“Re-Visioning Japanese Literary Studies through a Feminist Perspective”

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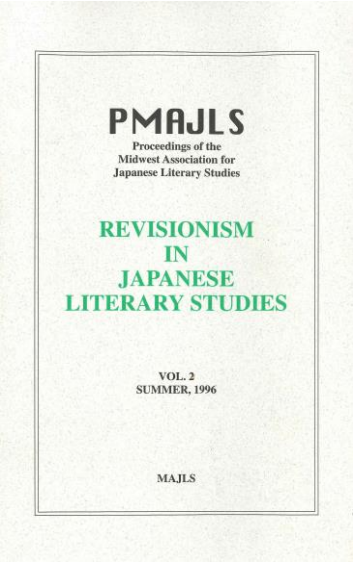
Proceedings of the Midwest Association for Japanese Literary Studies 2 (1996): 110–137.



PMAJLS 2:
Revisionism in Japanese Literary Studies.
Ed. Eiji Sekine.

RE-VISIONING JAPANESE LITERARY STUDIES THROUGH A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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How do we as literary critics want to read Japanese texts and interpret them from a fresh, inclusive perspective? How do we ferret out, pick apart, demystify, defamiliarize or deconstruct to find out what makes them work? Do we want those who read Japanese literary criticism to be comforted and entertained? Or do we want them provoked, challenged, and outraged, invoking in our criticism the "comical creativity" of Bakhtinian festive laughter? As critics we have the option to turn a literary text "upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it."[1]

On a more philosophical level, how do we treat the relation of the critic as reader to the novelist as writer, or the relationship between the reader's life and the writer's life? Whatever we wish to gain from reading a literary text, the key to this intellectual endeavor is, in Sara Lafanu's words, the "relation of the written word to life."[2] By "life" I mean that which interconnects men, women, society, nature and the universe.

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1 Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. (Austin: University of Texas, 1981), p. 23.

2 "Introduction" to *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction* by Joanna Russ (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. vii.

The question I want to raise, then, is why Japanese literary studies, seeking a so-called "universality" of human life, has proven resistant to gender issues, thereby excluding half of the human population, women. Or, what I should be asking instead is: Why do male experiences and sensibilities but not those of the female become the right stuff for literary inquiry? Livia Monnet, in her analysis of Tsushima Yūko's "Fusehime," articulates her frustration over this long-held bias:

> There seems to be consensus in the critical literature . . . that her [Tsushima's] texts dramatize narrow, self-contained worlds of typically female experiences such as childbirth, mothering and child-rearing, and that many of her stories are autobiographical, reflecting her unusually family history, as well as her experience as a divorcee and single mother. .
>
> The present study. . . arose out of a need to express my dissatisfaction, not only with the prevailing critical view of Tsushima's work, but with the methodologies of orthodox literary criticism as practised in Japanese academia (*kokubungaku kenkyū*: Japanese scholarship of the indigenous literature) and journalism (*bungei hihyō*), as well as with our own interpretative and theorizing practices used when dealing with Japanese women's texts.[3]

Central to what Monnet calls "methodologies of orthodox literary criticism" is a general Japanese reluctance for confrontation, questioning authority, explicit verbal communication, and pursuing an alternative world. This culturally-motivated, deep-rooted attitude of overidentification, which permeates every facet of Japanese society, inevitably

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[3] "The Politics of Miscegenation: The Discourse of Fantansy in 'Fusehime'," *Japan Forum,* v. 5, n. 1 (April 1993): 53.

affects the condition of literary studies in Japan. The minority status of parody and satire in modern Japanese literature is the direct outcome of this cultural construct. Many of us who have a deep emotional tie with Japan are not immune to this aesthetics of silence.

Furthermore, the oft-touted uniqueness of Japanese culture tends to divide the Japanese literary critical field into two camps. The first, particularly those Anglo-American scholars full of affinity for "Japanese-ness," welcome the change of scene, from the individualistic, competitive, conquest- and goal-oriented culture of the West to the non-confrontational, zuihitsu-like approach which does not require a vigorous, cantankerous type of verbal exchange with other Japanese and non-Japanese specialists. For this camp, Japanese literature is a great source of comfort and tranquility.

The other group of critics, so weary of what Norma Field called the "fragile impulse to dissent" [4]among Japanese, are bursting with a desire to critique and defamiliarize what has traditionally been thrust on them as quintessential Japanese literary interpretation and analysis. For these "dissenters," the stereotypical Japanese characteristic of looking inward and adopting a minimalist haiku approach has not served Japanese scholarship well; it has perpetuated the exclusivity of Japanese literature by isolating it from world literature.

Another perspective on this division may come from the overzealous feeling of those critics who want to protect Japanese literary studies (=aesthetics-oriented) from any further influence of the West (=theory- and/or gender-oriented), as this has been

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[4] *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), p. 24.

shown to taint the "purity" of Japanese culture. Arguing along the lines of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar,[5] we detect an ambiguous struggle for superiority and gender identification at work here: Japan, as part of the mysterious Orient, is forced to play the feminine in face of the masculinist West. I shall come back to this point later.

