how individuals can, on the one hand, resist cultural paradigms of oppression successfully through smaller-scale relational and communal ties while, on the other hand, simultaneously failing to extricate themselves from the larger-scale influences of the state and its social forms of production, like narratives of exceptionalism.

When Akiko comes to the US, she enters a complex power dynamic as an immigrant and cultural citizen. As numerous political theorists have observed, there is no historically consistent American stance toward immigrants. Ali Behdad argues that, on the whole, the US has a “national consciousness” marked by “ambivalence” when it comes to immigration because there is an “irreconcilable difference between competing perceptions of national identity” (17). Will Kymlicka understands this ambivalence as stemming from what American citizens are and are not willing to admit—that the US is certainly “polyethnic,” but there is an internal hesitation to view the US as “multinational,” since the latter might require granting certain rights to minority groups (22). Bonnie Honig explains the reason for this ambivalence. In a positive sense, the arrival of immigrants implies that the US has been “chosen,” which helps to confirm a sense of its universal allure and launches a national “reinvigoration” over being deemed “choiceworthy” by foreigners (42-45, 75). In this best-case scenario, an immigrant has the potential to become the “supercitizen immigrant” onto whom American-born citizens can “project [their] idealized selves” (77-78). Yet Honig also notes that, in a negative sense, immigrants never cease to pose a threat to the US because of the “undecidability of foreignness” (97). While both sides of the American political aisle adore the supercitizen immigrant, ambivalence never fully goes away because the US can never truly know if it is only witnessing “immigrant practicality”—a newcomer doing and saying the right things out of the will to survive (Honig 53).[[11]](#endnote-11)

Though the different positionalities of the individual immigrant are varied and numerous, the political theorists discussed above make clear that there is often division within the general public over how to view the immigrant. The problem is that the immigrant’s industriousness benefits the US, yet he simultaneously poses a threat to natural-born citizens’ ways of life. An immigrant either “has something to offer us” or “only wants to take things [i.e., jobs] from us” (Honig 80). This uncertainty over the immigrant is unsettling when a national narrative with clean categorizations is preferred. At the core of these concerns is the question of which side has the greatest impact—the immigrant on the nation or the nation on the immigrant? That is to say, does the immigrant retain subjecthood or become an object acted upon by the state? These two national responses to immigrants—adoration and unease—help to define the cultural identity of the nation (Behdad 17). America’s vacillating openness allows it to be either xenophilic or xenophobic depending on what the economic and social factors of the moment demand, which means that, in its own eyes, the US can do no wrong when it comes to immigration. It is either a pillar of democracy for all or a fortress under siege. This contradictory position is buoyed by a “historical amnesia” that eschews responsibility for the racially violent history of US immigration, and that enables the mythical, exceptionalist view of the nation to continue unimpeded (Behdad 3-4).

A similar either/or dyad also lies at the crux of neoliberal thought. The American ambivalence toward immigrants is similar in structure to an ambivalence within neoliberalism over subjecthood and objectification, and *My Year of Meats* bridges these closely related political and economic uncertainties. Huehls convincingly argues that the movement back and forth between subjective and objective conceptualizations of the individual “defines neoliberal discourse” (9). Though both of these representations seem contradictory, both play into the values system of neoliberalism and support its laissez-faire stance. Neoliberalism “wins either way” (10), because both images of the individual bolster the neoliberal economic agenda: She is either a free agent or contributes to a standardized data set. Huehls calls this the “neoliberal circle” and identifies it as a reason why it is so difficult to generate any substantial critique that “doesn’t in some way reinforce neoliberalism” (11). He questions what a confrontation of neoliberalism would look like if individuals embraced the ontological terms that it seems hesitant to embrace—namely “the simultaneity (rather than the mutual exclusivity) of subject and object” (19). This would mean inhabiting the “hybrid ontology that neoliberalism has produced for us” but refuses to represent concurrently (20). Akiko, in Ozeki’s capable hands, represents that simultaneity in a novel that imagines the limits (and strengths) of American hegemony in a neoliberal, transnational age.

Ozeki is doing something quite compelling here in that her novel carefully subverts our literary and political understanding of simultaneity. Benedict Anderson famously postulated that the novel form creates a nationally unifying sense of “meanwhile” as it encourages readers to imagine themselves connected to fellow citizens across time and space (24-25). Whilee Anderson’s “meanwhile” is a unifying metric, one that grows national identities, Ozeki shows that literary simultaneity should be understood as a point of divergence, not convergence. The community of fellow-citizens may continue to be imagined, but what is imagined is not as unified as Anderson would lead us to believe. Instead, Akiko and Jane’s different readings of *My American Wife!* and of the US reveal that any imagined community is diverse and varied in its interpretive framework. Or, to put it as Jenny Sampirisi does, narrative exists “as a series of events that happen and fail to happen simultaneously within the uncertain structure of language” (71). The act of writing itself enters “an all-at-onceness” that we should regard as a moment of either/or or even both/and, but as “n/either” (73). What Sampirisi describes here recalls Bergson’s concept of duration, that the ceaseless flow of past into present as a way to mark the passage of time amounts to a fluidity of experience where the “present [is] ceaselessly reborn” (44). Bergson would likely disagree with Anderson, claiming that imagining a “link among all individual consciousnesses” is *not* a unifying moment but, rather, the instance when our consciousness should actually grasp “multiple events lying at different points in space.” That is to say, “simultaneity would be precisely the possibility of two or more events entering within a single, instantaneous perception” (45). The kind of nationalistically homogenizing and unifying imaginative moment within Anderson’s “meanwhile” is, for Bergson, an opportunity to grasp the relativity of meaning within simultaneous events. Or, to return to Huehls, simultaneity is a space to productively explore the “hybrid ontology” of an individual’s movement in today’s age.

