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Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the
Constructions of Japanese Modernity (review)

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Chapter 10, however, shows that not all religious movements fit seamlessly into the intellectual mold of the period. An example is Renmonkyō, founded by Shimamura Mitsu (1831–1904), which gained followers in Tokyo, central Japan, and northern Kyushu as people desperately sought for relief from recurring cholera epidemics, but was ultimately unable to shake off public criticism. A fierce media campaign spearheaded by the popular *Yorozu chōhō* newspaper criticized the group’s “superstitious” healing practices and religious syncretism combining Nichiren-derived Buddhism and a nominal Shinto affiliation, and accused the group of financial corruption and moral depravity. In the end, these allegations drove Renmonkyō into extinction despite its affiliation with Taiseikyō. According to Sawada, Renmonkyō did not share the general consensus regarding self-cultivation that linked Tohokami, Tōkyūjutsu, Shingaku, and lay Zen practitioners and that enabled these groups to deflect earlier suspicions of heterodoxy. This last chapter on Renmonkyō may not fit as smoothly into the narrative progression of the book as the others, but it will allay criticism that Sawada presents only the concerns of intellectuals with a common interest in self-cultivation and does not take sufficient note of heterodox devotionalist movements that did not share the same ideals.

Given the enormous scope of Sawada’s study, the book holds together exceptionally well. Her densely packed manuscript contains enough material for two books with less diachronic breadth. It would have been possible to expand on the sheer physicality of the Edo-period movements and treat the developments within Rinzai Zen separately. Yet Sawada’s decision not to study these various groups in isolation allows ultimately for greater understanding of their resonances and institutional connections. As Sawada points out, the focus on practicality and personal improvement that developed out of Tokugawa Neo-Confucian regimens and Rinzai Zen continued to appeal to upper and middle levels of Japanese society well into the twentieth century.

Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity. By Tomiko Yoda. Duke University Press, 2004. 280 pages. Soft-cover \$23.95.

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In this work, Tomiko Yoda proposes to do two things: the first is to critique the construction of the discipline of *kokubungaku* (national literature), showing its necessary complicity with the formation of the modern Japanese nation-state and the constitution of a modern subjectivity for that state’s citizens; the second is to offer her reading of *Kagerō nikki*, and the kind of feminine “estranged voice” she discovers there, as a step toward resolving what she sees as an impasse reached by feminist theorists in their considerations of feminine identity and agency. As this summary suggests, Yoda’s book is a combination of literary history and literary criticism; that is, some chapters are devoted to the emergence of *kokubungaku* discourse, while others present the author’s own readings and interpretations of such primary texts as *Genji monogatari* and *Kagerō nikki*.

In her introduction, Yoda makes clear that she is going to contrast “traditional

scholarship” (p. 2)—by which she seems to mean that by mainstream researchers such as Ikeda Kikan and Akiyama Ken—with that of “post-1970s revisionist scholars” (p. 9), especially Mitani Kuniaki—in other words, the group known as “Monoken” (from Monogatari Kenkyūkai). While there is in fact little explicit discussion of mainstream scholars, Yoda does situate the Monoken movement—known chiefly for the introduction of structuralist theory into the study of classical Japanese literature—in useful and interesting ways.

The brief chapter 1, “The Feminization of Heian and Eighteenth-Century Poetics,” introduces some of the gendered aspects of the literary theories of Kamo no Mabuchi, Kagawa Kageki, and Motoori Norinaga, most of which are already fairly well known. Chapter 2, “Gender and the Nationalization of Literature,” proceeds to the movement from Edo-period Kokugaku to Meiji-period *kokubungaku*. This chapter, which forms the main part of the first, historiographic section of Yoda’s study, reviews some of the same territory covered by Tomi Suzuki in her chapter in Haruo Shirane and Tomi Suzuki, eds., *Inventing the Classics* (Stanford University Press, 2000) and Susan L. Burns’s work on the New Kokugaku in her *Before the Nation* (Duke University Press, 2003). Comparison of the books by Burns and Yoda, alike products from Duke University Press, is instructive in various regards. One is struck, in particular, by the lack of rigor that is apparently expected of “Japanese Literary Studies” (Yoda) in contrast to “Japanese History” (Burns), to use the labels assigned the books on their back covers. Burns writes clearly and concisely, and every assertion is backed up with concrete examples, references, and endnotes. Reading Yoda, on the other hand, one often finds oneself in want of specifics. The contrast can be indicated numerically: Burns’s (226 pages) and Yoda’s (230 pages) books are virtually the same length, yet the historian’s work has 528 endnotes to the literary critic’s 321.