When Adrienne Rich, an American poet and feminist critic, inserts a hyphen between "re" and "vision," she speaks for many of us, particularly women readers, who wish to liberate ourselves from the masculinist reading of the Japanese literary canon: "Re-vision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction--is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. . . We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us."[6]

How to look at the Japanese literary canon afresh and re-read its constituent works, how to rediscover modern Japanese women's works long neglected, how to understand the assumptions in which we are drenched, how to know the writing of the past differently than we have ever known it--all these issues, in my mind, point to what Rich calls a "radical critique

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5 *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Volume 2, *Sexchanges* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). See Chapter 1, "Heart of Darkness: The Agon of the Femme Fatale," pp. 3-46.

6 Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), p. 35.

of literature" that would "take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us" (Rich, 35).

Her position, her definition of reading as a "re-vision," echoing the voice of Japan's second Nobel laureate, Ōe Kenzaburō,[7] signals a feminist perspective which critics in Japanese literary studies have yet to embrace with enthusiasm. Inheriting a critic's time-honored cultural, historical, and political outlook, the overwhelming majority find themselves passing on a tradition rather than breaking its hold over them. A non-traditional investigation has never been considered appropriate in polite circles of the Japanese literary field.

This being the case, for a feminist critic to quibble at all about the absence of a gender perspective in modern Japanese literature and literary criticism is an ill- understood challenge to the literary establishment. To be unconventional or radical is two different things for a male writer and a female writer. We should remember that those male writers, even a group of "outcasts," are "also a part of a respected tradition that idolizes the writer."[8] In other words, no matter how radical a male

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[7] Commenting on Mishima Yukio's suicide, Oe has this to say: "I thought then that his suicide would bring about a revision of our history, one that centers around the Emperor. . . I would rather want to think about a god who did not obey the Emperor, and look at ancient times, medieval and modern times from the viewpoint of those who were chased outside, expelled to the margins." See Michiko N. Wilson, *The Marginal World of Oe Kenzaburo: A Study in Themes and Techniques* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1986), p. 105.

[8] Edward Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shisosetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1988), p.63.

writer's stance may be, he as writer/reader is still part of what Harold Bloom calls a "universal identity" that exists between critics and writers, who are, in his words, "coequal participants." In his deliberate misreading of another male writer's work, the male writer gains inspiration and courage to challenge and create a re-visionary masterpiece of his own.[9] One need only cite James Joyce challenging Homer in *Ulysses*, or, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke [1892-1927], a master of short story writer, envying and deliberately avoiding Shiga Naoya [1883-1971] and his *shishōsetsu* [autobiographical] style.

Does a Japanese male critic or Harold Bloom have in mind women poets/critics/readers at all? "What is left out of the account [by Bloom]," Annette Kolodny objects, "is the fact that whether we speak of poets and critics 'reading' texts or writers 'reading' (and thereby recording for us) the world, we are calling attention to interpretative strategies that are *learned, historically determined, and thereby necessarily gender-inflected*"(Kolodny, 47; Emphasis added).

I do not think gender becomes an issue when a male writer/critic adopts interpretative strategies as a coequal participant in psychic battles "in order to correct, rewrite, or appropriate the prior poetic vision as his own" (Kolodny, 46). This battle is fought exclusively by and for men, guaranteeing the perpetuation of a patrilineal literary tradition. In Japan the "battlefield" belongs to a cozy, codependent world of the male bastion of the *bundan* [the literary establishment],[10] which not

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9 Annette Kolodny, "A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," in Elaine Showalter, ed. *The New Feminist Criticism* (New York: Pantheon Book, 1979), p. 47.

10 Marvin Marcus gives the following definition: "The network

only traps our literary imagination and language but has extended its gender bias to the formation of a genre.

The "I-novel" or *shishōsetsu*, the most celebrated "uniquely" Japanese lyrical *form*[11] despite its detractors who long for originality and imagination, has been nurtured and defended by the *bundan* since the development of the form in the early 1900s: "The critical posture toward the *shishōsetsu* . . . from the mid-1920s through the 1950s, has remained essentially unchanged and continues to dominate present-day thinking" (Fowler, 69). When *shishōsetsu* writers mention "universal" or "human concerns," these concepts are dominated by male-centered values which assume the inclusion of females as an afterthought.

One can be truly amazed at the absence of a gender perspective, or rather the overriding concern for the male-defined "master narrative"[12] in the early 20th-century *shishōsetsu* (which still commands respect and genuine allegiance in present-day Japan). Not only is there no mention of the women's movement, which was at its height during the Taishō era [1912-1926] in Tokyo, the center of intellectual activity and of the *bundan*, but there is no sign in the *shishōsetsu* of any socio-political awareness of such an unprecedented historical moment. That

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of writers, intellectuals, critics, literary coteries, periodicals, journalists, and publishers that came to dominate the Japanese literary scene beginning in the late-Meiji period." See *Paragons of the Ordinary: The Biographical Literature of Mori Ogai* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), p. 345. Also see, pp. 32-38.

11 Edward Fowler prefers the term, form, to genre (Fowler, xxvii).

12 Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 13.

the institution of the *bundan* was able to ignore what the Taishō feminists had to offer, and that it still to this day virtually cordons off women's writings, are equally amazing.[13]

The *shishōsetsu* has for a protagonist one dominant type: a middle-class male intellectual, fully employed sexually but unengaged job-wise, antisocial, emotionally unfulfilled, and totally self-preoccupied. (Shiga Naoya's [1883-1971] hero, Tokitō Kensaku, as we shall see later, is the exception to the rule on one score: he tries to remain chaste.[14]) In this protagonist a *shishōsetsu* writer invests all his emotional capital, what Fowler calls the "ideology of sincerity," the most essential feature of this nonfiction fiction (Fowler, 69-70).