I do not find it a coincidence that both discourses of immigration and neoliberalism circle around the simultaneity of individuals as subjects and objects. At stake in both discourses is the sovereignty of the state (and thereby the market), and that tension is visible in *My Year of Meats*. Ozeki narrates how powerful the allure of US exceptionalism and freedom are for Akiko, while also suggesting that she and Jane *do* find small ways to productively resist forms of oppression. Akiko is both subsumed by a narrative of US exceptionalism while also a free subject or agent within it, a complex positionality that both increases American ambivalence toward immigrants and cannot be accounted for by neoliberalism. Before ever thinking of moving to the US, Akiko receives an image of a welcoming America through episodes of *My American Wife!* From watching John and Jane’s different episodes, Akiko consumes two separate visions of the US—homogenous and diverse, respectively. From the latter, she builds an expectation of what it would be like to live in America and start a new life, yet Jane’s episodes, even with their more nuanced vision of American life, actually succeed in inculcating Akiko with an exceptionalist view of the US. On the one hand, then, Jane’s episodes fail in their aims; yet on the other hand, they succeed because they encourage and activate Akiko’s determined agency.

*My American Wife!* and Akiko’s connection with it mark the beginning of her growing cultural citizenship. The most compelling episode for Akiko features the biracial lesbian couple, Lara and Dyann. While watching, she begins to cry “tears of admiration for the strong women” who found ways to have a family on their own terms (181). Though she is not pregnant at this point in the novel, Akiko abhors John and his abuse and knows that, while she wants to have a child someday, she does not want one with him. Lara and Dyann’s story moves her to write a letter to Jane, saying the episode has changed her life and motivated her to leave John. She closes the letter by asking Jane where she can go to “live my happy life like” the one Lara and Dyann have (214). The connection Akiko makes between the US and a “happy life” is complicated because, as Emily Cheng argues, it “posit[s] the United States as an unquestioned space of freedom” (203). But more than that, Akiko compares herself and her own unhappiness to a construction. What she perceives to be a better situation or outlet for relief in the real world is a carefully edited composition, pieced together to trigger the viewer’s emotions. Jane admits as much about Lara and Dyann’s episode. While filming the couple, she sees the episode’s affective potential unfolding into “another heart-wrenching documentary moment” (175). Later, while editing the footage, she shares her personal stance on truth and abstraction. She initially believed in a “singular, empirical, absolute” truth, but as she worked more with “editing and camera angles and the effect that music can have on meaning,” she came to realize how truth was measured in “ever-diminishing approximations” (176).

Jane’s explanation of the truth as an ever-diminishing approximation is also an apt description of US exceptionalism. As Behdad notes, the “historical amnesia” of the US sanitizes the nation’s problematic immigration history and constructs an approximate story of the nation and its values. It is a muted yet powerful form of forgetting that aids in building a national identity. Likewise, Jürgen Habermas mentions that this sort of “national consciousness” can lead to an “imaginary reality of the nation as an organic development” (116). Rather than believe the US has been carefully composed as an idea, citizens come to believe that the US has naturally developed into the nation it is today, without tinkering or editing. In the same way, some of the complexities of American lived experience are absent from Lara and Dyann’s episode that Akiko views. This is not to say the episode is meaningless, but its meaning has been carefully manufactured, and the elisions are significant. While the film crew sets up the cameras to film Lara and Dyann, Jane notices how “the backs of [the couple’s] hands brushed and their fingers entwined for a brief squeeze before releasing, quickly, well-trained in circumspection” (173). This circumspection, though, never appears in the final cut of their episode, but it is a nuance that could begin to show that not everything about Lara and Dyann’s life as a lesbian couple is liberated or happy in a heteronormative culture. With that omission, Akiko will not know of any societal hardships Lara and Dyann may have experienced, since the necessity for circumspection does not appear as part of their “official” story. Their lives become exceptional because of the exceptions Jane makes on the cutting room floor. All Akiko sees is a couple living a happy life.