Like Suzuki, in chapter 2, Yoda focuses on Haga Yaichi and Fujioka Sakutarō, expanding what Suzuki offered in outline. In many ways, this is the strongest chapter of the book, and one would have liked to see more of this kind of literary history. Instead, however, in chapter 3, Yoda moves from literary history to literary criticism, focusing on *Tosa nikki* and the role of women in the rise of *kana bungaku*. Yoda’s narrative jumps from the late Meiji period in the previous chapter to the postwar era, and her documentation becomes even spottier. Indeed, she offers “a composite of textbook versions of Heian literary history” (p. 85) without citing even one specific title. It is this textbook interpretation that becomes the focus of Yoda’s critique, rather than the interpretation of a specific, historically identifiable individual scholar. Among the points she takes issue with is the relationship between language and gender, that is, as have a number of scholars writing in English recently, Yoda insists that “a broad segment of Heian aristocratic women” (p. 105) were literate in Chinese, and, following Thomas LaMarre’s work, she suggests that the distinction between *mana* and *kana* was calligraphic rather than linguistic. From this understanding, *Tosa nikki* adopts a “strategy that specifically excludes Chinese poetry presented *in writing*” (p. 90, emphasis in the original):

Although Chinese poetry commanded more prestige, aristocratic men were actively engaged in composing Japanese poetry, and men, along with women, wrote their waka in kana. Male aristocrats (who were expected to be fully versed in Chinese poetry), however, could not have mediated the text’s subtle strategy for both invoking and repressing *kara uta* as the parallel and counterpoint to *yamato*

uta. Thus, while the narrator's discourse appears to be inflected by gender, the text *does not* necessarily invoke a distinct set of properties that defines female writing as such. By understanding the gender marking of the narratorial agent in negative terms (through what she does not write), I suggest an approach to the text that avoids presupposing a reified link between women and kana or kana literature. (pp. 94–95)

It is, of course, such a reified link between “women and the purity of national language” that *kokubungaku* discourse insisted on, and Yoda's explication successfully denaturalizes the connection.

Chapter 4 is a reading of *The Tale of Genji* through a staged argument between Motoori Norinaga and Masuda Katsumi, a modern scholar who, in a 1954 article, asserted that the poetry of *Genji* is “unpoetic.” In contrast, Yoda argues that, for Norinaga, *Genji* was essentially all poetry. Masuda is clearly taking as his criterion a modern, Romantic concept of the lyric, and it remains unclear to me why his theory should be given much attention—Yoda does not demonstrate that it is of exceptional historical influence. Rather, she seems to have enlisted Masuda to serve as a foil to her presentation of Norinaga. Following Naoki Sakai, Yoda insists on Norinaga's conceptualization of the performative nature of waka as something that “not so much represents *mono no aware* as *enacts* it” (p. 113, emphasis in the original). Yet, somehow, fifteen pages later, this turns into the following: “*mono no aware* in its purest form may best be described as the empathy of a spectator who identifies with the *Other without engaging in a relation of exchange or negotiation*” (p. 130, emphasis added). With such a definition, Yoda argues, “Norinaga” is unable to account for the most fundamental kind of poetic exchange, the *zōtōka* between a man and a woman, where the man appeals to the woman, only to have her reply purposely misread his verse. Yoda gives several detailed examples of such exchanges, and only then raises the “thorny question” of “the relationship between the poetic dialogues in the *Genji* and the powerful convention associated with the exchange of love poems in the tradition of Japanese poetry” (p. 134). But, of course, there is no such “thorny question”—it is Yoda's pseudoargument that has created one. Lovers in *Genji* exchange poems just as they do in every other romantic Heian narrative, and I have difficulty placing confidence in an interpretation that presents Norinaga as failing to recognize one of the most fundamental aspects of the monogatari genre. At the end of this chapter, Yoda identifies the polysemy of women's poems as a kind of “gender politics” (p. 144), thus bringing her long discussion back to the topic of gender announced in the book's title.