This posture of truthfulness applies to the detailed descriptions of every mood the protagonist experiences, every grudge he harbors against people and society, every foible and hostile thought he exposes to the expected male reader. Out of this intimate, self-flagellating act, the protagonist emerges as a sage-hero, particularly in the mind of an unresisting reader. The personal psychic battle the *shishōsetsu* writer wages points to this contradictory fact: "Yet even the rebel whose text projects

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13 For the writings of Taisho feminist writers and activists, see Tsuburaya Shingo's *Kotoage-suru onnatachi: Kindai shisō to bungaku* [Women Speak Up: Ideology and Literature of Modern Women], (Shakai Hyōronsha, 1989). Also, *Feminizumu ryōran: Fuyu no judai e no hōka* [The Profusion of Feminism: Firing at the Era of Winter], eds. Ogata Akiko and Nagata Michiko, (Shakai Hyōronsha, 1990). For a discussion on recent feminist scholarship in Japan and some of the Japanese male critics' reaction to it, see Kitada Sachie's "Contemporary Japanese Feminist Literary Criticism" in *U.S.-Japana Women's Journal*, English Supplement, n. 7 (1994): 72-97.

14 As we will later, his visits to brothels as a single do not count. Tokitō Kensaku is still considred chaste by critics.

a hostile society against which he struggles to define himself, if he is male, takes himself seriously because he and his public assume his significance within the dominant order: Only in the fullness of that membership can the fullness of his rebellion unfold" (Smith 1987, 9).

This all-too-obvious lack of a gender perspective, also pervasive in the Western literary canon, is summed up in one of Muriel Rukeyser's poems, "Myth," which describes the old, blind Oedipus re-encountering the Sphinx. To his question, "Why didn't I recognize my mother?" the Sphinx replies, "You gave the wrong answer":

> "But that was what made everything possible," said Oedipus. "No," she said. "When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn't say anything about woman." "When you say Man," said Oedipus, "you include women too. Everyone knows that." She said, "That's what you think."[15]

If, in the spirit of the Sphinx, we consider the following *shishōsetsu* and other scenarios, it becomes clear how gender-inflected our interpretative strategies are. (This idea of strategy is borrowed from a science fiction writer and feminist critic, Joanna Russ).[16]

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[15] Quoted by Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, p. 1. Also, Susan Gubar begins with this poem a critique of "male-devised stories" which have traditionally offered women readers/writers means of dreaming "through the dreams of men," in "Mother, maiden and the marriage of death: Women writers and an ancient myth," *Women's Studies*, v. 6, n. 3 (1979): 303-316.

[16] Joanna Russ, "What Can a Heroine Do? or Why Women Can't Write" in *To Write Like a Woman*, pp. 79-93.

1. Shiga Naoko as the quintessential writer (or the god of pure literature (*junbungaku no shinzui* or *kamisama*).

2. Married and the mother of two children, a woman of independent means who writes critical reviews of Western dance for journals is consumed by a wanderlust and takes off on a train to a far away snow country where she meets two young men: Komao, a handsome, wholesome, and sensuous man; and Yōsuke, a mysterious youth with a beautiful voice. Komao falls in love with her, which strikes her ego enough to draw her back to the snow country three times over two years. She enjoys the clean air, the passionate love, and the liminal space and time of the beautiful countryside, but as with everything else in life, the time comes for her to say goodbye to the young man and she goes home for good.

3. Two princesses battle for the possession of an elegant, irresistible, mysterious young man who cannot decide which princess to choose. Harassed by both, the frightened and desperate man tries to commit suicide by jumping into a raging river.

4. Georgiana meets a young man at a cafe who is a Rudolf Valentino lookalike. She takes this crude youth home and begins to mold him into what she wants to see in a perfect Western gentleman. The young man begins to enjoy playing his part in a S & M relationship in which he can manipulate his mistress to no end. However, he gets bored with her and begins to take new lovers. Georgiana begs him to stay with her and accepts all his demands as long as he stays with her.

5. A young man unwisely marries a much older, egoistic woman with political ambitions. Bored with him and now over thirty, she gives him money and tells him to find a young man for her insatiable sexual needs. The husband endures all the

humiliations and abuses meted out by his ruthless wife and achieves revenge on his deathbed by asking her to dump his body into Tokyo Bay.

6. A hyper-sensitive aspiring young female writer, abused and abandoned by her mother, suffers from an identity crisis, especially when she finds out she is an illegitimate daughter. She finally finds a pleasant young man for her mate, but when he is raped by one of his female cousins, she cannot forgive him. In anger and desperation, she seeks refuge in a Zen temple where she contracts diarrhea and almost dies. Her sweet husband rushes to her bedside, saying to himself, "I'll never leave her. I'll go wherever she goes."

7. A young woman in search of a mentor "meets" an older woman who is very mysterious. Despite or because of the latter's incommunicativeness and absolute lack of enthusiasm for life, the young woman pursues this misanthrope until she learns by mail that her beloved mentor has committed suicide.