This is not to discount the emotional power of Lara and Dyann’s story in the episode. The footage is moving for Jane, too. But as she edits, she realizes she never actually told the couple, who are also vegetarians, that *My American Wife!* is sponsored by the globalized corporate meat industry that uses chemicals and growth hormones in its products, meaning that the documentary itself, critical as it is of US corporatized power, is not outside the influence of neoliberal economics. Jane herself admits she has to “strive for the truth and believe in it wholeheartedly” while filming, even as she knows she is manipulating it (177). So everyone involved has blinders on—some self-imposed, others imposed for them—yet it is from this episode that Akiko acquires an understanding of the US. The simultaneity of truth and construction in the final cut of the episode is captured by Jane’s assessment of it. She describes it as “a good one, really solid, moving, the best I’d made,” but then continues to fine-tune the footage anyway in order to keep crafting “a seamless flow in a reality that was no longer [Lara and Dyann’s] and not quite so real anymore” (179). That which is “really solid” and deeply “moving” isn’t actually real at all. The constructed nature of film and television is not the problem here, since those are simply aspects of the medium. The complication comes when, after watching the episode, Akiko believes what she has just seen confirms that the US is where her “happy life” can occur. Akiko accepts this ever-diminishing approximation of the US on her television as truth, which primes her for her move to America and transition into cultural citizenship.

Akiko’s determination that the US is a space of freedom is solidified before she leaves Japan. When she comes home from the hospital after recovering from being raped by John, she thinks about her baby growing inside her and “didn’t turn on the television, not even once” (317). This is a significant moment. Akiko has sat dutifully in front of the television for most of the novel, rating the authenticity of the US and its citizens from what she sees on *My American Wife!* Her decision to leave the television off at first appears to imply that she is now avoiding constructions of “reality,” which would suggest a growing autonomy as she gets ready to escape to the US. But simply avoiding a mediating force like television does not change the fact that Akiko has already taken in the mediated message of *My American Wife!* Rather than do an about-face from the simplistic vision of the US she has adopted, Akiko’s decision to turn off the television is more of a declaration that she has seen enough and determinedly made up her mind about what she thinks the US is like. This is evidenced by comments she makes later to her friend Tomoko where, even with the television off, Akiko still pursues the symbol of the US that others have presented to her. She tells Tomoko that she is convinced her baby is a girl and hopes she “can grow up to become an American Wife” (318), a strong woman like Lara or Dyann. Tomoko interjects, “She doesn’t have to be a wife at all, you know,” and Akiko responds, “I know. I’m just kidding. Sort of” (318). Akiko’s continued attachment to the US as represented in *My American Wife!* is visible in her hopes that her daughter will be just like the characters on Jane’s documentary. The America captured through Lara and Dyann’s story is the ideal to strive for. While Jane’s vision of what it means to be an American may be more diverse than John’s, hers is still an ever-diminishing approximation, something manufactured and packaged. Though Akiko reassures Tomoko that she is only kidding about her dreams for her daughter, her comment, “Sort of,” makes that reassurance less than convincing. The television has already done its work.

Yet even for all the ways this moment seems like a surrender of agency on Akiko’s part, it is still undeniable that Akiko *does* assert her agency in her decision to leave John and Japan. While it would be easy to view the agency of her decision as undercut by her pre-packaged, romanticized view of the US, Akiko still decides what to do with her life. Nobody forces her hand. *My American Wife!* influences her decision, but there is nothing about Lara and Dyann’s episode that somehow announces it is imperative for her to move to the US and only the US. Akiko’s actions fit Huehls’ description of embracing the “doubled subject-object ontology” that neoliberalism refuses to represent (20), and when literature chooses to represent this dual position, it encourages alternative “forms of value production” (29). This is the compelling complication that *My Year of Meats* presents before Akiko leaves Japan: She is simultaneously an agent and acted upon. *My American Wife!* clearly has an effect on her. The documentary’s carefully calibrated affective properties touch her deeply. In that sense, Akiko functions in an objectified manner as a faceless consumer, a mere number within a larger mass of coveted viewer ratings. But what she does with that experience as a viewer is up to her and is the moment when she becomes an agent, producing something of value for herself. This is not to say that there is a transitional moment, where Akiko moves from being an object one moment to an acting subject the next. She is both simultaneously, the affective propulsion of *My American Wife!* staying with her in the US.

The simultaneity of objectification and subjecthood continues once Akiko moves to the US, which is also to say that she occupies both a challenged and advantageous position as an Asian immigrant, a situatedness that both theories of immigration and neoliberalism help us to understand. Specifically, the stereotyping that Asian immigrants experience in the US as the “model minority” can work both in and against Akiko’s favor when economic buying power carries more and more influence in an increasingly neoliberal, corporatized nation-state. Whether or not Akiko falls into the privileged place of the financially well-off immigrant is hard to say, since Ozeki keeps Akiko’s financial details vague. On the one hand, she withdraws “two-thirds of the money [from] the joint account” she and John share before leaving Japan (319), but we are never told how much money that actually is. On the other hand, Akiko is financially stable enough to afford a last-minute flight from Japan to New York, stays with Lara and Dyann for seven months until she gives birth, and appears intent on nesting for the duration of her pregnancy. Future plans for earning income in the US after she gives birth are also never mentioned. It could seem that her wealth potentially opens doors of autonomy and freedom.

