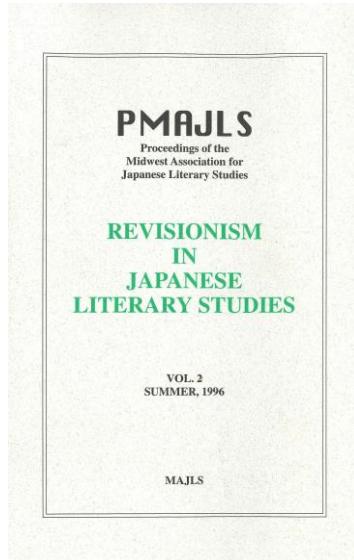


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Including a Foreword by James O'Brien

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Revisionism in Japanese Literary Studies

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FOREWORD

The papers collected in this volume were presented at the fourth annual meeting of the Midwest Association for Japanese Literary Studies. The three earlier conferences, which led to the formation of the association, were held at Purdue University, beginning in 1992. Each of these meetings were organized around a distinct theme--poetics in the first instance, narrativity in the second, and theatricality and performance in the third. As with the present conference, each of the earlier three resulted in a volume of proceedings. Copies of these publications can be ordered from the Eiji Sekine of Purdue University, who served as editor for them as well as for the present volume.

The fourth conference, which was held at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, had as its theme "Revisionism in Japanese Literary Studies: Its Potential and Pitfalls." Exactly what revisionism meant in this context was left to the discretion of conference participants. Those who inquired of the organizer what he had in mind by the word were referred in general terms to the striking departures in outlook and method that had arisen in Japanese literary studies during the past fifteen years or so, departure mainly evident in the work of younger scholars in the field.

The call for papers encouraged people on both sides of the divide to participate in the conference. One could be for or against cultural studies, a proponent or antagonist of feminist and gendered approaches to Japanese literary study. The hope was to bring together a diverse group committed to a variety of approaches, to encourage a dialogue from which would emerge a mutual appreciation of variety, if not a synthesis embodying various points of view.

Alas, visions of this sort usually prove illusory. What the conference did prove--something readers of this volume can experience for themselves--is a group of well thought out and clear presentations on a range of particular topics. That range is evident in the three large divisions into which the proposals accepted by the arrangements committee were divided. Any one of three large divisions--Theory vs. Practice/East vs. West, Historicism and Culture, and Feminism and Sexuality--might itself have served as the theme of an entire conference. In keeping with this broad spectrum, Professor Takahashi Tōru of Nagoya University gave a major talk on "The Space/Time of Monogatari and Psycho-Perspective" and Professor Earl Miner of Princeton University addressed the overall subject of the conference in his keynote address entitled "Visions, Re-visions, and Revisions in Our Japanese Literary Studies."

A focused dialogue between Oldreading and Newreading approaches might have been more likely if the conference had chosen a particular object on which to concentrate--say Genji Monogatari or a writer such as Kawabata.¹ The conference might then have taken stock of previous scholarship and criticism and tried to weigh the pros and cons of older and newer approaches. Whether the field includes a sufficiently critical mass of specialists in any of these areas to mount a conference of this kind is questionable. The idea is broached here mainly as a suggestion for the Midwest Association for Japanese Literary Studies to consider in the future. The feasibility of such a conference in the not too distant future can be discerned in the give and take between the papers and the discussion--the former

¹ The terms Oldreading and Newreading come from M.H. Abrams. The essays collected in his *Doing Things with Texts* are replete with shrewd commentary on developments in critical theory and method over the past forty years or so.

given mainly by younger scholars and the latter mainly by tenured faculty. A selection of these discussion is included in the proceedings.

It remains only to thank the organizations, by their financial and other support, made the conference possible. These are: The Northeast Asia Conference of the Association for Asian Studies, the Title VI Program of the U.S. Office of Education, the Office of International Studies and Programs and the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. And, finally, to report that the next three annual conferences are scheduled to take place at Indiana University, the University of Michigan, and The University of Iowa.

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