The plot lines are familiar to all of us.[17] But, somehow they do not sit well. They do not sound right. Why? Because I have changed the sex of the protagonist and the other characters in each story. Somehow, these stories no longer fit in the category of "masterpiece" as we know it. They all sound like a parody

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[17] 1) Shiga Naoya; 2) *Snow Country* by Kawabata Yasunari (1899-1972), the 1968 Nobel laureate. Translated by Edward G. Seidensticker; 3) A 11th century *The Tale of Genji,* the commonly called Uji chapters, by Murasaki Shikibu. Translated by Edward G. Seidensticker; 4) *Chijin no ai* [A Fool's Love, trans. *Naomi* by Jay Rubin ?] by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-1965); 5) *Onna-zaka* [A Woman's Slope, trans. *The Waiting Years* by John Bester] by Enchi Fumiko (1905-1986); 6) *A Dark Night's Passing* by Shiga Naoya, trans. by Edwin McClellan; 7) *Kokoro* by Natsume Sōseki (1899-1922), trans. Edwin McClellan.

or satire, or the Victorian erotica at its worst. Gender is the key to this oddness because our interpretive strategies are gender-inflected.

Could a manic-depressive female like Sensei be a protagonist in the literary canon? How about the conceited egoist female who comes and goes as the spirit moves her in search of liminal space and time in snow country? Or the uptight, high-strung, repressed wife who has a fit when her husband fails to fight off the sexual advances of his female cousin? A traditional reading has trapped us in our own prison-house of language; the majority of women characters in the above scripts would be labeled as either a domineering "Bitch Goddess" or "Dragon Lady," or worse, an oversexed and irresponsible "slut" or "whore." We should remember that the protagonists in many of the original stories mentioned above have been regarded as emblematic of alienated, suffering, self-doubting modern man.[18]

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[18] Recent feminist scholarships on the Japanese literary canon include: Egusa Mitsuko and Urushida Kazuyo, eds. *Onna ga yomu Nihon kindai bungaku: feminizumu hihyō no kokoromi* [Women Read Modern Japanese Literature: Attempts at Feminist Inquiry] (Shin'yōsha, 1992)

. In the same book is a feminist critique of *A Dark Night's Passing* by Egusa Mitsuko. See "'An'ya kōro' no shinsō," pp. 1-30. See also Egusa Mitsuko, eds. et al, *Dansei sakka o yomu: feminizumu hihyō no seijuku e* [Reading Male Writers: Towards the Maturity of Feminist Criticism] (Shin'yōsha, 1994), and a book of roundtable discussion by Ueno Chizuko, Ogura Chikako and Tomioka Taeko, *Danryū bungaku-ron* [Discussion on Men's Literature] (Chikuma Shobō, 1992).

Here, when I think of how long it has taken Japanese female scholars to challenge the male-dominated world of criticism, I am as helpless as Ellen Moers to resist the temptation of borrowing a famous

What happens if a Japanese woman writer adopts the autobiographical form? Her work somehow undergoes a subtle transformation in the mind of a reader and critic, and it finds itself excluded as a subject of male critical scrutiny. In 1928 Miyamoto Yuriko (1899-1951), the feminist-socialist writer and cultural critic of boundless intellect and passion, published one of her life works, *Nobuko*. The story itself shares a theme with two major contemporary works, one written by a *shishōsetsu no kamisama*, the above-mentioned Shiga Naoya, and the other by a master of eroticism, Tanizaki Junichirō: *A Dark Night's Passing* (*An'ya Kōro*, 1922-3 and 1932) and *Some Prefer Nettles* (*Tade Kuu Mushi*, 1928-29). Both works focus on real-life stories of rocky marital relationships, but strictly from a husband's viewpoint.

It is well known that Yuriko read *A Dark Night's Passing* while she wrote *Nobuko*. She also mentioned Shiga Naoya in one of her letters to her imprisoned husband, the communist Miyamoto Kenji. Numazawa Kazuko and Honda Shūgo agree that Yuriko valued *An'ya kōro* for its realistic depiction of actual events.[19] In Miyoshi's words, "What she learned from the aristocratic male author is thus largely his disciplined decorum in choosing words and sentences, certainly not his ideology or aestheticism."[20]

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line: ". . . I cannot quite, though I should, resist the temptation to quote 'You've come a long way, baby' from that ad which sells cigarettes to the liberated women." Moers, *Literary Women*, 129.

[19] See *Miyamoto Yuriko ron*, (Musashino Shobō, 1993), pp. 122-169.

[20] See a section on Miyamoto Yuriko in "Gathering Voices: Japanese Women and Women Writers," *Off-Center: Power and Culture Rlelations between Japan and the United States*, (Cambridge: Harvard

However, despite the similar theme and Yuriko's admiration of Shiga's *shishōsetsu* style, *Nobuko*, like other autobiographical fiction by Japanese women writers, has attracted little attention from mainstream Japanese male critics.[21] In its "emotional honesty" and purity of mind and heart, issues of paramount importance to the *bundan* readers and critics, *Nobuko* easily rivals or surpasses Shiga's *A Dark Night's Passing*. All the praise heaped upon his *shishōsetsu* equally holds true for Yuriko's powerful work, for example, the assertion that Shiga's stories "contain no false notes . . . There is not a single false note in the author's feelings toward his characters or toward nature. Instead of 'no false note,' I could just easily say 'no idle phrases' or 'no empty rhetoric.' To put it more positively: each and every Shiga sentence harbors profound emotion and a powerful sense of authenticity."[22]

One of the reasons why female autobiographical fiction fails to rank with its male counterpart, Saegusa Kazuko speculates, lies in the protagonist's gender, which allows him to expose his fragile ego to public scrutiny. With his role and status as a writer protected and sanctioned by society, he can afford to conduct a "self-excavation" [jiko tekketsu] into the darkest depths of his personality, whereas for a female, one of

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University Press, 1991), p. 198.