It would be wise, though, to qualify an understanding of the model minority, both in a political and neoliberal way, since a friction builds between objectivities and subjectivities within this immigrant trope. The view of Asians as the model minority, which began in the 1960s, is problematic, as Stacy J. Lee notes, for its racialized stereotypes of Asians as family oriented, hard workers, and financially successful, and because of the way Asians “making it” in America testifies to the ability of the US to take in outsiders and assimilate them into its socio-economic apparatuses (7).[[12]](#endnote-12) This stereotyping, then, lauds the Asian immigrant’s agency and initiative at the same time that it objectifies her as a boon to the economy of the state. Lisa Lowe argues that the latter overpowers the former to the point that the model minority trope is primarily an acculturating move. It robs subjects of their various classed, gendered, and cultural positionalities and then objectifies them into a homogenous, racialized construction (68).[[13]](#endnote-13) For Lowe, it is a form of “discursive fixing” that seeks to “stabilize the identity of the immigrant” in a way that is advantageous to the state (19). But Ong has argued that recent waves of Asian immigrants to the US have complicated the acculturating power of the model minority trope. The influx of already-wealthy Asians does not fit into the typical from-the-ground-up immigrant narrative that the US prefers to tell. Instead, “affluent Asian immigrants plug directly into the upper reaches of American society and thus have an unsettling effect on middle-class whites” (*Flexible* 174), a description that may fit Akiko’s situation. Similarly, Walter Benn Michaels argues that we have misunderstood the model minority trope entirely, proposing that it is not about the immigrant’s “commitment to Americanization,” but rather about “the successful importation of upper-middle-class status.” Within the neoliberal US, Asian immigrants “succeed not because of their Asian values … and not because of their eagerness to assimilate and adopt American values … but because of their middle-class values” (“Model” 1022-23). Money matters first, not culture. But there is another problem here. This scholarly conversation and disagreement over what exactly the model minority stereotype offers Asian immigrants returns too easily to an either/or construction. The model minority is either an autonomous subject position empowered by wealth or a limiting objectification. But Ozeki shows through Akiko that both happen at once.

What we can say with certainty is that the cultural paradigm awaiting someone like Akiko is one where the nation takes a specific interest in the economically successful individual. Though a minority, the character of Akiko fits the “model” type that the US political system prefers, where capital is a key factor contributing to an immigrant’s successful American acculturation. Historically, friendlier immigration laws have been passed to increase gains and stimulate the American economy.[[14]](#endnote-14) The US has generally been open to capitalistically-minded immigrants because their financial success can help to continue the national narrative of “upward mobility” (Honig 74). Here we have both micro- and macro-level forces operating: Akiko uses her access to an unspecified level of wealth to redirect the course of her life, what I have already suggested is a clear assertion of agency when she leaves Japan. Yet at the same time, her move across the Pacific Ocean is facilitated by state structures that could potentially bestow on her the status of a preferable immigrant. The model minority, then, is not outside Ong’s paradigm of cultural citizenship. It is at once a form of “self-making”/“being-made.”

Even so, to some extent the immigrant will always be a foreigner no matter how much she assimilates. Asian immigrants specifically remain what Lee calls a “perpetual foreigner,” for no matter how many generations of Asians have been in the US, they are still viewed as outsiders whose “patriotism and loyalty” remain suspect (4). Akiko may fit the description of a model immigrant, but that is still an objectified space that her financial autonomy does not automatically preclude her from. But, as Lee notes, perhaps just as (or more) important than an immigrant’s capitalistic potential is her level of patriotism and loyalty. As I have been arguing, while individual agency and finance are key concerns of immigration, the ambivalence over subject and object positions stems largely from something more affective in its constitution—namely, devotion. It is through the level of devotion to the immigrant’s new country that the dyad within cultural citizenship of “self-making/being made” is further clarified. Indeed, by the end of Ozeki’s novel, it is clear that Akiko’s autonomous choices are still simultaneously driven by the national narrative of the US she gleaned from *My American Wife!*

A key aspect of the neoliberal production of Akiko’s cultural citizenship is her expression of patriotism. Once she arrives in the US, her aforementioned attachment to a romantic view of the nation stays the same and quickly blossoms into full-fledged dedication, though it is briefly challenged while she rides a train in the Deep South. From the train, Akiko sees people living in poverty, and the sight hits her “with a shock.” In her mind, Americans are not poor. “Maybe in the past” they were, “or in the movies, but not now. Not these days. Not in real life” (336). Ozeki presents Akiko’s thoughts in a complicated way. For Akiko, poverty is either a historical moment or a cinematic one. If she believes that poverty is a thing of the past, then her image of the US is unrealistically optimistic in an economic sense. It is an exceptionalist view in that it takes poverty to be the exception to the norm of American life. But attaching American poverty to movies creates a difficult contradiction in her thinking. By saying that poverty is in the past, she claims it no longer exists. The “or” in Akiko’s thoughts separates “the past” and “the movies,” meaning that one way for poverty not to exist is for it to be featured in movies. In other words, movies are not real or, rather, they show things that are not real any*more*.