Chapter 5 is probably the most useful of the book. In it, Yoda introduces the work of the modern scholar of Japanese linguistics Tokieda Motoki (1900–1967) and explores its influence on Monoken scholars such as Takahashi Tōru, Fujii Sadakazu, and, of course, Mitani, especially in their discussions of monogatari and narrative. Yoda demonstrates the advantages and disadvantages of Tokieda's approach to the Japanese language and subjectivity, and concludes her critique by demonstrating that his “discussion of shutai [discursive subject] offers a narrative of imperial subject formation” (p. 181). Yet even in this relatively strong chapter, Yoda employs a strange mode of argument: she starts by suggesting some of the ways Tokieda's theories can be used in relation to texts such as *Taketori monogatari* but then states: “Here, however, I should confess my own ruse. I have hypothesized that Tokieda's theory can explain the problems posed by Heian narration, but the kind of scholarship [such as

that of Takeoka Tadao] I referred to in setting up that problem is itself broadly influenced by Tokieda grammar” (p. 159). Of course, this “ruse” was apparent to any reader either already familiar with Tokieda’s work, or with wit enough to look him up when Yoda first introduced him without specifying his time period.

The final chapter, which focuses on *Kagerō nikki*, is also founded on circular argumentation. Yoda starts by examining the uses of the words *ware*, *hito*, and *waga* in this text. She insists that *ware* is a first-person pronoun and *waga* a first-person possessive pronoun (even though *Kōji-en* gives both *watakushi no* [my] and *jibun no* [one’s] as definitions of the latter). She then discovers passages where *waga* cannot be translated as “my” and uses this as evidence that we should not think of *Kagerō* as an instance of first-person narration. She goes on to give some sensitive readings of scenes expressing the narrator’s sense of isolation and alienation, a circumstance that Yoda labels “the estranged voice”—a term she does little to define at this point, except to mark its gendered component. Yet, in the end, these scenes can manifest isolation and “estrangement” only if we presuppose an identification between the narrator and the protagonist—the definition, in other words, of autobiographical writing. Debates about grammatical person derived from Indo-European grammar are largely beside the point.

The epilogue is not a simple summation of the book’s main arguments. Rather, Yoda attempts to tie her study to contemporary debates in feminist theory, specifically, to a critique of Judith Butler. Yoda accordingly spends several pages introducing and critiquing Butler and then suggests that her “objections to Butler’s analysis of the gendered subject” are fundamentally similar to her “critique of Tokieda’s and his follower’s conceptualizations of the discursive subject” in that both are attempts to challenge “the modern (nominalized) subject, proposing instead to examine the subject performatively through its signifying practices” (p. 221). Yoda asserts that her conceptualization of the “estranged voice”—defined here, finally, as the “voice that frames the self . . . not a hidden speaking subject but the enunciatory context from which the self emerges and into which it recurrently disappears, most notably at the moment of self-reflection” (p. 225)—suggests a way “to simultaneously address both the symbolic mediation of the subject, which has no history of its own, and the historicity and sociality of the subject” (p. 229).

Yoda’s is a bold, if flawed, critique of Japanese literary studies, critical theory, and women’s studies, and an ambitious, if uneven, examination of the institution of the study of Heian texts under modernization. It will provide a challenging reading to all concerned with these fundamental topics and disciplines.

The Ethos of Noh: Actors and Their Art. By Eric C. Rath. Harvard University Asia Center, 2004. 317 pages. Hardcover \$49.50/£31.95/€45.60.

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Books about *noh* have appeared in abundance in recent years, but none has succeeded so well in rethinking the tradition in its historical context as this study. Eric Rath asks himself a question that, once it has been posed, seems obvious: how was *noh* trans-