[21] In her critique of the Japanese literary establishement, Janice Brown writes: "While women writers utilized the shishosetsu mode as frequently as did male writers, it is extremely rare to find Japanese woman writers work discussed as shishosetsu." See "Reconstructing the Female Subject: Japanese Women Writers and the *Shishosetsu*," *British Columbia Asian Review*, n. 7 (Winter 1993-94): 21.

[22] The comment by Honda Shūgo quoted in *The Rhetoric of Confession*, p.65.

the powerless and the victimized, the act of self-exposure has no intrinsic social value. If this is the case, there can be no true female *shishōsetsu*, Saegusa concludes. In other words, who wants to identify with someone who is intellectually and emotionally inferior on the gender scale? There is surely no appeal or value, except as a bit of humor, for the reader to learn about "a woman who has been abandoned by a man." Japanese society is not quite ready for this type of "humorous" story.[23]

It is ironical, however, that the *shishōsetsu* writer himself feels he is a powerless creature in a society where a sense of self and a mind of one's own have very little value and attract little recognition: "To authorize a self was no easy task in a society unwilling to acknowledge the individual as a viable social unit. . . . The self in a *shishōsetsu* is defined typically by its separation and withdrawal from a society that normally demands strict allegiance from members, rather than by its confident confrontation with society--the latter, . . . being the common scenario in classical western fiction" (Fowler, xxiv).

If one applies this analysis to Miyamoto Yuriko, the

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[23] See *Sayonara otoko no jidai* [Goodbye, the Era of Men], (Kyoto: Jinmon Shoin, 1984), pp. 128-132. What Saegusa is describing here is not certainly an impossiblity. Uno Chiyo (1897-) in an autobiographical and picaresque *Aru hitori no onna no hanashi* (1971, trans. *The Story of a Single Woman*) closely follows the first thirty-three years of her own life; she never regrets, never gives in to the female destiny prescribed by Japan's repressive male-centered socio-political codes. For this reason, *The Story of a Single Woman* is a subversive story of a picara, a covert betrayal of the masculine order, except men do not look at it that way. Uno makes sure they do not. However, Saegusa is right about doubting the existence of a true female *shishōsetsu* because Uno's work is not regarded as such by the *bundan*.

powerlessness of her heroine Nobuko becomes twofold: both social and private. She has to fight on two fronts because "the ideal of male freedom from convention is won through a suppression of the same options for women--through both a willful reimposition of conventional limitation on women's movement and an inability to acknowledge the women who ventured outside bourgeois norms."[24] If society imposes different codes of behavior and lifestyle upon women, then Nobuko's intention is to deconstruct them through an intellectually stimulating and emotionally equal relationship with a mate. *Nobuko* depicts the process of this deconstruction, a painful but most illuminating story of one woman's confrontation with her divided self, the opposite gender, and society. Questioning the status quo, re-thinking gender and the relation of the individual to the society, and re-visioning an alternative world for both men and women: these are the major concerns of Yuriko's autobiographical fiction, a primer that gives us a clue how to live (which is after all the overwhelming concern of a *shishōsetsu* writer).

In the traditional *shishōsetsu* context, Tokitō Kensaku, the Shiga hero, trapped in the male-centered world, cannot free his imagination to even consider the possibility of an alternative world or lifestyle. What is constant and normative in the story are his own feeling of discomfort (he finds things and people constantly *unpleasant* [fukai]), his swift mood changes, and his co-dependent behavior, which fails to set emotional boundaries with people he encounters. His is a case of "inflicting pain

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[24] Jamie Owen Daniel, a book reivew of *Resident Allen: Feminist Cultural Criticism by Janet Wolff*. "The Romance of Marginality" in *The women's Review of Books*, v. 13, n. 6 (March 1996): 22.

instead of pleasure upon his readers" as well as upon himself, "in the form of recurring obsessions, 'regressive' fantasies, and evocations of nameless fears."[25]

What bothers him more than anything else, even more so than his illegitimate birth and his abusive father, are women as the "Other," as sexual objects--some exotic and erotic means of distraction--or as a possible solution to his loneliness and bitterness by means of marriage. In fact, so many passages refer to the protagonist's sexual ambivalence and guilt that the story reads like an innocent pubescent tale of sexual awakening. Each and every one of his crises that move the narrative forward involves women:

1. Visits to teahouses (and later to brothels). In a passage reminiscent of what is commonly called "Ame no yo no shinasadame" [an assessment of the female species on a rainy night], the second chapter of *The Tale of Genji*, Kensaku (rain gives him and his friends an excuse to dally at the teahouse) undergoes training on how to assess females, a situation which upsets his equilibrium. He feels at once romantic, embarrassed, insulted, tricked, censured, judgmental, and annoyed, in the presence of several young geishas.

2. Rejection of a marriage proposal. It is the mother of the young woman Kensaku wants to marry who really interests him. She evokes in him a "sense of longing" for his dead mother. He then transfers this longing to her daughter, Aiko; the longing then takes the more physical form of sexual attraction.