Given how devoted she has been to accepting *My American Wife!* as reality, this is an important admission in Akiko’s inner dialogue. She knows what she sees in movies is fake, but this concession is immediately followed by her conviction that poverty is not around “these days. Not in real life.” So despite seeing tangible poverty, Akiko brushes it aside as an aberration that cannot possibly constitute “real life.” This means that poverty does not fit *her* conceptualization of “real life,” which is tantamount to Akiko confessing that her notion of “real life” is also an empty construction, devoid of actuality. At this point, Akiko expresses her own, as Behdad would put it, historical amnesia. She is not completely unaware of American history, since she considers that there was a time—“maybe in the past”—when Americans were poor. But even when she sees poverty from the train, she chooses to disavow the possibility that people could still be poor “these days.” In many ways, Akiko is still watching television, only this time she is seated on a train, and the window by her seat frames the picture she views. What is real is fake, and what is constructed is real.

This moment on the train has potential to be a breakthrough in the narrative, the point at which Akiko realizes she is pursuing a mere idea of the US and not the actual thing itself.[[15]](#endnote-15) If Akiko would readily admit that movies are not “real life,” then neither is television, and that means the representation of America and its housewives in *My American Wife!* are also not “real life.” Therefore, her romanticized view of the US gleaned from television is not a dependable basis upon which to pin her hopes for the future. But she continues to do this anyway, reflecting back on another family from *My American Wife!* with whom she recently spent the Thanksgiving holiday. She thinks, “They were authentic, exactly what [I] had seen on TV” (336). Movies and “real life” may not be the same for Akiko, but television and authenticity are.

To be fair, Akiko’s ready acceptance of an exceptional America is likely facilitated by the genre of Jane’s storytelling. That Jane’s work is done as a documentary—and not, say, a sitcom—demands a certain sort of faith from viewers. The documentary ostensibly presents that which is real, authentic, or unscripted. It is perhaps understandable why Akiko would more readily accept what she sees on her television as fact if it is in documentary form. But Jane’s documentary is, of course, no less of a construction than any other narrativized medium. Though she portrays real life and real families, Jane acknowledges her post-production efforts to force or maximize a certain emotional appeal, a rhetorical and narrative decision on her part that places elements of fiction into her work that still announces itself as nonfiction.

Akiko’s train ride continues, and her cultural citizenship further grows as she accepts an exceptionalist form of the US as authentic. The majority of her fellow passengers are African American, and the train attendant, an older man named Maurice, has a friendly conversation with her and informs her that she is riding the Chicken Bone Special. Maurice says its name comes from passengers often being too poor to buy the lounge car’s meals, so “these poor colored folk, they gotta make do with lugging along some home-cooked fried chicken instead” (338). The passengers around Akiko share their fried chicken and potato salad with her while Maurice starts clapping and leading the passengers in a chant of “chicken bone” over and over (339). Akiko “shiver[s] with excitement” over the communal camaraderie. As a result, Akiko feels

as if somehow she’d been absorbed into a massive body that had taken over the functions of her own, and now it was infusing her small heart with the superabundance of its feeling, teaching her taut belly to swell, stretching her rib cage, and pumping spurts of happy life into her fetus. *This is America!* she thought. She clapped her hands then hugged herself with delight. (339)

These sentences are complicated because they situate Akiko as being the agent in her search for the “true” America. Her pronouncement “*This is America!*” acts as a kind of confirmation of success. Yet she is also very much not asserting her agency here. Ozeki’s use of the passive voice—“somehow she’d been absorbed”—makes it clear that something other than Akiko’s own willed optimism infuses her with patriotic euphoria. Ozeki emphasizes how a romanticized, exceptional view of the US is swallowing up Akiko. By being “absorbed into a massive body,” America claims her and challenges her autonomy, since it “take[s] over the functions of her own” body. After this physiological commandeering, an affective invasion follows, “infusing her small heart with the superabundance of its feeling” that also spreads to her baby. Both mother and child have been filled with a patriotic happiness and awe.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Akiko believes that what she is witnessing on the train constitutes American reality and that it is something to be giddy over. Rather than consider why her fellow passengers are unable to afford food on the train, which might reveal some negative socio-economic and racial truth about the US, Akiko sees the situation around her as a joyous moment. Monica Chiu notes that Akiko’s reaction here “soften[s] America’s harsher realities” through a “normalizing of difference” (109), and Michaels argues that this effacement of difference via normalization is precisely the work of neoliberalism. By over-privileging issues of race and identity, the celebration of cultural difference overshadows the urgency of “minimizing economic difference” (“Model” 1023-24). Akiko commits the same oversight earlier when first boarding the train. She notices that most of the people on the train are black and assumes they are also “taking the train to find their happy life” like her (336).[[17]](#endnote-17) Akiko does not consider that there could be social or economic reasons for taking a train instead of, say, a car or a plane, assuming instead that everyone in America is destined for a happy life. The joyous sing-a-long moment on the Chicken Bone Special does nothing to counter her assumptions.