3. Oei the maid servant as Kensaku's sex object and his

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[25] William F. Sibley, *The Shiga Hero* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 6.

marriage proposal to her. This prompts the disclosure of the protagonist's illegitimate birth as a result of his mother and grandfather's affair. Oei flatly rejects Kensaku, he in turn becomes manic-depressive, and he eventually finds himself back at a teahouse fondling a geisha's "round, heavy breast," which fills him "with an indefinable sense of comfort and satisfaction. . . He let it rest on the palm of his hand, then shook it a little so that he could feel the full weight of it. . . . 'What riches!' It was for him somehow a symbol of all that was precious to him, of whatever it was that promised to fill the emptiness inside him" (Shiga, 197).[26]

4. The "acquaintance rape" of Naoko, Kensaku's wife. During his absence, Naoko's cousin visits with his buddies, and, after an all-night card game, forces himself on her: "Nearly beside herself with shock and anger she tried to free herself, but *he kept her down with his entire body,* [27]saying, 'Really, I won't do anything bad. It's my head, it feels funny [the reader remembers he has purposely avoided sleep for 24 hours]. The struggle continued for a time. *Then Naoko felt herself drained of all power to resist*" (Shiga, 337; Emphasis added).[28]

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[26] All the tranlsations from *A Dark Night's Passing* are by Edwin McClellan (New York: Kodansha International, 1976), p. 197.

[27] In Japanese the passage goes, "Kaname wa jishin no karada zentai de Naoko o ugokasanakatta." *An'ya kōro, Shiga Naoya Zenshū,* vol. 5 (Iwanami Shoten, 1973), p. 485. "He pinned her down with his whole body weight" would be a more accurate translation unless a translator wants to deemphasize the gravity of the situation. The original sentence leaves no doubt in any woman's mind the total powerlessness of Naoko's position, figuratively, physically, or otherwise.

[28] Fowler calls this episode "Naoko's seduction," Miyoshi Yukio "Naoko's indiscretion" (quoted by Fowler), p. 233. Since this episode is told in the form of reporting as if there is a neutral narrator, rather than

Kensaku's frequent male-bonding notwithstanding, *A Dark Night's Passing* obsessively focuses on the story of the protagonist's ambivalence toward the female gender: a mother who wrongs him; a young woman who has denied him because of his birth; a very caring and reliable maid/housekeeper who becomes the cause of his "lewd imaginings"; a wife who fails to avoid trouble with her cousin. And naturally Naoko bears the brunt of the husband's anger for "sleeping with his cousin" (Kensaku's words to his male friend). As Kensaku's mental health steadily deteriorates, he displays unprovoked outbursts: with a pair of sewing scissors, he slits from the collar almost to the waist the back of the kimono his pregnant wife is wearing. On another occasion, he begins to call Naoko "idiot," and pushes her off a slowly moving train, which seriously injures her.

Wife-beating was not considered a social problem in pre-war Japan. I do not think it is so much the descriptions of violence itself that disturbs the majority of women readers as it is the romanticization of the "ideal of male freedom" at the expense of half of the population. The female readers have been led to imagine that women are part of the soul-searching journey of the Shiga hero. Or, the unresisting readers have been led to believe that the dead seriousness of this confessional story, devoid of humor, satire or parody, is a source of comfort and salvation.

For whom? One episode from the story often quoted by

Naoko's direct "confession" to Kensaku, it becomes problematic as to what Naoko actually feels about her cousin's sexual assault other than she places all the blame upon herself, a very typical reaction of a rape victim.

feminist critics[29] shows that gender relationships afford no room for female freedom or salvation. Kensaku, still single and sexually inexperienced, is on a train watching a young mother accompanied by a maid shower affection upon her infant. They are seated across from Kensaku, who, after a very careful observation of the "fat and active" baby, his clothes, and "his plump, soft shoulders, shining pink," shifts his attention to the mother:

> The young mother, who had been engrossed in conversation with the maid, at last became aware of the fuss her baby was making. . . How lightly her head moved, Kensaku thought, and how lively her eyes were. . .
>
> The young mother, suddenly oblivious of her surroundings, began kissing--it was more like pecking--her baby all over his face. *It was as though momentarily she had lost all control of herself.* The baby jerked about happily, loving the ticklish sensation. The woman bent her head lower, showing the back of her pretty neck, and started kissing the baby's throat. *It was too much of a display for Kensaku*; it was like having something sickly sweet in one's mouth, and instinctively he turned away and looked out of the window. What a coquette she is. . . ah well, when the baby gets a bit older he will have his own little tricks.[30]

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[29] See an analysis of this scene from the relation of eros to Kensaku's "happiness" by Egusa Mitsuko, *Onna ga yomu kindai bungaku*, pp. 3-6.

[30] The original is slightly different from McCllelan's translation. Literally, it goes something like: "This woman is much better at being coquettish than the infant who has not yet learned the skill." It is clear that in Kensaku's mind the baby and his mother are on an equal emotional plane. One knows the art of playing coy, the other does not but will

> Somehow the whole scene looked to him like an unconscious reenactment of the love play that went on between her and her young husband. *The suggestion of such intimacy made him uncomfortable*; yet the woman was so full of life, so assured, there was such a feeling of harmony about her, that he could not but think her very beautiful. Tentatively, almost fearfully, he began to imagine himself having a wife like her. No doubt about it, it was a happy thought; indeed, for a moment he wondered if with such a wife he would want anything else. (Shiga, 67-69; Emphasis added.)

As I have already mentioned, the pendulum of his emotions shifts swiftly from one extreme to the other. First, the young woman is given compliments: she is graceful in her movement (her head) and full of life (her eyes). As long as she sits there as a pretty object, temporarily disengaged from the baby, the protagonist does not find the scene unpleasant. But, when she turns into a mother and does what any young mother does--public display of physical affection--he transfers his feeling of discomfort to her. It is not the young woman but Kensaku who is losing control of himself. This sense of disorientation is aggravated by the sight of the "back of her pretty neck" as she bends to kiss the baby's throat. An unpleasant feeling deteriorates into something physically repelling.

What puzzles the reader at this point is why his reaction is linked to the coquettishness of a woman. Shall we just gloss over Kensaku's acute embarrassment as the product of a strictly gender-segregated society which rejects any public display of affection and sexuality between men and women? It seems to me that there is something else operating here: he is equating

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pick it up soon to "harrass" him.

the one-year old baby boy with himself. He feels threatened by the woman (mother) who has control over him (the baby). This unequal relationship is unpardonable. She will be properly handled for it: The baby (himself) will eventually "have his own little tricks" to subjugate her. The paragraph that follows evoking an "unconscious reenactment of the love play," intimates this sexual conquest in a marriage. In other words, foreplay is to be initiated by a man/husband, and so is the entire sexual relationship.

Commingled with this masculine notion is Kensaku's craving for unconditional female attention which would give him "life," a sense of security ("assurance"), "harmony," and "beauty," the sole reason for his yearning to have a wife. The tension Kensaku feels about this imaginary marital bliss ("Tentatively, almost fearfully, he began to imagine himself having a wife like her.") demonstrates an age-old masculinist dilemma: a socially superior male, he wants emotional-sexual fulfillment from a socially inferior wife, an exchange of a social commodity which threatens to reverse the traditional gender hierarchy. Naoko, a woman in whom Kensaku hopes to find peace and harmony, is an afterthought in the author's scheme of things. *A Dark Night's Passing* ends with the protagonist in critical condition and Naoko saying, "Whether he lives or not, I shall never leave him, I shall go wherever he goes" (408), a very convenient and romantic ending, which falls back on the typical Biblical femininity found in one of the oldest "master narratives," the Book of Ruth.

Let us compare Kensaku's idea of marriage with that of Nobuko. Like contemporary women's writings in Shiga's times, Yuriko's novel uses autobiography "as a means of 'talking

back,'"[31] openly confronting the issues of gender inequality, female selfhood, and self-representation connected with the institution of marriage and the family system. Her autobiographical authority to publicly complain and declare her right to public power--these were the appeal of *Nobuko* to Taishō women readers.[32] Here is what the narrator tells us about Nobuko's misgivings about marriage, her own definition of it, and of an ideal gender relationship in marriage, after she has proposed to her husband-to-be, Tsukuda:

> Whenever her mind fell on the topic of marriage, Nobuko was assaulted by a vague feeling of suffocation, crampness, mediocrity and anxiety. *When people marry, why do they settle down as if they've already reached the goal of their lives, allow themselves to be assimilated into the world just to maintain harmony? Many men and women spend their entire lives unconscious, as if some invisible guide were leading their way.* Nobuko refused to marry and live the rest of her life like that. She had no desire to have children, nor any ambition to be called "Mrs." in the wake of her husband's rise in the world. *Tsukuda has his own job, and I have mine.* Besides she had no economic need to depend upon him as a wage earner. The reason I want to share my life with him, *the reason we should support each other and work together is only that, granted that we can let our love*

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[31] Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Tweneith Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 20.

[32] In postwar society, Japanese women read the novel as the "Bible for new women." See Kobayashi Fukiko, "Women Writers and Feminist Consciousness in Early Twentieth Centuiry Japan," *Feminist Issues* (Fall 1991): 58. *Nobuko* is the only one still in print as a book; the rest of Yuriko's works are available in her *Collected Works.*

grow unhampered, I want the two of us to grow [nobitai] more richly, more expansively and gallantly. (Emphasis added)[33]

Unlike Kensaku who considers Naoko outside his emotional world, Nobuko insists that Tsukuda be part of her world, and she of his, creating at the same time a space where each can preserve an autonomous self. Seeking "to represent herself rather than to remain a mere representation of man," (Smith 1987, 41) Yuriko's autobiographical fiction attests to what late 20th-century feminists are saying: "Women who do not challenge these gender ideologies and the boundaries they place around women's proper life script, textual inscription, and speaking voice do not write autobiography" (Smith 1987, 44).

One of the enduring charms of the *shishōsetsu* and of Japanese literature as a whole lies in its lyrical style. Let me turn to one definition of "lyricism."

> "If *the narrative mode* . . . concerns itself with events *connected by the chronological order* in which they occur, and *the dramatic mode* with *voluntary human actions* which are connected both by *chronology* and *causation,* then the principle of construction. . . [called] *lyric* consists of *the organization of discrete elements* (images, events, scenes, passages, words, what-have-you) *around an unspoken thematic or emotional center.* The lyric mode exists without chronology or causation; its principle of connection is *associative.* . . A writer who employs the lyric structure is setting various images, events, scenes,

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[33] *Miyamoto Yuriko Zenshū* [Complete Works of Miyamoto Yuriko], v. 3 (Shin Nihonsha Shuppan, 1979), p. 72.