That these scenes take place on a train is key, for the train as literary setting carries with it historical baggage as a place where claims to citizenship and belonging have been challenged or negated. Daylanne K. English notes how train car vignettes are familiar stock scenes throughout African American literature where the law would seek to “reinforce the noncitizenship status of African Americans” by moving black passengers to the back of the train to make room for white travelers (53). The train car has often been a place where the juridical and cultural objectification of people groups has overruled their agency and autonomy as subjects. Lest the reader begin to accept Akiko’s agency and autonomy too quickly, the symbolism of her geographical movement suggests that she may not be as free (or her ending as happy) as she thinks it is. It is more than a little ironic that Akiko is on a train in the Deep South traveling north to New York, mimicking a journey purportedly to freedom.

Yet her patriotic fervor remains undiminished. The absolute nature of Akiko’s patriotism productively supports the nation in different ways, and though these train scenes could appear to problematically metonymize the Deep South with fried-chicken-loving African Americans, the stereotypically racist constructions serve a purpose here. Akiko is surrounded by a bunch of happy-go-lucky African Americans, and it appears Ozeki is alluding to the long history of docile Uncle-Tom-type characters that have populated American fiction. Such stock characters have helped to place a shroud over black outrage at centuries of oppression. Akiko’s fellow passengers, then, are American exceptionalism personified. They are nostalgic stereotypes that gloss over slavery, racism, and economic inequality as aberrations within an otherwise consistent national narrative of freedom and opportunity. It is no wonder that the black passengers’ cheer, congeniality, and chant (as if a religious mantra) all help to accelerate the inculcation of patriotic fervor within Akiko, the likes of which encourage the formation of her cultural citizenship. Oblivious to the racialized history of the poverty she views from the train, she is able to maintain her idyllic view of the US, supported as it is by this stereotypical block of fellow passengers.

Ironically, Akiko’s thought “*This is America!*” can be read as her first moment of true clarity about the US in the novel.[[18]](#endnote-18) In line with political theory, this *is* America, the nation that takes immigrants and attempts to acculturate them to its larger narrative by convincing them to believe that other forms of social and cultural violence or inequality are merely exceptions to the norm. Michaels reminds us that neoliberal values encourage this type of cultural narrative, the glossing over of economic inequalities to the benefit of the multicultural project (“Neoliberal” 74). Behdad makes a similar argument, that American multiculturalism takes a “new cultural politics of difference” and uses it to display “its power of absorption.” In the end, it is “a linear narrative that begins with difference but ends in sameness” (12-13), the sameness being that everyone—citizens and immigrants—agrees to America’s self-told tale of exceptionalism. Akiko may have seized her own agency by deciding to leave Japan and move to the US, but that does not remove the continued effects of the state on newcomers.[[19]](#endnote-19) While Akiko’s absorption into the US—her objectification, the “being made” aspect of cultural citizenship—does not negate her autonomous efforts of “self-making,” it does suggest that attempts to extricate oneself from oppressive environments can never be fully realized. The friction of subjecthood and objectification seem destined to continue in their simultaneity, regardless of one’s efforts to land fully on the side of freedom.

Though Akiko never leaves the path to patriotic cultural citizenship, she does not fully yield her autonomy, either. Akiko asserts her agency by making a decision to change the trajectory of her life. It is important to note that this choice does not fall into the realm of what Jane Elliott terms “suffering agency,” a key feature of recent neoliberal novels where characters have the freedom to choose, but only between deplorable options. Instead, Ozeki uses the character of Akiko to show something more complex than just a buffet of bad alternatives. The life Akiko embraces by moving to the US is certainly an improvement on her situation in Japan. Her decision to leave is an assertion of her self-worth and a resolution to survive, personally and for her progeny. The problematics of American exceptionalism aside, Akiko’s options are better in the US than in Japan, and it is easy to forget that there is not always something implicitly hegemonic in the possibility that one place could offer greater safety and security over another. After all, Ozeki is writing about one character. Akiko is not a stand-in for Japan anymore than Jane is for the US. The human individual is (hopefully) free to make choices for oneself.

What *is* complicated, then, is how individuals’ choices place themselves within larger-scale social and cultural conflicts, and this is where *My Year of Meats* is challenging reading. In other words, what if we did read the novel allegorically? While Akiko is not representative of all of Japan, Ozeki still places her East-to-West movement in the middle of a time when transfers of capital between Japan and the US were further showing signs of American imperialistic dominance. As Giovanni Arrighi has carefully shown, capital typically has moved from declining centers to rising centers, where the latter expands capitalist power to a greater extent than its hegemonic predecessor could (15). But this did not happen in the 1980s and 1990s between Japan and the US. Japan found it difficult to redistribute assets from the US to its own economy because “the world’s richest and most developed continental power proved to be not as devoid of control over foreign business” as Japan soon found out (Arrighi 18). Additionally, at this same point in American history, the US was asserting its imperial/military strength in Kuwait and against Russia. I mention these events to note that, while Ozeki writes just one story of one fictional woman’s search for a happier life, its trajectory is also inseparable from the tangles of neoliberal economics and imperialism that join Japan to the US and the US to much of the world. True, Akiko’s situation in the novel improves dramatically, but we must also consider what Ozeki shows to have declined, almost all of which is Japanese: The novel ends with John abandoned, his show destroyed, and parts of the US beef industry shutting down in a way that will certainly not please Japanese investors. These plot points form a denouement where Japan, more or less, ends up losing and the US remains largely unchanged. If the reader doubts for a moment that the US remains unaffected, Ozeki makes sure to leave Akiko’s subsumption into patriotic fervor as one of the novel’s final images.