> or memories to circling round an unspoken, invisible center. The invisible center is what the novel or poem is about; . . .there is no action possible to the central character and no series of events that will embody in clear, unequivocal, immediately graspable terms what the artist means." (Russ, 87)

Does this definition refer to the Japanese literary canon? The plotlessness, open-endedness and non-Aristotelian nature of modern Japanese fiction has been noted by critics time and again. Certainly, nothing really happens in masterpieces such as *Snow Country, Some Prefer Nettles, Kokoro,* and *A Dark Night's Passing.* Japanese literature takes for granted that the reader will read between the lines. The reader and the author both share the assumption that there is an unspoken thematic and emotional center, invisible, indeterminate and equivocal.

What I have just quoted above comes from Joanna Russ who disputes the English-American male criticism of women's writings. "There is nothing the female characters can do--except exist, except think, except feel," Russ continues: "And critics (mostly male) employ the usual vocabulary of denigration: these novels [by women writers] lack important events; they are hermetically sealed; they are too full of sensibility; they are trivial; they lack action; they are feminine" (Russ, 87-88). In the literary arena, is Japan, as part of the mysterious Orient, *forced to* play the feminine in face of the masculinist or imperialist West? The answer is clearly no. Western domination has very little to do with modern Japanese literature. On the contrary, it is apparent that the Japanese literary canon has a great deal in common with women's works. The "feminization" or the lyrical mode of Japanese literature is native to Japanese culture. Unbeknownst to Japanese male critics, the feminine in

this case is indeed a relative and ironical term.

Snow Country[34] is a good example of the lyric mode under discussion. Shimamura, the protagonist, a lost soul in the lyrical fantasyland, lives only from image to image, from memory to memory, from event to event in which he is a disengaged, emotionally immature dreamer. Far from being an alienated modern man, here is a man who wants female attention, pure and passionate, the recreation of an unconditional maternal love that demands no reciprocity. What does the novel say to women readers? Besides responding to the universal quality of lyricism in the story, are women supposed to deny their gender and identify momentarily with Shimamura and let themselves revel in the voluptuous body of Komako? Women readers have done that for centuries, identifying with Odysseus, Prince Genji, Tokitō Kensaku, Tom Sawyer, and even the most misogynistic protagonists in Norman Mailer's works.

Yet, here is another irony: Japanese prose literature, which goes back to the women's diaries of the Heian period [A.D. 797-1190], has been assessed and discussed predominantly by male critics and reviewers for so long a time that to adopt a woman's perspective is automatically taken to be an affront to

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[34] In a feminist reading of *Snow Country*, Tajima Yōko calls it a "sanatorium for male self-recovery," and calls Komako "a sexually liberated, unpaid nurse"; and Tajima shows the protagonist, Shimamura, far from being an "example of the meaninglessness, isolation, and futile love of modern man" who brings himself closer to "modern enlightenment" (as patriarchal critiques of the novel would have it), to be nothing more than an immature man who is totally incapable of developing an equal relationship with a woman. See Tajima, "A Rereading of *Snow Country* from Komako's Point of View," *The U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, n. 4 (January 1993): 26-48. Tajima's article originally appeared in Egusa and Urushida, eds., 149-180.

male-centered Japanese scholarship. I think this gender struggle operates on two levels: 1) between feminist criticism and traditional patriarchal criticism on the one hand, and 2) between feminist scholars and those protective of Japanese traditions on the other. The struggle has not been identified or addressed effectively by Japanese literary studies, leaving us critics behind in literary critical practice, hampered in our effort to change with the times.

Without addressing cultural, gender and theoretical issues, how can we teach American students who need to go beyond the commonly held exotic, stereotypical image of Japanese literature? In light of the ongoing debate in cultural studies nourished by the wide variety of current theories, the time is ripe for us to appropriate the spirit of its inclusiveness, to "re-vision" the field of Japanese literary studies.

To conclude my essay, I would like to allude to another plot, "Number Eight," in which a spacey, free-spirited middle-aged female novelist is married to a man who quits his job and enjoys life with her as a househusband, cook, secretary and travelling companion. While she daydreams, creates stories, and critiques everything under the sun, he listens and reflects on the established order of things in the patriarchal system.

In this case, no sex change for the two protagonists is necessary. They are from Ōba Minako's 1985 novel, *Naku tori no* [Birds Crying]. Here is a case of a reversal, a violation, and a challenge of the boundaries placed around women's life script. The female reader, out of the prison-house of inarticulateness, can now contest the "very act of naming that has been till now a male prerogative," and we begin to "see and name--and therefore live--afresh" (Rich, 35).

If exploring the condition of being marginal and peripheral, if evoking the power to confuse and escape the structures of society and the cultural order of things, and if dealing with impossible possibilities, with endless caricatures, with reversals, negations, violations and transformations,[35] as Japanese male writers like Ōe Kenzaburō and Inoue Hisashi have shown, is a way of intentionally misreading the master narrative, is it not even more appropriate for women to misread, unread and re-vision literature?

Saegusa Kazuko's remark concerning female *shishōsetsu* mentioned earlier rings true. The *shishōsetsu* as we know it, with its ideology of self-absorbed sincerity and total indifference to a socio-cultural-political perspective, does not belong to Japanese women writers, and this is a positive situation which enables them to appropriate the form, challenge it and re-write it. We might also say that this observation is particularly relevant to the role of critics. "Re-visioning" by women writers and readers opens up a new interpretative and critical strategy for Japanese literary studies.

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35 See Wilson, p. 105.