As a final note, I have found that people are often quick to dismiss *My Year of Meats* as didactic. I always find that slightly disappointing, but perhaps not too surprising. Ozeki’s novel is preachy at times, as if she is telling readers precisely how they should feel and think about the US beef industry. The narrative’s reliance on different genres (faxes, news articles, etc.) to quickly disseminate information about questionable practices within food and drug corporations can come across as gimmicky efforts to break from the rigors of narrative. But this didacticism is a surface ploy that actually functions as an expertly crafted framing device. Consider that Ozeki positions a heavily didactic text that the characters interact with (*My American Wife!*) within a larger, seemingly didactic frame for readers to encounter (*My Year of Meats*). With Akiko’s story specifically in mind, *My American Wife!* ultimately falls short of its intended political effect. We should read this as a self-referential moment where Ozeki also queries what the effect of *My Year of Meats* is in the neoliberal present. In other words, does this novel *do* anything? Do we expect that art and entertainment *should* do anything? Ozeki’s answer, via the character of Akiko, seems to be yes to both questions, albeit not without qualification. *My American Wife!* for all its problems, all its constructed presentations of reality, and all its connections to neoliberal corporate America, is transformative for Akiko in positive ways. It does nothing to holistically change more macro-level political concerns, but it is still a vehicle through which Akiko’s life is changed for the better. *My Year of Meats* seems to suggest that that’s probably enough.

True, by the novel’s conclusion, nothing has really challenged Akiko’s romanticized view of the US. It is telling that she is basically subsumed by the nation on her train ride as she delightedly accepts further abstractions as a true embodiment of the US. As she sits on the train, moving from the Deep South to the North in a historical reiteration of a journey out of bondage to supposed freedom, she enters a scripted future. In other words, it seems that Akiko’s “story,” if you will, has been absorbed into a larger, exceptionalist American narrative. Fine—stories can be co-opted and probably always will be to some extent.[[20]](#endnote-20) But what Ozeki presents in *My Year of Meats* is a smaller vision of possible hope within larger political concerns: two women pushing against a violently masculine, imperialist, and neoliberal world by taking the reins of representation and, in the end, using art to forge together a small community of femininity that tries to protect and provide for future generations. It is an encouraging possibility to consider, one that immediately brings to mind the outlook behind the recent global Women’s March on January 21, 2017. Ozeki’s novel, then, suggests something rather hopeful, if also cynically realistic, about the hard but worthwhile nature of progressive, truly liberating work within and outside the arts. All things are not rectified by the end of *My Year of Meats*—should we even expect the novel to do this?—but a “happy life” can still be possible.

1. Notes

 Other scholars have written about the novel from a more transnational approach. See Emily Johansen’s “The Political Allure of the Local: Food and Cosmopolitanism in Timothy Taylor’s *Stanley Park* and Ruth L. Ozeki’s *My Year of Meats*” and David Palumbo-Liu’s *The Deliverance of Others* (specifically chapter four). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. In other words, *My Year of Meats* moves beyond more reductive understandings of postcolonial and neoliberal experience, where descriptions of political environments are too easily understood along either/or binary splits. Within postcolonialism, that could be binaries of West/East, center/periphery, colonizer/colonized, or the European/the Other. Various critics have noted that engagement with subaltern communities is one way to work against these reductive paradigms, though there is also the risk of reinscribing the Other in Us-versus-Them binaries by speaking for the subaltern with one’s academic research (see Fernando Coronil, “Listening to the Subaltern: The Poetics of Neocolonial States”; bell hooks, “Marginality as a Site of Resistance”; and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?”) Within neoliberalism, reductive binary splits could be freedom/socialism, private/public, subjecthood/objectification (for a classic representative example of these reductive theoretical models in practice, see Milton Friedman’s *Capitalism and Freedom*).

Similarly, I am aware of the potential irony within the methodological approach I take to Ozeki’s novel—critiquing US exceptionalism via a literary text that is mostly taken up with US concerns, a sort of recentering of American ethnocentrism in the very act of criticizing it. This same slippery slope has been identified within postcolonial theory from time to time—that it only recenters the West as it critiques it. This, however, is precisely one of the main problems Ozeki spotlights with her novel: how even the best intentions to protest or resistant dominant power structures may only end up strengthening them. Jane’s documentary is a case in point, since it critiques American exceptionalism only to eventually help another immigrant become in awe of the social construction that is American freedom. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire*, Michael Feher’s “Self-Appreciation: or, The Aspirations of Human Capital,” and James Ferguson’s *Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution*. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Many critics have examined the role of a uniquely neoliberal common sense in their studies of contemporary economic trends. See Michel Foucault’s *The Birth of Biopolitics*, David Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Wendy Brown’s *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*, Brett Levinson’s *Market and Thought: Meditations on the Political and Biopolitical*, and Bruce Robbins’ *Perpetual War: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Violence*. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Renato Rosaldo has been credited with coining the term “cultural citizenship,” defining it as the minority’s “right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense” (402). His theorization, though, does not sufficiently account for the overwhelming influence of the nation-state on a foreigner or immigrant like Ong’s does. More recently, in “Globalization, National Cultures and Cultural Citizenship,” Nick Stevenson has further problematized the idea that “cultural citizenship” is as closely tied to the nation-state as Ong argues. He conceptualizes a more cosmopolitan understanding of the outsider’s level of agency as he or she works to connect the “self and society” (43). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. These aspects of neoliberalism are discussed at length by both Foucault and Brown. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. To combine some of these terms, Ong has also pointed out how neoliberalism often functions in an exceptional manner. Though we tend to think of the political notion of exception from Carl Schmitt as “mark[ing] out excludable subjects who are denied protections,” Ong notes that “the exception can also be a positive decision to include selected populations and spaces as targets … associated with neoliberal reform” (*Neoliberalism* 5). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Benjamin H. Ogden explains how this kind of understanding of simultaneity might benefit literary criticism. He calls for a “Quantum Criticism” inspired by the way quantum mechanics “creates conceptual paradoxes” by representing “all the available knowledge about the potentialities of a system in the quantum realm” (80, 83). Literary criticism in this vein would seek to understand how the truth or “state of things” is “multiple and simultaneous” (85). It is an examination of how meanings “interfere” and “overlap” with each other (86). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Some scholars have suggested that Jane and Akiko, as a sort of feminist pairing, are successful in liberating themselves from patriarchal paradigms. For readings in this vein, see Jennifer K. Ladino’s *Reclaiming Nostalgia: Longing for Nature in American Literature* (specifically chapter six) and Shameem Black’s “Fertile Cosmofeminism: Ruth L. Ozeki and Transnational Reproduction.” For scholars who disagree with such a reading, see Palumbo-Liu’s “Rational and Irrational Choices: Form, Affect, and Ethics” and Monica Chiu’s “Postnational Globalization and (En)Gendered Meat Production in Ruth L. Ozeki’s *My Year of Meats*.” [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Just a few years prior to the events of the novel, in 1986, the Reagan administration approved the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which responded to public calls for a greater control of the Mexican border. This act made it illegal to hire undocumented workers for the first time; however, the law also provided loopholes “that made it possible for growers to employ temporary Mexican workers” without the threat of prosecution (Behdad 20-21). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Honig’s arguments certainly call to mind early theorizations of mimicry as a form of political resistance in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* and Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. These economic trends have continued into the present. The most recent Statistical Abstract from the US Census Bureau shows that Asian Americans continue to earn nearly as much as (and in some cases more than) white Americans. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. See also Ellen D. Wu’s *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. This has been true at times of the American stance toward Asian immigrants. See Madeline Y. Hsu’s *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority*. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. The suggestion that a nation is an “actual thing itself” can be problematic, given Anderson’s theorization of the nation as an “imagined community.” To say that the US can be an actual thing for Akiko to encounter simply means that there is a type of experiential knowledge one gains only by living in an actual physical place (like, for example, the knowledge that poverty does, in fact, still exist in the US). Akiko has only recently moved to the US, so she can continue to dismiss poverty as something other than “real life,” rather than accept that it might be part of some people’s national experience. While on the train, her televisual understanding of the US still holds court. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. For arguments on how the role of the Child in the US is metonymic of the future of the nation, see Berlant’s *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (specifically chapters 1 and 3) and Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Akiko’s projection of happiness onto her fellow passengers calls to mind Bergson’s argument about how the sense of our own inner duration can lead us to misinterpret the world around us:

To each moment of our inner life there thus corresponds a moment of our body and of all environing matter that is “simultaneous” with it; this matter then seems to participate in our conscious duration. Gradually, we extend this duration to the whole physical world, because we see no reason to limit it to the immediate vicinity of our body. The universe seems to us to form a single whole; and, if the part that is around us endures in our manner, the same must hold, we think, for that part by which it, in turn, is surrounded, and so on indefinitely. (45) [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. It is also worth noting how similar Akiko’s exclamation here is to the main refrain “Ain’t that America!” in John Mellencamp’s “Pink Houses,” a song that both sides of the US political establishment have used as a patriotic aesthetic at campaign rallies. Similar to Akiko’s dismissal of the poverty around her, the first verse of “Pink Houses” describes a vision of American black poverty, only to move on to the chorus and exclaim that America is “something to see” and the “home of the free.” [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. As noted earlier, arguments like Ladino and Black’s seem to suggest that Akiko’s move to the US is a wholly successful and liberatory venture and not one still fraught with problems. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. See Sarah Brouillette’s Literature and the Creative Economy.

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